

SPECULATIONS ON THE ORIGINS OF AN EMPTY MORPHEME IN UPPER CHEHALIS

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Upper Chehalis and Cowlitz (Salish) have a morpheme which serves no apparent function, and has been difficult to explain in historical terms. It has two different shapes. For a couple of years now I have had ideas on the origin of one of these variants, but a possible explanation for the other has only recently come to my attention. The purpose of the present note is to publicize these speculations on the origin of this morpheme.

The morpheme in question is *-w-/-t*. The two variants are in complementary distribution, *-w-* occurring in imperfective aspect forms and *-t* occurring in perfective (or stative) aspect forms. They occur only on intransitive roots. They do not simply mark intransitivity, however, since it turns out that their use is restricted to CVC and C \acute{a} RC roots (where R is any resonant). If the root has three consonants (where the second is not a resonant), or if there is any other suffix present, these suffixes do not occur. The *-w-* must be followed by one of the imperfective subject suffixes in (1).

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|-----|--------|-------|
| (1) | -anš | 1 sg. |
| | -š | 2 sg. |
| | -n | 3 sg. |
| | -stawt | 1 pl. |
| | -alp | 2 pl. |
| | -it(i) | 3 pl. |

(These imperfective subject suffixes must be considered as being separated from the preceding stem by a disjunct boundary because of the way they affect vowel deletion rules.) This distribution of *-w-/-t*, along with its apparent lack of meaning or grammatical function, suggests that its presence is phonologically determined: a surface word requires a minimum of three consonants, and if there are only two, then *-w-/-t* is added to constitute the third. A resonant as C₂ in a C \acute{a} RC root counts as a vowel; the schwa in these cases is epenthesized to carry stress. Athabaskan and Iroquoian languages also expand roots to create words of a minimal size, although there a prothetic vowel is added to create a two-syllable minimum. The Upper Chehalis case differs in that a minimum number of *consonants* is required (at least for predicate stems). There is only a handful of exceptions that do not add *-w-/-t* to CVC roots,¹ and a few more exceptions that add the suffix to other C \acute{a} RC roots; these last appear to be analogical.

¹ Three of these are very common roots: *ciw* 'say', *ciš* 'come', and *yis* 'work'. Five other such roots occur less frequently: *k^wá?* 'shut up, be quiet' (in Boas's data only), *šup* 'faint', *p^ó?* 'break wind' (in Boas's data only), *q^ál-* 'lift out of the water with a dip net' (intransitive; only attested in imperfective aspect *s-q^ál-n*), and *yá-l-* 'go by, pass by' (*s-yá-l-n/yá?*). One other root occurs without the suffixes in data that I collected: *q^wó?* 'cough'; Boas records the form with *-w-/-t*, however (but no glottal stop).

Although a phonological relationship between *-w-* and *-t* is not impossible, in this morpheme it is highly unlikely. It is common in Salish for a final or pre-obstruent *l* to devoice to *t*, and this process can be seen synchronically in Upper Chehalis. Then one would be faced with an alternation of *l* and *w* to explain this morpheme. A change of *l* to *w* is not unnatural, but in Salish seems to be restricted to Comox-Sliammon, and then only when the original *l* is adjacent to *u*. Separate origins of the two variants of this empty Upper Chehalis morpheme must therefore be sought.

The systematic distinction of stems and subject markers according to perfective and imperfective aspect is found only in Upper Chehalis and Cowlitz within Salish. Subjects with perfective stems are the clitics in (2), cognates of which are familiar throughout Salish (with the exception of the third plural form).

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|-----|------|-------|
| (2) | čn | 1 sg. |
| | č | 2 sg. |
| | ∅ | 3 sg. |
| | čt | 1 pl. |
| | čalp | 2 pl. |
| | yamš | 3 pl. |

The origin of the imperfective subject suffixes has been, and remains, unclear, except for second person forms (singular and plural). However, both Paul Kroeber and I have come to the conclusion that the split of predicate shape in Upper Chehalis and Cowlitz along aspectual lines had its origin in an old main clause vs. subordinate clause split. There are two reasons for this conclusion: (1) Such a division of clause structure is found throughout the rest of Salish, where the historical pattern seems to have been that main clause intransitive subjects were indicated by clitics beginning with *k-*, and transitive subjects and subordinate clause subjects used suffixes that are historically the same as the pronominal markers added to intransitive *k-*. (2) Subordinate clauses are also commonly marked throughout Salish with an *s-* prefixed to the predicate of that clause. Imperfective predicates in Upper Chehalis (at least in direct quotations in main clauses and in subordinate clauses) also require a prefixed *s-*. For these two reasons, it seems likely that imperfective inflections in Upper Chehalis have their origin as subordinate clauses, which have become main clauses with an aspectual contrast. They continue to use subject suffixes (like subordinate clauses), while perfective clauses use subject clitics typical of (intransitive) main clauses throughout Salish.

There is one more feature of some subordinate clauses in Salish that may provide the explanation of the *-w-* in Upper Chehalis. In the three Northern Interior languages Lillooet, Thompson, and Shuswap, there is an additional set of subject clitics. The Thompson set (given in 3) is labelled 'conjunctive' by Thompson and Thompson (1992:60ff.).

| | | | |
|-----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| (3) | //w-en// | wn | 1 sg. |
| | //w-ex ^w // | ux ^w , wx ^w | 2 sg. |
| | //w-es// | us, ws | 3 sg./pl. |
| | //w-et// | ut, wt | 1 pl. |
| | //w-ep// | up, wp | 2 pl. |

The Shuswap set (given in 4) is merely called a 'suffixal paradigm' by Kuipers, but he notes that it is 'used in certain syntactic constructions' (1974:44), e.g. progressive constructions, locative clauses, temporal clauses, and if-when clauses (1974:84-85).

| | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| (4) | -wn | 1 sg. |
| | -əx ^w , -wəx ^w | 2 sg. |
| | -əs, -wəs | 3 sg./pl. |
| | -ət, -wət | 1 pl. |
| | -əp, -wəp | 2 pl. |

The Lillooet set is called 'subjunctive' by van Eijk (1985:171); the forms are given in (5). Van Eijk treats these as suffixes, but others working on Lillooet consider them to be clitics.

| | | |
|-----|------------------|-----------|
| (5) | -en | 1 sg. |
| | -ex ^w | 2 sg. |
| | -es | 3 sg./pl. |
| | -et | 1 pl. |
| | -eʔep | 2 pl. |

The important thing to note here is the *w* in the Thompson set; this rounding is often lost in Shuswap, and has disappeared entirely in Lillooet. In all three languages, these clitics are used only in (certain) subordinate clauses. I suggest that it is this *w* that is retained in the Upper Chehalis imperfective forms as *-w-*.

A possible origin for Upper Chehalis *-ʔ* has been even harder to discern. Recently Henry Davis suggested that it might be connected with an unexplained morpheme in Lillooet. In that language main clause intransitive pronominal clitics have two forms, given in (6); there is no discernable functional difference between the two sets.

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|-----|------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| (6) | ken | ʔken | 1 sg. |
| | kex ^w | ʔkex ^w | 2 sg. |
| | ∅ | ∅ | 3 sg./pl. |
| | keʔ | ʔkeʔ | 1 pl. |
| | keʔep | ʔkeʔep | 2 pl. |

The set with *ʔ* generally occurs "(a)fter stems ending in a vowel or resonant" (van Eijk 1985:172). There are numerous exceptions, however, and van Eijk (p.c.) speculates that the use of *ʔ* has spread by analogy with the much more common vowel- or resonant-final forms. If, however, the Lillooet *ʔ* is cognate with the *-ʔ* in Upper Chehalis, then we must see the Lillooet usage as one of contraction rather than expansion. It is striking that this *ʔ* occurs only immediately preceding the subject clitics. If the *ʔ* is cognate in these languages, then we still require an explanation of its function. One possibility is that the subject clitic base should be reconstructed as **ʔk-*, not just the **k-* that has usually been postulated (Hoard 1971, Newman 1979).

An origin of Upper Chehalis *-ʔ* as associated with main clause subject clitics then can be seen as parallel to the origin of *-w-* from a set of subordinate clause subject clitics. One additional change occurred, however. In Upper Chehalis these suffixes must be considered to be suffixes to the root, not part of the subject markers. This is because in the perfective aspect third person subjects are zero, yet the *-ʔ* must still occur, and there is no reason to treat it as a clitic.

These comments on an origin for Upper Chehalis *-w/-ʔ* must be considered speculative because of the very limited distribution of the putative reflexes, and because they occur only in some of the languages from two different branches of the family. If the speculations turn out to be accurate, they constitute relic forms in a classic sense.

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