

The Expression of Collective in Mainland Comox

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Abstract: Mainland Comox expresses the concept of collective in its article system and in its morphology. The article /ʔəw/ is parallel with a similar construction in the Nishga language. This article, pronounced [ʔuo], also serves as a counter-example to the claim of the taxonomy criterion of phonemic theory.

Keywords: articles, collective plural, distributive plural, Mainland Comox, Homalco, Klahoose, Sliammon, Salish.

1 Introduction

Although present-day Mainland Comox has undergone change in its reassignments of usages to match the English lexicon, in the past the dichotomy between collective plural and distributive plural was prominent. This is shown by the statements of Noel George Harry (born circa 1890), Bill Galligos (born 1908), and Mrs. Mary George (born 1924), among others.

2 {C₁əC₂-} plural

One way to form a plural is with prefixed {C₁əC₂-}.¹

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|--|----|--|
| (1) | a. | <i>qaymiwh</i>
[qaimiç ^w]
/qaymiç ^w /
'person' | b. | <i>qeyqaymiwh</i>
[qéiqaimiç ^w]
{C ₁ əC ₂ -qaymiç ^w }
'people' |
| (2) | a. | <i>'imin</i>
[ʔəmin]
'road; door' | b. | <i>'em'imin</i>
[ʔəmʔəmin]
{C ₁ əC ₂ -imin}
'roads; doors' |
| (3) | a. | <i>thoman</i>
[θoman]
/θuman/
'eyebrow' | b. | <i>themthoman</i>
[θəmθoman]
/θəmθuman/
'eyebrows' |

¹ The use of curly brackets to indicate morphophonemic notation is in accordance with the convention which can be found at <http://www.fb10.uni-bremen.de/anglistik/linguistik/pdf/notation-conventions.pdf>. Capital letters are being used to indicate that the segments are morphophonemes, not phonemes (Gleason 1961:82, §7.8).

3 The collective plural suffix {-VW}

The most common phonemic shapes of this suffix include /-iw/ [εʊ] ~ [iʊ] and /-ig-/ [εg].

In June 1969, Noel George Harry (Homalco) started the story of Killing the Wind with the words in Homalco and English “*Tl'emîs kw qayiwmiwh*. The people had houses.” The beginning words [ʎəmɛs k^w qayio^wmiç^w] are to be analyzed as [ʎəmɛs] ‘house, dwelling’ plus stative infix, here [ε] with a tonal accent, [k^w] ‘the’ and /qaymiç^w/ ‘person’ with the collective plural suffix, here /-iw/. He then listed the names of the people: Raven, Pileated Woodpecker, Seagull, Heron.

When I later asked Bill Galligos (Sliammon; born 1908) the difference between /qayiwmiç^w/ and /qəyqaymiç^w/, he answered that the first means “Indians all in one place” and the latter means “Indians all over the place” — a classic opposition of collective plural versus distributive plural. Speakers today are English dominant, which could explain why this opposition is not as strong as it may have been in the past. Indeed, Noel George Harry said that by the time he was born (circa 1890) the language was already changing noticeably under the impact of English.

4 Examples of /-iw/ and /-ig-/

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (4) | <p>a. <i>qayimiwh</i>
[qamiç^w]
‘person’</p> | <p>b. <i>qayiwmiwh</i>
[qayio^wmiç^w]
/qay-iw-miwh/²
STEM-PL-SUFFIX
‘people all in one place’</p> |
| (5) | <p>a. <i>kwanachem gi</i>
[k^wanɔçim gi]
/k^wa-naç-əm gi/
place-bottom-VERB COMMAND
‘(You) sit down!’</p> | <p>b. <i>kwanachemiw gi</i>
[k^wanɔçimεʊ gi]
/k^wa-naç-əm-iw gi/
place-bottom-VERB-PL COMMAND
‘(You) all sit down (together)!’</p> |
| (6) | <p>a. <i>yep'tasolh</i>
[yip̄tasɔɬ]
/yəp̄-t-as-uɬ/
break-TRANS-AGENT-PAST
‘(S)he broke (one cup).’</p> | <p>b. <i>yep'igatasolh</i>
[yip̄εgɔtasɔɬ]
/yəp̄-ig-a-t-as-uɬ/
break-PL-a-TRANS-AGENT-PAST
‘(S)he broke all (the cups).’</p> |
| (7) | <p>a. <i>yeymatas</i>
[yimɔtas]
{C₁V₁-y(ə)m-a-t-as}³
IMPF-kick-a-TRANS-AGENT
‘(S)he is kicking it.’</p> | <p>b. <i>yeymatigas</i>
[yimɔtegas]
{C₁V₁-y(ə)m-a-t-iW-as}
IMPF-kick-a-TRANS-PL-AGENT
‘They are all together kicking it.’</p> |

² In examples (4b) and (8b), the plural /-iw-/ is inserted between the historical stem and the historical suffix.

³ This example illustrates the loss of /ə/ from the root with {C₁V₁-} prefixing.

- (8) a. *'ilhten*
[ʔɛʔtən]
'food; eat'
- b. *'ilhiwten*
[ʔɛʔɛtən]
/ʔiʔ-iw-tən/
STEM-PL-SUFFIX
'They eat together.'
- (9) a. *'imash*
[ʔɛmʌʃ]
'walk'
- b. *ho sht ga 'i'imigash ga*
[ho št gʌ ʔɛʔɛmɪgʌʃ gʌ]
{hu št ga C₁V₁-ʔim-iW-aš ga}
go we ga IMPF-walk-PL-VERB ga⁴
'We were walking along together.'

From Tommy Paul's story about the time I almost fell into the water at Stuart Island:

- (10) a. *qoqo chia'atiw peya*
[qoqo ʔʰɛʔɛtɛʊ piyʌ]
/q^wuq^wu ʔʰaʔat-iw pəya/
drink short.time-PL beer
'(We) drank some beer together.'
- b. *ho shtiw q'witiw*
[ho štɛʊ q^wɛtɛʊ]
/hu št-iw q^wit-iw/
go we-PL downhill-PL
'We all went to the dock together.'

The allomorph /-ig/ is also seen in the reciprocal of the result transitive:

- (11) a. *k'wenewhas*
[k^wɔnɔç^wʌs]
/k^wən-əç^w-as/
see-TRANS-AGENT
'(S)he sees it/him/her'
- b. *k'wenenwhigas*
[k^wɔnənç^wɪgʌs]
{k^wə(n)-(ə)-nW-ig-as}
see-(ə)-TRANS-PL-AGENT
'They see each other.'

5 Collective plural expressed by modification of the root vowel

As we were talking about the verb 'to run' Bill Galligos volunteered the verb for "a bunch running all together" and a collective plural for "a bunch of boats".⁵

- (12) a. *jetl'*
[jɪʌ]
'run'
- b. *jia'atl'*
[j^yɛʔʌʌ]
'several running together'
- (13) a. *newhilh*
[nɔç^wɪʔ]
'boat, canoe'
- b. *na'anwhilh*
[naʔanç^wɪʔ]
{C₁V₁-ʔ-V₁C₁-ç^wɪʔ}
'many boats together'

⁴ Here *ga* serves as a politeness marker.

⁵ These are Bill Galligos' words, not the author's glosses.

In example (7b) above, the concept of plural actors was expressed by the collective suffix. However, this suffix has not been recorded with agent-centered verbs ending in /-ʔəm/ or /-aʔam/. Instead, plural actors have been expressed by modifying the root vowel. Examples include:

- (14) a. *yem'em*
 [yimʔəm]
 /yəm-ʔəm/
 ‘kick unspecified object’
- b. *yeyma'am*
 [yimaʔam]
 {C₁V₁-y(ə)m-aʔam}
 ‘kicking unspecified object(s)’
- c. *ye'eyma'am*
 [yiʔimaʔam]
 {C₁V₁-ʔ-V₁C₁-aʔam}
 ‘several people kicking unspecified
 object(s); playing soccer’

6 Examples of the article system

The articles of Mainland Comox include /tə/, /t/, /kw/, /sə/, and /təw/ (or /taw/).

- (15) *tatam te Jack snatolh*⁶
 [tatam tə Jack snatəʔ]
 {C₁V₁-tam tə Jack s-nat-əʔ}
 IMPF-what ART Jack STATIVE-night-PAST
 ‘What was Jack doing last night?’ [from Bill Galligos]
- (16) *lhextom s qoqos 'e te Nora*
 [tʰɛχstom s q^woq^wos ʔə tə] *Nora*
 {tʰɛχ-stW-m s q^wuq^wu-s ʔə tə *Nora*}
 bad-CAUS-INTR NOM drink-his/he OBL ART *Nora*
 ‘Nora doesn’t like him to drink.’ [from Mary George]
- (17) *hiya sem kwey'sem s hahap 'iy te Jimmy 'e kw 'owp*
 [hɛya səm k^wiɪʔsəm s hahap ʔɛi tə Jimmy ʔə k^w ʔoɔp] Church.House
 {hiL-a⁷ səm k^wəyʔsəm s ha(h)-ap ʔiy tə Jimmy ʔə k^w ʔuwp}⁸
 DEICTIC-Q FUT tomorrow NOM go-you(PL) and ART Jimmy OBL ART Church.House
 ‘So it’s tomorrow you and Jimmy go to Church House?’ [from Mary George]

⁶ The word ‘last night’ illustrates the stative prefix /s-/. It is most emphatically *not* the nominalizer /s/ proclitic, which would require the pronominal suffix /-s/. If it were the nominalizer, the output would have been [s natous] ‘that it was last night’; /t/ ⇒ /-w/ before a consonant in this, the past tense morpheme. For more explanation see Davis (2019 §9) with Marion Harry’s comment.

⁷ {-L} represents the alternation between /-t/ and /-y-/.

⁸ Bill Galligos said that [ʔoɔp] is “that little island in front of Church House” — Bartlett Island. The beach itself was called *lhelhukwem* [tʰɛk^wəm]. As you approach Church House, you first pass by Bartlett Island, so its name has become synonymous with the village.

- (18) *chia'at shtem k'wenomi 'iy te Bonnie*
 [čʸɛʔɛt štəm kʷɔnomɛ ʔɛi tə Bonnie]
 {čʸaʔat št-əm kʷən-nW-mi ʔiy tə Bonnie}
 short.time we- FUT see-TRANS-you and ART Bonnie
 ‘Bonnie and I will see you (next summer).’ [from Mary George]
- (19) *'i'inat chwh negilh neyneyjia 'e te Tom, kwenes 'ey' qaymiwh*
 [ʔɛʔɛnat čçʷ nɪgɪʔ nɪmɪjʸɛ ʔə tə Tom, kʷɔnəs ʔiɪʔ qaimiçʷ]
 /ʔɛʔɛnat čçʷ nəgɪʔ nəynəjʸa ʔə tə Tom, kʷənəs ʔəyʔ qaymiçʷ/
 say.what you you about OBL ART Tom, whether good person
 ‘What do you say (think) about Tom, is he a good person?’ [from Mary George]

Examples (15) through (19) indicate that in the past personal names may have been preceded by the article /tə/. There are no examples of any other article preceding a personal name. See also (33) below.

- (20) *ni' k'we te pipa'a tumesh*
 [nɛʔ kʷə tə pɛpaʔa tumiʃ]
 /niʔ kʷə tə pɪpaʔa tuməʃ⁹
 there reportedly ART one.person man
 ‘There is/was a man.’¹⁰
- (21) a. *lh salhtwh* b. *te nigaptey ~ te nigaptay*
 [ʔ saʔtçʷ] [tə nəgaptɪɪ] ~ [tə nəgaptɪɪ]
 ‘the woman’ ‘the women’

In these examples a single female entity takes /ʔ/; a plural requires the article /tə/.

- (22) *ho zem t'oz' 'em 'e kw qigath*
 [ho tʰəm totʰʔəm ʔə kʷ qɛgʌθ]
 /hu tʰ-əm totʰ-ʔəm ʔə kʷ qɪgath/
 go I-future shoot-VERB OBL ART deer
 ‘I’m going to shoot (at) a deer.’
- (23) *tl'ayatas kw xwi'lem 'ey tetk'wtas*
 [ʔayɛtʌs kʷ χʷɛʔləm ʔiɪ tətʰkʷtʌs]
 {ʔay-at-as kʷ χʷɛʔləm ʔəy C₁V₁-t(ə)kʷ-t-as}¹¹
 hold-TRANS-AGENT ART line/rope and IMPF-pull-TRANS-AGENT
 ‘He took hold of the line and was pulling (a foot on the dock, one on the boat).’¹²

⁹ The phonetic [u] rather than [o] in ‘man’ illustrates regressive assimilation.

¹⁰ Tommy Paul’s first line of the story of Thanch and P’ah going traveling to the land beneath the ocean. His choice of /tə/ may be because he was identifying this particular individual. Thanch (Pileated Woodpecker) was identified as a *xaxgelh* (shaman) and in the story he succeeds where Raven fails.

¹¹ {C₁V₁-C₁ə-}: the root schwa is elided.

¹² From Tommy Paul’s description of how I almost fell off the dock at Stuart Island.

- (24) *'eymot kwa'an kweth qwel' sem*
 [ʔimot k^waʔan k^wiθ q^wəlʔ səm]
 /ʔəy.mot k^waʔan k^w θ q^wəlʔ səm/
 good.very that(way) ART your come FUT
 'That (will be) good (for) you to come' = 'you can come'
- (25) *ga'awt'ma zem kwez qwel' xapey*
 [gaʔaʊtma t^θəm k^wit^θ q^wəlʔ χapii]
 /gaʔawt-ma t^θ-əm k^w t^θ q^wəlʔ χapəy/
 rowing-by 1SG-FUT ART my come back (return)
 'It's by rowing that I'll come back'
- (26) *hiy'amolh Chichila' 'e she mos z'ok'wshten*
 [heiʔamoʃ čičilaʔ ʔə ši mos t^θok^wʃtən]
 {hiy-ʔəm-uʃ čičilaʔ ʔə šə mos t^θuk^wʃtən}¹³
 make-VERB-PAST name OBL ART four rug/mat
 'Chichila' wove four mats/rugs.'¹⁴
- (27) *lhelhna'am ch 'e kw z'ok'wshten*
 [ʃhnaʔam č ʔə k^w t^θok^wʃtən]
 {C₁V₁-ʃ(ə)n-ʔəm č ʔə k^w t^θuk^wʃtən}¹⁵
 IMPF-weave-VERB I OBL ART rug/mat
 'I'm weaving a rug/mat.'
- (28) *paya 'ot hahasem shez chuy'*
 [payɛ ʔot hahasəm šit^θ čuiʔ]
 {paya ʔut C₁V₁-hasem šə t^θ čuyʔ}
 always IMPF-sneeze ART my child
 'My child is always sneezing.'
- (29) *kw chia k'we she mimaw'*
 [k^w čyə k^wə ši məməʌʔ]
 /k^w čyə k^wə šə mimawʔ/¹⁶
 where reportedly ART cat
 'Where's the cat?'
- (30) a. *tez chiapth* b. *lhez chiapth* c. *shez chiaptholh*
 [tət^θ čyəpθ] [ʃt^θ čyəpθ] [šit^θ čyəpθoʃ]
 /tə-t^θ čyəpθ/ /ʃ(ə)-t^θ čyəpθ/ /šə-t^θ čyəpθ-uʃ/
 ART-my uncle ART-my aunt ART-my uncle/aunt-PAST
 'my uncle' 'my aunt' 'my deceased aunt/uncle'

¹³ Note: /ʔəm/ ⇒ /ʔam/ before /uʃ/.

¹⁴ In this example, Mary George used the name of her great-grandmother, Chichila, who was her father's father's mother.

¹⁵ Note: /ʔəm/ ⇒ /aʔam/ after C₁V₁- imperfective reduplication.

¹⁶ In (28) and (29) the child and the cat are both known to exist, but are not present.

- (31) *whe ch texwnîwhan tez k'wenomi sem*
 [ç^wɔ̄ č təχ^wnɛç^wʌn tət^θ kwɔnomɛ sɛm]
 /ç^waʔ č təχ^w-niç^w-an tə-t^θ k^wən-umi sɛm/
 not I know-DURATIVE-I ART-my see-you FUT
 ‘I didn’t know that I would see you.’

Here, in (31), the article /tə/ is for an event that just happened but was future in the past.

- (32) *hilh shez chu'julh*
 [hɛʔ šit^θ čuʔjʊʔ]
 {hiL šə-t^θ čuŸ-uʔ}
 deictic ART-my child-PAST
 ‘That was when I was a child.’

‘My’ occupies the same slot and hides the nominalizer /s/ in (31) and (32). The sequence /šə.../ has not been recorded; see Davis (2019, §9). Mary George hesitated and changed from /šə.../ to /kwəs/ when this came up in a sentence.

7 The collective article *lhew* [ʔuʊ]

As noted in Section 3, the most common phonemic shapes of the suffix {-VW} include /-iw/ [ɛʊ] / [iʊ] and /-ig-/ [ɛg] (before vowels). A third phonemic shape is /-əw/ [uʊ]. The Sechelt cognate of this suffix is /-aw/.

In 1972 Tommy Paul (Homalco) told the story of the transformation of the birds into humans. In this story Transformer refuses to give Raven a colorful coat because of his bad behaviour and instead marks him with a coat of pure black; the narrative refers to *lhew P'ah* [ʔuʊ pʰah] — Raven and his cohort. Although the present-day name for ‘raven’ is [pʰoh], his myth name is [pʰah].

In her essay on an equivalent expression used by Nishga-dominant speakers of English, Tarpent (1982) describes the meaning of *them Fred* as “Fred and those with him.” This also describes the meaning of the article *lhew* in Mainland Comox.

It is a mistake to phonemicize the article [ʔuʊ] as /ʔu/ because /u/ is realized as [o] after the consonant /ʔ/, but this article is not pronounced [ʔo] and so cannot be phonemicized as /ʔu/.

Other examples of this /ə/ ~ /a/ alternation are the Island Comox word for ‘all, every’ /ʔawk^w/ [ʔaʊk^w] (Sapir 1915; Boas n.d.) compared to the Mainland Comox /ʔəwk^w/ [ʔuʊk^w] with the same meaning; this has often been misphonemicized with no regard for the bimoraic syllable. It is also seen in the variation between /gat/ [gʌt] and the lesser used pronunciation /gət/ [git], both meaning ‘who?’ or ‘whoever’.

This (systematic) phonemicization of [ʔuʊ] as /ʔəw/ indicates that the collective plural suffix /-əw/ is here affixed to an historic element /ʔ/. Colville has the collective prefix (proclitic?) [həʔ=], which seems to contain the same /ʔ/ historical element (Seymour 2015:779).

8 More examples of the article *lhew* [ʔuʊ] ~ *lhaw* [ʔaʊ]

- (33) *qwel' tayqathotlh lhew Steve 'iy te Marion 'e te lhe'amin* [from Mary George]
 [q^wɛlʔ tʰaiqʰəθotʰ ʔuʊ Steve ʔɛi tə Marion ʔə tə ʔʌʔamin]
 /q^wɛlʔ tayqa-θut-uʔ ʔəw Steve ʔiy tə Marion ʔə tə ʔəʔamin/
 come move-REFL-PAST COLL.ART Steve and ART Marion OBL ART Sliammon
 ‘Steve and Marion along with their family moved to Sliammon (from Church House).’

- (34) *texwnîwh a chwh shems ho tesolh e she 'ayas lhew Henry*
 [təχ^wneç^w a çç^w šims ho tásot ʔə ši ʔayes tso] *Henry*
 /təχ^wniç^wa çç^w šəms ho təs-ot ʔə šə ʔaya-s tso *Henry/*
 know-Q you ART-our go arrive-PAST OBL ART house-his COLL.ART (family) Henry
 ‘You know (remember) when we got to Henry’s house?’ (in Victoria)

At the end of Mary George’s story about Christine falling down and being taken to hospital:

- (35) *Ho k’we k’wetamolh (’e) lhew Elsie*
 [ho k^wə k^wotamoł (ʔə) tso] *Elsie*
 {ho k^wə k^wə(n)-t-əm-ot (ʔə) təw *Elsie}*¹⁷
 go reportedly see-TRANS-PASSIVE-PAST AGENT¹⁸ COLL.ART Elsie
 ‘Elsie and some others went to see (Christine at the hospital).’

And from the Sliammon app:

- (35) *t’it’inamiw lhaw Karen*
 [tətenameo tso] *Karen*
 ‘Karen and her family are going to barbecue.’

The speaker on the Sliammon app pronounces this article as [tso], illustrating the common /ə/ ~ /a/ alternation in Mainland and Island Comox.

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¹⁷ The suffix {-əm} becomes [-am] before the past tenst suffix [-ot].

¹⁸ Here elided.