A CASE GRAMMAR OF COMOX 'OBJECTIVE' SUFFIXES

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Comox is a Salish language spoken on both sides of the Strait of Georgia in British Columbia, Canada. It is a member of the North Georgia Branch of Salish along with Pentlatch and Sechelt. Two dialects presently exist, one on the mainland and the other on Vancouver Island. The mainland dialect is spoken by three groups—the Klahoose, the Homalco and the Sliaa'mon. It has about five to six hundred speakers (Chafe 1962). The island dialect is spoken by two people living on a reserve between the towns of Courtenay and Comox about halfway up the east coast of Vancouver Island. Both of these people are over seventy and this dialect will soon follow Pentlatch to extinction. The two dialects are mutually intelligible and differ in minor ways in their lexicons and grammars with the most striking difference being a theta and a theta affricate in the mainland dialect corresponding to an s and a c in the island dialect. It is the island dialect that I will be describing in this paper.

Typologically Comox is a VSO language, but it has preposed modifiers contrary to what Greenberg found to be the case for VSO languages in general. Its only prefixes are the result of initial reduplication. The possessive paradigm is odd because it occurs both as suffixes for some persons and as preposed particles for others. It has an optional singular-plural distinction in the third person in all suffixed pronominal paradigms.

The order of cases on the surface following the predicate corresponds fairly well with an order that has been proposed by Fillmore (Fillmore 1971)

COMOX----Agent-Dative-Benefactive-Object-Instrument-Loc-Time
FILLMORE-Agent-Experiencer-Instrument-Object-Source-Goal-Loc-Time

Fillmore has substituted the Goal for the Benefactives and the Experiencer for the Dative. I have preserved both of the traditional labels since both cases have distinct morphological outcomes and since I do not have the data to either confirm or deny his proposal.
The only striking conflict between our orders is the inversion of the Object and the Instrument and the placement of the Benefactive before the Object. I will return to both of these differences later.

In Comox there are a set of agreement transformations that add 'subject' suffixes to the predicate that agree in number and person with some case in the sentence. There are three paradigms for the subject suffixes: one for transitive predicates, one for intransitive predicates, and one for embedded predicates. There are also agreement transformations for the 'object' suffixes. For these, there are four paradigms. It is this set of 'object' paradigms that I will be describing. The term 'object' has a purely syntactic definition referring to all suffixes that occur in the 'object position' of a transitive predicate. They have in fact five different semantic case functions.

On the surface, the order of elements in a predicate is as follows:

Root-Lexical suffixes-Root type-Object suffixes-Past tense-Yesno question-Subject suffixes-Future tense-Aspect

The selection of a root in Comox can vary widely from what is possible in English extending to such roots as

[túmi] 'man' as in [túmiʃ] 'I am a man'

The lexical suffixes are suffixes that have referential meaning and semantically are similar to compounds in English although these suffixes are often not derivable from the complete word for the same object. Their referents include body parts, shapes, and objects. The root type suffix marks a root as being intransitive. Transitive roots are unmarked in Comox although this is not the case in other Salish languages. The object suffixes I will examine in more detail later. The position of the past tense particle differs from the position of the future tense particle. There are only three tenses in Comox with the present being unmarked. All tenses are generated in the position of the future tense particle with the past tense being transformationally shifted in most instances to the position following the object suffixes. Following the past tense suffix, the yes-no question element is inserted. The subject suffixes follow it.
finally following the future tense suffix are aspect particles that are not well understood.

The first phrase structure rule for the predicate expansion is as follows:

\[ \text{PRED} \rightarrow \text{STEM} + \text{TENSE} + \text{ASPECT-1} + (\text{ASPECT-2}) \]

The first aspect node deals with the 'spreadoutness' of the action and the second denotes the starting point of the action. All of the elements of the predicate other than those listed in the above rule are transformationally generated. The stem in the above rule also encompasses the lexical suffixes. This formulation is not a statement of theory or belief; I simply have not investigated the semantic relationships of the lexical suffixes. The ordering of the elements of the predicate that are transformationally generated is governed by the order of the copying transformations. This ordering makes the formulation of these transformations simpler since if they are ordered, all they need do is add their element before the tense node.

The rest of this paper will focus on the object suffixes. As mentioned earlier, there are four object suffix paradigms in Comox: the transitive, the accidental transitive, the embedded-agent, and the Benefactive.

I. The transitive paradigm is as follows:

- **-s-** me  - **-tumo+-** us
- **-si-** you  - **-tanapi-** you
- **-t-** him, her, it  - **-t(ew?)-** them

The third person is only optionally pluralized with [ew?].

Employing these on a root we have:

1. **á̄sas** He hit me
2. **á̄sís** He hit you
3. **á̄stčan** I hit him
4. **á̄satumo+ās** He hit us
5. **á̄satana+pís** He hit you
6. **á̄satæw?č** I hit them
The accidental transitive paradigm is

- nomš- me  - nomo+- us
- ncmi- you  - nnanap‡- you
- xw- him, her, it  - xw(ew?)- them

Adding these to a stem we have

1 xáypanomščxw You startled me
2 xáypanomič You startled you
3 xáypoxč I startled him
4 xáypanomo+as It startled us
5 xáypananap‡č I startled you
6 xáypoxčew?č I startled them

The interpretation of this paradigm as an unintentional transitive action is provided by the following contrasts

1 sópethčan I chopped it
2 sópoxčan I accidentally chopped him
3 sóxwethčan I stabbed him
4 sóxwxwčan I accidentally stabbed him

Since one cannot be ordered to do something accidentally, this paradigm does not occur with the imperative

5 *t’oc’xw gye Shoot him accidentally

In roots where there is no intentional cause, this paradigm is the only one possible. The root [qømg‡] means 'to meet someone unexpectedly'

6 qømg‡xto+čan I met him
7 *qømg‡ato+čan I accidentally met him on purpose
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8 xʷəʔagʷuxʷčən  I lost it
9 *xʷaʔagʷatʰčən I lost it on purpose

However, there are some cases in the perfect aspect where I could elicit no difference in meaning between the use of this paradigm and the transitive paradigm

10 xʷəs  to chase a human being
11 xʷəstəs  He chased him
12 xʷəsxʷas  He chased him

III All of the examples of the embedded-agent paradigm in my data are added to an intransitive stem. Predicates with this paradigm are often translated with the object pronoun being the subject of the stem of the predicate in a relative clause.

The paradigm is
- stomš- me
- stom- you
- sxʷ- him, her, it

On roots they would be
1 síʔəmstomšas  He made me dig
2 síʔəmstom-  He made you dig
3 síʔəmsxʷəs  He made him dig (different people)
4 síʔəmstomo+əs  He made us dig
5 síʔəmstanapəs  He made you dig
6 síʔəmsxʷəwəs  He made them dig

The interpretation of this paradigm encompasses the following contrasts
7 síʔəmsxʷəs  He made him dig
8 qóʔqosxʷgreg  Give him a drink
as opposed to

9 síq̂̂m̂̂sas
He dug it

10 qóq̂̂q̂̂ĥ̂ĝ̂ya
Drink it

There are some translations with let,

11 n蜻̂̂q̂̂m̂̂ŝ̂x̂̂ŵ̂ ĝ̂ya
Let him swim (fish)

and examples like

12 só́st̂̂ô̂m̂̂ĉ̂am
I'll take you

formed on the stem [so] 'to go' Examples 8, 11, and 12 will be discussed later

IV The Benefactive is formed with [ʔam] followed by the regular transitive objects giving

1 síq̂̂q̂̂amŝ̂ŝ̂as
He dug it for me

2 síq̂̂q̂̂amŝ̂ŝ̂is
He dug it for you

3 síq̂̂q̂̂am̂̂nt̂̂as
He dug it for him

4 síq̂̂q̂̂am̂̂t̂̂unô̂þ̂̂as
He dug it for us

5 síq̂̂q̂̂am̂̂tan̂̂apis
He dug it for you

6 síq̂̂q̂̂am̂̂taseŵ̂?
He dug it for them

Where a Benefactive co-occurs with an Object, the object is preceded by an [ʔa].

7 ?eʔaĵ̂m̂̂ʔam̂̂ht̂̂cam t̂̂om â̂ta č̂̂q̂̂’
fix him I-futTom obj-the fence

I'm going to fix the fence for Tom

V The dative is not a separate paradigm. It is indicated by the transitive object pronouns in the presence of an object
In cases where the Benefactive and Dative co-occur as pronouns, the Dative occurs as the pronominal object on the predicate

7 tóć’osíš c’jamas č’ni?+n shout-you-he for? me He shouts to you for me

To regularize the above data, we need a way to account for the semantic distinctions present in the use of the transitive paradigm and a way for the copying transformations to distinguish which paradigm needs to be added to the predicate.

The intentionally caused object seems to fit the traditional direct object or Fillmore's Objective case. The examples given can be represented as a predicate plus an Agent and an Object. Ordering these as they occur on the surface in Comox we have

PREDICATE---AGENT---OBJECT

Now as a tentative hypothesis we can formulate the copying rules for this first paradigm by having the subject agreement transformation copy the specifications of the first case argument after the predicate. The 'object' would be a copy of the specifications of the second argument. This would agree with the convention for subject formation proposed by Fillmore for English.

The accidental object paradigm must have an Object case since there is a person or object that undergoes some change as a result of the action of the verb. But we must deal with the lack of intention juxtaposed to the presence of intention.
in the previous paradigm we might add cause to the transitive paradigm, but cause would be redundantly specified since the idea of an agent is the idea of a motive cause. The idea of cause also does not specifically capture the distinction we are after since an action is caused but unintentionally. The only other case that affects the Object is the Instrument which to use Aristotle's distinctions is the material cause. In English we can distinguish these with the two different interpretations of causing involved in opening a door in the conventional way as opposed to falling against the door and opening it. If we accept the subject of the second paradigm as being the Instrumental Case and define both the Instrument and Agent as causes, we must separate them with the idea of intention.

Now if we order the Object and Instrumental cases as they are on the surface, we would have

**PREDICATE---OBJECT---INSTRUMENT**

However, if we take this as the proper order, the tentative copying rules formulated for the transitive case will not work since they would make the Object a subject and the Instrument the object. Remember though that Fillmore proposed an order with the Instrument first and the Object second. If we take this as the underlying order of Comox, then our two rules will work. Now although this order will make the formulation of the rules tidy for this and all of the other paradigms, it is only a formal justification for such a change. We would of course feel more secure in our formulation if some empirical evidence existed that could independently justify this formulation. Unfortunately I do not at present have such evidence. And we must see this as a weakness in the analysis. The proposal then is to arrange the Instrument before the Object giving an underlying order of

**PREDICATE---INSTRUMENT---OBJECT**

In the embedded-agent paradigm, the person encoded as the object of the predicate is the agent of that stem

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He made me dig} \\
\text{dig me he}
\end{align*}
\]

The translation seems to indicate that we are dealing with a higher order verb under which the verb 'to dig' is embedded. As mentioned earlier I am analysing the Agent as containing the semantic element of CAUSE. Therefore this higher order
verb need not be *cause* since it has an Agent. It appears to be an active verb. Therefore I tentatively use the neutral DO to show activity. This verb would have two cases associated with it in the above example, the Agent and the Object. Under the Object argument would be an embedded sentence with 'diq' as the predicate. In assigning a case structure to the embedded predicate, we must resolve the following translations:

- *síq-*amstomš-as: He made me dig
- *diq* me he
- *go?go-*sxw-gya: Give him a drink
- drink he imper
- *so-stomč-č-sam: I'll take you
- go you I fut

In the first example the case of the embedded predicate appears to be an Agent. If this is the case for the other examples, they would literally mean 'You cause it that he drinks' and 'I will cause it that you go' respectively. This interpretation seems compatible with the data. Therefore we would have:

**PREDICATE**(DO)--AGENT--(PREDICATE(DIG)--AGENT)

Arranged as a tree:

```
  S
 /|
S  |
PREDICATE  AGENT  OBJECT
  \
   S
   PREDICATE  AGENT
```

To make this formulation work we must have some form of predicate raising. With this process we would have the following sequence. The embedded root would be marked as intransitive since it has no Object. Then some form of predicate raising would operate. The newly formed predicate would have two Agents, the first from the verb DO and the second from the embedded verb. Then by the application of the two copying rules the Agent of the higher verb would appear as the subject suffix and that of the embedded verb would be the object.

To account for the Benefactive we must contrary to Fillmore's
analysis, include the Benefactive as a separate case following the Dative. In the example where they both appear, the Dative appears as the object on the predicate,

\[ \text{tòc'ösìs cyámìs ċìni} \]  
He shouts at you for me

but where the Benefactive and the Object co-occur the Benefactive is the object pronoun

\[ \text{?éq'ajam'ämtoom tòm ċè ċ'éq'} \]
I'm going to fix the fence for Tom

Therefore preserving this case distinction and maintaining the surface order, the two copying rules will give the correct output

The Dative is simply accounted for. Since it is ordered before the Object, when it occurs, it is encoded as an object suffix on the verb

To recapulate then, we must postulate an underlying order for the cases different than the predominate surface order

AGENT-DATIVE-BENEFACTIVE-INSTRUMENT-OBJECT-LOCATIVE-TIME

This order has at the moment only a formal justification. However, with it we can account for the encoding of the object suffixes with two copying rules which are ordered. The first rule will take the second case argument as the object suffix on the predicate. The second rule will take the first case argument as the subject. The terms object and subject will have the purely syntactic definition of the first pronominal suffix after the stem of a predicate and the second pronominal suffix. In order to account for the semantics of the embedded-agent paradigm, we must add to the analysis of Comox a higher verb which never surfaces. If we define the Agent as an active intentional cause and the Instrument as a material cause, it need only be a neutral verb of activity.

NOTES

1 All forms are cited in a broad phonetic transcription.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


Fillmore, Charles J 1971 Some Problems for Case Grammar Working Papers in Linguistics No 10 Ohio State University Po 245-265