Nuuchahnulth Modification: syntactic evidence against Category Neutrality

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Based on the observation that any open-class category in Nuuchahnulth can be either a predicate or an argument, this language has traditionally been regarded as syntactically category-neutral. This paper examines the category-sensitivity of complex predicates and relative clauses, and determines that there is in fact ample evidence within the syntax of Nuuchahnulth to enable us to dispense with the notion that it is a language free of inherent syntactic categorial distinctions.

1 Introduction

Nuuchahnulth (nuučaan̓aht) is a Southern Wakashan language spoken on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Formerly known as Nootka, this dialectally diverse language is comprised of approximately 14-20 distinct variants (Rose 1981). Unless otherwise noted, the dialect under consideration within this paper is that of Ahousaht (saaxaamistath).

Since the publication of Swadesh’s (1939) “Nootka Internal Syntax,” Nuuchahnulth has been repeatedly cited as a language with no categorial distinctions (see Jacobsen 1979 for a comprehensive review of references to the status of Wakashan categories). In his influential article, Swadesh (1939: 79) makes the following claim about Nuuchahnulth:

One general type of word structure applies to all words with the exception of a limited number of particles. Normal words [ie. non-particles] do not fall into classes like noun, verb, adjective, preposition, but all sorts of ideas find their expression in the same general type of word, which is predicative or non-predicative according to its paradigmatic ending.

As this quote indicates, the characterisation of Nuuchahnulth as a category-neutral language arises from the observation that nouns, verbs and adjectives each appear to have the ability to function as either predicates or arguments. This flexibility is demonstrated in (1).²

(1a) mamuuk-ʔiš čąkup-ʔi
work-3SG man-DET
'The man is working'

(1b) čąkup-ʔiš mamuuk-ʔi
man-3SG work-DET
'The working one is a man'

(1c) hii̇x*athii-ʔiš mamuuk-ʔi
cranky-3SG work-DET
'The worker is cranky'

²Abbreviations are as follows: CL = classifier, CAUS = causative, DIR = directive transitivizer, DEIC = deictic, DET = determiner, DUR = durative aspect, ERG = ergative, EXIS = existential, MOM = momentaneous aspect, PSN = position, QUOT = quotative, RED = reduplication, REL = relativizer, RLT = relative, SG = singular, TOP = topic.

²I am very grateful to language consultant Mary Jane Dick for sharing with me her extraordinary insights into Nuuchahnulth, as well as for her patience and humour in teaching me her language: Sā́łipíłk̕áns nuxt̕, Mary Jane! Thanks also to Henry Davis, Florence Woo, and all the other members of UBC’s Winter 2000 Field Methods class, who provided invaluable support and discussion. All errors are my own responsibility. Fieldwork on Nuuchahnulth has been funded by SSHRCC grant # 410-95-1519 awarded to Henry Davis.
In this predicate-initial language, the roots *mamuuk* ‘work’, *hiix*’athii’ ‘cranky’ and *čakup* ‘man’ receive predicative interpretations when they are inflected for person and number, while the same roots are interpreted as arguments when they occur with the determiner -ʔi. This apparent overlap in the distribution of lexical categories has prompted Nakayama (1993) to assert that there exists in Nuuchahnulth only a “sharp distinction between predicates and arguments as structural domains” and that, in fact, “parts-of-speech distinctions, such as nouns and verbs, are not very much of an integral part of the formal structure of [the] grammar” of this language.

The examples in (1) appear to constitute straightforward evidence for the hypothesis espoused by Marantz (1997, as cited in Davis and Matthewson 1999), who claims that when inherently category-neutral roots “are placed in a nominal environment, the result is a ‘nominalization’; when the roots are placed in a verbal environment, they become verbs.” The existence of putative category-neutral languages such as Nuuchahnulth seem to lend obvious support for the proposal that it is the functional categories of D and v that determine the lexical category of the roots which serve as their complements. This proposal, hereafter referred to as “The Functional Determination Hypothesis,” has as its aim the removal of redundancies between lexical and functional categories. The reader is referred to Davis and Matthewson (1999) for further discussion of this hypothesis.

The proponents of the category neutrality hypothesis have not gone unchallenged. In both Demirdache and Matthewson (1995) and Baker (in prep) it is argued that an inherent distinction between lexical categories constitutes a fundamental trait of Universal Grammar. Davis and Matthewson (1999) show the limitations of the Functional Determination Hypothesis in representing languages as structurally dissimilar as Salish and English. Within Wakashan literature specifically, Jacobsen (1979) provides an argument for a distinction in the morphological behaviours of the lexical classes in Makah, a language closely related to Nuuchahnulth. In summary, Jacobsen notes the following differences in morphological distributions with regards to nouns and verbs: (1) only nouns may directly occur as arguments; verbs functioning as arguments require a determiner; (2) possessive suffixes may only occur with nouns; (3) iterative and future markings are restricted to verbs. While similar differences in morphological distribution have yet to be conclusively determined for Nuuchahnulth, Rose (1981) does provide some suggestive evidence regarding the category-sensitivity of Nuuchahnulth aspectual morphology: continuative aspect is limited to verbal and adjectival roots, while gradative aspect occurs only with verbal roots.

Despite this morphological evidence for category distinctions in Wakashan, it may still be assumed that there is no basis for representing distinct and inherent categories in the syntax of these languages. Indeed, Nakayama (1993: 286) states that notions of lexical categories may still be represented semantically in the grammar of Nuuchahnulth even though there is no evidence for separate morphosyntactic representations of these categories. This sentiment echoes Robins (1952), who makes the following statement with reference to Nuuchahnulth:

There is only one form-class of major word-stems; but these stems can be nominalized or verbalized, and the two grammatical categories are thereby still introduced, though at a slightly different level in the analysis.

It appears that although some authors are comfortable dispensing with the idea of distinct syntactic categories, they nonetheless prefer to retain some semantic notion of a categorial distinction.
With this background in mind, the present study aims to confront the long-standing assumption that the underived categories of noun, verb and adjective are not represented at a syntactic level in Nuuchahnulth. This paper draws upon the methodology developed by Demirdache and Matthewson (1995), who target complex nominal predicates and relative clauses as sources for differentiating nouns from other lexical classes in Salish. The outline of the paper is as follows. Section 2 examines the category-sensitivity of both initial- and final-position in complex nominal predicates. Section 3 introduces two structurally distinct forms of Nuuchahnulth relative clauses, and shows that for both of these constructions, only nouns may occur as heads. The evidence in these sections will conclusively demonstrate the inaccuracy of referring to Nuuchahnulth as a syntactically category-neutral language.

2 Complex Nominal Predicates

In Nuuchahnulth, there is a modification construction which allows a single clause to contain two predicative elements:

(2a) [kəurl-ʔiš ɩucma] Susan
good-3SG woman Susan
‘Susan is a good-hearted woman’

(2b) [ʔiij-aq-aq-ʔiš čims] Smokey
big-very-very-3SG bear Smokey
‘Smokey is a very, very big bear’

(2c) [mamaʔihi-ʔiš ʔakum] Betsy
caucasian-3SG queen Betsy
‘Betsy is a white queen’

The inflectional marking, as a clitic, attaches word-finally to the first predicative element in the clause. It is ungrammatical for the inflection to appear on the second element:

(3) * [kəurl ɩucma-ʔiš] Susan
good woman-3SG Susan
‘Susan is a good-hearted woman’

In these complex predicates, the initial element must be an individual-level predicate. The following examples are disallowed because hawiiq ‘hungry’, nunuuk ‘singing’ and hiixʷəthii ‘cranky’ denote stage-level properties:

(4a) * [hawiiq-ʔiš ɩucma] Susan
hungry-3SG woman Susan
‘Susan is a hungry woman’

(4b) * [nunuuk-ʔiš ɩucma] Susan
sing-3SG woman Susan
‘Susan is a singing woman’

(4c) ?? [hiixʷəthii-ʔiš ɩucma] Susan
cranky-3SG woman Susan
‘Susan is a cranky woman’

2.1 A Categorial Constraint on Final Elements

There are additional restrictions on the constituency of these complex predicates. While noun-final orderings are permitted, as in the earlier examples in (2), adjective-final orderings are not:
(5a) *[hucma-ʔi] ʔut Susan
car-3SG good Susan ‘Susan is a female good-hearted one’

(5b) *[čim-ʔi] ʔiθ-aq-aq] Smokey
bear-3SG very-big-very Smokey ‘Smokey is a very, very big bear (lit: Smokey is a bearish very, very big one)’

(5c) *[čim-ʔi] mnaθaθi] Betsy
queen-3SG caucasian Betsy ‘Betsy is a white queen (lit: Betsy is a queenly white person)’

In (5), each of the initial elements is a noun, while the final elements are adjectives. It is also ungrammatical for an adjective to occur finally with an initial adjective:

(6a) *[qʷačaθ-aq-ʔi] ʔut Susan
beautiful-very-3SG good Susan ‘Susan is a very beautiful good-hearted one’

(6b) *[qʰaθɨθ-aʔ] nanaʔa] ḥaa ʔuucma-ʔi
friendly-3SG intelligent DEIC woman-DET ‘That woman is a friendly intelligent one’

(6c) *[qʰaθ-ʔi] ʔaθɨθ] ḥaa ʔuucma-ʔi
good-3SG friendly DEIC woman-DET ‘That woman is a good-hearted friendly one’

A verbal element in final position is similarly disallowed:

(7a) *[qʷačaθ-aq-ʔi] nunuk] Susan
beautiful-very-3SG sing Susan ‘Susan is a very beautiful singer’

(7b) *[nanaʔ-aʔ] manuuk] ḥaa čakup-ʔi
intelligent-3SG work DEIC man-DET ‘That man is an intelligent worker’

(7c) *[waaθaʔ-aʔ] maθukʷ] ḥaa čakup-ʔi
selective-3SG buy DEIC man-DET ‘That man is a selective buyer’

Only nouns are permitted in the final position in Nuuchahnulth complex predicates. In the examples in (5) and (6), each of the final predicates denotes a permanent property of the subject, so no distinction between individual- and stage-level modification could justify a difference in relative ordering. Since there is no known semantic factor which could account for the noun-final restriction on Nuuchahnulth complex predicates, a syntactic categorial distinction is necessary.

2.2 Restrictions on Initial Elements

As noted in Section 2, stage-level predicates are disallowed in initial position in complex predicates. In addition to this restriction on initial elements, there is also a constraint which prohibits two nouns from co-occurring in one complex predicate:
In order to avoid creating noun-noun complex predicates, a single predicate may be used which carries the semantics of both nouns. For example, in (9) it is shown that *t̓ućuk `womanish' is an aspectualized predicate which can only be used in reference to men:

(9a) * t̓ućuk-uk-ʔiš Tim
    woman-DUR-3SG  Tim
    ‘Tim is womanish (and a man)’

(9b) * t̓ućuk-uk-ʔiš Susan
    woman-DUR-3SG Susan
    ‘Susan is womanish (and a man)’

The ungrammaticality of the noun-initial cases shown in (8) arises from a categorial constraint which requires that the first element in a complex predicate be an individual-level adjective, rather than simply an individual-level predicate. While Davis, Lai and Matthewson (1997) argue against an independent category of adjective for the Salish languages St’át’imcets and Seewepemcisn, the Salish complex nominal predicates are unlike those in Nuuchahnulth in allowing both N-N and apparent A-N combinations. Therefore, while the notion of “individual-level predicate” may suffice for describing the initial element in Salish complex predicates, this label is inadequate for Nuuchahnulth. Only individual-level adjectives, and not individual-level nouns, are the first element in Nuuchahnulth complex nominal predicates.

Davis, Lai and Matthewson (1997) adopt a Salish categorial distinction between the class of nouns and the undifferentiated class of verb/adjective. Such a notion of an undifferentiated class will not be utilized within this paper for Nuuchahnulth. The complex predicates presented in this paper constitute evidence for a Nuuchahnulth distinction between verbs and adjectives, since if one were to assume an undifferentiated verb/adjective class, it would merely be an accident that the individual-level predicates of this class pattern one way and the stage-level predicates pattern another. I will therefore assume that “adjective” is an appropriate label for the class of individual-level predicates which have been shown to contrast with nouns in their privileged ability to appear initially in complex predicates.

3 Relative Clauses

In their cross-linguistic study of relative clauses, Keenan and Comrie (1977) provide the following definition for what constitutes a relative clause (RC): an RC is any syntactic object which (1) specifies a large set of objects, called the “domain” of relativization, and (2) restricts this set to some subset for which the “restricting” sentence is true. Using this diagnostic, Nuuchahnulth can be seen to have two distinct means of forming relative clauses, each of which may be either “headed” or “headless”. The RC types differ in the positioning of their heads as well as in the presence of certain morphology. The first type, termed a “left-headed” relative clause, has a head which precedes a clause containing relativizing morphology:
(10) quuu's-ʔiʔ [haa čakup-ʔi man-DET yaq-ʔitiq nunuuk] F.N.person-3SG DEIC REL-3SG.RLT sing
‘That man who is singing is a First Nations person.’

In (10), the highlighted element, čakup ‘man’, is the head and is modified by the following clause. This head is not obligatory. The following is an example of a headless RC of this type:

(11) quuu's-ʔiʔ [haa yaq-ʔitiq nunuuk] F.N.person-3SG DEIC REL-3SG.RLT sing
‘That one who is singing is a First Nations person’

In these examples, the main predicate, quuu's ‘First Nations person’, is marked with the third-person inflection -ʔiʔ, while relative clauses use special relative morphology. For third-person singular, this relative inflection is either -ʔitiq, as in (11), or -ʔi, as in (12), and it attaches to a relativizer morpheme, yaq-:

(12) yaaq-waaqs-itʔiʔ [čakup-ʔi man-DET yaq-itʔiʔ suut‘yaap suuhaa] walk-outside-past-3SG REL-past-3SG.RLT bring salmon
‘The man who brought the salmon left’

The second type of Nuuchahlnult relative clause, referred to as a “right-headed” relative clause, is both structurally and morphologically dissimilar to left-headed relative clauses. In right-headed relative clauses, both the previously described relative inflection and the morpheme yaq- are absent. Instead, what appears is a head preceded by a restricting small clause (see Section 3.2.1 for discussion):

(13) fiiliʔ-siʔ-ʔiʔ [hahuk* as-ʔi haak*aak] cry-MOM-3SG DEIC eat-surface-DET girl
‘That girl who is eating (at the table) is starting to cry’

I assume that the determiner is a clitic which appears word-finally on the first element of its complement (see Stonham 1999). For a structural representation of this type of DP, see Section 3.2.1.

In the restrictive context of specifying out of a group of girls the one girl who is eating, the right-headed RC in (13) is deemed as natural as the equivalent right-headed RC in (14):

(14) fiiliʔ-siʔ-ʔiʔ [hahuk*aak-ʔiʔ yaqʔitiq hahuk* as] cry-MOM-3SG DEIC girl-DET REL-3SG.RLT eat-surface
‘That girl who is eating (at the table) is starting to cry’

The two RC types differ distributionally in that transitive verbs occurring with objects are not permitted in the restricting clause of right-headed RCs.4

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3 According to Rose (1981: 128), these relative inflection forms differ in that -ʔitiq is used for “definite and particularized” referents, whereas -ʔi is reserved for “particularized but indefinite” referents. Within the Kyuquot dialect of Nuuchahlnult described by Rose, this contrast may be represented by yaq'upitq ‘that's the one who/which he likes’ (definite) and hayimpiys yaq'upi‘I don't know which he killed’ (indefinite).

4 It does not appear that this restriction on right-headed RCs holds for all dialects of Nuuchahlnult, however. Stonham (1999) presents evidence from the Tsishaath (Čwaasʔatl) dialect studied by Sapir and Swadesh which indicates that transitive verbs and their accompanying lexical objects are allowed in right-headed RCs, or at least in headless versions of this type. For example:

[ʔuuca-em-ʔiʔ mačhla] go-MOM-past-DET Machhla.tribe
‘The one who went to Machhlaat’ (adapted from Stonham 1999: 244, #38)

Unfortunately, Stonham presents no headed versions of this type, and indeed, he mistakenly refers to this RC type as “left-headed.” As noted earlier, left-headed RCs in Nuuchahlnult contain the relativizer yaq-, as well as relative inflection.
* yaac-waas-it-ʔís [yuut'yaap-ʔíi suuhaa čakup]
  walk-outside-past-3SG bring-DET salmon man
  'The man who brought the salmon left'

(15b) ?? quuʔas-ʔís [haa maakukʷ-ʔíi małʔíi čakup]
  F.N.person-3SG DEIC buy house man
  'That man who bought a house is a First Nations person'

This restriction also holds for headless versions of right-headed relative clauses (see Section 3.2.1 for discussion of the status of this construction as a pro-headed right-headed relative clause):

* yaac-waas-ʔák-ʔís [yuut'yaap-ʔíi suuhaa]
  walk-outside-now-3SG bring-DET salmon
  'The one who brought the salmon left'

(16b) ?? kuwít-ʔís čapac [tuca-čiʔ-ʔíi mačtaalth]
  steal-past-3SG canoe go-MOM-past-DET Machhla.tribe
  'The one who went to Machhlaath stole the canoe'

Unlike right-headed RCs, left-headed RCs may have restrictive clauses that contain transitive verbs with lexical objects:

(17) quuʔas-ʔís [haa čakup-ʔíi yaq-ʔitq maakukʷ małʔíi]
  F.N.person-3SG DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT buy house
  'That man who bought a house is a First Nations person'

The impermissibility of objects occurring in the restrictive clause of Ahousaht right-headed RCs may result from one of the two following constraints: (1) a restriction on the transitivity of the predicate in the restricting clause of right-headed RCs, or (2) a "same-side" constraint which prohibits complements in restrictive clauses of right-headed RCs from appearing before the head of the construction. While these hypotheses remain to be tested, the latter option in particular would not be unexpected, since the same restriction applies to other languages such as English and St'át'imctets (Henry Davis, p.c.). This is shown in the following examples (in the St'át'imctets examples, '=' denotes a clitic boundary, while '-' denotes an affix boundary):

English:

(18a) 'the man good at Linguistics'

(18b) * 'the good at Linguistics man'

St'át'imctets:

(19a) ti=sqáycw=a ti=ats'x-en-tálí=ha ti=sqáx7=a
  DET=man=EXIS DET=see-DIR-TOP=EXIS DET=dog=EXIS
  'the man who saw the dog'

(19b) * ti=ats'x-en-tálí=ha ti=sqáx7=a sqáycw
  DET=see-DIR-1SG.ERG=EXIS DET=dog=EXIS man
  'the man who saw the dog'

The following sections will examine the category-sensitivity of both the left-headed and right-headed RCs of Nuuchahnulth. In Section 3.1, I consider the category requirements of the predicate and head positions in left-headed RCs, and then in Section 3.2, I turn to the restrictions on the head position in right-headed RCs.
3.1.1 Main Predicates within L-headed Relative Clauses

Lexical items of any category can appear as the predicate of a restricting clause. In the following example, the verb *numuuk* 'sing' appears in this position:

(20) \[ k^i-i^k-wix-as-i-k-it-\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad \text{Sue} \quad \text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{*numuuk]} \]

‘Sue kissed that man who is singing’

It is also possible for a predicative noun, as in *quu\d\d\d* 'First Nations person’, to occur in this position:

(21) \[ k^i-i^k-wix-as-i-k-it-\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad \text{Sue} \quad \text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{F.N.person]} \]

‘Sue kissed that man who is a First Nations person’

Adjectives that are accompanied by classifiers also occur in relative clauses as the predicate of a restricting clause. In the example in (22), the adjective *\d\d\d\d* 'big' appears with the classifier -um\d\d\d, which roughly provides the semantics of ‘round’:

(22) \[ haa\d\d\d-p\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad [\text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{\d\d\d\d}}] \]

‘The bear that is big is eating’

Based on the evidence that any category of predicate can occur as the predicate of a relative clause, it appears that for this position there are no categorial requirements. This is not surprising considering the uncontroversial fact that lexical items of any open-class category can be predicates in Nuuchahnulth.

3.1.2 The Category of the Head of L-headed Relative Clauses

While there are no category restrictions on the restricting clause of this construction, the head position of this relative clause is category-sensitive. Nouns can head a relative clause:

(23a) \[ haa\d\d\d-p\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad [\text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{black-CL}}] \]

‘That bear that is black is eating’

(23b) \[ quu\d\d\d-\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad [\text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{old.person-DET}}] \]

‘That old person who is eating is a First Nations person’

(23c) \[ k^i-i^k-wix-as-i-k-it-\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad \text{Sue} \quad \text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{sing}}] \]

‘Sue kissed that man who is singing’

Verbs, in contrast, are not permitted as heads:

(24a) * \[ k^i-i^k-wix-as-i-k-it-\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad \text{Sue} \quad \text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{man}}] \]

‘Sue kissed that singer who is a man’

\footnote{One means of avoiding verb-headed relative clauses is to use within the main predicate of the sentence a suffix which connotes the meaning of the ungrammatical verb head. For example, the grammatical version of (24c) is:}

(24b) \[ haa\d\d\d-p\tilde{i}\tilde{s} \quad [\text{\{Wi-J\{Wix-as-i-\~it-\?iS} \quad \text{RED-kiss-check-MOM-past-3SG} \quad \text{Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT} \quad \text{work}}] \]

‘The one sitting on the ground who is working is eating’
It is important to note that there is nothing in the semantics of verbs which would restrict them from functioning as heads. In the sentences in (24), the verb heads should receive the interpretation of nominalized verbs, since they occur with determiners. In other instances in the language, when the verb is not functioning as the head of a relative clause, verbs receive just such an interpretation:

(25) yaaca-ʔiš ʔúh nunuuk-ʔi
    walk-3SG DEIC sing-DET
    ‘That singer is leaving’

According to the Functional Determination Hypothesis, any lexical item that is in a nominal syntactic environment (that is, any complement of a determiner) should be a noun. However, it appears that beneath this “nominal” guise lies an underlying syntactic distinction in the root. Within the class of lexical items that occur with determiners, it is the case that nouns, and not verbs, can head a relative clause.

A categorial distinction for heads of relative clauses is even more striking when individual-level adjectives are taken into account. Individual-level adjectives are also disallowed as heads:

(26a) * yaac-waas-wit'as-ʔiš [ʔúh qʷutak-aq-ʔi yaq-ʔítq nunuuk]
    walk-outside-plan.to-3SG DEIC beautiful-very-DET REL-3SG.RLT sing
    ‘That very beautiful one who is singing is planning to walk outside’

(26b) * čims-ʔiš [ʔúh tuk-umt-ʔi yaq-ʔítq haaʔapš]
    bear-3SG DEIC black-CL-DET REL-3SG.RLT eat
    ‘That black one that is eating is a bear’

(26c) * haaʔapš-ʔiš [ʔúh ʔułuł-unr-ʔi yaq-ʔítq čims]
    eat-3SG DEIC big-CL.-DET REL-3SG.RLT bear
    ‘That big one that is a bear is eating’

Like nouns, the adjectives in the above examples describe permanent properties. I know of no semantic explanation for how some lexical items denoting permanent properties can head a relative clause, while others cannot. While individual-level adjectives and nouns have similar semantics, they do have different syntactic categories. It is this syntactic distinction that determines that only nouns can head a relative clause.

The head of a relative clause must therefore be represented as an N, as in the following structural representation of the relative clause from the example below (I assume that the determiner -ʔi encliticizes at PF to the first element within the the complement of D):

(27) kʷi-kʷix-as-iʔ-ʔiš Sue ʔułukʷi̠t̠ [ʔúh čakup-ʔi yaq-ʔítq nunuuk]
    RED-kiss-cheek-MOM-past-3SG Sue to DEIC man-DET REL-3SG.RLT sing
    ‘Sue kissed that man who is singing’
3.1.3 “Headless” L-headed Relative Clauses

Based on the evidence that only nouns are permitted as heads of relative clauses, it is possible to re-examine the claim that the relative clauses in (28) are truly “headless”:

(28a) quu'las-ʔiš [ʔaa yaq-ʔitq nunuuk]  
F.N.person-3SG DEIC REL-3SG.RLT sing  
‘The one who is singing is a First Nations person’

(28b) kamatli-aq'it-ia-it-wa-ʔiš  
run.into.woods-inside-towards(?)-past-QUOT-3SG REL-past-3SG.RLT steal canoe  
‘The one who stole the canoe ran into the woods (hearsay)’

(28c) ciq'iha-ʔiš [ʔaa yaq-ʔitq waʔič-ʔi]  
talk-3SG DEIC REL-3SG.RLT sleep-inside  
‘That one who is sleeping is talking away’

There is an understood head in these relative clauses. Headless relative clauses may occur when there is a discourse antecedent to the understood head, so that the head need not be explicitly stated. They also occur when it is impossible to discern the properties necessary to assign a lexical label to an item.

Since heads are necessarily nominal, this understood head may be represented by the NP pro. This allows for the following representation of “headless” relative clauses, as in (29)⁶:

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⁶ I leave open the issue of why no overt determiner appears in pro-headed left-headed relative clauses. It may be that there is a null determiner in this construction, or it may be that there is actually a determiner -ʔi which fails to appear phonologically because it lacks a suitable phonological host. As previously noted, -ʔi is a clitic which finds its phonological host within its complement. Within left-headed relative clauses, the first phonologically contentful item within the pro-determiner’s complement (that is, the head of the CP) may be outside of the determiner’s phonological phrase.
3.2 Head Restrictions on Right-Headed Relative Clauses

The same categorial restriction that applies to the head of left-headed RCs also applies to the head of right-headed RCs. Nouns may be the head of this construction:

(30a) tiic-aci-ʔlä-ʔiS [ʔaa waʔič-ʔi-ʔi]
alive-MOM-now-3SG DEIC sleep-inside-DET

‘That man who is sleeping is in better health (now)’

(30b) haawapS-ʔiS [ʔuħ tupk-umt-ʔi]
eat-3SG DEIC black-CL-DET bear

‘That bear that is black is eating’

(30c) yaaca-ʔiS [ʔuħ ñičüm-ʔi]
walk-3SG DEIC old.person-DET woman

‘The old woman is leaving’

While nouns are freely permitted, verbs are not:

(31a) *čims-ʔiS [ʔaa tupk-umt-ʔi]
bear-3SG DEIC black-CL-DET

‘That eating thing that is black is a bear’
Given the appropriate context, there is no semantic reason for why these examples should be ruled out. Likewise, there is no semantic explanation for why adjectives are prohibited as heads, as in the following sentences:

(32a) *kwa?uc-uk-s [haa q*a?acr-aq-?i ?aphii]
   granddaughter-POSS-1SG DEIC beautiful-very-DET friendly
   ‘That friendly one who is beautiful is my granddaughter’

(32b) *haawaps-?is [haa ?ims-?i tupk umr]
   eat-3SG DEIC bear-DET black-CL
   ‘That black thing that is a bear is eating’

(32c) *yaaca-?is [haa nunuuk-?i q*a?acr-aq]
   walk-3SG DEIC sing-DET beautiful-very
   ‘That very beautiful one who is singing is leaving’

Only nouns can occur as heads in these relative clauses. Again, this follows from a categorial syntactic distinction rather than from the semantics of the construction.

3.2.1 pro Heads

Since the head of this relative clause is necessarily a noun, it follows that when there is an implicit head, this head may be represented as pro. In the following example, tupkumr ‘black’ is not simply a nominalised adjective, but is instead an adjective modifying an implicit head NP, pro:

(33) ?ims-?ri?a-?is [haa tupk umr-?i pro]
   bear-pretend-3SG DEIC black-CL-DET
   ‘That black thing is an abstract bear’

This modification construction may thus be represented as an NP complement of a DP, as in the following small clause analysis (again, I assume that the D -?i encilitizes to its host, tupkumr ‘black’, at PF):

(34)  
  DP
    haa
      D’
        D
          ?i
            AP
              NP
                A’
                  pro
                    A
                      tupkumr†
Unlike the left-headed relative clauses, there is no CP or IP in these relative clauses. If CP and IP were to occur, then we would expect the morpheme yaq-, as well as relative inflection (cf. Section 3.1.2). Neither of these features appears in right-headed RCs. The representation shown in (34) can plausibly be extended to account for all so-called “verbal” or “adjectival” arguments in Nuuchahnulth. In instances when verbs or adjectives appear to be complements of determiners, it is actually the case that the complement of the determiner is an NP pro which is modified by a verb or adjective (see Matthewson and Davis 1995 for similar arguments for Salish).

4 Conclusion

The characterisation of Nuuchahnulth as a category-neutral language is an erroneous one. While a lexical item of any open-class category may occur as a simple predicate, this generalisation does not hold for complex predicates. Only adjectives appear in initial position of complex predicates, and only nouns appear in final position. Similar categorial restrictions are found within relative clauses, where only nouns may occur as the head of these constructions. Given these distinctions, there is strong syntactic evidence for a three-way distinction between the lexical categories of noun, verb and adjective in Nuuchahnulth. This serves to reinforce the conclusion drawn by Jacobsen (1979) regarding morphological distinctions between categories in Wakashan.

References