An autolexical sketch of SgüüXs (Southern Tsimshian) predicate adjectives and predicate nominatives

John A. Dunn
University of Oklahoma

1. Introduction. Several autolexical (Sadock 1991) notions have influenced this descriptive analysis of SgüüXs predicate adjective and predicate nominative clauses: (1) a unitary X-bar phrase-structure template informs all the modules of grammar (morphological, semantic, syntactic, etc.), (2) X-bar trees representing these modules interface through association-type lines, (3) these interfacing lines effectively replace the move-alpha principle, (4) the semantic module universally represents proto-agents (Dowty 1987) as subjects, i.e., as specifiers to head verbs.

I use two module-trees in this paper: (1) a lexico-syntactic tree, which contains much the same information as the d-structure in Government-Binding theory, and (2) a morphological tree, which represents whatever lexical material is apparent in the concrete word order. The lexico-syntactic tree represents grammatical relations as positions in verb phrases and thematic roles as functions lexically assigned to those positions. I impose a strict local constraint on other phenomena, esp. case-marking and agreement. The preliminary contrastive characterization of SgüüXs and English sentences this model generates indicates that agreement and overt case-marking are lexicosyntactic-tree phenomena in the former and morphological-tree phenomena in the latter. See sentence 1.1 below and Figures 1 and 2 on the following pages. Application of this model to a wide variety of languages may indicate two parameters: (1) agreement is either lexico-syntactic or morphological, (2) overt case-marking in either lexico-syntactic or morphological.

These characterizations (Figures 1 and 2) of SgüüXs and English are preliminary; their purpose is to make the contrastive point only. This autolexical type description of SgüüXs will doubtless look quite different once it has been applied to all the attested sentence types. To that end this paper will be a beginning: it will look at the autolexical properties of SgüüXs sentences which have predicate adjectives and predicate nominatives as heads. I will refer to such sentences as 'verbless' ,' more as a convenient designator than a technically precise term.

1.1   sits'ikts'áXu k'àba'yú'uxwt
     si- ts'ik- ts'áX-u k'àba- 'yú'uxwt
     make plural nose -I little men
     I am making a nose [on] the boys
        'making-a-nose-[on]', i.e., pinching and pulling another's
        nose, an idiom meaning 'scolding,' thus
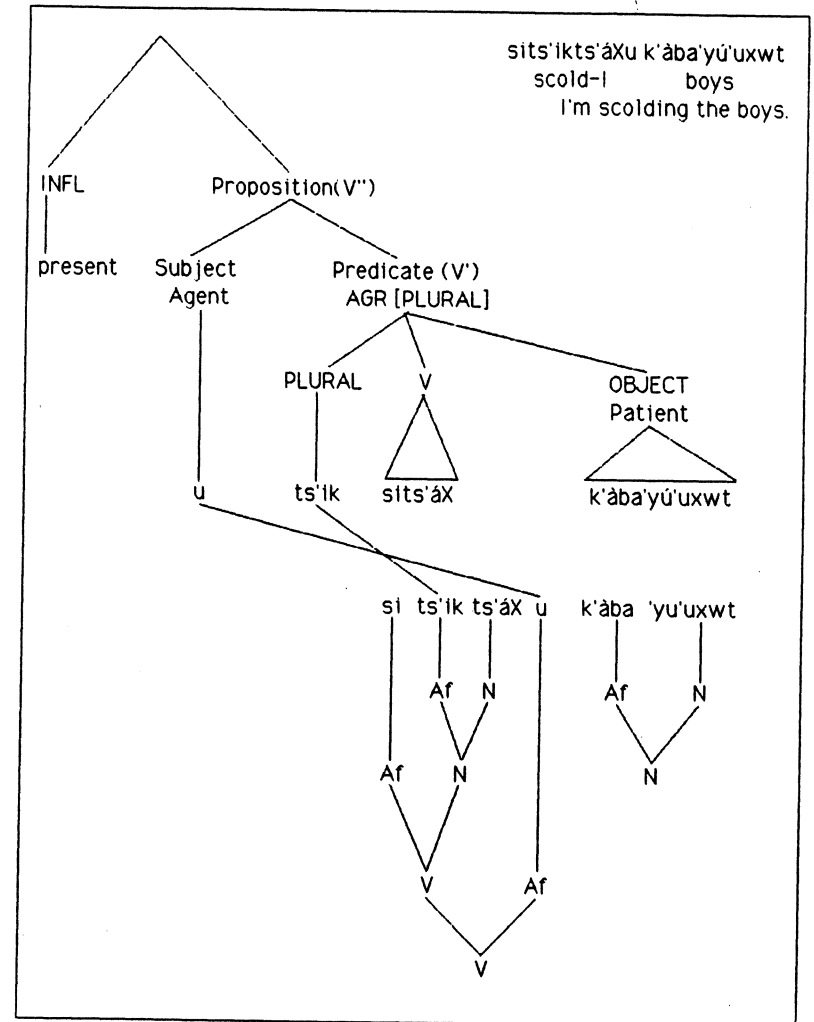   I am scolding the boys.
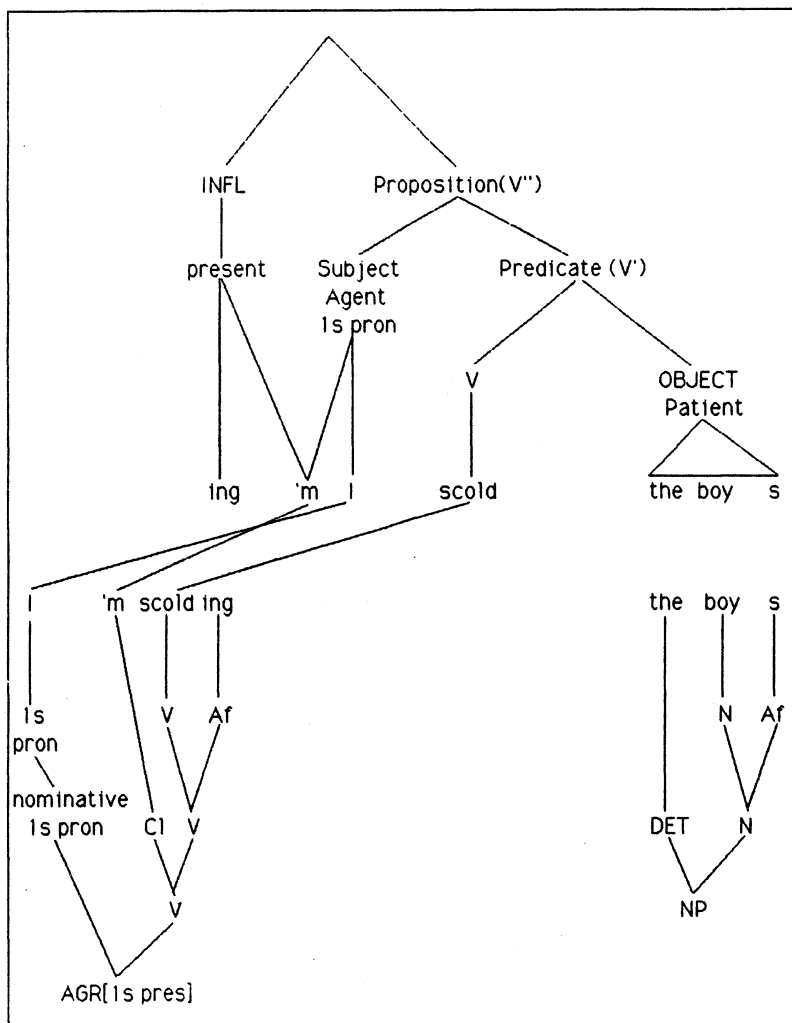

Figure 1. Trees for sentence 1.1

Figure 2. Trees for the English gloss of sentence 1.1

2. The generic verbless sentence. There are a large number of SgüüXs sentences each of which competent SgüüXs/English bilinguals translate with interchangeable English predicate adjectives and predicate nominatives (Cf. 2.1 thru 2.7).

2.1 á:'tsígi Gan
    á:'tsíg -i   Gan
    straight-case pole
    The pole is straight *or* It's a straight pole *or* There's a straight pole.

2.2 á:mi bilhá:
    á:m -i   bilhá:
    good-case abalone
    The abalone is good *or* It's good abalone.

2.3 á:mi daXhl
    á:m -i   daXhl
    good-case hammer
    The hammer is fine *or* It's a good hammer.

2.4 á:mi sesó'o
    á:m -i   sesó'o
    good-case rattle
    The rattle is good *or* It's a good rattle.

2.5 hlü:'ntçi 'yaxwt
    hlü:'ntç-i   'yaxwt
    angry -case man
    The man is angry *or* There's an angry man.

2.6 mihó:ksi midzaGaléi
    mihó:ks -i   midzaGaléi
    fragrant-case flowers
    The flowers are fragrant *or* There are some fragrant flowers.

2.7 tçiáipgi 'laX
    tçiáipg-i   'laX
    hard   -case needle
    The needle is hard *or* It's a hard needle.

This simple pattern, *Adjective-case Noun,* can be elaborated in two ways: with the machinery of a noun phrase, e.g., with a quantifier specifier (Cf. 2.8), or with the machinery of a verb phrase, e.g, with a sentential negative (2.9) or a tense marker

(2.10). These elaborations make the construction unambiguously predicate nominative (Figure 3) or predicate adjective (Figure 4) and thus prove that the basic (unelaborated) construction is intrinsically ambiguous (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

2.8   wiháildi hóan
     wiháild-i   hóan
     lots   -case fish
     There are lots of fish *but not* *The fish are [ADJ lots of].

2.9   ákndi hóksgi 'yaxwt
     ákndi hóksg -i   'yaxwt
     NEG   present-case man
     The man was not there *but not*
         *There was a not-present man *nor* *There was not a man present.

2.10 hla gí:kdi báni 'yaxwt
     hla gí:kd -i   báni 'yaxwt
     TNS swollen-case belly man
     The man's belly has just now become swollen *but not* *There's a man's
         just-now-become swollen belly.

3. Possessives in verbless sentences. When a verbless sentence has a possessive on a noun, that possessive can, in the predicate nominative interpretation, take the lexico-syntactic subject relation:

3.1   sí:pgi Gó:adu
     sí:pg-i Gó:ad-u
     sick-case heart-I
     I am heartsick *or* I have a broken heart *or* My heart is broken.

3.2   tçáksgi ts'a'an
     tçáksg-i   ts'a'an-Ø
     clean -case face   his
     His face is clean *or* **He** has a clean face.

Such sentences are, I believe, related to the type of predicate nominative construction seen in 3.3 thru 3.5.
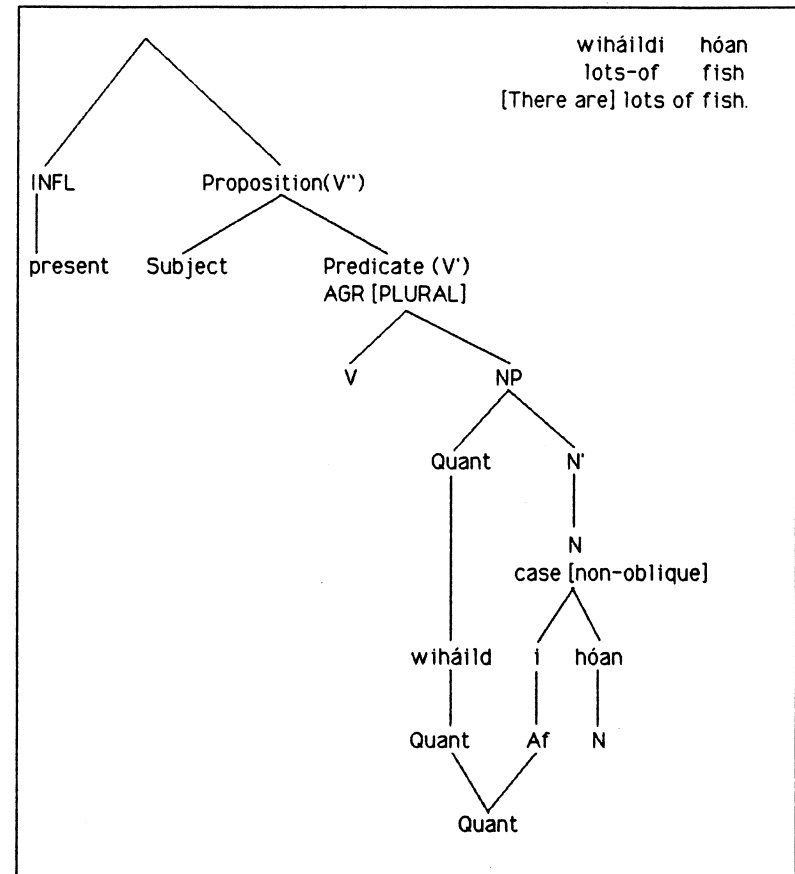

Figure 3. Trees for sentence 2.8

3.3   'n'ní sitaGó:di gwi:
     'n'ní sitaGó:d -i   gwi:
     this advice -case deictic:proximate
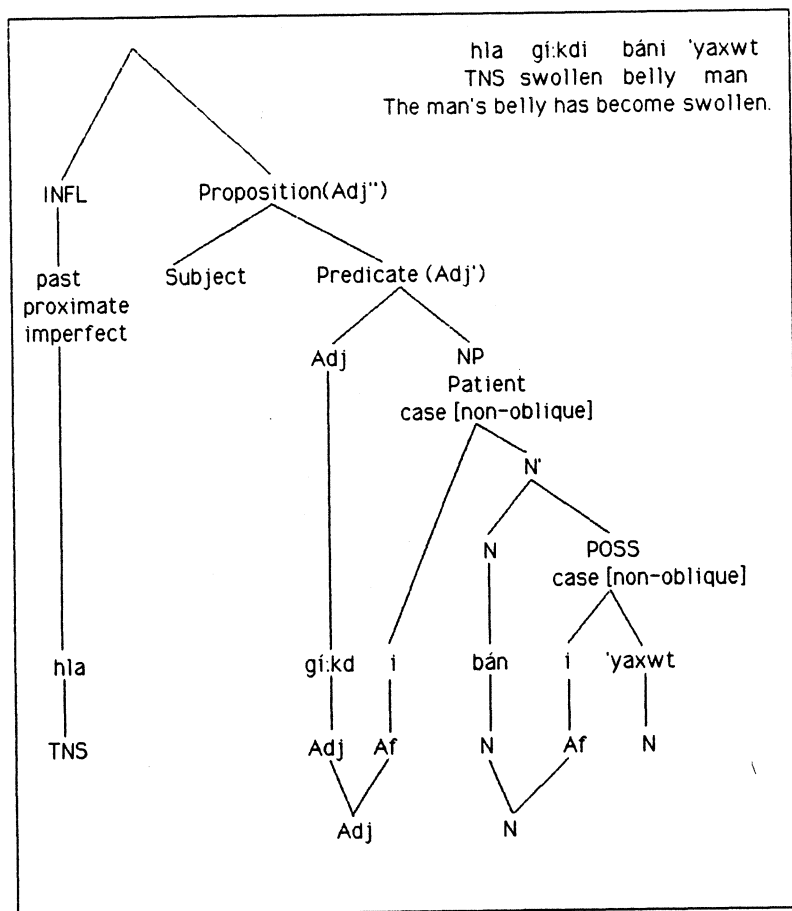   This is the proximate, i.e., my, advice.
     This is my advice.

hla giːkdi báni 'yaxwt
TNS swollen belly man
The man's belly has become swollen.

Figure 4. Trees for sentence 2.10

hlüːntçi 'yaxwt
angry   man
The man is angry.

Figure 5.1 Trees for sentence 2.5 interpreted as predicate adjective.

3.4   'náxu nadúːsit
       'náxu na- dúːs-i-   t
        I   POSS-cat -case POSS
       It is my cat.

3.5   'náxu nawáːlt
       'náxu na-wáːl-t
        I   POSS-do-POSS
       I own it, i.e., it is my possessing.

Figures 6 and 7 propose parallel analyses for 3.5 and 3.1. The independent pronoun in 3.3 thru 3.5 maintains its lexico-syntactic word order position; the pronominal clitics in 3.1 and 3.2 become morphological adjuncts (Af) to the predicate nominative.
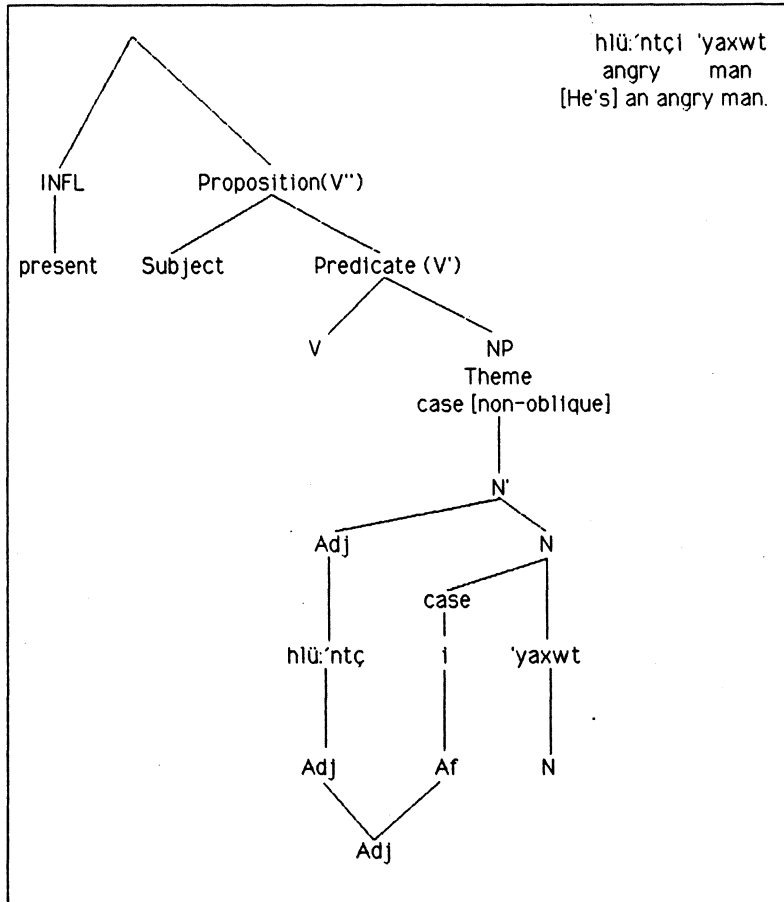
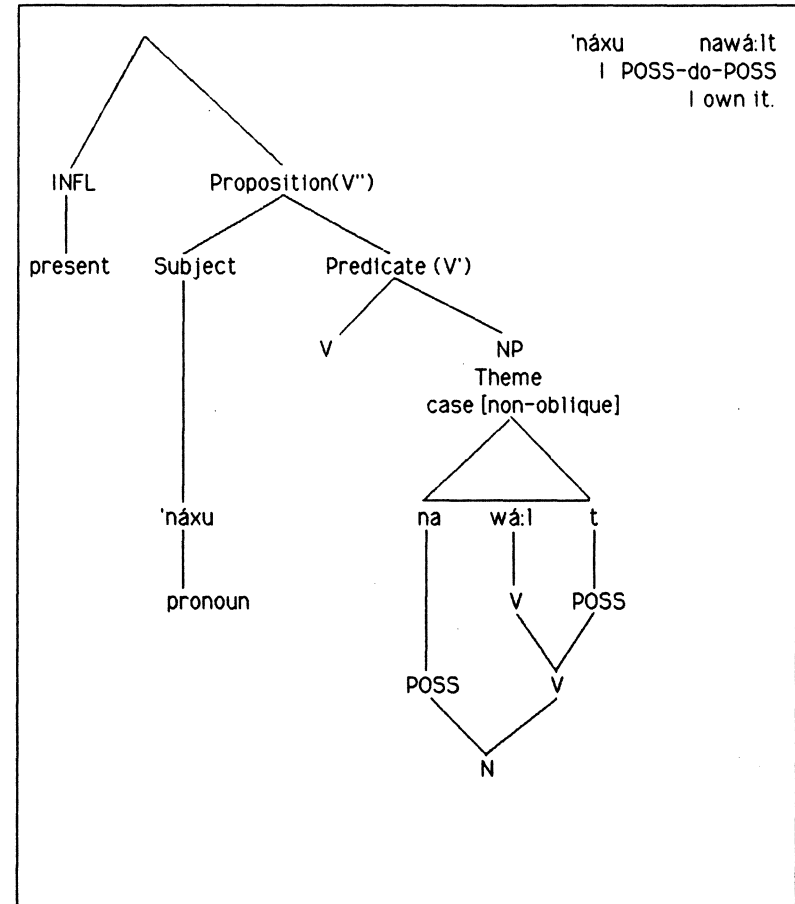Figure 5.2 Trees for sentence 2.5 interpreted as predicate nominative.

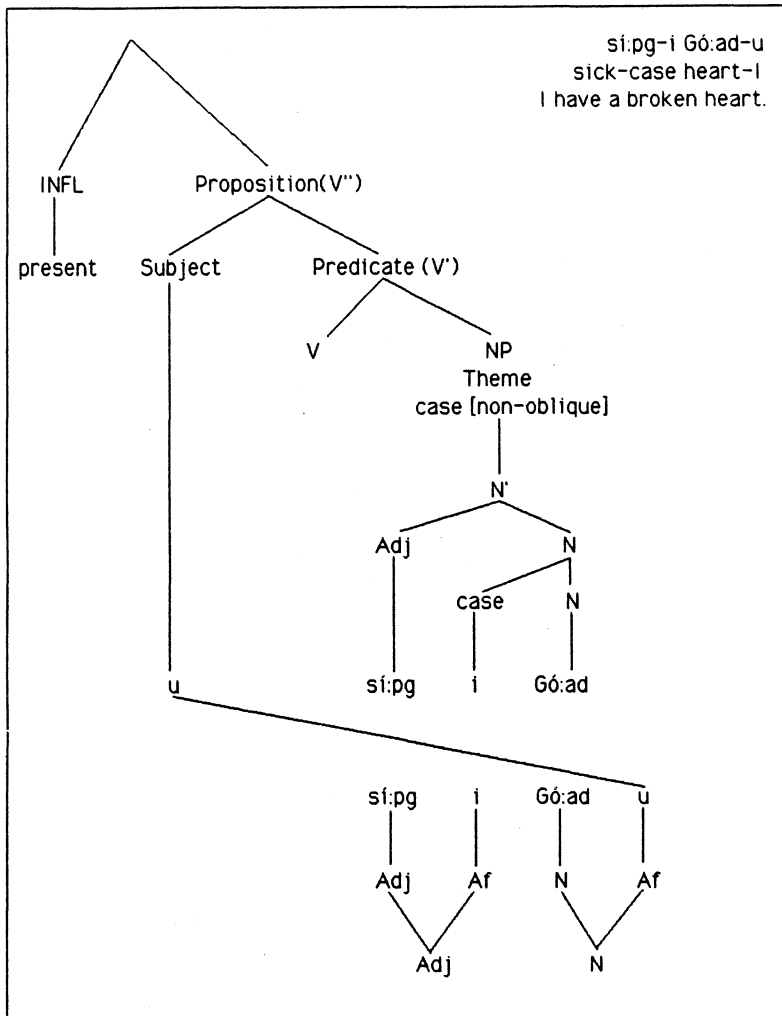

Figure 6. Analysis of sentence 3.5.

sí:pg-i Gó:ad-u
sick-case heart-I
I have a broken heart.

Figure 7. Analysis of sentence 3.1 as predicate nominative.

---

4. Four types of verbless sentences. The analysis to this point indicates that there are four kinds of verbless sentences: predicate adjective sentences, predicate nominative sentences, sentences with possessor subjects and those without possessor subjects.

Sentences of the type [Adj+case Noun] are ambiguous: they can be either predicate adjective or predicate nominative sentences (4.1 thru 4.21, Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

4.1 á:mi bilhá:
good abalone

4.2 á:mi daXhl
good hammer

4.3 á:mi sesó'o
good rattle

4.4 am'á:mi sesó'o
am-'á:mi sesó'o
plural-good rattle

4.5 á:'tsigi Gan
straight pole

4.6 ats'á:'tsigi GanGán
ats-'á:'tsigi Gan-Gán
plural-straight plural-pole

4.7 amap'ási la:kws
pretty   light

4.8 q'ap amamá:mqsi la:kws
really plural-pretty light

4.9 amap'ási ts'ihliná'a
pretty   apron

4.10 q'ap amamá:mqsi ts'ihliná'a

4.11 amap'ási yü:´s'ilt
basket

4.12 q'ap amamá:mqsi yü:´s'ilt

4.13 amap'ási sXá'in
mat

4.14 q'ap amamá:mqsi 'wa:n
tooth

4.15 hlü:´ntçi 'yaxwt
angry   man

4.16 hlik-hlü:´ntçi 'yu'uxwt
plural-   men

4.17 mihó:ksi midzaGaléi
fragrant flower

4.18 mik-mihó:ksi midzaGaléi
plural-

4.19 mit-mú:tgi nhlànaGán
plural-full barrel

4.20 tçláipgi 'laX
hard   needle

4.21 dzip-tçláipgi 'laX or tçip-tçláipgi 'laX
plural-   plural-

Sentences of the type [Adj+case Noun+Possessor] are also ambiguous: they can be either predicate adjectives without possessor subjects or predicate nominatives with possessor subjects (4.22 thru 4.28, Figure 7).

4.22 á:mi daXhli na'wá:-n
good hammer side-your
That's a good hammer you've got
or Your hammer's just fine.

4.23 am-'á:mi daXhli na'wá:n
plural-
You've got some good hammers

4.24 sí:pgi Gó:d-u
sick heart-my
I have a broken heart
or My heart is broken.

4.25 'wi'nági nts'ú:'p-t
long tail-their
Their tails are long.

4.26 tçiáksgi ts'á'an
clean face-his
He has a clean face
or His face is clean.

4.27 tçik-tçiáksgi Gats'al-ts'á'alsin
plural plural

4.28 lutçik-tçiáksgi ts'mmü:'xn
plural ears-his
He has clean ears *or* His ears are clean.

Verbless sentences are unambiguously Predicate adjective type when there is an overt tense/aspect word or words (4.29 thru 4.31, Figure 4) and/or an initial adverb construction (4.33). They are also unambiguously predicate adjective type when the noun is 'heavy,' i.e., when it is compound (4.34) and/or follows more than one adjective (4.30 and 4.32).

4.29 hla ak'alásgwi 'yu'uxwt
hla ak-'alásgwi 'yu'uxwt
TNS plural-weak men
The men are suddenly weak.

4.30 hla al'alà:isi wit'á as'ós
hla al-'alà:isi wit'á as-'ós
TNS plural-lazy big plural-dog
All of a sudden the big dogs [have got] lazy.

4.31 hla gi:kdi báni 'yaxwt
TNS swollen belly man
The man's belly is all of a sudden swollen.

4.32 yikyí:xi wit'á as'ós
yik-yí:xi wit'á as-'ós
plural-fat big plural-dog

4.33 k'ap lú'wil sí:pgi Gó:du
only very sick heart-my
I am quite angry

4.34 sí:pgi wimásgm'os
sick big-red-dog

Sentences of the type [quantifier+N'] are unambiguously predicate nominatives (4.35, 4.36, Figure 3).

4.35 wiháildi hoan
lots-of fish
[There are] lots of fish.

4.36 wiháildi wíliks gigiádi aná:s
lots-of many kinds pelts
[There are] different kinds of pelts.

Other predicate nominative sentences consist of [pronoun NP]. The initial independent pronoun can function as a coreferent to the NP (4.37, 4.39), or as a possessor subject (4.38, 4.40, Figure 6). The former, which are quite rare, are the only SgüüXs constructions that look like English predicate nominative sentences.

4.37 'náxsimi hlikhlgwidzú:sg-u
you(plu) sisters-in-law-my
You are my sisters-in-law.

4.38 'náxu na-dú:s-it
I POSS-cat-POSS
It is my cat.

4.39 'n'ní sitaGó:di gwi:
this advice here
This is my advice.

4.40 'náxu na-wá:1-t
I POSS-do-POSS
It is my possession.

5. Unresolved questions. If sentences 4.1 thru 4.21 can be interpreted as predicate nominatives (Figure 5.2), why does the -i- case marker occur in the middle of the NP rather than at the beginning where it belongs? Is it possible that the ambiguity in these sentences is an epiphenomenon, arising from English translation, and not a part of SgüüXs at all? If so, then these sentences should be interpreted as unambiguous predicate adjective constructions (Figure 5.1). But then why do bilingual SgüüXs/English speakers translate such constructions in two ways?

Why is the NP in the predicate adjective sentence not a subject as in English? Especially in sentences like

hlü:'ntçi 'yaxwt 'The man is angry (4.15)'

does the NP not function as a proto-agent? If so, then does the sentence

si:pgi Góːd-u   'Mine is a broken heart (4.24)'

have two subjects?

```
I [case-heart sick]
u [i-Goːd      si:pg]


     [si:pg  i-Goːd]  u
```

The syntactic evidence for possessor subjects in verbless sentences is straightforward (Figures 6 and 7; see also Figure 1). But there is nothing in the predicate adjective syntax to indicate the grammatical relation status of the other NP. Perhaps, once this analysis of verbless sentences is integrated with autolexical analyses of SgüüXs 'active' intransitives, transitives and ditransitives, some resolution to the puzzle will present itself. But it has always been the the nature of the Tsimshianic languages to confound the notion of subjecthood.

References

Dowty, David. 1987. Thematic proto-roles, subject selection, and lexical semantic defaults. LSA meetings colloquium paper. San Francisco.

Sadock, Jerrold M. 1991. Autolexical syntax, a theory of parallel grammatical representations. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.