

0. Introduction

In this paper I would like to present a set of facts relating to the binding properties of possessive constructions in Shuswap¹. The binding facts have some importance in contributing to an understanding of the relation of surface VSO order and configurational structure². In particular, as argued in Speas (1991), if a language has a 'flat' or non-configurational structure, where the grammatical relations of subject and object are not structurally distinguished, then certain constructions are predicted to be impossible, apparently ruled out by violations of the conditions of Binding Theory. These constructions are, in fact, impossible in Shuswap. I argue however that this does not constitute strong evidence that Shuswap is a non-configurational language but rather that the constructions are ruled out by other general properties that regulate the distribution of empty pronominals.

1. Predictions for a 'Flat' Language

Consider the binding facts for possessive constructions in English as shown in (1):

- (1) a. Mary_i likes her_i father.
 b. Mary's_i father likes her_i.
 c. Her_i father likes Mary_i.
 d. *She_i likes Mary's_i father.

Binding Theory predicts that co-reference ought to be possible in (1a,b,c). In (1a) the R-expression 'Mary' binds the pronominal 'her' but the pronominal is free in its governing category. The (1b-c) constructions have possible co-reference, although binding does not obtain. The R-expression (in b) does not c-command the pronominal and (in c) the pronominal does not c-command the R-expression. (1d) is ruled out as a violation of Condition C of Binding Theory: the pronominal binds the R-expression which must be free in all categories.

Speas (1991) has observed that in a 'flat' language where there is no structural distinction between subject and object, the following predictions can be made.

The Binding Properties of Possessive Constructions in Shuswap
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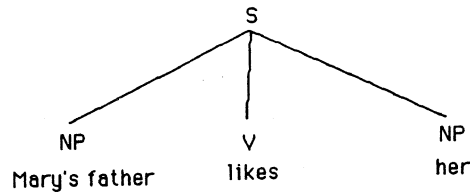
¹Shuswap is spoken on the Interior Plateau of British Columbia and is the northernmost member of the Interior Salish language family. It is a surface VSO language with a system of pronominal person marking on the predicate. Shuswap is spoken with several minor dialectal differences. The data in this paper is representative of the Deadman's Creek/Kamloops area. I would like to thank in particular Leslie Jules of Kamloops, Mona Jules of Chu Chua, Annie-May Jules, Basile Deneau and Sam Camille of Skeetchestn, who have helped me to understand their language. I would also like to thank Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins, Henry Davis, Mandy Jimmie, and M. Dale Kinkade for participating in a working group on the syntax of Interior Salish and for helpful comments on a presentation of this paper. Ross Saunders has also provided many helpful comments on this paper. Any errors however, remain with the author. Research for some of this work has been funded by the Melville and Elizabeth Jacobs Fund, and the Phillips Fund of the American Philosophical Society.

²This paper assumes a theory of binding as proposed in Chomsky (1981).

- (2) a. Mary_i likes her_i father.
 b. *Mary's_i father likes her_i.
 c. Her_i father likes Mary_i.
 d. *She_i likes Mary's_i father.

The binding facts ought to be the same for 'flat' languages as for English except for the contrast in (1b-2b). In (2b) 'Mary's father likes her' co-reference between the R-expression and the pronominal should be impossible. As shown in (3) the pronominal binds the R-expression and causes a Condition C violation.

(3)



I now turn to the Shuswap facts.

2. Properties of Possessive Constructions in Shuswap

I begin by presenting Shuswap constructions that are given similar interpretations to the English forms in (1). There is some freedom of word order in Shuswap. (4-6) can all mean 'Mary likes her father'. Third person possession is marked by the suffix /-s/ on the head of the construction.

- (4) x^wi-st-θ-és x-M x-qé?čə-s³
 like-caus-3abs-3erg det-Mary det-father-3poss
 Mary likes her father.⁴
- (5) x-M x^wi-st-θ-és x-qé?čə-s
 det-Mary like-caus-3abs-3erg det-father-3poss
 Mary likes her father.
 *Her father likes M.

³The following abbreviations have been used: abs (absolute), acc (accusative), caus (causative), deic (deictic), det (determiner), emph (emphatic pronoun), erg (ergative), intr (intransitive), nom (nominative), obl (oblique), poss (possessive), tr (transitive).

⁴This form can also mean 'Her father likes Mary' or 'She likes Mary's father'.

- (6) x^wi-st-θ-és x-qé?čə-s x-M
 like-caus-3abs-3erg det-father-3poss det-Mary
 Mary likes her father.

(4) reflects the surface VSO word order but of near equal frequency in direct elicitation is (5) where the subject occurs in pre-verbal position. In (6) the subject has been right-dislocated. These constructions receive the same interpretations as in English with a strong preference for co-reference between 'Mary' and the possessive pronoun. If co-reference is not intended the speaker will give the name of the possessor or use a deictic as shown in (7).

- (7) M x^wi-st-θ-és yəxéy x-qé?čə-s
 Mary like-caus-3abs-3erg deic det-father-3poss
 Mary likes that one's father.

Before turning to the crucial examples equivalent to (1b) I will confirm that the Shuswap facts are the same as the English examples for (1c-d). In (8) the possessive is in the nominal in pre-verbal position and co-reference with the object is possible.

- (8) x-qé?čəs x^wi-st-θ-és x-M
 det-father-3poss like-caus-3abs-3erg det-Mary
 Her father likes Mary.

The Shuswap equivalents to (1d) also do not allow co-reference between the subject pronominal and the R-expression possessor in object position. Non-coreference with the possessor can be indicated by (4), an emphatic pronoun (9) or by a deictic (10).

- (9) nəwí?s x^wi-st-θ-és x-M x-qé?čəs
 emph like-caus-3abs-3erg det-Mary det-father-3poss
 She's the one who likes Mary's father.
- (10) nəxéy sc'ləwt x^wi-st-θ-és M x-qé?čəs
 deic stand like-caus-3abs-3erg det-Mary det-father-3poss
 That one standing there likes Mary's father.

If co-reference were intended, a Shuswap speaker would select an appropriate construction from (4-6) or use (11).

- (11) x^wi-st-θ-és x-qé?čəs
 like-caus-3abs-3erg det-father-3poss
 She likes her father.

I now turn to the crucial equivalents of (1b). There are no Shuswap transitive constructions that express the interpretation 'Mary's father likes her.' (12) and (13) use passives.

- (12) x^wi-st-ém-Ø x-qé?čas x-M
like-caus-intr-3abs obl-father-3poss det-Mary
Mary is liked by her father.
- (13) x-M x^wi-st-ém-Ø x-qé?čas
det-Mary like-caus-intr-3abs obl-father-3poss
Mary is liked by her father.

Corresponding to the passives are (14) with 'Mary' in focus position and (15) with a deictic pronoun in focus.

- (14) M xi? x^wi-st-ém-Ø x-qé?čas
det-Mary deic like-caus-intr-3abs obl-father-3poss
Mary is the one who is liked by her father.
It's Mary who is liked by her father.
- (15) yəxi? xi? x^wi-st-ém-Ø x-qé?čas
deic deic like-caus-intr-3abs obl-father-3poss
That's the one who is liked by her father.

There is another construction that is used in Shuswap to express the interpretation 'Mary's father likes her' with intended co-reference. This is apparently an antipassive⁵.

- (16) M x-qé?ča-s x^wi-st-ém-əs
Mary det-father-3poss like-caus-intr-3
Mary's father is the one who likes her.
- (17) yəxi? xi? lə-qé?ča-s x^wi-st-ém-əs
deic deic det-father-3poss like-caus-intr-3
That's the one who is liked by her father.

Shuswap has a number of strategies to avoid expressing a co-referential null pronominal in object position. If the pronominal is not co-referential it will be overtly expressed either with an emphatic pronoun or a deictic.

- (18) nəwi? s x^wi-st-ém-Ø tə-M x-qé?ča-s
emph like-caus-intr-3abs obl-Mary det-father-3poss
She is the one liked by Mary's father.
- (19) núne x^wi-st-ém-Ø tə-M x-qé?ča-s
deic like-caus-intr-3abs obl-Mary det-father-3poss
The one over there is liked by Mary's father.

⁵This construction was extensively discussed in Gardiner and Saunders (1990).

It turns out however that it is not conditions on binding that are blocking these constructions, but rather factors that determine the distribution of empty pronominals. I will now have a look at this distribution.

3. The distribution of empty pronominals

It is well recognized that the distribution of empty pronominal categories often correlates with rich agreement or with languages that are discourse-oriented. English is an example of a language which is neither discourse-orientated nor one with rich enough agreement to licence pro-drop. Spanish (Jaeggli (1982)) and Italian (Rizzi (1982)) are languages with rich enough agreement so that pronominal subjects typically drop in non-emphatic situations. Chinese, Japanese and Korean (Huang (1984)) are languages that lack agreement but are discourse-oriented and again have frequent pronominal drop. The Shuswap language has both subject and object agreement as well as being discourse-oriented so that it is not surprising to find pro-drop.

In (20-21) the predicate is marked for subject and object pronominal agreement and there are no overt pronominals.

- (20) x^wi-st-sí-n
like-caus-2acc-1nom
I like you.
- (21) xi-st-Ø-és
like-caus-3abs-3erg
She likes him.

When there is a single post-verbal nominal it will be interpreted as the object⁶.

- (22) xi-st-Ø-és x-John
like-caus-3abs-3erg det-John
She likes John.
*John likes her.

(22) has only one interpretation in which the empty pronominal is a subject. Shuswap does not permit the expression of an overt nominal as subject with a null object (23).

- (23) *x-John xístés
John likes her.

⁶Gerdts (1988) noticed that when intransitive clauses are included in the pattern, that single post-verbal nominals are interpreted as absolutes.

Sentence (23) is felt to be incomplete by Shuswap speakers. The constructions given in (14-17) are consistent with this fact. Assuming that (25-26) are examples of topicalizations, it is only subjects that can topicalize.

- (24) $\text{le}^{\text{?}}\text{-}\emptyset\ \text{}\text{?}\text{-k}\acute{\text{u}}\text{kpi}^{\text{?}}$
 good-abs det-chief
 The chief is good.
- (25) $\text{wik-t-}\emptyset\text{-s}\ \text{}\text{?}\text{-k}\acute{\text{u}}\text{kpi}^{\text{?}}\ \text{}\text{?}\text{-s}\acute{\text{a}}\text{k}'\acute{\text{e}}\text{p}$
 see-tr-3abs-3erg det-chief det-coyote
 The chief saw the coyote.
- (26) $\text{?}\text{-k}\acute{\text{u}}\text{kpi}^{\text{?}}\ \text{le}^{\text{?}}\text{-}\emptyset$
 det-chief good-abs
 The chief is good.
- (27) $\text{?}\text{-k}\acute{\text{u}}\text{kpi}^{\text{?}}\ \text{wik-t-}\emptyset\text{-s}\ \text{}\text{?}\text{-s}\acute{\text{a}}\text{k}'\acute{\text{e}}\text{p}$
 det-chief see-tr-3abs-3erg det-coyote
 The chief saw the coyote.
 *The coyote saw the chief.
- (28) $\text{?}\text{-s}\acute{\text{a}}\text{k}'\acute{\text{e}}\text{p}\ \text{wik-t-}\emptyset\text{-s}\ \text{}\text{?}\text{-k}\acute{\text{u}}\text{kpi}^{\text{?}}$
 det-coyote see-tr-3abs-3erg det-chief
 The coyote saw the chief.
 *The chief saw the coyote.

In a language such as Shuswap that not only is discourse oriented but also exhibits extensive pro-drop it is perhaps initially surprising that there is so little ambiguity permitted. A discourse-oriented language however is one that is likely to have a number of mechanisms related to topic and focus. The Shuswap data suggests that a topic hierarchy is involved⁷. Subjects are most likely to be topics and pro-drop (22). When objects are intended to be topics they are turned into subjects by passive or antipassive. The ungrammatical (23) is simply an expression of the fact that Shuswap provides other discourse devices to express topics.

4. Conclusion

To summarize, the binding of possessives in Shuswap appears to give credence to the prediction that in 'flat' or non-configurational languages an object is in a position to bind an element in subject position. However a more careful look at the distribution of empty pronominals in the language suggests that the binding facts cannot be used to detect subject/object asymmetries. Given the lack of verb-complement constituency tests in Shuswap the burden of determining its configurational status

⁷I would like to thank Henry Davis for this suggestion.

lies on judgements regarding weak-crossover effects and long-distance extraction. Early indications suggest that the crossover facts are parallel to those of English, giving some evidence of hierarchical structure.

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