POS and PSO in Lillooet

Jan van Eijk

Saskatchewan Indian Federated College

1. Introduction. In his well-known and highly insightful survey of topics in Salish linguistics, Thompson (1979:740-741) makes the following observation on Salish syntax:

> There are important problems concerned with the adjunct phrases by which predicates
> can be modified. Hess (1973) has explored some of these, drawing on Lushootseed,
> Straits, and Halkomelem materials. The type of English transitive sentence in which
> both agent and patient are indicated by noun phrases (e.g. Bill killed the bear) seems
> a typical of at least many Salish languages, and is actually impossible in Lushootseed,
> where only the patient can be so specified. In fact, such sentences as do occur in
> elicited material may represent one of the ways bilingual speakers tend to modify the
> tradition of their Indian languages in adaptation to the English model to please
> assiduous linguists. Even in languages which appear to permit such sentences,
> they are rare or nonexistent in spontaneous conversation and traditional texts
> (noted most recently by Hukari 1976[..]).

Thus, in Lushootseed, sentences where overt mention is made of a patient and an agent noun phrase to a predicate are actually possible, but these sentences employ a construction which contains a suffix -b in the predicate, a noun phrase that indicates the patient, and a noun phrase introduced with the oblique marker ?ə- which indicates the agent. Such constructions translate conveniently as English passives ("the boy is taken off by (?ə-) the policeman"), but both Hess and Thompson point out the problems of interpreting this type of construction as passive. As Thompson mentions, constructions with both an agent and a patient noun phrase (without oblique markers) are possible (though of doubtful status) in other Salish languages, and Hess quotes indeed three examples from Island Straits, Halkomelem and Squamish, all meaning "The dog bit the man" and all following a PSO (for Predicate-Subject[=Agent]-Object[=Patient]) order (i.e. "Bit the dog the man"). As Kuipers (1967:169, section 245) remarks, the order POS is also possible in these sentences in Squamish, so that it is ambiguous who is acting on whom, and only context can disambiguate the situation. I agree with Thompson that this potentially confusing situation seems to hint at a change in progress, possibly under the influence of English (although it is interesting that in all cases the predicate is maintained in its traditional initial position). One way of disambiguating the problems that result from allowing two noun phrases in free order is to fix the order of constituents. Lillooet seems to be undergoing such a process, and the successful order seems to be POS. In section 2 this issue is discussed in greater detail. Some conclusions, and suggestions for further research, are given in section 3.

2. LIllooet PSO vs. POS. In Van Eijk 1985:263, I observe that transitive predicates with a third person object suffix and a third person subject suffix may have both a subject and an object complement, usually in this order. In a footnote (nr. 5, p. 268) I mention that in texts the ratio PSO:POS is roughly 4:1, so PSO is the more common order in my data. However, a few years ago I was asked to check the first proofs of a Lillooet dictionary for the primary grades which is in the process of being composed by a committee of Native speakers of Lillooet, and this dictionary contains 11 examples of transitive predications which show POS order and only one which shows PSO order. These sentences are given below, in the practical orthography used in the primer (with the added orthographical devices of hyphens to introduce [third person] subject suffixes, and the equal sign to introduce the 'reinforcing' enclitic a which is required by certain articles):

(1) t'axilmín-as ti qwílqn=a ti staníy7=a   "the moose (staníya7) attacked (t'áxilmin) the wolverine (nqwílqen)"

(2) wa7 qixexs-twítas i ntsqústn=a i wa7 nts'áw'cal   "the ones washing dishes (nts'áw'cal) are banging (qíxexs) the pots (ntsqústen)"

(3) papt t'u7 wa7 wáz'an-as i káoh=a ti nsqáx7=a   "my dog (sqáxa7) always (papt) barks (wáz'an) at cars (kaoh)"

(4) t'útsun'-as ti sráp=a ti sqáycw=a   "the man (sqaycw) is chopping (t'útsun') the tree (srap)"

(5) wa7 nzanmán-as i sráp=a ti wa7 pel'p   "the one who is lost (pel'p) is going around in circles (nzánem) around the trees (srap)"

(6) nq'ixtsán'-as ti sk'ém'ts=a ti sk'úk'wm'it=a   "the child (sk'uk'wm'it) closed (nq'ixtsan') the door (sk'em'ts)"

(7) ts'áts'qn'-as ti sm'úm'tm'=a ti nskícez7=a   "my mother (skícza7) plucked (ts'áts'qen') the grouse (sm'úm'tem')"

(8) wa7 steqs-ás ti nqépktn=a ti twíw't=a   "the young boy (twiw't) is holding (steqs) the saddle-blanket (nqépkten)"

(9) kelhn-ás ti t'ímin=a ti nsísq7=a   'my uncle (sísqa7) took the sinew (t'ímin) off" (kélhen "to take off")

(10) naq'wtsán'-as i sts'wán=a ti míxalh=a   "the bear (míxalh) is stealing (náq'wtsan') the dried salmon (sts'wan)"

(11) lhvnps-ás ti tsítcw=a ti xzúm=a kém'cwyeqs   "the big (xzum) truck (kém'cwyeqs) made the house (tsitcw) vibrate" (lhvnps "to make vibrate")

The lone example of PSO is:

(12) kwezn-ás kw sBill ti kaohs=a   "Bill shined (kwézen) his car (kaoh)"

Note that since both PSO and POS are allowed, sentence (1) shows the ambiguity discussed by Kuipers. Of course, this ambiguity only arises where the subject and object noun phrases could conceivably switch roles (in a case like "wash-father-car" it is obvious who does the washing and this sentence could allow any order, but in a case like "bite-cat-dog" both the dog and the cat could do the biting, and the order becomes important). As I mention on p. 269 of my dissertation (Van Eijk 1985), when I read sentences with two noun phrases that could be both subject and object back to my consultants, confusion arose as to the role of the participants. It is possible that this confusion has now been resolved in that the Lillooets have possibly opted for a rigid POS order.

3. Conclusions and outlook. In the preceding sections I have given an account of a probably recent development in Lillooet (allowing two noun phrases on a single transitive predicate), the potentially confusing results of this change (in a number of cases it is no longer clear what role is played--subject or object--by the noun phrases, if the word order is free), and the remedy (decide on a fixed word order). Two issues that touch upon these problems warrant further discussion: (a) if the rise of two noun phrases on a single predicate is recent, what is the cause of it, and (b) why does Lillooet seem to settle on POS, rather than PSO.

As for the first issue, influence from English is certainly a possibility. After all, there are convincing examples of languages rearranging their syntax under foreign influence, even across language families: Arlotto (1972:193-195) mentions the replacement of the "X has" construction in Russian with "at X is," under influence of neighboring Finno-Ugric or Altaic, and the rise of the izafet-construction in Turkish under Persian influence. With regard to Salish, the influence of omnipresent English seems not only plausible, but even unavoidable. A contributing factor may be the general loss of lexical suffixes which in many instances form the functional equivalent of object noun phrases: as is well known, in Salish one does not scratch one's nose, but one "nose-scratches," and one does not repair one's car, but one "conveyance-repairs," with the morphemes for "nose" and "conveyance" represented by suffixes on the (often intransitive) predicate, thereby obviating the need for special object noun phrases for "nose" and "car." In many Salish languages these lexical suffixes seem to have been dropping out of use and are functionally replaced by separate noun phrases. As for the dropping of the suffixes, Kuipers (p.c.) brings to my attention that Shuswap, for example, does not have a suffix -axwats for "chest," which occurs in a number of other Salish languages. Kuipers also points at the paucity of suffixes in Saanich (Montler 1986) in this respect. It is a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem whether the suffixes started disappearing first, and were then replaced with noun phrases, or whether the use of two noun phrases on the same predicate came first, thereby leading to a loss of lexical suffixes. It should be noted that in some cases we do have both a lexical suffix on the predicate, and an object noun phrase that falls under the semantic purview of that suffix, as in (6) and (10) above, where we have the suffix -ts "rim, edge, mouth, food" in the predicate, and a noun phrase that is semantically covered by this

AK: does have another lex. suff. so can't be used as an argu. so can't be used as an argu.

suffix later in the predication (sk'em'ts in [6], and sts'wan in [10]). I do not know to what extent such double markings are typical for traditional Lillooet syntax, or whether they represent a relatively recent innovation.

As for the second issue, the choice of POS over PSO, it is possible that POS is modelled after the order of constituents within a transitive predicate. In such predicates, Lillooet has a transitive stem followed by a pronominal object suffix followed by a pronominal subject suffix, as in:

(13) núk'w7an-ts-as   "he (-as) helps (nuk'w7an) me (-ts)"

Of course, it is impossible to predict where Lillooet syntax will go in the future (linguistic developments are always impossible to predict). It would be a worthwhile project to take sentences like (1), where the participants in the predication can potentially shift roles, and read them back to Lillooet speakers. If the uniform response is to interpret the first noun phrase as the object, then POS has been firmly established as the order of choice in contemporary Lillooet syntax.

REFERENCES

Arlotto, A. 1972. Introduction to Historical Linguistics. University Press of America

Hess, T. 1973. "Agent in a Coast Salish Language." IJAL 39:89-94.

Hukari, T. E. 1976. "Transitivity in Halkomelem." Paper read at the 11th ICSNL, Seattle. (UW preprint, pp. 69-119.)

Kuipers, A. H. 1967. The Squamish Language. Mouton.

Thompson, L. C. 1979. "Salishan and the Northwest." Pp. 692-765 of L. Campbell and M. Mithun (eds.), The Languages of Native America: Historical and Comparative assessment. University of Texas Press.

Van Eijk, J. P. 1985. The Lillooet Language. University of Amsterdam Ph.D. dissertation.