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On the grammaticalization of 1st and 2nd person pronominal affixes in North American Indian languages

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1. Introduction¹

Since the famous articles by Benveniste (1956) on the nature of pronouns and by Jakobson (1957) on the *shifter* character of pronouns, it is widely accepted that there is a major split between the 1st and 2nd person pronouns representing the speech act participants, on the one hand and the 3rd person which is the person or object spoken about. Benveniste therefore suggested that the 3rd person is rather a *non-person*. The 1st and 2nd person pronouns in general refer to human individuals which are identified by the speech act roles they are performing. Speaking and listening are the mutually related and interdependent speech act roles which are the foundation of every communicative event. The symmetrical relation between the basic speech act roles, i.e. the repeated change of the speech act roles during the conversation and the corresponding shift of reference between the 1st and 2nd person are treated equally in the languages of the world which is, in fact true in many cases. Furthermore, because of the essential character of pronouns and other deictic expressions of a language, personal pronouns are sometimes considered as the oldest and most stable parts of the grammar of a language with respect to historical change. Both views have to be revised.

A close look at the personal paradigms of North American Indian languages provides some evidence that the 1st persons have a priority against the 2nd persons and that there are numerous categorial changes involved in the formation of pronominal paradigms which in turn suggests that these paradigms are highly dynamic in nature. I will begin my presentation with different types of data which allow the conclusion that in many instances the establishment of a person paradigm begins with forms for the 1st person. Then I will briefly summarize and comment on the grammaticalization processes which can be found in the examined paradigms of North American Indian languages. The majority of person markers which are involved in these processes show a shift or extension of their person category from a 3rd person or 2nd person towards a 1st person category. I will conclude my presentation with a brief discussion of a special process which can be observed e.g. in transitive paradigms, namely the fact that transitive pronominal forms which include a 1st person in these combinations, although these 1st person forms exist in other paradigms of the language.

2. The priority of the 1st person

The overwhelming majority of person paradigms display correlations between person categories and various other categories such as number, gender, different modal and aspectual categories, and case. These correlations, however, are often not homogeneous but show markedness relations with respect to the different person categories. Besides the expected marking split between 1st and 2nd person versus 3rd person, there are numerous cases which show a split between 1st person and 2nd and 3rd person. This is significant, because these cases are much more frequent than marking splits where a 2nd person opposes the 1st and 3rd person. The latter cases occur only in specific contexts such as imperatives or interrogatives. Let me illustrate some types of splits between the 1st person versus 2nd and 3rd with some examples.

In Maidu, a Californian language of the Penutian stock, the bound pronominal affixes which indicate the subject of the clause distinguish dual and plural number for the 1st person only. The other persons are neutral with respect to number. Compare the paradigm in (1).

(1) Maidu (Penutian)

	sg	du	pl
1	-s	-as	-es
2	-no	-no	-no
3	-n	-n	-n

Dixon (1911:710)

A similar split can be observed in Kwakiutl, a Wakashan language of the Northwest Pacific coast. The subject paradigm of pronominal suffixes distinguishes singular and plural only for the 1st person; 2nd and 3rd person pronouns are neutral with respect to number (cf. Boas 1911b:529). The same holds with respect to dual marking. There are many languages which have a complete paradigm with singular and plural distinguished for all persons, but a dual form for the 1st person only; this is the case, e.g. in Winnebago and other Siouan languages as well as in the possessive and independent pronominal paradigms of Carrier (cf. Forchheimer 1956:78), an Athapaskan language of Canada. These and other examples suggest that the development of plural and dual pronouns starts with the 1st person (cf. Mithun 1991 for similar conclusions). I did not find a paradigm with a 2nd person plural but no plural form for the 1st person.

Marking splits between 1st person versus 2nd/3rd person also occur with respect to case. When languages start to develop pronominal paradigms which indicate one or two arguments of the clause they very likely begin with the 1st person. In Chitimacha, an isolate of the Southeast, only the object of the clause is indicated by pronominal affixes and it is only the 1st person singular and plural object which is marked (cf. Swadesh 1946:317). Second and 3rd person objects are not distinguished and remain zero marked. In Tonkawa, an isolate originally spoken in Texas, there is a set of pronominal suffixes which indicate the subject of the clause. These pronouns are differentiated for all persons and are conflated with some tense and mode forms. In addition, Tonkawa has developed object prefixes, but these forms distinguish only 1st person singular and plural whereas 2nd and 3rd person objects remain zero (cf. Hoijer 1946: 304ff.).

There are other kinds of split marking between 1st versus 2nd and 3rd person which suggest a priority of the 1st person. Seri, a language of the Hokan stock, has bound pronominal prefixes which indicate 1st and 2nd person singular and plural subjects. The 3rd person generally is not marked. The interesting point here is that only the 1st person singular has two alternate forms which distinguish transitive and intransitive 1st person subjects. The pronominal affix for the transitive 1st person subject could also be called a 1st person ergative² (cf. Marlett 1990:514). In the paradigm of the object pronominal prefixes in Seri, there is another instance of alternative forms for the 1st person singular only. The two 1st person singular pronouns display a kind of modal distinction. One form is used in imperatives only³, the other form is used elsewhere (cf. Marlett 1990:521).

Other instances of an allomorphy which is restricted to 1st persons can be found in Lakhota, a Siouan language of the Great Plains, which has two 1st person possessive pronouns in possessive constructions with inalienable nouns denoting body parts. The two 1st person possessive forms are semantically distinguished by the feature control or volitionality which the speaker is considered to have over the possessed body part (cf. Boas/Deloria 1941:128). A similar allomorphy with

respect to the 1st person can be observed in the independent pronouns of Hopi, an Uto-Aztecan language of Arizona (cf. Whorf 1946:169). In the pronominal object paradigm of Tsimshian, a language of the Northwest Pacific coast, there are two alternative forms for the 1st person singular. One of the forms is used as a regular 1st singular object pronoun; the second form, however, is used only in cases in which the event is conceived as unreal, e.g. in negative sentences, in sentences expressing potentiality, and in conditional clauses (cf. Boas 1911a:387).

There are many other cases of a split between 1st person versus 2nd and 3rd person marking; besides these instances of allomorphy which do not necessarily have to show some kind of semantic distinction, there are often formal irregularities in the 1st person, e.g. the 1st person pronouns tend to be fused formally with other verbal categories to a greater degree than the other persons. All the examples and facts together suggest that there is a priority of the 1st persons over the other persons and that the 1st person is the most likely to become grammaticalized first in the pronominal paradigms.

3. Historical changes of person categories in pronominal paradigms

It is a remarkable feature of person marking systems in North American Indian languages that instances of the formation of polite or formal pronouns for the addressee are very rare. This lack of polite forms can be explained by the fact that traditional Indian societies often did not have a complex social stratification. The polite or rather formal reference to a hearer is frequently indicated by the usage of a 2nd person plural pronoun as in French, or by a 3rd person plural pronoun as in German; 3rd person singular pronouns occur in this function as well. The only instances of polite forms in Indian languages I am aware of for the moment are Eastern Pomo (cf. Head 1978:167) and two Mayan languages, Aguacatec and Quiché (cf. Bricker 1977:2f). The forms for polite reference in the two Mayan languages are based on the 3rd person pronouns. Further it is reported that the indefinite pronoun *ji-* in Navajo was once used as a polite address, but this usage is obsolete now (cf. Saxon 1993:343). It is possible that the polite usage of 2nd plural or 3rd plural pronouns could lead to syncretisms between 2nd singular and plural pronouns or between 2nd singular and 3rd plural forms which can be found sometimes in pronominal paradigms of Indian languages. But other reasons are equally possible and I have no evidence to decide this question.

In tables (1-7), I have summarized a number of historical processes which include a change of the person categories of a pronoun or any other grammatical form, and which lead to the formation of a 1st or 2nd person pronoun.

1st sg.	← 1st pl.	Chol, Chontal, Tojolobal, Tzeltal
	← 2nd sg.	Tsimshian
	← 1st subject	Kalispel, Spokane (borrowed from neighboring Kutenai)
	← adverb 'here'	Mandan (optative only)
	← deictic	Wintu
	← evidential marker	Maricopa (in some aspect/moods only)
	← 3rd possessor	Washo (indirect speech only)

table (1)

1st pl.	← based on 2nd person	Wiyot
	← 3rd pl.	Coos (?), Kiowa
	← plural marker	Tsimshian
	← subject marker	Kalispel, Spokane (borrowed from neighboring Kutenai)
	← indefinite pronoun	Dogrib, Koyukon, Slave, Yuchi, etc.

table (2)

1st incl. pl.	← 1st pl.	Shuswap, Numic
	← based on a 2nd person	Algonkin, Yokuts, Kiowa, Kwakiutl
	← 3rd sg. + incl. pl.	Huave
	← incl. marker + pl.	Mohawk, Chinook

table (3)

1st incl. du.	← 1st pl.	Northern Paiute
	← based on a 2nd person	Yokuts, Kiowa, Coos
	← 3rd sg. + incl. du.	Huave
	← incl. marker + du.	Mohawk, Chinook
	← noun 'man, person'	Siouan

table (4)

1st excl. pl.	← 3rd + excl. marker	Shuswap
	← 3rd pl.	Siuslawan
	← indefinite pronoun	Chinook
	← animate classifier	Yuchi

table (5)

1st excl. du.	← 3rd du.	Siuslawan, Coos (?)
	← indefinite pronoun	Chinook

table (6)

2nd sg.	← 1st sg.	Tunica, Yuchi (?)
	← 1st pl.	Tsimshian, Aztec, Bella Coola

table (7)

The leftmost column contains the person category of the target form, the middle column contains the category of the source form, and the right column indicates the language(s) in which this process can be found. Question marks indicate uncertain cases. Because of lack of space, I cannot go into details here, but let me just point out some general observations. First of all, the processes indicated in tables (1-7) do not always reflect already completed historical changes. For example, the deictic form which refers to the 1st person subject in Wintu — see table (1) — (cf. Schlichter 1986:55) still functions as a deictic temporal or locative expression in

other grammatical contexts in this language. Or the plural marker in Tsimshian — see table (2) — which has become a 1st person plural pronoun — still functions as a plural marker for demonstrative pronouns in this language. The same is true for the indefinite pronoun — see again table (2) — which can be used as a 1st person plural subject pronoun in many Athapaskan languages such as Dogrib, Koyukon, Slave, etc. But this form is still used as either an indefinite or anaphoric pronoun in these languages.

Secondly, as can be expected from the referential nature of these forms, the exclusive 1st person forms are not derived from nor do they contain 2nd person pronominal forms. In the majority of cases the exclusive pronouns are the marked members of an inclusive/exclusive distinction (for some exceptions see Helmbrecht 1996). The inclusive 1st person pronouns are, from a referential point of view, the most complex of the 1st person non-singular pronouns, because their reference includes the speaker, the hearer, and 3rd persons. Therefore, the possible range of sources for the development of these forms is broader than that for the exclusive forms. Many inclusive pronouns are derived from 2nd person pronouns or contain traces of a 2nd person pronoun, because it is the reference to the hearer which is the central difference between exclusive and inclusive pronouns. The ultimate source of inclusive or exclusive markers often cannot be reconstructed and remains unclear; e.g. the Mohawk inclusive marker *te-* cannot be traced back to any source while it seems to be likely that the exclusive marker *ya-* in Mohawk is originally a 3rd person pronoun. Another case where the inclusive marker is transparent is Sierra Miwok. The inclusive marker in Sierra Miwok has its origin in the word for 'two'.

Thirdly, the majority of changes which are indicated in the tables above consist of a shift or extension of the category value from a 3rd or 2nd person towards a 1st person. That means that different pronouns such as indefinite pronouns or 3rd person plural pronouns or 2nd person singular or plural pronouns, or other grammatical markers such as plural replaced old 1st person pronouns or became additional 1st person expressions. The directionality of this process emphasizes again the priority of the 1st person categories over the other person categories. On the other hand, it is possible to find person category changes which run in the opposite direction, but these instances seem to be rare. Some examples of a change from a 1st person to a 2nd person are given in table (7). Especially the change from a 1st person plural to a 2nd person singular seems to occur with some frequency. The functional basis of this change is probably the same which underlies the use of the so-called nursery-we in English and other European languages. People use the 1st person plural pronoun for a 2nd person reference in order to express a strong commitment or empathy with the person who is addressed.

The high number of processes which lead to the replacement of 1st person pronominal forms or to the creation of additional 1st person expression raises the question why it is the 1st person pronouns which are replaced or supplemented by alternative expressions. It is obvious that at some point of the development of the different personal paradigms, speakers begin to avoid an explicit self-reference by using old regular 1st person pronouns and start, simultaneously, to use other forms which do not express a direct speaker reference. The usage of new forms for a speaker reference is, at the beginning, certainly restricted to particular contexts. Usually, this is not a problem with respect to the hearer, because the speaker provides enough background information so that the hearer is in the position to make the right inferences, i.e. the hearer can infer from the context that the speaker is included in the group of individuals referred to. The reasons for this kind of

avoidance of an explicit self-reference may vary from language to language or from culture to culture. But in essence, I believe that there are some kinds of taboos or politeness rules which require that a speaker should not draw too much attention to his or her own person by using an explicit means of self-reference. Speakers should not empathize too much with themselves because this may offend their interlocutors. The mere existence of such an avoidance-rule is a nice confirmation of the fact that the most natural viewpoint is the speaker's own viewpoint and that the person he or she empathizes with is naturally the speaker himself rather than the hearer. In the following section I would like to present some data from some transitive pronominal paradigms which show quite clearly the effects of such an avoidance rule.

4. The avoidance of 1st person expressions in transitive paradigms

Many North American Indian languages indicate more than one core argument of the clause by means of pronominal affixes on the verb. It is very common that these languages have at least two series of pronominal paradigms, one of which refers to the subject and one of which refers to the object of a transitive clause. Subject and object of a transitive clause are very much fused so that it is no longer possible to identify the components with some degree of certainty. In other cases, the transitive pronominal combinations are very transparent and the pronominal parts can easily be segmented. A close examination of such transitive paradigms in different languages shows that it is the 1st person pronoun in these transitive combinations — no matter whether it is the subject or the object — which is quite frequently simply missing or replaced by some other element. An interesting example in this respect is Chinook, a language of the Northwest Pacific coast. Chinook has — according to Boas (1911c:580) — three slightly different series of pronominal prefixes which distinguish singular dual and plural in all three persons. In addition there are inclusive and exclusive forms for dual and plural 1st person as well as gender distinctions for the 3rd person singular. The first series represents the subject of a transitive clause, the second series the object of a transitive clause as well as the subject of an intransitive clause, and the third series contains possessive pronouns. The forms of all three pronominal series are quite similar, but their function in the verbal complex can easily be recognized by their morphological position in relation to each other and to the verbal stem. The subject prefixes of a transitive verb precede the object prefixes which are always closer to the stem than the subject prefixes. Now, one might expect from such a pronominal system that every subject pronoun could be combined equally with every object prefix so that every possible transitive combination — except the reflexive forms, which are usually formed with a separate marker — would occur. This is not the case. In Chinook, the expected transitive forms for a 1st person singular acting on a 2nd person and for the 1st person non-singular exclusive acting on a 2nd person do not occur. Instead, there are replacement forms which clearly show the avoidance of an explicit expression of the 1st person. Compare the transitive pronominal forms in (2) and their analysis.

(2) Chinook (Boas 1911c: 584)

1st sg.	→	2nd sg.	<i>yam-</i>	<	<i>ya-</i>	(?)	<i>m-</i>	(2nd sg. obj.)
1st sg.	→	2nd du.	<i>yamt-</i>	<	<i>ya-</i>	(?)	<i>mt-</i>	(2nd du. obj.)
1st sg.	→	2nd pl.	<i>yamc-</i>	<	<i>ya-</i>	(?)	<i>mc-</i>	(2nd pl. obj.)
1st excl. du/pl	→	2nd sg.	<i>qam-</i>	<	<i>qa-</i>	(indef. subj.)	<i>m-</i>	(2nd sg. obj.)
1st excl. du/pl	→	2nd du.	<i>qamt-</i>	<	<i>qa-</i>	(indef. subj.)	<i>mt-</i>	(2nd du. obj.)
1st excl. du/pl	→	2nd pl.	<i>qamc-</i>	<	<i>qa-</i>	(indef. subj.)	<i>mc-</i>	(2nd pl. obj.)

All the transitive pronominal forms in (2) which are compound forms exhibit as one part the regular 2nd person object prefixes, as expected. The first part of these forms, however, is not the regular 1st person singular or exclusive subject prefix. Instead, there are replacement forms which represent the 1st person categories. The form *ya-* which replaces the 1st person singular subject cannot be traced back to any other source; the form *qa-*, however, which replaces the 1st person exclusive subject forms is originally the indefinite transitive subject pronoun and it is still in use in this function. Chinook is an example where the expected pronoun for the 1st person in certain transitive combinations is replaced by some other element. In other languages, the expected 1st person pronoun is simply rendered zero, i.e. receives no expression at all. This is, for example, the case in the animate transitive paradigm of the independent indicative in Fox, a language of the Algonkin family (cf. Dahlstrom 1995). Compare the forms in (3a-b).

(3) Fox (Dahlstrom 1995:97)

- a) *ke-wa:pam- en- e*
 2 look.at 2.obj-epenth.vowel
 I look at you (sg.).
- b) *ke-wa:pam- en- e pwa*
 2-look.at- 2.obj- epenth.vowel- 2.pl.
 I look at you (pl.).

The independent indicative pronouns of the transitive verb 'look at' show no morphological expression of the 1st person singular subject which is acting on a 2nd person. In all other transitive pronouns — no matter whether the 1st person is subject or direct object — the 1st person is clearly represented.

Other languages which show either a Fox-like or a Chinook-like or a somehow similar deletion of an expected 1st person pronoun in the transitive paradigms are Yuma, a Hokan language, Takelma, a language of the Northwest, Kiowa and Taos, languages of the Kiowa-Tanoan group, Yuchi, an isolate of the Southeast, Winnebago and Ioway-Oto, two Siouan languages, and Kwakiutl.

5. Conclusions

In the previous sections I presented different types of data which suggest that a) the 1st person category has a special status or priority against the other person categories, b) that the 1st person is very likely the first person category which receives a morphological marking with respect to the development of person paradigms, and c) that the 1st person pronouns are, to a high degree, involved in the dynamics of person paradigms, i.e. the historical changes of the form and the category value of pronouns. It is the hypothesis of this paper that there is very

often — due to politeness rules or certain kinds of taboos — a need to form new 1st person pronouns whose initial purpose is not to refer to the speaker in a direct way. This process can ultimately lead to the grammaticalization of all kinds of originally 3rd person pronouns or 2nd person pronouns into 1st person expressions. The avoidance of an explicit self-reference on the side of the speaker does not pose a problem on the part of the hearer. The necessary inferences can easily be drawn by the hearer. First of all, the speaker provides all the necessary background information to facilitate these inferences on the hearer's side, secondly the hearer is naturally very empathic with the speaker which means that he or she takes over the speaker's point of view to get an understanding of what the speaker talks about. The existence of such rules or taboos which demand an avoidance of explicit self-reference is a confirmation of the idea that the most natural point of view is the speaker's own point of view.

Endnotes

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² The fact that an ergative marking pattern arose in Seri for the 1st person only clearly runs against the predictions of Silverstein's agentivity hierarchy. Silverstein (1976) has claimed that 1st and 2nd persons are the least likely categories to receive an ergative marking pattern.

³ It seems to be very likely that the 1st singular direct object pronoun which is used in imperatives only is etymologically related to the 1st singular transitive subject pronoun.

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