

Grammatical Radial Categories in the Languages of the Northwest Coast

LINDSAY WEICHEL
University of Oxford
lindsay.weichel@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk

ABSTRACT. In the languages of the Northwest Coast of North America, there is little difference in the morphological or syntactic environments in which lexemes that one would expect to belong to different lexical categories or parts of speech can appear. This paper will discuss syntactic and morphological evidence regarding the categories of Noun, Verb, and Adjective in these languages, and will arrive at the conclusion that lexical categories exist as interconnected radial categories in these languages, while in most Indo-European languages they are far more separated and well-defined.

1 The Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest Coast of North America is home to a great concentration of languages belonging to a variety of language families in a relatively small geographical area, many of which share a variety of linguistic characteristics, including similar phonological systems and morphological structures. This area is generally referred to as the Northwest Coast Linguistic Area. A common feature of these languages is that they seem to lack a distinction between the parts of speech, in that all lexemes appear able to act as predicates or as arguments in these languages. This presentation will focus on the Salish and Wakashan families. The Salish family consists of between twenty-one and twenty-seven separate languages (Campbell 1997), and the Wakashan language family consists of six languages (Mithun 1999). All of these languages are endangered, and some are already extinct.

2 A Brief Discussion of Terminology

This paper is a discussion of whether lexemes in Salish and Wakashan languages have inherent features of lexical class or are inherently members of lexical categories. That these languages have syntactic and morphological structure is not questioned. Since many linguistic theories assume that inherent features for lexical category or lexical category membership determine the role that a lexeme may play in syntax, the same terms are generally used to describe both lexical classes and syntactic classes. For example, it is generally assumed in English that ‘speak’ is a verb, and must therefore be found in a verb phrase, which constitutes

4 Morphological and Morphosyntactic Evidence

Salish and Wakashan languages are polysynthetic. The predicate generally undergoes heavy affixation, which may include lexical suffixes, subject clitics or suffixes, and object markers in the case of an argument acting as an object. Certain aspectual affixes or morphological processes may also be applied to the predicate.

- (7) swiʔqoał_ləʔ_sx^w
young.man_pst_2s.nom
'You were a young man.' (Straits Salish; Haag 1998)
- (8) ʔiʔenkwəs_ləʔ_sx^w
brave_pst_2s.nom
'You were brave.' (ibid.)
- (9) t'ləm=ləʔ=sx^w
sing=pst=2s.nom
'You sang.' (ibid.)

Here, the same past tense marker =ləʔ and second person singular nominative marker =sx^w are applied to each stem. The morphology applied to all predicates and arguments is generally the same, regardless of the part of speech of the stem's translation.

In the data that has been discussed thus far, there has been no difference between lexical categories syntactically or morphologically in these languages. This is a pervasive phenomenon in Salish and Wakashan languages. However, in some languages, some differences do appear to exist with respect to morphology, indicating that lexical categories exist to at least some extent in these languages.

Certain aspect markers are reserved for certain stems, and these stems tend to translate into English as verbs. For example, in Lillooet and Lushootseed, certain aspects are reserved for specific stems. In Lillooet, for example, some stems are able to undergo final reduplication to indicate the iterative; an example of this is *pállaʔ* 'to get together' from *pálaʔ* '(to be) one' (Van Eijk & Hess 1986). Certain other stems cannot take this aspect.² The inchoative or ingressive aspect, which is formed by the insertion of a glottal stop after a stressed root vowel, is limited to the same stems; this is observed in the derivation of *laʔkw* 'to get loose, untied' from *-lakw* '(to be) loose, untied' (ibid.). Additionally, in Lushootseed there are five aspectual prefixes that are added to certain stems only. Some examples of this include *ʔəs-ʔtut* 'asleep (stative),' *ʔu-ʔtut* 'fall asleep, slept

² Numerals are generally considered to belong to the lexical category of Verb in Salish languages.

(punctual),’ and *ləs-ʔtut* ‘being moved while sleeping (progressive state)’ (ibid.). In both languages, the stems that are able to undergo all operations for tense and aspect tend to translate into English as verbs.

Van Eijk & Hess (1986) note that the same stems that are unable to undergo all aspectual processes in Lillooet and Lushootseed are generally the stems that are able to take possessive marking directly; other stems must take the prefix *s-*, which they refer to as a nominalizer, but which some other linguists consider a stative marker, in order to take possessive marking. They give the example of *n-tmixw* ‘my land’ as compared to **n-ʔlam* ‘my sing’, which cannot take the possessive marker directly; the correct form is *n-s-ʔlam* ‘my song’. Stems that are possessed can still act as predicates and take subject marking. However, this observation is not as convincing as it may seem. Vogt (1940) identifies less than ten lexemes that can appear with a possessive marker without *s-* in Kalispel, and with such a limited number of lexemes it is difficult to posit this behaviour as a defining characteristic of a major lexical category in this language. Additionally, Davis (2005) gives examples with *s-*, glossed as a nominalizer, on proper names, although none of his examples involve possession.

Additionally, Galloway (1993) lists a number of affixes that appear to appeal to lexical category in their application. These include *-əlp* ‘plant, tree’, *-é:ləws* ‘leaf’ *-ʔá:ll* ‘young’, *-á:t* ‘female name’, *-əléce* ‘male name’, and suffixes used in the creation of pet names. The stems that take these affixes tend to translate as nouns; it must be noted, however, that this may be because of semantic reasons, as proper names and types of trees and leaves are all nouns in English. He also writes that *wə-* ‘when, if’, *hε-*, *hə-*, and *təl-* which indicate reciprocal or reflexive constructions, and the benefactive *-əlc* are only applied to certain stems, all of which translate as verbs (ibid.).

This shows that although lexical categories are not as clearly demarcated as they are in English or other Indo-European languages, there is some evidence that the categories of Noun and Verb are demarcated to some extent on the lexical level.

5 The Category of Adjective

Lexemes that carry meanings pertaining to modification can be inflected fully as predicates with agreement markers indicating their relationships with their arguments, and they are able to undergo the full range of tense and aspect marking, as demonstrated above in examples 7, 8, and 9.

Based on this, linguists who accept the notion of lexical categories in these languages tend to consider modifiers to be a subcategory of Verbs. However, in Kalispel, modifying lexemes appear to have a characteristic in common with lexemes that translate as Nouns that is not shared with lexemes that translate as Verbs. In this language, some lexemes take a marker *qł-*, which becomes *q-* before */s/*. These lexemes tend to translate as nouns or adjectives; those that

translate as verbs are not able to take this marker. This marker appears to carry mood meaning, as in *č̣i-qt-ilámixum* ‘I am going to be chief’, as compared to *q-sq’wéc’əti* ‘it is going to be full’. Furthermore, in some languages, lexemes with a modifying meaning can behave predicatively or act as argument modifiers; other lexemes do not appear able to act as argument modifiers, and can only behave as predicates or arguments in these languages:

- (10) \mathfrak{N} i \mathfrak{N} ilmíxwm qwəʃlqw’íʃl-s-t-s
 DET chief talk-IPFV-t-3SG.TR
- \mathfrak{N} i pypáyť \mathfrak{N} i səxwťr’qám-s
 DET lively DET dancer-3SG.POSS
- The chief is talking to his lively dancer’ (Okanagan: Hebert 1983)

When the argument of a sentence is plural, both the modifier and the argument must be pluralized, which is marked through reduplication on both the modifier and argument (ibid.). It is ungrammatical to pluralize only the modifier or only the argument:

- (11.a) \mathfrak{N} i q-ʔəw-ʔíwl’x \mathfrak{N} i ym-yámxwa?
 DET PL-old DET PL-basket
- (11.b) * \mathfrak{N} i qʔíwl’x \mathfrak{N} i ym-yámxwa?
 DET old DET PL-basket
- (11.c) * \mathfrak{N} i q-ʔəw-ʔíwl’x \mathfrak{N} i yámxwa?
 DET PL-old DET PL-basket
- ‘The old baskets.’ (ibid.)

This shows that modifiers are dependent on the arguments they modify, and that they agree with them in number. This is evidence that the category of Adjective exists to some extent in some of these languages, as well.

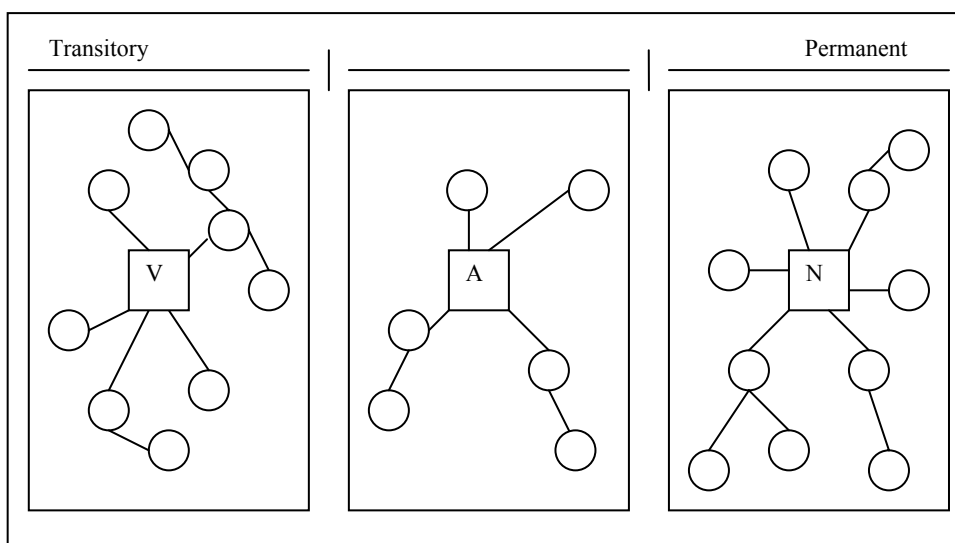
6 Conclusion

In Salish/Wakashan, there is a lack of syntactic criteria for identification of lexical categories, and with no formal criteria, semantic evidence is too subjective to provide convincing evidence that separate lexical categories as they are traditionally defined exist in these languages.

However, as the previous discussion has shown, certain morphological and morphosyntactic differences exist between types of lexemes. This is taken as evidence that lexical categories can be demarcated in Salish languages to some extent by many Salishists (Vogt 1940; Hébert 1983; Van Eijk and Hess 1986; Haag 1998; Weichel 2004). Lexical category terms are useful for the purposes of

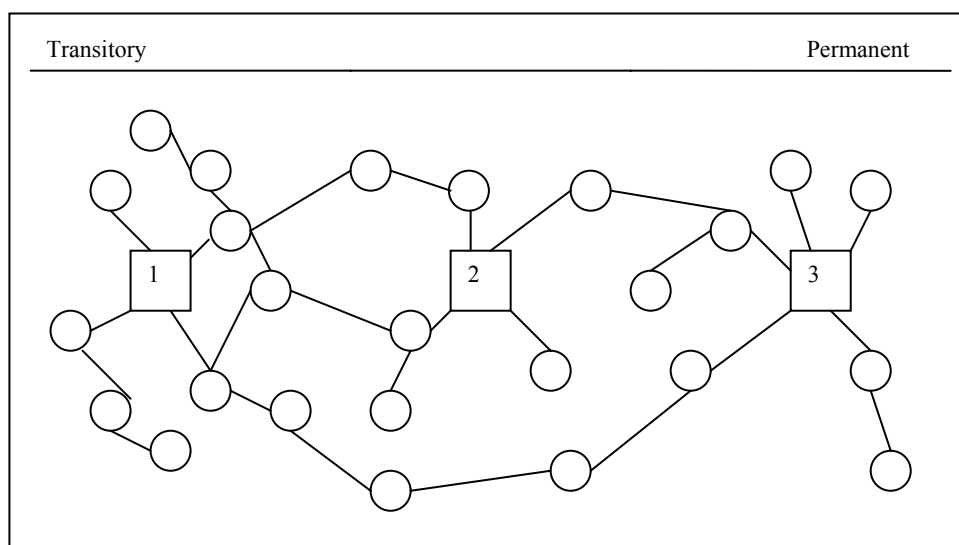
simplicity and are useful for the purposes of structuralist description or discussion of linguistic phenomena that is not related to lexical categories, and especially for the purposes of the development of educational materials for these languages.

However, lexical category labels give little insight into the actual structure of the Salish lexicon. The following diagrams compare the structure of the English lexicon, where lexical categories are quite clearly demarcated, with the Salish and Wakashan lexicons, where they exhibit blurred boundaries and a great deal of overlap.



This schematic diagram of English lexical categories is based on Lakoff (1987); it is clearly overly-simplistic, but it indicates that in English we have (at least) three clear, separate lexical categories. Although this diagram does not show it, overlap exists between lexical categories in English, as in cases of zero derivation. An example of this is [sleep]_V becoming [[sleep]_V Ø]_N. However, this is much more limited in English than it is in Salish/Wakashan; not all stems are able to undergo this process, like they are in Salish/Wakashan, and zero-derivation can only be applied to uninflected stems in English, while both bare and fully inflected stems are able to act as predicates or arguments in Salish/Wakashan.

Grammatical Radial Categories in the Languages of the Northwest Coast



This diagram is a similar schematic representation of the Salish and Wakashan lexicons. Again, the lexicon can be divided into three categories, but these are far less distinct in Salish and Wakashan languages than they are in English. Type 1 lexemes, which prototypically lie on the less durative end of the temporal spectrum, like Verbs in English, are able to undergo all aspectual operations, and cannot take possessive marking directly. These will likely translate as verbs in English. Type 2 lexemes have much in common with Type 1 lexemes, including the ability to undergo a wider range of aspectual marking, but they take the same *ql-* marker as Type 3 lexemes in Kalispel (Vogt 1940), and they display agreement patterns in Okanagan (Hébert 1983). They prototypically involve modification semantically, and will likely translate as adjectives in English. Prototypical type 3 lexemes are more durative and concrete semantically. They are able to take possessive marking directly. They are able to take certain lexical suffixes not available to other lexemes in Halkomelem (Galloway 1993). Note that Type 1 and Type 2 lexemes are highly interconnected, indicating their semantic and grammatical similarity. Type 3 lexemes may also be connected via interwoven subcategories to Type 1 and Type 2 lexemes. This accounts for the high degree of morphological, semantic, and syntactic overlap across all subcategories. It is difficult to predict what will determine the prototypicality of a given lexeme. Connections between elements in a radial category appear to be semantically motivated, but highly metaphorical, unpredictable, and possibly culturally dependent.

This figure shows a great deal of similarity in many ways to that showing the demarcation of categories of lexemes in English; it is likely that there are similarities between the subcategorization of the lexicon between these languages that may extend across languages. However, lexical categories in IE languages and Salish/Wakashan languages are obviously different, as well, and the categories that exist in one cannot be assumed to correlate to those in the other.

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