

## THE WORD-CLASSES OF UPPER NORTH WAKASHAN

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By "Upper North Wakashan" (henceforth UNW) I mean Haisla (spoken in Kitimaat, B.C.), Heiltsuk (in Klemtu and Bella Bella), and Oowekyala (in Rivers Inlet). These languages are structurally very similar and mutually intelligible. UNW is distinct from Kwakwala, the fourth surviving language of the North Wakashan type.

UNW sentences divide into those that have and those that lack a "predicate plus subject" structure. The concept of predicate (P) is defined as "sentence minus its subject". The concept of subject (S) is defined as "any member of the paradigm of enclitics called 'subject enclitics', or a word or word group which has the structure of a relatum (explication further below) and is substitutable by a subject enclitic referring to the 3rd person, or a relatum in conjunction with a 3rd person subject enclitic that is attached to the first word of the sentence and refers to the same thing as the relatum. The UNW subject enclitics are one of five different paradigms of enclitics referring to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person. The 3rd person forms vary with the orientational features of their referents.

Examples of the P+S pattern with just one word for P and a one-word relatum (henceforward R) for S, suggest that UNW words are not predestined for particular syntactic functions. Just about any word, including proper names, can be substituted for P; nothing like the English copulative expressions "is" or "is a" is ever required. And although a single word functioning as a R must contain certain enclitics so that one cannot say that any word is automatically a R and substitutable for S, one can nevertheless say that any word that can substitute for P can also be used as the constructional basis of a R and hence of a S. Here are two Oowekyala examples.

P	+	S	
↓		↓	
↓		R	
kix'sistɬs	+	yabɪ a_xi	"a/the messenger runs around the field"
yabɪ	+	kix'sistɬs_a_xi	"the person that runs around the field is a messenger"

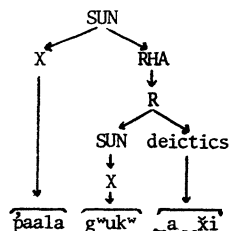
This syntactic plasticity of UNW words implies that it would strictly speaking be inaccurate to gloss yabɪ as "messenger" and kix'sistɬs as "to run around the field". Rather yabɪ

should be glossed as the disjunction "to be a messenger V messenger" and kix'sistɬs as the disjunction "to run around the field V one that runs around the field".

A study of many-word P-s and R-s however leads to the following reformulation of the syntactic plasticity, "Any syntactically unmarked nucleus can be used as a P and as the basis for a R provided it does not contain a 1st person reference paradigmatically related to a combination of yis\_ or hs\_ plus a R." The meaning of the latter restriction will be explained further below. A syntactically unmarked nucleus has the structure X, LHA+X, X+RHA, or LHA+X+RHA, in which "LHA" and "RHA" stand for "left-hand adjunct" and "right-hand adjunct" while the constructional centre X stands for a single word meeting the following requirements, (1) not combined with proclitics; (2) not combined with enclitics of the kind that can only follow the first word of the sentence, such as the imperative and interrogative enclitics; (3) not combined with enclitics characteristic of subordinate clauses; (4) neither combined with enclitics referring to the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person, nor with deictics. (Deictics are enclitics expressing the orientational features of the reference of a word; examples are  $\underline{a}$  and  $\underline{xi}$  in the above Oowekyala sentences.); (5) not indicating the logical operation of negation. Thus, X is a variable whose values constitute a class of words comprising just about the whole UNW lexicon and all the words derivable from it by means of the very many enclitics compatible with the definition of X. In contrast, LHA, which also represents a single word, is a variable whose range of values consists of a limited portion of the values of X plus a small number of proclitics. (Proclitics are by definition not values of X, see above.) Thus, schematically,



For simplicity's sake I ignore the possibility of consecutive LHA-s. As for RHA (of which consecutive instances are in fact also possible), it is not necessarily a single word but can be a variety of structures including (1) a syntactically unmarked nucleus (defined above; henceforward referred to as SUN); (2) a R. (Broadly, a R is a SUN plus one or more deictics attached to its centre of construction X. Simple examples are the subject R-s in the above cited Oowekyala sentences.); (3) a combination of proclitic  $\underline{la}$ \_,  $\underline{qq}$ \_, or  $\underline{yis}$ \_ (in Haisla  $\underline{hs}$ \_, at least the Kitlope dialect) plus a following R. The 2nd and 3rd types of structure can be substituted by special 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person forms. These latter are full words in some but enclitics in other cases. There is no need to go into the wide variety of ways in which these types of RHA translate into English, but note nevertheless that if the RHA is a R it usually corresponds to what is called direct object in English grammar. Example (from Oowekyala):



Gloss: "to fix a/the house V one that fixes a/the house" (ignoring the precise meaning of the deictics). The first member of this gloss is used when the whole SUN serves as a P, the second when it serves as the basis for a R. The word *paala* by itself can be glossed as "to fix V one that fixes" (among other things as well) and the word *guk* as "to be a house V house".

Having defined the concept of a SUN a first, broad, definition of the UNW word-classes is possible. Let proclitics count as a special kind of words - this is advantageous from the point of view of system. Moreover, most proclitics, unlike enclitics, can be isolated and repeated like full words by native speakers. The major word-classes, then, are (A) full words that can function as the X in a SUN; (B) full words and a few proclitics that can function as a LHA to the constructional centre X in a SUN. (The full words in this class are a subclass of the preceding one.); (C) full words and proclitics with miscellaneous specific syntactic functions. Each of these major classes divides into several minor classes. There is no need to detail the small but very heterogeneous class C, to mention it first, but of class B it has to be said that it divides into members that are marked by an enclitic *\_s* when used as a LHA and members that are not. Compare (Oowekyala) *hi?x\_s* *Kata* "to write well V one that writes well" and *g'ai* *Kata* "to quit writing V one that quits writing". The proclitic members of B never combine with *\_s*. Let the two subclasses of B be called B-s and B- $\emptyset$ . The subdivisions of class A are based on the fact that what is substituted for X in a SUN may restrict the choice of a following RHA. (On the types of RHA see an earlier paragraph.) To begin with, there is a subclass A-1 constituted by the words following which a RHA can be a relatum, and a subclass A-2 comprising the words with the opposite property. By another criterion class A divides into subclasses A-3 and A-4, with the whole of A-1, part of A-2, and most of B included in A-3. To explain the criterion I have to refer to the fact that one type of RHA consists of proclitic *yis\_* (Haisla *hs\_*) plus R. (Remember, a R is broadly a SUN plus deictics after its constructional centre X.) The construction *yis\_*/*hs\_* plus R can be substituted by a special type of reference to the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person. For the 3rd person and, as far as Haisla is con-

cerned, the 2nd person, the reference always has the form of an enclitic but for the 1st person (and in Heiltsuk and Oowekyala also the 2nd) one has to choose between items from columns 1 and 2 below. \*)

		1	2
1 sg.	Heiltsuk Oowekyala Haisla	qs_	yis_nug'a yis_nug'a hs_nug'a
1 pl. incl.	Heiltsuk Oowekyala Haisla	qpts_	yis_nug'ants yis_nug'ants hs_nug'ants
1 pl. excl.	Heiltsuk Oowekyala Haisla	qptk_	yis_nug'antk' yis_nug'antk' hs_nug'amuk'
2 sg./pl.	Heiltsuk Oowekyala Haisla	us/_us/_hus _us/_hus	yis_qsú yis_qsu _us/_hus

The Heiltsuk and Oowekyala proclitics in column 1, and all full words and proclitics in column 2, belong to class C. Joining a column item to the constructional centre X of a SUN precludes the SUN from functioning as the predicate of a main clause. Using column 2 items usually (but not necessarily) signals that the SUN is used as the predicate of a main clause. Now, an entire subclass of A, namely A-3, is constituted by its members just not being combinable with a 1st person reference from column 1 or, as far as Heiltsuk and Oowekyala are concerned, the 2nd person reference from this same column. The syntactic importance of this should be neither overestimated nor underestimated. It is overestimated if one concludes that a SUN constructed on the basis of a member of class A-3 is predestined for the function of predicate of a main clause. One should not lose sight of the fact that as long as the column 1 items are not added to a SUN, this latter can in principle be used both as a predicate and as the basis of a relatum. A simple example of this syntactic plasticity has been given at the beginning of this paper. On the other hand, SUN-s based on class A-3 words are in practice used more often as predicates than otherwise. In addition, SUN-s based on class A-3 words are not welcome in negative existence statements with the following structure,

Haisla	Kius	+	SUD
Heiltsuk	Kis		
Oowekyala	Kius		

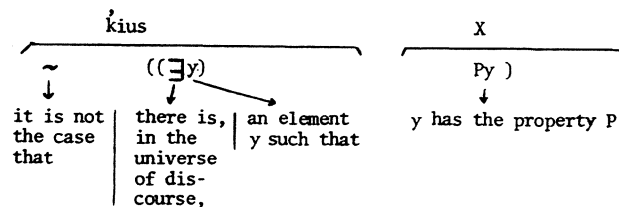
The first word can be glossed as "non-existent". Oowekyala example with a 1-word SUN: *Kius yutx'sqzuala* "There are no

3-dollar bills", "3-Dollar bills do not exist". This sentence type, incidentally, contains no part that can be substituted by a subject enclitic. By that token, it contains no subject and consequently no predicate either. It is one example of an "irregular" sentence type.\*\*) In a recent experiment I tested the acceptability of examples where the SUN was not a single class A-4 word like *yutx<sup>s</sup>smzuala*, but a single class A-3 word. Here are the test words in their Oowekyala form, *hik* "to be good V one that is good", *lsa* "to be slippery V one that is slippery", *halaka* "to hurry (to do) V one that hurries (to do)", *gla* "to crawl (like baby) V one that crawls (like baby)", *tsa* "to push V one that pushes". Several consultants were presented with *Kius hik*, *Kius lsa*, and so on, and asked what it meant to them. The responses ranged from the reluctant admission that, in an appropriate context, *Kius hik* could mean "Nothing is good", *Kius lsa* "Nothing is slippery", and so on, to downright rejection as nonsense.

Let this conclude the definition of the UNW word-classes. Seven classes have been distinguished, A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, B-s, B- $\phi$ , and C. Their definition has been descriptive, that is, in terms of regularities observable in UNW sentences, and they are more particularly not the result of trying to fit the facts into one or another grammatical grid used for alien languages such as for instance English. Thus, I have not tried to read nouns, verbs, adjectives, and what have you, in the facts. Yet for the sake of objectivity the following are also facts to be reported. The English glosses of class A-1 words typically involve English transitive verbs, those of class A-4 words typically nouns, and those of class B words typically adjectives or adverbs. What to think of this? Should one consider changing the class labels A-1, and so on, into "transitive verb", and so on? I do not think so. Again, the UNW word-classes predestine the syntactic fate of their members to a much lesser extent than do English word-classes. There is no parallel to the all-embracing class A in English. To say this differently, the syntactic functional load of UNW word-classes is lighter than that of English word-classes. Therefore one must apply Aert Kuipers' dictum (1968:626) that English class labels "not only fail to give any information beyond the already-known facts on which the labeling is based, but are even misleading as they suggest a far-reaching parallelism between languages which does not exist." Furthermore, a description of UNW syntax using English for a meta-language can go a long and, from a practical point of view, clear way without having to talk about word-classes other than the indeed conspicuous class B. Partial as the parallelism is between UNW and English word-classes, one can nevertheless very often rely on the English glosses for UNW words showing what the latter are combinable with and what not.

## Notes

- \*) The notation  $\sim$  denotes the Haisla accent whereas  $\hat{\quad}$  denotes the Heiltsuk high tone. The Heiltsuk low tone is indicated by the absence of a diacritic over a vocalic element. /M/ is a boundary signal with a great variety of phonetic manifestations.
- \*\*) Because there are no enclitics at all in the example, its structure corresponds to the predicate-logical formula  $\sim((\exists y)Py)$ . Thus,



The word *Kius* is probably polymorphic, -s being the existential quantifier.

## Sources

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