Backgrounding and Nominalization in Haida

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In a discourse-oriented paper presented at this conference last year, we noted that a narrator may successively shorten a particular clause in Haida such that the clause ultimately becomes an NP that functions syntactically as topic and subject of a sentence. To illustrate, consider the initial clause in the utterance:

(1) Ikwaan nang sGwAAnsang uu yaahl kil an l unsidang
But one person Topic raven language self he understands

'But there was one person, he understands raven language.'

Here, the topic Ikwaan nang sGwAAnsang uu `But there was one person' sets the framework for the predication yaahl kil an l unsidang `he understands raven language'.

At next mention, the information both topicalized and predicated in the initial clause, when referred to again, is backgrounded. That is, in (2) the content of the initial clause of (1) recurs in its entirety yet is "reduced" syntactically, such that it appears as the topic of a further predication.

(2) nang sGwAAnsang yaahl kil an unsitaan uu
the one person raven language self understood Topic

gin isan Gan l unsits tl'AA aa l gyUUlaanggaangaan
thing was what he understood them to he listened

`The one person, who understands raven language, listened to them and understood whatever was going on.'

In (2), the topic (the entire utterance (1) now reduced) nang sGwAAnsang yaahl kil an unsitaan uu `the one person, who understands raven language', is a full clause functioning syntactically as the subject of the main clause in (2) gin isan Gan l unsits tl'AA aa l gyUUlaanggaangaan `(he) listened to them and he understood whatever was going on'.

In its next appearance, the message content of (1) occurs in a clause with the verb having lost its tense-aspect markers and with the addition of a subordinate marker -s indicating nominalization.

(3) nang yAAhl kIl an l Unsits uu
`The one who understands raven language

tlakw sUUs Gan l Unsitaan
understood whatever was said.'

Here the topic nang yAAhl kIl an l Unsits uu may be glossed as a nominal constituent `The one who understands raven language' that is again the subject of the main clause tlakw sUUs Gan l Unsitaan `(he) understood whatever was said'.

This construction (with nominal marking) alternates with the previous construction (with tense-aspect marker) used throughout the rest of the story.

Narrators in Haida, in the course of their story-telling, may exhibit stages of nominalization in the evolution of a single narrative such that by the end of a story, as the examples above show, a 'new' noun phrase will have been created from an independent clause, possibly even lexicalized in its narrative context. The examples presented above from Haida are from the narrative text "kaao kaao", a Haida raven story examined in two previous papers (Eastman and Edwards, 1983, 1984) in which our concern was primarily with narrative structure and contextualizing cues employed by narrators. The productive process of word formation discerned in narratives in Haida is highlighted here as it appears to be a major word formation process in general in the language. Interestingly, this form of word building exists in Haida as a deverbative process. As such, too, it appears to be productive in an ordered way. However, the deverbative process is ordered such that the functions of word formation in Haida may be seen on an implicational hierarchy that is somewhat of a mirror image of the scheme proposed by Mithun (1984) for the evolution of various forms of noun incorporation in other languages.

We suggest that this deverbative nominalization process may be the next step, evolutionarily, after normal noun incorporation has run its course. That is to say, Haida, once it had Type 4 noun incorporation (according to Mithun's schema and to be described below), moved along a word building continuum to begin forming words via a deverbative process to be described here, i.e., verb incorporation if you will.

The process of noun incorporation involved in creating verbs from nouns (i.e., such that nouns are incorporated in the VP) has received much attention in recent years from linguists working with a number of languages and concerned with distinguishing morphology and syntax. Sadock (1980) demonstrates that noun incorporation (NI) in Greenlandic Eskimo follows ordinary syntactic rules (e.g., case assignment and modifier-noun agreement) and, as such, "falsifies pronouncements concerning the independence of syntax and word formation based on data from languages that are typologically very different from Greenlandic" (Abstract, p. 300). Mithun (1984), in a compromise position, sees NI as the most nearly syntactic of all morphological processes. She examined a large array of "geographically and genetically diverse languages" and found that "where syntax and morphology diverge, incorporation is a solidly morphological device that derives lexical items not sentences" (p. 847). To Mithun, NI may be seen cross-linguistically on an implicational hierarchy of four functions suggesting the historical development of verbs from nouns:

1) If a language exhibits NI at all, it will have lexical compounds forming an intransitive predicate denoting a unitary concept. E.g., berry-picking.

2) The intransitive predicate derived has the slot vacated by a direct object filled by an oblique argument (e.g., instrument, location, possessor).
E.g., Blackfoot Nit-ohpokon-sskoawa noko'sa 'I provided my child
(Frantz 1971) I-ball-acquire.him my.child with a ball.'

3) NI functions "to background known or incidental information within portions of discourse" (p. 859).
E.g., Huahtla Nahuatl (Merlan 1976)
na' ipanima ni-naka-kwa 'I eat it (meat) all the time'
I always I meat eat

4) A general noun stem narrows the scope of the VP, yet an external NP identifies the argument.
E.g., Mohawk (Dorothy Lazore in Mithun 1984)
Tohka niyohsers:ke tsi nahe' sha'te:ku
several so.it.year.numbers so it.goes eight

niku:ti rabahbot wahu-tsy-ahni:nu ki rake'niha.
of.them bullhead -he-fish-bought this my.father

'Several years ago, my father bought eight bullheads.'

Languages with NI of Type 1 only represent languages in which the process is primarily morphological while those with Types 1-4 exhibit NI morphologically and syntactically. In what we see to be a mirror-image or reverse process, as we suggested above, Haida nominalization proceeds from full clause with external NP identifying the argument, through a backgrounding process which shortens the verb of the clause and nominalizes it as a Topic or Subject NP (a morphologizing or de-syntactizing process) - backgrounding the basic utterances's content progressively such that the entire utterance achieves nominal status.

In Haida, then, an implicational hierarchy of word formation may be discerned such that:

1) an external NP identifies the argument
Yaahl kil an l unsidang 'He understands raven language'
raven language self he understands

2) topic marking backgrounds known information.
Nang sGwAAnsang yaahl kil an unsitaan uu
'The one who speaks raven language...'
(clause has become subject noun phrase)

3) Once backgrounded, information represented by a V in the NP may be marked as less-salient -or subordinated.
E.g., 'The raven language understander...'
nang yaahl kil an unsits uu
one raven language self understands
(the narrative past tense suffix -aan is replaced by a subordinate marker -s).
This has the effect of nominalizing the verb stem unsit-, 'understand/understander'.

Further examples outside a narrative context taken from Leer (1977:133) also show the process clearly.

hal IItl'aakdAAgang 'he is chief'

nang IItl'aakdAAgang 'one (someone) is chief'

nang IItl'aakdAA 'a chief' (lit., 'one who is a chief')

nang IItl'aakdAAs 'the chief'

In this set of examples, the first two involve independent arguments (hal, nang) which identify the subject of the verb of the full clause IItl'aakdAAgang. Then we see an example where the tense-aspect marker -gang is dropped to nominalize the clause as an NP. Finally, we see an example in which a subordinate -s is added forming a definite NP.

Indeed a case might be made that Haida exhibits not only Type 4 NI but also VI (verb incorporation=nominalization) through a reversal of the processes Mithun found to be operating in NI. That is, in Haida, nouns are created from verbs; noun phrases are

created from clauses. Further, the functions Mithun attributes to NI evolutionarily are carried out by nominalization in Haida. In other words, N + V stems combine in Haida to form VPs as in the normal process of noun incorporation and also combine through syntactically reductive processes to form NPs.

Thus, NI, in the sense of Sadock and Mithun, as noted above, appears to be continued as a nominalizing process in Haida. Mithun asserts that if a language has NI at all, it will have NI of the stage 1 type and that from stages 1-4, evolution may be arrested at any point. In Haida we see the process being reversed in the formation of a background-scene-setting sentence-initial NP. And, the process appears to work in exactly the reverse order described for NI. Nominalization, like NI, is a morphological or morphologizing process leading in some cases to lexicalization. Likewise, as is the case with NI, "speakers know not only whether a derivationally complex word is possible, but also whether they have heard of it before" (Mithun, 1984, p. 889). Narrators in Haida, in the course of their narrative, may exhibit stages of nominalization in the evolution of a single narrative such that by the end of a story a 'new' noun phrase will have been created from an independent clause, possibly even lexicalized in its narrative context.

Mithun observed that in polysynthetic languages with NI Type 1 and Type 2, a third type might occur which is "used to manipulate the flow of information within discourse" (p.896). The process occurs with an entity introduced for the first time in a discussion "...usually identified by a full independent NP" (op. cit.). Then "once it becomes old information..., it can be represented by a less salient incorporated noun --one less likely to sidetrack the attention of the listener" (op. cit.). This is part of the defining characteristic of Type 3 NI as elaborated earlier. Mithun asserts that "NI apparently arises as part of a general tendency in language for Vs to coalesce with their non-referential objects" (p. 890). Our evidence from Haida, in contrast, suggests that there is also a tendency for referential verb phrases to become nominalized in the creation of referential nominal NP arguments.

That is to say, Haida seems to 'count' as what Mithun would call an incorporating language in that a process of N + V compounding occurs treating "basic unitary lexical items as needed to represent institutionalized unitary concepts" (Mithun, 1984 p. 890), yet what takes place is a stage by stage reverse process whereby verbs are incorporated as nouns instead of nouns incorporated as predicates. Indeed, it may be that the result of Vi is manifest in Haida by complex NPs that serve as topics and agents of the action of the sentences in which they occur.

E.g., "The one who understood raven language
listened to them (the ravens) and understood whatever was going on."

"The one who understood raven language understood whatever was said."

"The raven language understander told them the reason why there were so many ravens there."

"The raven language understander told the people `the raven-chief will fly here'."

In summary, we are suggesting that Haida is an incorporating language exhibiting all four types of incorportion as a morphologizing process that Mithun sees cross-linguistically on an implicational hierarchy. In Haida, word formation is deverbative and NI as discussed in the literature has decayed into a productive system of affixation. Areally, the Northwest Coast is rich in languages (such as those of the Wakashan, Salish and Chemakuan families and Bella Coola) that contain extensive sets of

lexical suffixes that may be reflexes of NI. Haida's system of shape classifier prefixes, similarly, might have so arisen. Mithun notes that these NW coast languages are among the few in which "extensive sets of affixes function just like incorporated nouns although a derivational relationship between the affixes and independent Ns is not now discernible" (p. 887). It would be interesting to look next at what happens in other topic-prominent verb final languages in this regard.

For the present our claim is that a productive process of nominalization seems to be at work in Haida which like NI, in all languages where that process is productive, "is always functional, and can be used to achieve a variety of intricate stylistic effects" (Mithun 1984, p. 891). Too, as is the case with NI, VI (nominalization) "can be a difficult process, often requiring special linguistic virtuosity" and "(S)peakers who do it well may be especially admired, while marginal speakers may not be able to do it at all". (op. cit.)

Sources

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