Functions of the Nootka (Nuu-chah-nulth) ‘Passive’ Suffix

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1. Introduction

In this paper I will examine the function of the suffix -'at in Nootka that has been characterized as a 'passive' or 'inverse' in previous studies. Sapir and Swadesh (1924; 1939; Swadesh 1933) were the first to use the term 'passive' for this suffix, but they provide neither a detailed description of its use nor a justification for calling it a 'passive'. In their fairly detailed discussions of uses of the same suffix, Rose 1981 and Rose & Carlson 1984 basically accept the characterization as 'passive', but they note deviation of the -'at construction from the prototypical syntactic passive. Whistler 1985 proposes an alternative analysis of the suffix as an inverse marker similar to that found in Algonquian languages. Emanatian 1988 makes a counter-proposal that the -'at construction is in fact a prototypical syntactic passive.

The aims of this paper are to show that neither 'passive' nor 'inverse' is an appropriate characterization of the function of the suffix, and to provide an alternative to the previous characterizations. We first examine the passive analysis, looking at the facts on which the analysis is based and then the facts that are problematic for the analysis. We then proceed to examine the inverse analysis.

A word about terminology is in order. In this paper I will use the terms ACTOR and UNDERGOER to characterize the two participants that are semantically involved in the transitive predication. ACTOR and UNDERGOER are semantic macroroles and are not the equivalents of 'agent' and 'patient' in the narrow senses of these terms. As pointed out by Foley & Van Valin 1984 and Van Valin 1993, not all semantic roles are distinguished in every part of grammar. Rather, a group of roles are treated alike for a certain purposes in the grammar. In transitive predications semantic roles are grouped into those that are typically expressed as subjects of simple transitive (neither causativized nor passivized) predicates, ACTOR, and those that are typically expressed as objects, UNDERGOER. Although the concepts ACTOR and UNDERGOER are grammatically delineated, they are nonetheless semantically motivated categories and I use these terms to refer to semantic characteristics of participants.

2. Passive Analysis

2.1 Motivations behind the passive analysis

Before we enter the discussion on the passive analysis, we need to be clear about the notion of 'passive'. Crosslinguistically, the application of the term 'passive' has not been strictly constrained, and the term 'passive' has often been used for a diverse range of structural arrangements and functions. Even in the typological literature some scholars (e.g. Keenan 1985; Shibatani 1985) take a more liberal view of passive than others (e.g. Givón 1981). Thus, we first need to clarify what we mean by 'passive' before we can evaluate the appropriateness of the application of the term. The defining characteristics of the 'prototypical passive' that have been discussed in the discussion surrounding the Nootka suffix -'at (most clearly presented in Emanatian 1988) can be summarized as (1).

(1) Definition of the Prototypical Passive:

a. the passive clause structurally alternates with the 'active' clause
b. the active object assumes the syntactic privileges of the subject
   — i.e. promotion of the active object to the subject status
c. the active subject loses the syntactic privileges of the subject
   — i.e. 'demotion' of the active subject expressed as an oblique (syntactically peripheral nominal element) or left unexpressed
d. the valency of the passivized predicate is reduced compared to that of the non-passivized 'active' predicate

In short, the 'prototypical passive' is a structural alternation that affects the organization of the clause through change in the syntactic status of the clausal arguments.

The characterization of the Nootka passive as a prototypical syntactic passive is argued for in Emanatian 1988. There are two facts that suggest that the Nootka -'atconstruction is a 'passive': (i) an apparent transitive-intransitive alternation that is reminiscent of the syntactic alternation of active-passive, and (ii) a change in the grammatical treatment of the ACTOR and UNDERGOER.
The apparent transitive-intransitive alternation is illustrated in (2), (3) and (4).

(2) **qahsa-**p Bill muwič
    qah-**so** p Bill muwič
    die -NOM.CAUS NAME deer
    kill Bill deer
    PREDICATE ACTOR UNDERGOER
    ‘Bill killed the deer.’ [KYU: Rose & Carson 1984:37]

(3) **qahsa:**t
    muwič
    is.killed
    die
    PREDICATE UNDERGOER
    ‘The deer was killed.’ [KYU: Rose 1981 p.78: #1851

(4) **qahsa:**t
    muwič
    is.killed
    deer
    being.by.him Bill
    PREDICATE UNDERGOER
    ‘The deer was killed by Bill.’ [KYU: ibid.]

In (3) the ACTOR is left unexpressed and in (4) the ACTOR is expressed as an object of a combined predicate ²ak-ut. In either case the ACTOR appears to be purged from the core argument structure leaving only the UNDERGOER as an argument.

The changes in grammatical status of the ACTOR and UNDERGOER are illustrated in (5) and (6). In a typical two-participant transitive clause, the pronominal index is coreferential with the ACTOR as in (5), but in a clause with the suffix -at the index is coreferential with the UNDERGOER as in (6). In terms of the morphological marking on the predicate, the UNDERGOER in the -at clause is given a special grammatical status that it does not otherwise have, and the ACTOR in the -at clause lacks the special status that it otherwise has.

(5) **1 PLURAL (ACTOR) → 2 PLURAL (UNDERGOER)**
    ha:’am/-agwič at-šaθ.
    ha:’am -qαq-nill at-šaθ
    invite -PUT -pl you.all
    we.will.invite you.all
    ‘We will invite you all.’ [elicited (7.24.91:77)]

(6) **3 SINGULAR (ACTOR) → 1 SINGULAR (UNDERGOER)**
    ha:’am/-units.
    ha:’am -at-ai -s
    invite -AT-PAST -1sg
    he.invited.me
    ‘I was invited; He invited me’ [elicited (7.24.91:81)]

The passive analysis equates these changes in morphological status with changes in syntactic status observed in the prototypical syntactic passive: i.e., syntactic promotion of the UNDERGOER to and demotion of the ACTOR from the subject.

### 2.2 Problematic facts

Although the above observations appear to invite identification of the -at construction as a syntactic passive, a closer examination of the construction raises questions about such analysis.

First, the Nootka -at clause is not fundamentally a construction derived from a transitive clause. It can be formed on an intransitive predicate.

(7) **nixyuː-itini s**
    nix -yu -’at-int -(y)i:-s
    rain -ed ’AT-PAST-INDEF-1sg
    ‘I got rained on’ [KYU: Rose & Carson 1984: 17a]

(8) **hα-’at**
    na:’ilti
    being.early go.out.fishing
    ‘Go out fishing early.’ [Carson 92]

The predicates in (7) and (8), nixyuː- ’rained’ and hα-’at ‘being early’, are one-participant predicates and there is no corresponding ‘active’ clause for (7) and (8). Therefore, it is not reasonable to characterize the above ‘intransitive’ -at clauses as a syntactic configuration derived from corresponding transitive (n-two-place) configuration through the application of a regular syntactic process.

Thus, the regular correspondence between the -at clauses and their transitive counterparts is not a defining characteristic of the -at construction. If we are to treat the -at clause based on a two-place (transitive) predicate and that based on a one-place (intransitive) predicate as a single construction type, which seems to be a reasonable assumption, the -at clause must be considered a syntactically independent, not derived, construction. This is in fact suggested by Rose 1981 and Rose & Carlson 1984 in their generative characterization of the construction as ‘base-generated’ (as opposed to transformationally generated). The intransitive -at clause and its implications for the passive analysis are not discussed in Emanation 1988.

2 Notice that (7) and (8) in fact represent two different types of intransitive -at clauses, i.e. what we can call the UNDERGOER-focusing type and the ACTOR-defocusing type. In the UNDERGOER-focusing -at clause (illustrated by (7)), the UNDERGOER that is not subcategorized for the main predicate is introduced as the grammatically central argument. This construction is reminiscent of the ‘adversative passive’ in Asian languages such as Japanese. On the other hand, in the ACTOR-defocusing -at clause (illustrated by (8)) the ACTOR that is subcategorized for the main predicate is removed, leaving the clause as an impersonal construction.
The second aspect where Nootka -'at construction deviates from the prototypical syntactic passive is the nature of structural rearrangement involved. As we noted above the argument for the passive analysis is based on the assumption that the change in the morphological marking pattern coincides with a syntactic reorganization of clausal arguments. As it turns out, however, the syntactic patterning in Nootka does not align itself with the morphological marking in the same way as in European languages and the structural reorganization involved in the -'at construction cannot be characterized as syntactic.

In the -'at construction the way the UNDERGOER interacts with the pronominal indexing differs from that in the non-'at construction: the UNDERGOER controls the pronominal index in the -'at construction, although it does not otherwise. This change cannot be characterized as a syntactic promotion. There is no discernible difference between the UNDERGOER argument in the -'at construction and that in the non-'at construction in terms of syntactic privileges. The argument that controls the pronominal index in Nootka does not necessarily play a major role in the organization of the syntactic structure of a clause that the 'subject' in European languages does. As Whistler 1985 (247) points out, there is no evidence suggesting that the morphologically identified 'subject' in Nootka has a syntactically privileged status.

In fact, it is doubtful whether the category of 'subject' even has reality in the syntax of Nootka. In the traditional literature on Nootka grammar, the pronominal index on the main predicate has been characterized as a subject pronominal suffix and the argument that is coreferential with the index as a subject. This characterization is understandable given the fact that the discourse characteristics of the participant that is identifiable in Chafe's (1987; 1994) terms. However, there is no syntactic operation or constraint in Nootka that refers to 'subject' as a category.

Emanatian 1988 argues for 'subject' as a syntactic category, citing the fact that when there is a constraint on coreferentiality between a complement-taking predicate and its complement, the constraint refers to the 'subject' of the complement clause regardless of its semantic role. (9) and (10) are among the examples Emanatian uses to illustrate her point (273: data cited from Rose 1981).

(9) [KYU: Rose 1981 p.87: 231]

a. *kumalÉkinit's
   kumal-3H-int -yili:-s
   try -MOM-PAST-INDEX-1SG
   I.tried
   (intended as: I tried for Joe to get invited.)

b. +kumalÉkinit's
   kumal-3H-int -yili:-s
   try -MOM-PAST-INDEX-1SG
   I.tried
   invited
   'I tried to invite Joe.'

(10) [KYU: Rose 1981 p.87: 232]

a. *kumalÉkinit's
   kumal-3H-int -yili:-s
   try -MOM-PAST-INDEX-1SG
   I.tried
   being.invited.by
   'I tried to get invited.'

b. +kumalÉkinit's
   kumal-3H-int -yili:-s
   try -MOM-PAST-INDEX-1SG
   I.tried
   invited
   (intended as: 'I tried for someone to invite me.')

However, this phenomenon alone is not enough to establish the syntactic category of 'subject'. This coreferentiality constraint may very well be viewed as a pragmatic constraint on perspective consistency between the matrix and complement clauses. Without other independent evidence, it is difficult to justify the validity of 'subject' as a syntactic category.

Thus, the fact that the UNDERGOER gains control over the pronominal indexing does not have a discernible implication for the syntactic privileges of the UNDERGOER within the clause, and therefore it is not reasonable to characterize the grammatical change concerning the UNDERGOER as a 'syntactic promotion'.

The grammatical realignment of clausal arguments in Nootka -'at clauses deviates from the syntactic reorganization associated with the prototypical passive not only with respect to the syntactic status of UNDERGOER but also to that of the ACTOR. Syntactic demotion of the ACTOR has been claimed in Nootka based on two observations (Rose 1981; Rose & Carlson 1984; Emanatian 1988): the ACTOR (i) loses control over the pronominal index and (ii) is expressed as an 'oblique' argument. But unfortunately, these observations do not serve as conclusive evidence.

As already discussed above, control over the pronominal index does not coincide with a syntactically privileged status of the argument. Thus, the loss of that control itself cannot be taken as an indication of a change in syntactic status.

The observation concerning the 'oblique' status of the ACTOR argument is also open to question. When the ACTOR is expressed as an overt argument in the -'at construction, it can be expressed either as a direct argument, i.e., without any syntactic mediation, or as an object of a combined predicate in which 'at is 'being done by ...' the one who did ...'. In the latter case the -'at sentence shows a surface resemblance to the English passive construction.

(11) qohtsa?t
    qot-3H-int -'at
    being.invited.by
    being.invited.by
    being.invited.by
    'The deer was killed by Bill.' [KYU: Rose 1981 p.78: #185]
In (11) the ACTOR Bill is apparently demoted to a non-direct argument status which is marked by a preposition-like predicate \(\text{\textit{at}}\). Temp-ing as this account may be, it is not an appropriate description of the structure. \(\text{\textit{at}}\) is neither a grammatical marker of an oblique ACTOR argument nor an integral part of the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction. The ACTOR can be expressed without \(\text{\textit{at}}\) as a direct argument in the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction (see example (12) below). Expression of the ACTOR as an object of \(\text{\textit{at}}\) is an independent structural option, not a part of the obligatory structural pattern of ‘passive’-formation in Nootka. Thus, a construction like (11) does not prove the denoted status of the ACTOR argument.

(12) \(\text{\textit{at}}\) Bill will cut for me.

It’s for me Linda will cut it up.’ [KYU: Rose 1981 p.79: #193]

Rose (1981) claims that the direct ACTOR argument Linda in (12) in fact has a syntactically peripheral ‘oblique’ status. Her claim is based on the observation that the ACTOR argument in the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction, unlike that in the non-\(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction, has limited word order flexibility: it cannot precede the predicate with which it associates and does not normally precede the core arguments with which it associates (57). However, word order flexibility alone does not provide strong evidence for a syntactic category, especially in a language where word order is flexible and is very responsive to pragmatic demands. In fact this constraint can very well be explained pragmatically. As can be independently shown, in Nootka discourse the important information is most likely to be placed in initial position before the predicate. When the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction is used in discourse, an ACTOR such as Linda in (12) generally occupies a relatively unimportant place within the immediate context. Therefore, it does not make sense to put it into the pragmatically highlighted position, i.e. sentence-initially (= before the predicate). This pragmatic explanation is consistent with the general characterization of Nootka as a ‘pragmatic word order language’ (Thompson 1978), and it seems better to view the word order flexibility as a factor independent of the syntactic status of an argument.

Given the lack of definitive evidence for its syntactic peripherality, it seems most reasonable to conclude that the ACTOR argument in the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction is syntactically no less central within the clause than that in the non-\(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction.

The fact that there is no clear syntactic demotion of the ACTOR has a major implication for the characterization of the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction with respect to valency reduction. The prototypical passive as defined above involves reduction of the valence of the predicate through removal of the ACTOR from the core argument structure. However, as we have already seen, the Nootka \(\text{\textit{at}}\) clause can retain the ACTOR as a direct argument. Although this ACTOR argument does not control the pronominal index on the predicate, it is indistinguishable from the ACTOR in non-\(\text{\textit{at}}\) clauses in terms of syntactic privileges.

Thus, the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) predicate is just as ‘transitive’ as the non-\(\text{\textit{at}}\) form of the predicate. More accurately, the criterion based on valency change cannot be applied to Nootka in a meaningful way. Nootka grammar is not sensitive to the transitivity of the clause, that is, there is no grammatical marker in Nootka that indicates the transitivity of the clause. Therefore, any application of the notion of syntactic transitivity to Nootka clausal structure is bound to be arbitrary, e.g. based on the number of overtly expressed direct arguments.

2.3 Summary

The apparent alternation in syntactic transitivity and also the alternation in the pronominal indexing pattern seem to have led earlier researchers to the passive analysis. However, the Nootka \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction deviates from the prototypical syntactic passive in the following important ways:

i) the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction can be formed on an intransitive predicate — it does not necessarily have an ‘active’ counterpart

ii) grammatical promotion/demotion of the arguments does not have identifiable effects on their syntactic privileges

iii) the valency of the predicate is not reduced compared with that of non-\(\text{\textit{at}}\) clause

3. Inverse Analysis

3.1 Motivations behind the inverse analysis

Whistler 1985 questions the traditional characterization of the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction as a passive and argues that it is closer to an inverse. Whistler’s proposal is motivated by the animacy hierarchy constraints on the use of the \(\text{\textit{at}}\) construction in Nootkan languages (Whistler 1985 on Nootka; Klokeid 1978 on Nitinaht; Jacobsen
1973 on Makah) that find parallelism in the constraints governing the inverse person marking system, e.g. in Algonquian. The hierarchy is laid out in (13), and the pattern of use of ‘at’ is summarized in Table I.

(13) Animacy hierarchy governing the Nootka ‘at’ construction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Configuration</th>
<th>Use of ‘Passive’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2 → topical 3 &gt; nontopical 3</td>
<td>Prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 → 1, 2</td>
<td>Obligatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2 → 3, 1</td>
<td>Prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 → 3’</td>
<td>Prohibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3’ → 3</td>
<td>Obligatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Pattern of use of ‘at’

Basically, what (13) suggests is that the ‘at’ construction is required whenever a lower participant is acting on a higher participant. That is, the ‘at’ construction is not allowed when a first- or second-person participant (Speech Act Participant, SAP) is acting on either a third person or another SAP. On the other hand, when a third person is acting on a SAP, the sentence has to be put into the ‘at’ construction. When the sentence does not involve a SAP, the use of the ‘at’ construction is governed by the relative discourse topicality between the ACTOR and UNDERGOER: the ‘at’ construction is not allowed when the topical third person is acting on the nontopical, while it is required when the nontopical is acting on the topical.

The following excerpt from a text illustrates the use of the ‘at’ construction triggered by relative discourse topicality between third-person participants. In this excerpt the protagonist, a mink called Kwaaxtii, who killed the wolf chief, is being pursued by packs of wolves that are eager to take revenge. Notice that the ‘at’ construction is used in (c) and (d), when peripheral characters, i.e. wolves, are acting on the protagonist Kwaaxtii.

(14) [Mink 166-172]

a. PROTAGONIST > PERIPHERAL
na’as’ax  hə’tə’sax’i:t
na’as’ax  hə’tə’sax’i:t
hear -TEL Kwaaxtii
 hears Kwaaxtii
‘Kwaaxtii heard it [= the howling of the wolves].’

b. PROTAGONIST > PERIPHERAL
wilə’ax ḭə’tə’ax’i:t
wilə’ax ḭə’tə’ax’i:t
not -TEL exchange -MOM

(15)

3.2 Problematic facts

The Nootka ‘at’ clauses deviate from the prototypical inverse in one important respect, namely that the pattern of the pronominal indexing in ‘at’ clauses is different from that in non-‘at’ clauses. As we have seen, the pronominal indexing is controlled by the UNDERGOER in the ‘at’ clause and by the ACTOR otherwise.

a. Non-‘at’ clause: controller = ACTOR

b. ‘at’ clause: controller = UNDERGOER

‘Come here’, my grandmother told me.’ [Caroline 103]
3.3 Summary

The treatment of the Nootka -'at clause as an inverse construction is motivated by the observation that the use of -'at is sensitive to the animacy configuration of two participants. The -'at construction deviates slightly from the prototypical inverse construction in that the grammatical status (although not the syntactic status) of the arguments in an inverse clause differs from that in a non-inverse clause. Although the inverse analysis provides a non-ad-hoc characterization of certain constraints on the use of -'at, it leaves unexplained a large set of data involving intransitive-based -'at clauses.

4. Data left unaccounted for in previous studies

Previous studies on the -'at construction are limited in that they only take into account uses of -'at that affect the UNDERGOER (UNDERGOER-focusing function). However, -'at can be used for a function different from UNDERGOER-focusing, i.e. to de-particularize an action or event by eliminating the ACTOR. In this section I provide a basic description of this undocumented DE-PARTICULARIZING use of -'at.

The DE-PARTICULARIZING -'at basically occurs with predicates without an UNDERGOER. It can occur with predicates with an UNDERGOER, but in such a case the UNDERGOER is invariably inanimate.

Grammatically the predicate in a DE-PARTICULARIZING -'at clause takes the third person form regardless of the person of the UNDERGOER. It seems most natural to consider that the pronominal index is coreferential with the ACTOR, which is invariably non-referential or impersonal. Since there is neither semantic-discourse nor grammatical focusing of the UNDERGOER in DE-PARTICULARIZING -'at clauses, it is inappropriate, and sometimes impossible, to translate these DE-PARTICULARIZING -'at clauses into English passive clauses.

We can distinguish three types of contexts where the DE-PARTICULARIZING -'at clauses are commonly used, i.e. generic statements, non-specific actions, and instructive expressions.

Generalizing use

The DE-PARTICULARIZING -'at clauses can express generic statements. The prototypical cases involve relatively atemporal predicates, especially states. Here the DE-PARTICULARIZATION of the action is realized as atemporality and elimination of a particular agent. In (18) the speaker is describing canoe travel in former times from Vancouver Island to the Olympic Peninsula. Notice that the predicates with -'at, -'aniyat 'only time', 'at-cimbaht 'properly' and 'a:at-cimbaht 'in a short time', do not involve the UNDERGOER.

Example (19) was produced in a traditional narrative as background generic information to explain the protagonist’s action. In the immediately preceding part the protagonist dove into a river and picked up a rock in his hands.

Example:

You want to be home early.

You left the house, your hands were rubbing your revised imagining a "AT of something else."

In (16) and (17), neither ni'yu: 'rained nor ha: 'at-ma: 'at's 'wanting to be early' involves any kind of participant interaction. Thus, use of -'at cannot be ascribed to the configuration of relationships between two participants.
Myjx?at?is rhuksyi ?uq'l';lUk"'at.

"You can move fast [under water] when you are holding rocks in your hands [as ballast]." [Kingfisher 141]

**Impersonalizing use**

The use of "-at" for IMPERSONAL expressions is most clearly observed with highly momentaneous, temporally unstable actions.

(20) ?una:hsi?atqu: hu'is

"it-seeking-MOM.TEL." AT-IRR one.would.go.for yonder water

"Then we would go looking for fresh water, way over to the river." [Caroline 74]

The meaning and distribution of the IMPERSONAL "-at" overlap with those of the INSTRUCTIVE use discussed below, but the IMPERSONAL "-at" is found in wider contexts. The IMPERSONAL use, but not the INSTRUCTIVE use, can be found in irrealis, conditional sentences like (22) and (23).

(22) "when you quarrel..." [Caroline 181]

(23) "It was probably over a quarter mile if you measure it." [Kingfisher 146]

The IMPERSONAL use also differs from the INSTRUCTIVE use in that it can be found to describe non-controllable events.

**Instructive use**

DE-PARTICULARIZING "-at" clauses can also be used to express advice or instruction. In these uses the DE-PARTICULARIZATION is associated with the generality or nonindividuality of social expectations and obligations shared by all community members. Thus, advice or instruction expressed with "-at" clauses is based on social expectation, as in 'in our society things are done in this way' or 'people do ... this way' rather than on the individual authority, as in 'I think you should do so' or 'I order you to do so'. Distributionally the INSTRUCTIVE use are found with momentaneous actions, more specifically, highly controllable, executable actions. They do not occur with predicates that are in irrealis modes such as the conditional (when, if ...) and predicates that denote uncontrollable actions (cf. examples in IMPERSONAL use section). The INSTRUCTIVE use significantly overlaps with the IMPERSONAL use in terms of both distribution and meaning, and may well be considered a specialized case the IMPERSONAL use.

The most common context where the INSTRUCTIVE "-at" clause is found is when the speaker shows the hearer how to perform a certain task. In (25) the speaker is explaining how one would/should examine a tree for its suitability for a canoe. This example could be interpreted either as the INSTRUCTIVE use or the IMPERSONAL use.
The structure, i.e. the pragmatic configuration of participant structure surrounding the predicate, in such a way that the arguments between the structural alignment between morphological marking and syntactic structure. Use of -'at affects the pronominal indexing pattern on the main predicate, causing the argument structure in any syntactically relevant way: there is no discernible change in the syntactic privileges of discussing their implications for a general account of the function of -'at.

5. Toward a general characterization of Nootka -'at

We are now ready to seek a general characterization of the -'at construction that is appropriate in the light of the structural uniqueness of Nootka. First we summarize the relevant facts about the use of -'at and discuss their implications for a general account of the function of -'at.

**Types of effect of -'at on participant structure**

Use of the Nootka -'at construction affects participant structure in certain ways. Morphologically it affects the pronominal indexing pattern on the main predicate, causing the actor to lose and/or the undergoer to gain control of the indexing. A change in the morphological marking may be linked to syntactic reorganization of clause structure in some languages, but in Nootka there is not enough evidence to prove a structural alignment between morphological marking and syntactic structure. Use of -'at does not affect the argument structure in any syntactically relevant way: there is no discernible change in the syntactic privileges of the arguments between the -'at and non-'at constructions. The -'at construction also affects pragmatic argument structure, i.e. the pragmatic configuration of participant structure surrounding the predicate, in such a way that the actor is defocused and/or the undergoer is focused. There is a clear parallelism between the morphological and the pragmatic changes in the argument structure configuration in the -'at construction. The different types of change are illustrated below:

**Type 1: Undergoer-focusing + Actor-defocusing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Morphological Marking</th>
<th>Syntactic Structure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'at</td>
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**Type 2: Undergoer-focusing only**

<table>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'at</td>
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**Type 3: Actor-defocusing only**

<table>
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<th>Syntactic Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'at</td>
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</table>

It is notable that all of the types of -'at construction affect the participant structure either through focusing the undergoer or defocusing the actor. This fact seems to be relevant to the general function of -'at, but it does not necessarily mean that undergoer-defocusing and/or actor-defocusing are the 'function' of -'at.
Both the passive analysis and the inverse analysis take the view that a combination of UNDERGOER-focusing and ACTOR-defocusing constitutes the function of -'at, thus, that the function of -'at is to manipulate the overall configuration of the ACTOR-UNDERGOER relationship. But this view turns out to be problematic, leaving unexplained the uses of -'at that involve only one participant (cf. type 2 and 3). In fact, any attempt to define the function of -'at solely in terms of its effects on the participant structure, i.e. UNDERGOER-focusing or ACTOR-defocusing, faces the similar difficulty of not being able to explain all the types of -'at construction. Instead, it seems better to consider the changes of the participant structure as side effects of the use of -'at. In other words, UNDERGOER-focusing or ACTOR-defocusing should be considered as epiphenomena of the function of -'at, not the function itself.

**Constraints on participant structure in the -'at construction**

The range of participant structures that occur in the -'at construction is constrained in a systematic way. The constraint has been characterized in terms of the animacy hierarchy (see the section on the inverse analysis): the -'at construction almost always shows a participant structure where the participant with the lower animacy rank is acting on the participant with the higher animacy rank. To look at this constraint from another viewpoint, -'at can be used only when the UNDERGOER is higher in animacy than the ACTOR. This constraint is relevant only to the -'at construction involving two participants, but it is, nevertheless, systematic enough to warrant a treatment as an integral part of the function of -'at.

**Structural environment surrounding the -'at construction**

Another factor that should be taken into account in determining the general characteristics of the -'at construction is its structural environment, i.e. the network of structural alternation the construction is in. In the previous studies the -'at construction has generally been put in opposition to the corresponding non-'at construction based on the same main predicate with the same set of participants. This treatment suggests that there is a regular structural alternation between the -'at and non-'at constructions and that the function of -'at is to mark or trigger the structural alternation. However, as evident from type 2 and type 3 constructions, the apparent structural alternation is not completely regular: there are -'at constructions where the set of participants involved is not identical to the non-'at constructions based on the same predicate. The -'at construction is structurally independent: that is, it cannot be derived from other constructions through a regular structural operation. This observation leads to a new expectation about the function of -'at. The function of -'at cannot be structural rearrangement of a given participant structure. The participant structure in the -'at construction does not result from rearrangement of that in other construction, as in the passive or inverse, but is built anew based on the -'at predicate. Thus, the function of -'at is more lexical-semantic than structural. This characterization of the function of -'at is consistent with the fact that the -'at construction can introduce a participant that is not subcategorized for the non-'at form of the predicate (see the UNDERGOER in type 2).
generic expressions. Nevertheless, the question of whether or how we should characterize these functions of ·'at
in terms of the single general function is not a trivial one. Here, for the lack of a general characterization that
does justice for the two distinct functions, it seems most reasonable to characterize the suffix ·'at as
polysemous.

The Nootka ·'at construction shows some resemblance to the passive and the inverse constructions, but
it deviates in important respects from both the prototypical syntactic passive and the prototypical inverse:

The Nootka ·'at construction conforms to the prototypical syntactic passive in that:
The ·'as the undergoer is grammatically promoted to gain control of the pronominal index;
The ·'at construction does not necessarily have an 'active' counterpart;
The ·'a grammatical promotion/demotion of the arguments do not have identifiable effects on their syntactic
privileges;
The ·'at construction is not reduced compared with that of the non- ·'at clause.

The Nootka ·'at construction conforms to the prototypical inverse in that:
The ·'at construction becomes a passive; the arguments are not necessarily an 'active' counterpart;
The ·'at construction does not have identifiable effects on their syntactic privileges;
The ·'at construction is not reduced compared with that of the non- ·'at clause.

The deviation from the prototypical cases itself does not necessarily preclude our applying these terms
to the ·'at construction. In fact, the term 'passive', especially, is applied crosslinguistically to constructions of
such a diverse range of characteristics that many deviations from the prototypical passive could be tolerated.
Moreover, the advantage of indicating comparability between the ·'at construction and the passive or the
inverse in other languages may provide an argument for adopting these terms for the Nootka construction.
However, in this case, the deviation is substantial enough that extending the labels 'passive' or 'inverse' to the
·'at construction is descriptively misleading. A label is more than a simple designator for what a form does. It
also carries important implications about the structural environment in which the form occurs. Although what it 'does' might bear surface resemblance to what the passive or the inverse 'do', the ·'at construction occurs in a
structural environment significantly different from that of the passive and inverse: most notably, the ·'at
construction is not in regular structural opposition to a non- ·'at construction unlike the passive (vs. active) or the
inverse (vs. direct). Thus, since calling the Nootka ·'at construction 'passive' or 'inverse' can give misleading
implications about the systematic characteristics of the language, I have suggested a more language-specific, and
I think more realistic, account of its grammar and pragmatics.

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