POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN A COAST TSIMSHIAN TEXT

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1. Introduction. An intensive examination of the possessive constructions in one Coast Tsimshian text indicates that an analogy between sentence structure and possessives structure is a useful one for this language. A Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995) theoretical approach facilitates the construction of this analogy. Part 2 of this paper contains the possessive constructions data. These come from a text narrated by Henry Pierce and originally transcribed by William Beynon (1980). Part 3 outlines the writer's theoretical assumptions, with special focus on the universal computational system for building phrasal structure and the notion that NPs are complements and specifiers to determiner heads (cf. Abney 1987, Logobardi 1994, Tremblay 1991). Part 4 presents the writer's analysis of the possessive constructions data. I take as my starting point Boas' (1911) analysis of possessives in Coast Tsimshian.

2. The woman who pretended to be dead. The adawx (true saying) of the *Origin of Txaamsm and Lagabula* , narrated by Henry Pierce and transcribed by William Beynon for Franz Boas (Beynon 1980, no. 119), consists of a cycle of stories about the hero Txaamsm. The first story in this cycle is about the hero's parents and his strange birth. I entitle this first story in the cycle *The woman who pretended to be dead.* This story contains twenty different possessive constructions, many of them repeated several times and many of them compound, i.e.,

possessives embedded within possessives. In the writer's opinion this corpus is representative of the range of data to be found in possessive constructions in the Coast Tsimshian language. I here present these twenty constructions with story context (in English), sentential context (in Coast Tsimshian), and morphological glossary. I have retranscribed the Coast Tsimshian, using the practical writing system in general use.

THE WOMAN WHO PRETENDED TO BE DEAD

There was a great village   at the mouth
of the Nass River

2.1

süü   ḱluusms
mouth   Nass River

T'aaga 'wii galts'apga a süü ḱluusms.
sit   great village   at mouth Nass

                                              There
                      a great chief   lived
              and his wife also.

2.2
naḱs-   t
spouse   his

Ada 'nii   wil dzooxsga 'wii sm'oogit ada nakst.
and there where lived   great chief   and wife-his

His wife was very beautiful   and the great chief
loved her dearly

                               But he was a hunter
always away out hunting   as soon as he left
to go hunting   a man came
who   secretly
visited   his wife
for as long   as the one was gone
Out hunting   just how long the other
her lover secretly lay with her

2.3
na   siip'nsg-   a t
discon lover   possessive

Ada al sga 'naga waalsga k'amtsn na   sii'pnsgat
and just how long do   secretly __ lover-her
a-t sila waal-t.
to-he with be-her

                               was suspicious   Now the chief
                                     to kill   because he was unable
                      Therefore he returned   even one animal
                              and accused   home
                              of sleeping   his wife
                         while he was gone   with another

                      by what her husband   His wife was so shamed
                        that she decided   said
                                                  to pretend to be dead

First she pretended to be ill   then she spoke
              to her husband

                                                  "Do not have me cremated,
                    but rather build for me   a great
                             coffin-box   put me in it and place it
          at the top of a great spruce   that is where
                 you must lay me to rest

2.4
na   ts'üwaan 'wii sa'mnt
discon top   great spruce

Ada na ts'üwaan 'wii   sa'mnt
and __   top   great spruce
'nii mi dmwil lisgüü- yu.
there you must   lay-   me

3   4

After she had
she seemed

said these things
really to be dead

All that she
asked   the great chief did
He built   a great
coffin-box   and placed in it
the body   of his wife

2.5

na   sami   naks-   t
discon body   spouse-   possessive

Ada-t   wil   lumaga   na   sami   naks-t.
And- he then   put-in   __   body   wife-his

He also placed in it   food
and grave goods

                          Then he put it at the top
of a huge cedar tree   he did all that his wife
had asked   before
she died

The great chief's heart
was sorely troubled   that his wife
was now dead   he almost took his own life
so burdened   was his heart

2.6

goot-   sga   'wii   sm'oogit
heart- absent great   chief

Ada sm   doxtga gootsga 'wii   sm'oogit
and   very troubled heart   great   chief
a   ta dzaga naks- t.
that now   dead   wife- his

2.7

goot-   t   > [goot]   his heart
heart- possessive

Ada gidza lip   gilks malksit
and   almost self   cremate
a   sga   doxtga   goot.
because   so   troubled   heart-his

5   6

Every   night
he came to watch   at the place
where she lay   and after he had done this
for a long time   one
day   maggots
began falling down   where we sat
the chief wept most bitterly   for now the chief knew
that the body   of his wife
was corrupted

Then he left off watching

As soon as the great chief   stopped guarding
the place   where his wife lay
then the woman's secret   her lover
came   ...

2.8

na   K'amtsn   na   sii'pnsg-   a   hana'axga
discon   secret   discon   lover-   indef   woman

Ada nah wil goydiksa   na   K'amtsn
and   then   came   __   secret

    na sii'pnsga hana'axga.
    __   lover   woman

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then the woman's secret   her lover
came   and stood a ladder up
so that he might climb up   to the place where lay
the woman   who was the chief's wife

2.9

naks-   a   sm'oogit   the chief's wife
spouse-   indef   chief

...at   man   goosga   wil   lisgüüsga   hana'axga
... to   up   go   where   lay   woman

gu   naksa   sm'oogit.
who   wife   chief

He knocked   on the outside of the coffin

2.10

kwtuun-   sga   xpiis
outside-   absent   box

Ada   wil-t nah   'ye'tsa   kwtuunsga   xpiis,
and   then-he   struck   outside   box

He knocked   on the outside of the coffin
and said   "Let me in, Ghost!"

8

the woman recognized | the voice of her lover
therefore she spoke | "Why else would I pretend
to be full of maggots?"

opened the coffin | Then the woman
and the man | where she lay
inside | went
just before | and made love to her
he went away | dawn

the chief | Sometimes
husband | the woman's
  | came to weep

2.11

naƙs-   *a*   *hana'axga*
husband- indefinite woman

Ada al gaxpa goydiƙsa sm'oogitga
  sometimes came   chief
naƙsa hana'axga a wihawtgat,
husband woman   to   weep

9

Sometimes
The woman's | husband
came | To weep
mourning | his wife
then the woman | would let
white shavings | from a bone spoon fall down

2.12

Łaalb-   *m*   *nopd-*   *a*   *wiu*
shavings- connector white- idefinite bone-spoon

Ada nah wil waalsga hana'axga
and then   do   woman
at tgi gal'oo Łaalbm nopda   *wiu.*
to down drop shavings white   bone-spoon

and they | seemed to move
turning in the breeze | they truly
looked like | maggots

The chief would leave | the place where his wife lay
his heart | sorely troubled

But in the night time | the woman's
secret | her lover
came | and lay with her

10

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                    things went on    like  this
                    for a long time

                                      Then one
                    morning           it was just at first light
                    one               of the great chief's nephews
                    was going out     to hunt seals
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2.13

k'old-   a   £gwisliis- a   'wii   sm'oogit
one   indefinite nephew-   indefinite great   chief

. . . ada wil yaasga k'olda £gwisliisa 'wii
. . . when   went   one   nephew   great

sm'oogit a dm   woot.
chief   to   hunt-seals

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                    he caught sight    of a man
                    coming out of the coffin   of the chief's wife
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2.14

na xpiis- a   naks- a   sm'oogit
discon coffin- indefinite wife- indefinite   chief

. . . ksi yeltga 'yuuta   a   na xpiisa naksa sm'oogit.
. . . out return   man   from __   coffin   wife   chief

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                    He watched    where
                    the man went   the chief's nephew saw
                    that the man   was carrying
                    a ladder       suddenly he disappeared
                    among the trees  into the forest


                    The chief's    nephew
                    decided        he would keep watch
                    over these things  and see for himself
                    what this one   who visited
                    the place where his uncle's  wife lay
                    was doing
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2.15

naks- is   nibiip- t
wife- proper name   uncle- possessive

. . . dmt k'ap   lip   nii wila loo t'in ts'ilaaya
. . .   to   really himself see what do   who   visit

wil   sgüüsga naksis nibiipt.
where   lay   wife   uncle-his   .

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                    He stayed near
                    where the tree   stood
                    where        the woman lay
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As soon as it was dark   that man
came   and climbed up
the ladder   to where the woman
lay   and said
"let me in, ghost!"

Then the woman replied
"For what other reason   would I pretend
to be full of maggots?"

Then the woman
opened the coffin-box   and the man
went in   and lay with her
all night

Just before
first light in the morning   the chief's nephew
saw   that the man
went away   from his uncle's wife
Now the man   knew
that the woman   was alive
he went   to his uncle
and said

"Well, uncle,
your wife   is not dead!"

2.16
naḳs- n
wife- your

Wai biip aƚga dzaḳsga naḳs-n
Well uncle not dead wife-your

Then the man
told   his uncle
what   he had seen

The great chief was furious   because his wife
had deceived him   that is why he made
a ladder   when it was dark
he went   to where his wife lay
he put the ladder up   and climbed up
he struck   the coffin-box
and said,   "Let me in, ghost!"

But the woman   did not answer
because she did not recognize   the voice
that spoke to her.

Again the chief spoke,
"Let me in, ghost!"

And again the woman
made no answer

the chief spoke

Now the third time
he said,

"If you do not open to me
from where you are lying."

I will cast you down

Then at last the woman

spoke

and said, "Why did I

pretend to be full of maggots?

the coffin-box
that the woman
to giving birth
was so big

Then she opened
and the chief saw
was close
now that her belly

2.17
ƀan-   t
belly   her

Adat niisda sm'oogit Ła deplga dm 'waasga
and   saw   chief   now soon to give-birth
hana'axga Ła sm 'wiileeksa ƀant.
woman   now very big   belly-her

When he saw

what his wife had done   he took

his knife   ...

2.18
na   t'u'utsg-at
discon   knife-   his

Adat gyaasga na t'u'u'tsgat...
and   took   __   knife-his

When he saw
what his wife had done   he took
his knife   And cut her body
in half   right at the her waist

2.19
na   süülg-   a   txamoo- t
discon   middle- indefinite body-   her

Adat sm libagayt sga k'odza na süülga txamoot
and   very right across cut __ middle body-her

When he saw
what his wife had done   he took
his knife   And cut her body
in half   right at the her waist so that
she would at last be truly dead

Then he left

Well just at the moment   she died
she gave birth   to her child

This is why   he suckled
his mother's entrails

2.20

na   haats- ga   noo-   t
discon   entrails- absent   mother-his

Ada na haatsga   noot   'niisga gan   mmoot.
and __   entrails   mother-his   this   why   he suckled

   At night time
people   would notice
something like a child   who had the appearance
of darkness   coming out of the grave
they would try to follow him   but he would disappear
among   the trees
into the forest   and no one could see
where   he had gone

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3. Theoretical assumptions.

3.1 Minimalist model. I use the Minimalist Program (MP) theoretical model (Figure 2) in this paper. This model, developed out of the Government-Binding (GB) model (Figure 1), dispenses with the notions of D-structure and S-structure.
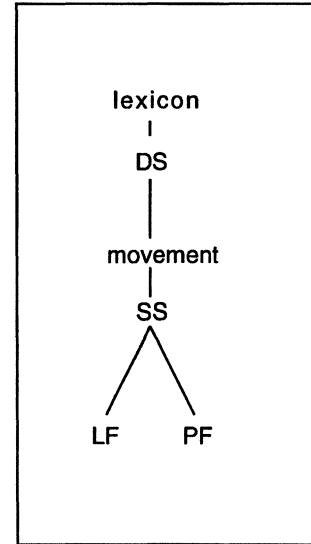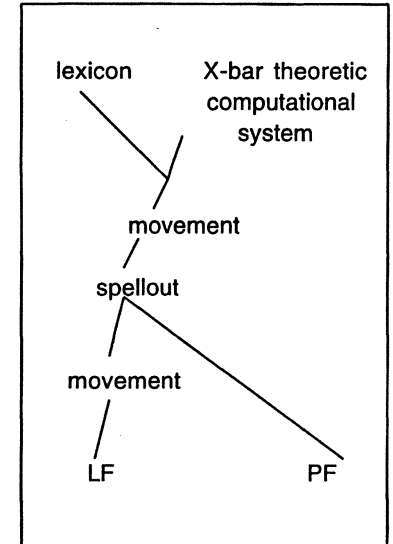
Figure 1. GB model.   Figure 2. MP model.

It assumes a universal X-bar theoretic computational system (Figure 3) into which lexical items, with their subcategorization frames and theta-role assignments, are inserted and then

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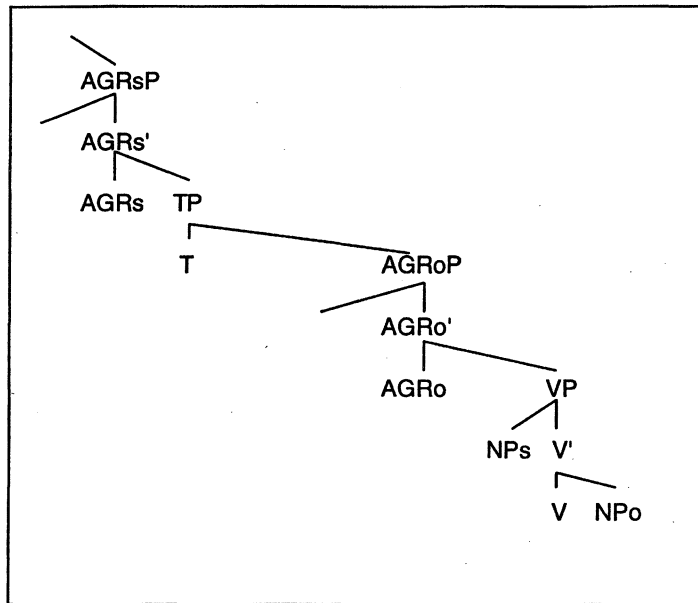
Figure 3. Partial X-bar theoretic construction for sentences.

projected into phrases and clauses. Lexical items are fully
inflected in the lexicon. Movement, or rather copy-deletion,
procedures are devices to check the morphology of a
construction: word-order and inflection. Word order movement
(upward copying) comes earlier and is necessary in the
construction of Phonetic Form (PF). Only the highest copy of an
entity will have phonetic shape. When the process of
morphological inflection checking begins to distort PF word
order, then the construction is said to have passed a point in its

derivation called spell-out. Movement after spell-out occurs to
show such things as quantifier scope, as is necessary in the
construction of Logical Form (LF).

The AGR and T phrases are devices to check the inflection
of the lexical items in the construction. In an SVO language, no
movement is required before spell-out. In a VSO language, such
as Coast Tsimshian, V movement occurs before spell-out, thus
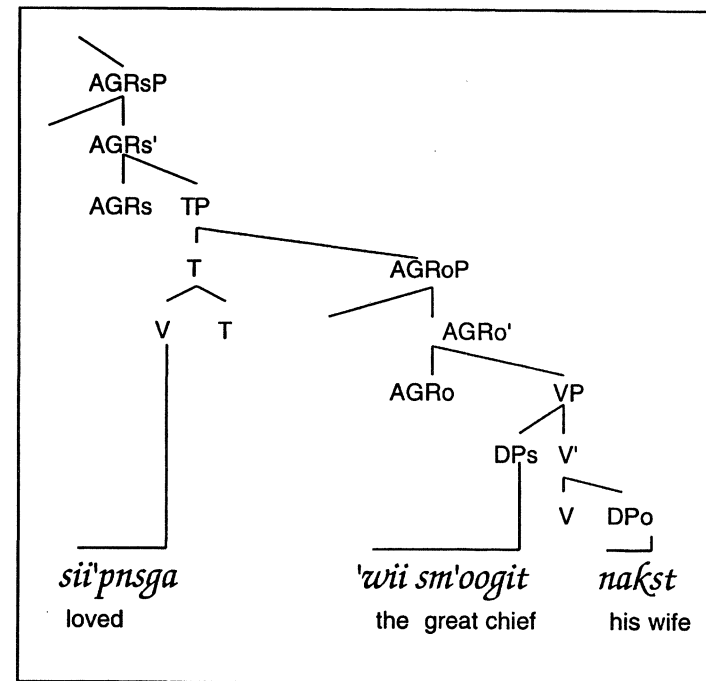giving the proper PF word order (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. V adjoins T before spell-out.

3.2 Determiner phrases.   I assume that NPs are the complements to phrasal heads called determiners, and that possessor NPs are the specifiers in determiner phrases (DP). I assume further that it is desirable to view the X-bar construction of a DP as analogous to that of a sentence, i.e., that the possessor NP/DP should be analogous to a sentence subject, the determiner head (D) analogous to a sentence verb, and the possessed NP/DP analogous to a sentence object (Figure 5). Determiner heads are either simple, i.e., "intransitive," or, if they have a possessive, "transitive."

| The great chief | loved | his wife. |
| the great chief | 's | love for his wife |
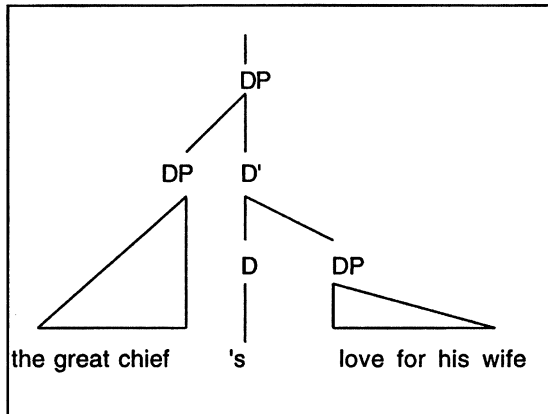
Figure 5. Possessive construction.

The difficulty in Coast Tsimshian is that the word orders for sentences and possessive constructions are not analogous. The

order of subject and object is the reverse of the order for possessor and possessed (Figure 6).
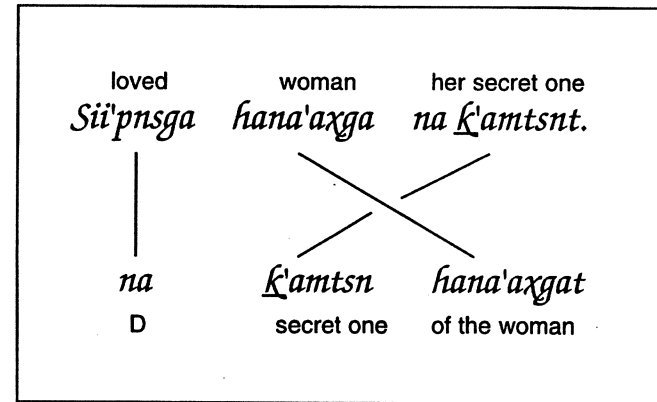

Figure 6. Sentence and possessive word order asymmetry.

4. Analysis. Coast Tsimshian has intransitive and transitive determiner heads. The transitive determiner heads assign theta-possessor role to their specifiers.

4.1 Intransitive determiner. The intransitive determiner has no phonetic shape and assigns no theta roles (cf. Figure 7):
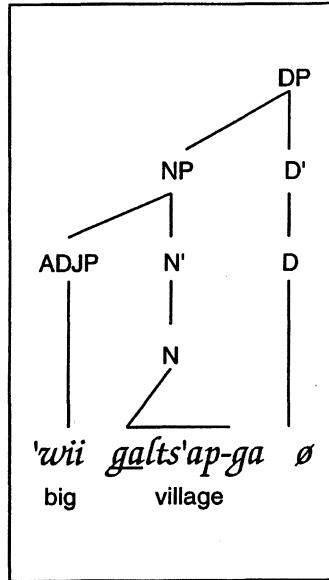
$$\emptyset \quad \text{[\_]}(\ )$$

Figure 7. An intransitive DP.

4.2 Transitive determiners.

4.2 <u>Transitive determiners</u>. There are two transitive determiner heads. Both assign theta-possessor role to their specifier (Figure 8). One has no phonetic realization, the other has the phonetic shape [næ], represented by the orthographic 'na.'

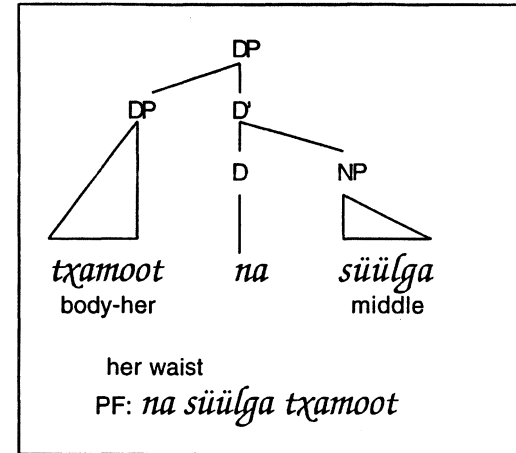Ø   [_NP] (__, possessed)
na   [_NP] (__, possessed)

Figure 8. Transitive DP before movement.

4.2.1 <u>The 'na' determiner</u>. The type of possession the 'na' determiner names is one of disconnectedness. The possessed item is either not an intrinsic part of the possessor or it has been separated from the possessor, even if it is/was an intrinsic part of the possessor such as a body part. This determiner is not simply an agreement or classifier morpheme, but is used creatively, sometimes for great dramatic/poetic effect.

It occurs in eight different constructions in this text (Table 1). Ordinary separateness is to be seen in the woman's coffin (2.14) and in the chief's knife (2.18). But this possessor determiner is used to special effect in the other instances. The woman is separated from her secret lover (2.3, 2.8a, 2.8b)

	D	possessed	infl	possessor	infl?	infl
2.3	na	sii'pnsg-	a	*pro*		t
2.4	na	ts'üwaan	ø	'wii sa'mn-t		
2.5	na	sami	ø	naks-t		
2.8a	na	sii'pnsg-	a	hana'ax-	ga	
2.8b	na	k'amtsn	ø	na sii'pnsga hana'axga		
2.14	na	xpiis-	a	naksa sm'oogit		
2.18	na	t'u'u'tsg-	a	*pro*		t
2.19	na	süülg-	a	txamoo-t		
2.20	na	haats-	ga	noo-t		

Table 1. Disconnected possession.

because their love is ill-fated and they will be lost to each other. The top of the spruce tree (2.14) in which her coffin is placed is disconnected from the rest of the tree just as this world of the living separated from the (sky) world of the dead. Her body (2.5) is separated from her in the context of her (feigned) death. Her waist (2.19) is disconnected from her when her husband butchers her, cutting her in two. The slain mother is separated from her own entrails (2.20) that nourish her orphaned newborn son, forever lost to her.

4.2.2 The unmarked possessive determiner. Table 2. Lists the unmarked possessive constructions, i.e., those wherein there is an instrinsic connection between possessor and possessed and wherein the notion of "possession" is really a natural

	D	possessed	infl	possessor	infl?	infl
2.1	ø	süü	ø	kluusms		
2.2	ø	naks-	ø	*pro*		t
2.6	ø	goot-	sga	'wii sm'oogit		
2.7	ø	goot-	ø	*pro*		t
2.9	ø	naks-	a	sm'oogit		
2.10	ø	kwtuun-	sga	xpiis		
2.11	ø	naks-	a	hana'ax-	ga	
2.12	ø	£aalbm nopd-	a	wiu		
2.13	ø	k'olda £gwisliis-	a	'wii sm'oogit		
2.15	ø	naks-	is	nibiip-t		
2.16	ø	naks-	ø	*pro*		n
2.17	ø	ban-	ø	*pro*		t

Table 2. Unmarked "possession."

connection rather than an act of state of ownership. Intrinsically connected relationships include one's own heart (2.6, 2.7) and belly (2.17), the river's mouth (2.1), a box and its outside (2.10), a nephew and his uncle (2.13), a wife and her husband (2.2, 2.9, 2.11, 2.15, 2.16). The unusual construction here is 2.12 wherein the shavings from a bone spoon, a grave good, let float down from the coffin to imitate maggots, are considered connected to the spoon from whence they came, a communication, a connection, between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

4.3 <u>The inflection of the possessed NP</u>. NPs are inflected for distance vs. presence, and, in the presence of a *pro* possessor, to show person-number agreement. The possessor NPs do not receive inflection.

4.3.1 <u>Distance inflection</u>. A series of suffixes (often called connectives in the Tsimshianic literature) indicates presence (-da, -sda), absence (-ga, -sga), or indeterminate (-ø, -a). The distinction between absent and indeterminate distance is analogous to the distinction between disconnected possession and unmarked or intrinsic "possession." The possessor determiners and the NP inflectors can be made to interact for dramatic effect. The -sga suffix indicates distance in 2.6 and 2.10 which both have unmarked possessive determiners.

2.6   ø   *goot-*   *sga*   *'wii*   *sm'oogit*
        D   heart   absent   great   chief

The heart of the great chief is so troubled by the death of his wife that he contemplates suicide. The narrator distances himself, indicating that the chief's heart is far away, close to being lost.

2.10   ø   *kwtuun-*   *sga*   *xpiis*
         D   outside   absent   coffin-box

This is the outside of the coffin-box which the secret lover strikes as he addresses the "ghost" inside. The narrator places the outside of the coffin-box at some distance from the inside, calling attention to the distance between the world inside and the world outside the woman's resting place.

The -ga suffix interacts with a 'na' possessor determiner in one construction:

2.20   *na*   *haats-*   *ga*   *noot*
       disconnected entrails   absent   his-mother.

This expression is the most poignant, emphasising the separation between the dismembered mother and her new-born child, who must suckle her disgorged entrails in order to survive.

4.4 <u>Movement before spell-out</u>. The determiner must move in order to check its features: (1) transitive vs. intransitive, i.e., possessive construction versus simple determiner, and (2) disconnected, true possession vs. intrinsic connection. Likewise the possessed NP must move in order to check its inflection: absent vs. present.

4.4.1 <u>The transitive determiner phrase before movement</u>. I assume that the X-bar theoretic construction for a DP has a superordinate POSS phrase analogous to TP in a sentence construction. I also assume that the DP construction has another phrase (X) that is complement to POSSP and superordinate to DP, thus analogous to AGRoP in a sentence construction (Fig. 9).

4.4.2 <u>The transitive determiner phrase at spell-out</u>. The Determiner head adjoins the POSS head in order to check its morphological features, just as a verb adjoins T. In Coast Tsimshian this must occur before spell-out in order to give the correct PF word order. The possessed NP/DP will move into the empty specifier to X position, just as the object must must into
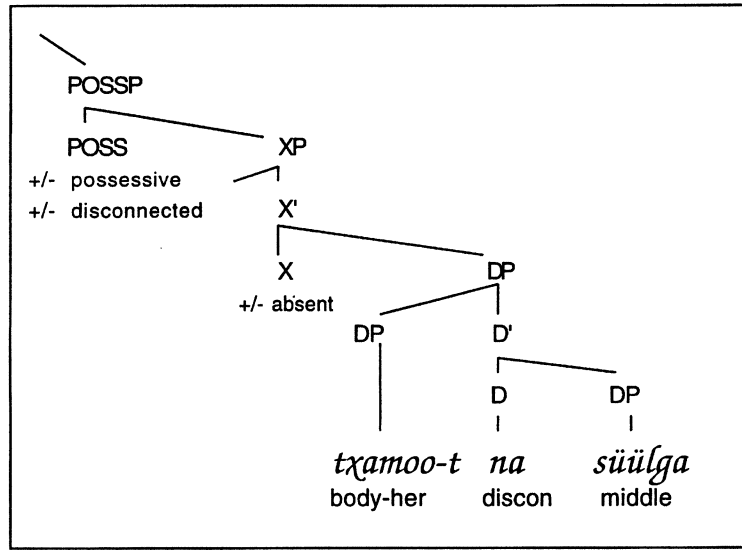
Figure 9. A Coast Tsimshian DP.

Figure 10. Movement required before spell-out.

the AGRoP after spell-out. The movement in a possessive construction, however, must also occur before spell-out in order to give the proper PF word order (Figure 10).

4.4.3 Sentence and determiner construction at spell-out. The Coast Tsimshian PF word order is VSO, indicating that only V raising occurs before spell-out. In the possessive determiner phrase construction, Coast Tsimshian syntax requires that both the determiner and the possessed NP/DP raise before spell-out.
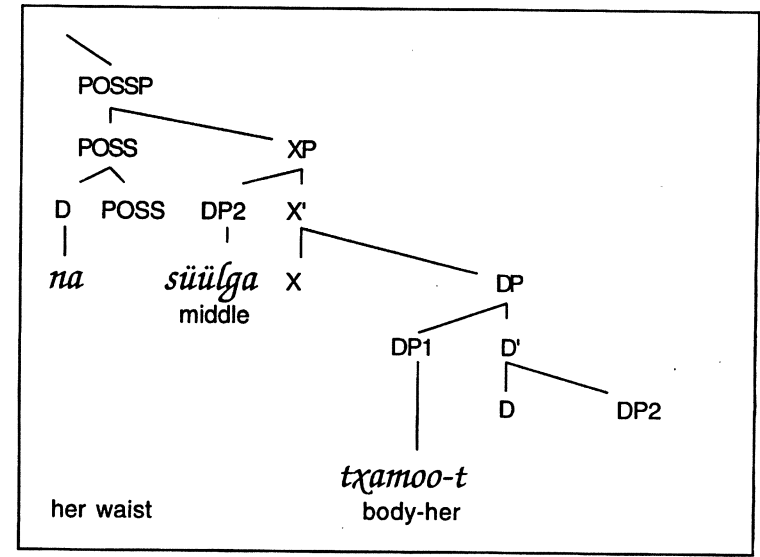
4.4.4 Conclusion. A minimalist approach to Coast Tsimshian syntax lays bare the desired analogy between different phrasal constructions, i.e., the universality of the X-bar theoretic computational system. Specifically the Coast Tsimshian Sentence (AGRsP) and Determiner Phrase (POSSP) can be usefully characterized by directly analogous X-bar structures. The only difference between the two is that object raising must occur after spell-out in the sentence while the possessed NP/DP must be raised before spell-out.

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