An agentive suffix in Lushootseed

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This paper details the syntactic, aspectual, morphological and discourse properties of the Lushootseed suffix -alikw 'creative activity'. The discussion touches on important questions within the study of Salish languages, including issues of transitivity and the distinction between lexical and grammatical affixes.

1 Introduction

This paper discusses several qualities of the Lushootseed agentive suffix -alikw, as in "db-alikw", an intransitive predicate glossed 'to give things away as at a potlatch', which contrasts with a transitive form containing the same root: 'hab-8 'give something'. Bates, Hess and Hilbert (1994:28) follow their major source (Hess, 1976) in glossing -alikw as 'creative activity'; the later dictionary adds a grammatical comment that -alikw is a lexical suffix forming agent oriented stems with iterative meaning.

Hess (1998:114) downplays the earlier claim that -alikw is a lexical suffix and describes it as an "agent oriented suffix with iterative meaning"; in related work, Hess (1995:28) contrasts (1a-b), which he notes are synonymous.1

1 Abbreviations: 1 (first person); 2 (second person); 3 (third person); ADV(erb); Ag(ent); Appl(icate); ASP (any of several aspect morphemes); Det(enniner); Dirc(ontional prefix); Caus(ative); C0ss (change of state); Emph(atic); Fem(inine); Fut(ure); InCeP(tive intransitive); Inst(Rument, instrumental); InTR (detransitivizing suffix); Neg(ative); Nom(inalizing prefix); Ob(ject); P(reposition); Pass(ive); PL(ural); Poss(essive, possessor); Pst(past); Pnt(punctual); Qua(ntifier); Red (aplication); Rep(etitive); Subj(ect); Sing(ular); St(something); So (someone); St(ative); SubJunct(ive); Tr(Ransitivizing suffix). Boundary symbols: - (affix); = (lexical suffix); + (reduplication).

(1a) ?u-šab-alikw tsi hu? ʔo ti sʔuladxw.
pnt-dry-ag D-f elder P D salmon
'The old woman dried the salmon.'

(1b) ?u-šaba-t-ob ʔo tsi hu? ʔo ti sʔuladxw.
pnt-dry-tr-pass P D-f elder D salmon
'The old woman dried the salmon.'
Hess (1995:29) goes on to add a comment indicating that perhaps a more technical way to capture the synonymy of (1 a-b) would be to say that they can be used to describe the same event: “To say that [1a] and [1b] are synonymous, however, is not to say that they are identical.”

Hess notes that in (1a), attention in the discourse centers on the agent’s activity, “which is typically performed with his/her own ends paramount.” In contrast, (1b) has the typical structure of a transitive stem plus passive -o, where the patient direct complement (subject) is of central importance in the discourse.\(^2\)

The foregoing short review of our previous work on -alik\(^w\) points out three potentially fruitful areas of investigation with regard to this suffix and its relationship to other affixes in the Lushootseed lexico-grammatical and lexico-semantic system:

- Is -alik\(^w\) a lexical suffix or a grammatical suffix?
- What are the details of the aspectual qualities of -alik\(^w\)?
- What is its distribution in third person narrative texts?

These questions are addressed in turn in the sections below.

2 A lexical suffix?

Our current analysis of -alik\(^w\) is that it is grammatical, rather than lexical. Czaykowska-Higgins and Kinkade (1998:25) give the following brief description of the properties of Salish lexical suffixes.

Lexical suffixes (also known as substantival, referential, or etymological suffixes) are affixes with lexical referents. Most of them refer to nominal concepts (body parts, common items such as ‘blanket’ or ‘house’, geographical entities such as ‘water’, and so on), and they can have concrete senses ... or more metaphorical senses... Included in this class is a pan-Salish morpheme -tn ‘instrumental’ which serves as a kind of nominalizer. Lexical suffixes may also be used as classifiers or to refer to general categories rather than specific items...

If Lushootseed -alik\(^w\) is truly a lexical suffix, then it fits more with Czaykowska-Higgins’ and Kinkade’s description of -tn ‘instrumental’ than with the concrete nominals they rightly claim are central to the category of lexical suffix. We suggest that the meaning and function of -alik\(^w\) is even less typical of lexical suffixes than those of -tn. Unlike an instrumental, which often names an implement or instrument (nominal concepts), -alik\(^w\) forms are predicates, with the activity semantics common in predicates. Moreover, -alik\(^w\) seems to

\(^2\) Bates (1997) argues, with most of the literature on Salish, that -o is a passive marker; Bates and Hess (in prep) adopt this position, contra the pedagogical approach taken in Hess (1995, 1998).
be a detransitivizer, forming semantically transitive yet syntactically intransitive predicates. Finally, constructions with -alikʷ consistently realize an agent in subject position. The following examples illustrate these verbal characteristics of -alikʷ.

(2) gəłk'-alikʷ 'knit'
   compare gəłk'-əd 'wind something around something'

(3) +u-gəłk'-alikʷ cəd ə kʷi s-ʔə:mm=əlc
   fut-wind-ag 1sS P D nom-clam=container
   'I am going to make a clam basket (from this that I already have here.)'

(4) ?il-alikʷ dəxʷ-əal kʷi dəxʷ/laə=acid
   sing/repeat/interpret-ag toward D Lushootseed
   'Translate into Lushootseed.'

Examples (1a) and (3-4) show that -alikʷ renders a predicate intransitive; its patient or theme is relegated to an oblique phrase. More examples appear below.

(5) cili′-(a)likʷ 'serving up food for others at a feast'
   compare cili-d 'place something in/on a receptacle'

(6) d′u-b-likʷ 'dance'
   compare d′u-bu-d 'kick something'

Not all forms in -alikʷ are as clearly verbal as (3-6), however. Perhaps the second meaning of (7) and the form in (8), which contains an optional derivational prefix denoting someone who has a proclivity for the action named by the root, argue for lexical suffix status for -alikʷ.

(7) bəc-likʷ '1. bet, wager  2. clipboard'
   compare bəc-əd-d 'set something down'

(8) (dəxʷs-)səkay=qs-likʷ 'a barber'
   compare səkə-d 'scrape something'

The iterative aspect imparted by -alikʷ seems more verbal than nominal, however. The next section explores this further.
3 Iterative aspect

The forms in (9-14) illustrate the iterative semantics of forms in -alikw.

(9) ča?-alikw
   compare ča?-ad
   'dig for edible roots and the like'
   ča?-ab
   'dig st up / dig it out (agent oriented)'

(10) gʷo-6-alikw
    compare gʷo-6-ad
    'look for so/st (patient oriented)'
    gʷo-6-ab
    'someone seeks something (agent oriented)'

(11) kʷod-alikw
    'take again and again (as in fishing)'
    compare kʷod-a-d
    'take something, grab so/st'

(12) kʷo-4-alikw
    'serve liquid repeatedly (as to all the guests)'
    compare kʷo-4-ad
    'pour something'

(13) či-6-alikw
    compare či-6-d
    'frying'
    'fry something'

(14) čs-alikw
    compare čs-6-d
    'pecking at something, nailing something'
    'peck something, nail something'

The examples in (15-18), however, are less obviously iterative in their aspect.

(15) ča-ča-alikw
     compare ča-ča-d
     'fight a fire'
     'put fire out'

(16) čol-alikw
     compare čol-d
     'win, prevail'
     'defeat someone'

(17) huy-alikw
     compare huyu-d
     'create something'
     'prepare st, do st, make st'

(18) tul-alikw
     compare tulu-d
     'read, translate'
     'interpret'

Although many forms in -alikw are iterative, (15-18) show that more study is needed on the semantics of this form.
4 Textual distribution

Finally we discuss the distribution of -alikw in a text. The following excerpt, from the scene-setting introductory passage from a long traditional story, shows that -alikw marks an agent that is topic in the discourse. The storyteller introduces the characters in turn. Each character is the topic of the discourse until the next character is introduced. The suffix -alikw appears in line 12.

(19) An excerpt from Martha Lamont’s Seal Hunters story (Bierwert 1996:238-9)

1. ?os-ta+Hil ti?i+ ?i sg*alub ?i
   st-dwell D conj pheasant conj
   ti?i+ ?x+a+?xHad-s, ti?i? ?i+?-k?alq
   D red+inlaw-3poss D part-other
   ‘Pheasant dwelled [there] and his brothers-in-law [and] others.’

2. dx*s-xe?+xwi?xwi?
   procliv-red-hunt
   ‘They were hunters.’

   asp-hunt 3pl toward-seaward
   dx*-xw*xw*
   ‘They would hunt out on the water.’

   asp-hunt 3pl toward-mountainward
   dx*-xw*xw*
   ‘They would hunt up in the forest.’

5-7 ... (more on hunting brothers)

8. g”al cadi+ conj pronoun
   ‘And as for him,’

9. g”al ?u-payaq.
   conj pnt-hew
   ‘he just made canoes.’

10. ?u-payaq.
    pnt-hew
    ‘He made canoes.’
11. ?u-?ayəq.
   pmt-hew
   'He made canoes.'

12. (c)įwqid ?u-huy-alikw ʔə tĩʔal dįl'bid.
    always  pmt-make-ag  P  D  canoe
    'He always crafted canoes.'

Line 8 introduces a character into the narrative, a canoe-maker. This character is the referent for the subject constituent in every clause 9-12. Each clause 9-12 is syntactically intransitive; the oblique phrase in line 12 is the first overt mention of the canoes this character creates.

A note about topic maintenance in Lushootseed discourse can clarify Hess’s (1995) comment about the role assigned by -alikw its importance in the discourse. The predicate in -alikw in line 12 assigns agent to the discourse topic and subject, the carver. Lushootseed discourse topics in third person narratives tend to appear in subject position; Lushootseed is similar in this respect to many other languages. Forms in -alikw behave like other intransitive predicates in this respect.

References


