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Discourse and Functional Factors in the Development of Southern Interior Salish Ergative Case Marking

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1. The twenty or so closely related languages of the Salish family, spoken in the Pacific Northwest (Table 1), offer a potentially fertile field for the study of morphosyntactic change. Case marking (CM) of NPs is one point of divergence within Salish. It seems that some of the Southern Interior languages have developed an ergative type of CM on the analogy of passive clauses, passives having grammatical and discourse functions that give them a high text frequency.

A. Bella Coola (Be)

B. Interior Salish (IS):

Northern (NIS):

Lillooet (Li)

Thompson (Th)

Shuswap (Sh)

Southern (SIS):

Okanagan (Ok)

Columbian (Cm)

Kalispel (Ka)

Spokane (Sp)

Coeur d'Alene (Cr)

C. Tsamosan (Ts)

D. Coast Salish (CS):

Tillamook (Ti)

Central Coast Salish (CCS):

Comox (Cx)

Pentlatch (Pt)

Sechelt (Se)

Squamish (Sq)

Halkomelem (Hk)

Northern Straits (NStr)

Klallam (Kl)

Nooksack (Nk)

Lushootseed (Ld)

Twana (Tw)

Table 1: Branches of the Salish family, with abbreviations for language and branch names (after Thompson 1979)

I restrict my attention here to the core case roles of object (O), intransitive subject (S), and transitive subject (A) (cf. Dixon 1979). It will be convenient to refer to the agent of a passive clause as A as well. Salish transitive verbs are inflected for person and number of object as well as subject; in most languages of the family there is at least some distinction between the A and S series of person/number markers (note in particular 3A *-as vs. 3S *Ø, both widely distributed) and both are different from O (but 3O also is usually Ø) (Newman 1980). However, I will be concerned here primarily with the CM of independent NPs, not pronominal affixes.

2. In most languages of the family for which satisfactory data is available, O and S NPs are consistently left unmarked; A in active clauses also receives no special mark, while A in passive clauses is marked by a preposition.

1) Hk (intr) ni ʔímaʃ ɬə sɬéni? 'the woman walked'
ptc walk Det woman(S) (Gerds 1981: 43)

- 1)(cont.) (tr-act) ni ^ííc'-ət-əs ^lə s^léni? k^wθə s^əpííł
 ptc cut-Tr-3A Det woman(A) Det bread(O)
 'the woman cut the bread' (Gerds 1981: 39)
 (tr-pass) ni q^wəl-ət-əm [?]ə θə s^léni? t^θə scé'itən
 ptc bake-Tr-Pass Obl Det woman(A) Det salmon(O)
 'the salmon was baked by the woman' (Gerds 1981: 195)
- 2) Sh (intr) m q^wəcéc ^γ k^wúk^wpy' 'the chief left'
 ptc leave Det chief(S) (Kuipers 1974:77)
 (tr-act) m t-[?]éy-n-s ^γ x^wélmx ^γ sk'lep
 ptc prf-meet-Tr-3A Det fox(A) Det coyote(O)
 'Fox met Coyote' (Kuipers 1974: 92.1)
 (tr-pass) m cún-t-m-əs ^γ sq^wyic t x^wélmx
 ptc tell-Tr-Pass-sf Det rabbit(O) Obl fox(A)
 'Rabbit was told by Fox' (Kuipers 1974: 78)
- (See also, e.g., Davis 1980 [Cx], Kuipers 1967:169f. [Sq], Jelinek and Demers 1985 [NStr], Davis and Saunders 1978:38 [Be].) The preposition used to mark A in passive clauses is [?]ə in most CS languages (but t in Squamish) and t in most IS languages (but [?]ə in Cr). The same preposition that marks A in passives also marks instrument and demoted O in antipassive constructions.² All Salish languages have verb-initial word order; in active transitive clauses A typically precedes O, but this does not seem to be rigidly required in all languages.
- Most Salish languages, then, distinguish none of the core case roles in active clauses. At least some of the languages of the Southern Interior subbranch of the family, however, display an ergative type of CM: the A of active clauses is marked with the same preposition as is the A of passive clauses, while S and O are consistently left unmarked.
- 3) Ka (intr) hoi x^wíst ^li?é ^litətəw'ít 'then the youth walked
 then walk Det youth(S) away' (Vogt 1940:82.2)
 (tr-act) u k^wém't k^wé-i-s ^li?e t ^litətəw'ít ^li?é səm?ém
 and then grab-Tr-3A Det Obl youth(A) Det woman(O)
 'and then the youth grabbed the woman' (Vogt 1940:84.7)
 (tr-pass) č-x^wt'əp-əmint-əm t st'əlt'əłé?m ^li?é sx^wəlótqs
 toward-rush-Tr-Pass Obl thunder(A) Det rabbit(O)
 'Thunder rushed upon Rabbit' (Vogt 1940: 84.12)
- 4) Ok (tr-act) uł n'in'w'i? cəm' ixi? wah-ənt-s-ís
 and then ptc ptc bark-Tr-2sO-3A
 i? t kkəw?əpa? 'and then the dogs will
 Det Obl dogs(A) bark at you'
 (Mattina 1985: 102.128)
 (tr-pass) cū-nt-əm i? t sk^wúy-s
 tell-tr-Pass Det Obl mother(A)-his
 'his mother told him' (Mattina 1985: 80.22)
- 5) Cr (tr-act) ek^wú-stu-s ^lə číč'íl'ix^w ^luw'e [?]ə t'ík^wt'ík^wt
 tell-Tr-3A Det muskrat(O) Det Obl old.woman(A)
 'the old woman told Little Muskrat' (Reichard 1938: 694)

6) Ok mət way' cù-nt(-s)-s yəʔ ylmíx^wəm
I.suppose tell-Tr-2sO-3A Det chief(A)
'I suppose the chief will tell you' (Mattina 1985:102.128)

7) Cr ... a-t-qíx^w-st-me-s x^we hín-čīcēy'e?
aspect-prf-warn-Tr-1sO-3A Det my-grandmother(A)
'(so that's why) my grandmother warns me' (Reichard 1938:
696)

The scanty texts available to me in Spokane (a dialect closely related to Ka) and Columbian also have only the general Salish unmarked-A pattern, though it is unclear what conclusions to draw from this (Carlson 1978, Kinkade 1978).

It seems a reasonable guess, then, that some of the SIS languages are acquiring an ergative pattern of CM, the process being complete in Ka but in progress in Ok and Cr. It may be significant that certain non-Salish languages spoken near SIS, namely the Sahaptian languages, have suffixal case systems that sometimes distinguish A, S, and O from each other (Aoki 1970:136, Jacobs 1931:224). But there are also factors internal to Salish that surely facilitated the postulated shift in CM, to which I now turn. Suggesting a plausible historical route for development of the ergative pattern will naturally help support the claim that this is indeed the innovative pattern.

3. As the ergative markers in the SIS languages are the same prepositions used to mark A in passive clauses both in those languages and elsewhere in Salish, it seems reasonable to attribute the ergative pattern of CM to extension of passive-clause CM to active clauses--the preposition has other functions to be sure, but nothing else likely to lead to its use to mark A. Note that this is not the same thing as the passive-to-ergative reanalyses attested in various South Asian languages (Anderson 1977), in which a passive construction is reinterpreted as (non-passive) ergative because no corresponding active construction exists. In SIS a distinction between active and passive verbal inflection is productively maintained, although verbal inflection is the only overt difference between passive and ergatively-marked clauses.

One reason why passive clauses should influence the surface form of active transitive clauses is that there are close morphological parallels between active and passive verbs throughout Salish. Except in a few clearly-innovating Coast Salish languages, passive verbs retain 0 person and number marking, differing from actives only in that subject person and number marking is replaced by a Passive suffix (typically -m or -(V)t; the choice of suffix is differently conditioned in IS and CS).

- 8) Sh pic'-n-c-t 'you are squeezed'
 squeeze-Tr-2s0-Pass
 pic'-nt-m 'he is squeezed'
 squeeze-Tr-Pass (30 = Ø)
 (cf. pic'-n-c-n 'I squeeze you'[-n 1sA], pic'-n-s 'he squeezes
 him'[-s 3A]) (Kuipers 1974: 48)

Verb-initial word order means that there is no dramatic difference in the linear position of A NPs between active and passive clauses, especially given the prevalence of zero-anaphora (sec 4).³

Second, the passive constructions of Salish languages, unlike those of typical Western European languages, are of quite high frequency in texts. In the most extended Hk (CS) text that I have been able to inspect (Hukari et al. 1977), of over 300 lines, the passive may actually be more frequent than the active; other Salish languages seem less extreme, but in all of them the passive is frequently used where a smooth English translation would require an active. Beyond the cross-linguistically expectable function of signalling an unspecified agent, Salish passives have various other functions--not enormously surprising in cross-linguistic perspective either, but unusually strongly developed--that help explain their prevalence in discourse and so motivate the influence of passive on active clauses that I postulate.

4. The first function of passives relates to the prevalence of zero anaphora in Salish. The typical choice of referring expression in Salish languages is between a full NP (proper name, Det + N, and so on) and no NP at all. Pronouns are rare and may carry very specific meanings of contrast and the like; the normal way of referring to a highly thematic referent is just to have no overt NP, letting verbal person/number morphology do the work of referring.

- 9) Hk ?i wəɬ q'ʷəq'ʷələm? Ø 'he was already barbecuing'
 and then barbecuing Ø(S) (Hukari et al. 1977:46.72)
 ni? ʔəwʔwəɬ k'ən-nəx-əs Ø tə q'ʷəq'ʷəq
 ptc then take-Tr-3A Ø(A) Det bladder-wrack
 'then he got the bladder-wrack' (Hukari et al. 1977:48.92)
 10) Sh yɬi? y s-cún-Ø-s Ø y ʔuq'ʷy-s⁴
 then Det Nom-tell-Tr-3A Ø(A) Det brother(O)-his
 'then he told his brother' (Kuipers 1974: 104.11)
 11) Ka k'əm't cú-i-s Ø Ø "tə" 'then he told her "no"
 then tell-Tr-3A Ø(A) Ø(O) no (Vogt 1940: 84.10)

Overt NPs and zero anaphora are not equally frequent in all case roles: many Salish languages prefer that active clauses not have an overt NP as A. It has even been reported that some Coast languages prohibit overt NP As in active clauses in which the O is a third-person zero anaphor (Kuipers 1967:172 [Sq], Jelinek and Demers 1985 [NStr]) or in which O is any third-person expression, zero or not (Hukari 1976: 308f. [Ld]).

The Interior languages (and Be, for that matter) evidently do

allow overt NPs in the A role in active clauses, even when the O role is filled by anaphoric zero: this is true even of Shuswap, where nominal CM does not distinguish A from O in active clauses.

- 12) Sh m cún-Ø-s γ x^wélmx Ø 'Fox said to him ...'
 ptc tell-Tr-3A Det fox(A) Ø(O) (Kuipers 1974: 92.3)
- 13) Ka cú-i-s yé t ɬtəw'it Ø
 tell-Tr-3A Det Obl youth(A) Ø(O)
 'the youth said to her ...' (Vogt 1940: 84.8)

However, a preliminary count of transitive clauses in the two longest Shuswap texts in Kuipers (1974) (14) shows that passive is preferred to active if the A is an overt NP, both in absolute and in percentage terms.

14) Transitive clauses in Kuipers 1974, texts VII and VIII

Active:	A = Ø	134
	A = overt NP	14
Passive:	A = Ø	88
	A = overt NP	51

If such results persist in further text counts in Sh and elsewhere, it can safely be said that both the Interior and the Coast languages share a preference for putting clauses with overt As into the passive. This is evidently one reason for the high textual frequency of passives in Salish.

5. Besides the above tendency, the passive/active voice opposition of the Interior languages also serves the rhetorical function of signalling what Whistler (1986) calls 'focus'; 'relative thematicity of A and O' might be a more precise term. If an entity that is relatively focal (more central to the narration at that point) is A, while a less focal entity is O, active voice is typically used; while if O is more focal than A, passive voice is typically used.

Probably not all choices of active vs. passive in Interior languages can be explained thus. But clear instances can be found of narrated dyadic interactions in which one participant--typically the hero of the story--is consistently focal, with its case role determining voice choice in the manner just sketched, while the other participant is non-focal. (Cf. Kuipers 1974: 78f.)

- 15) Sh ... kəkéw γ s-xət-éqs γ x^wélmx 'Fox_i was far
 far Det ahead Det fox(S)_i ahead,
 nq'-ílx-mnt-m Ø ... he_i (A) looked
 look.back-sf-Tr-Pass Ø_j(O) back at him_j(O),
 ʔu... c-plq'-ílx γ x^wélmx oh, Fox_i came
 oh hither-turn-sf Det fox(S)_i back.
 m s-t-yén-mnt-m Ø and ran circles
 ptc hither-prf-circle-Tr-Pass Ø_j(O) around him_j(O),

- 15)(cont.) s-t-yén-mnt-m ək^we Ø, ran circles
 hither-prf-circle-Tr-Pass ptc Ø_j(Ø) around him_j(Ø),
 cún-t-m Ø ... said to him_j(Ø)...'
 tell-Tr-Pass Ø_j(Ø)

(referent j is focal [he goes on to win the race], i [Fox] is not)
 (Kuipers 1974: 104.15,16)

- 16) Sh ... m t'úx^wt-st-m-əs Ø t spyʔúy ...
 ptc fly-Tr-Pass-sf Ø_i(Ø) Obl eagle_j(A)_j
 'The eagle_j flew withⁱ him_i ...
 cún-t-m-əs Ø t spyʔúy ...
 tell-Tr-Pass-sf Ø_i(Ø) Obl eagle_j(A)
 the eagle_j told him_i ...
 kəx-t-és yʔéne l spyʔúy.
 feed-tr-3A this_i(A) Det eagle_j(Ø)
 he_i fed the eagle_j.
 cún-Ø-s Ø t'ʔene ...
 tell-Tr-3A Ø_i(A) Ø_j(Ø) then
 then he_i told him_j ...' (Kuipers 1974: 111.41-44)

(referent i is focal--the hero of the rest of the story--,
j [eagle] is not)

- 17) Ka u číc-i-s Ø Ø, 'And he_i went up to
 and approach-Tr-3A Ø_i(A) Ø_j(Ø) her_j,
 u q^wəlq^wél-st-əm Ø, and she_j spoke to
 and speak.to-Tr-Pass Ø_i(Ø) him_i,
 cún-t-əm Ø ... she_j said to him_i...
 tell-Tr-Pass Ø_i(Ø)
 cú-i-s Ø Ø ... He_i said to her_j...'
 tell-Tr-3A Ø_i(A) Ø_j(Ø) (Vogt 1940: 84.4)

(referent i is focus--and hero of story-- , j is not)

This focus-tracking function is found in both Shuswap (NIS) and Kalispel (SIS), despite the different surface morphosyntax of active transitive clauses in the two languages, and so can safely be assumed to be old in Interior Salish. We may note, too, that there is no real conflict between the focus-tracking function and the facts about Salish passives noted in sec. 4 above: since passives in many Salish languages are associated with lesser thematicity of the A, and since overt NPs as against pronouns or zero are cross-linguistically associated with lesser thematicity of the referent (cf. the studies in Givón 1983 and fn.5), it is not too surprising that overt NP As should be more frequent in passive than in active clauses.

6. In consequence of the focus-tracking function of voice in Interior Salish--and despite the tendency for overt NP As to

evoke passive voice--passives with omitted A are fairly common in discourse contexts where there is no doubt as to who the A is. Omission of the A in passive clauses, then, often functions very much like zero anaphora of O or of S or of A in active clauses, where likewise no overt NP appears to fill a case role but a particular referent can nevertheless be recovered from context as the understood filler of that role: see especially examples (15) and (17) above.

In the morphological parallelism of active and passive verb inflection and in the parallelism of As in active and passive clauses with respect to discourse anaphora, we have the basis for an analogical proportion in the Southern Interior languages:

18) (A = anaphoric $\emptyset$) (A = overt NP)

stem-Tr-Pass	:	stem-Tr-Pass	Obl NP _A	} (Passive: O is focal)	
:: stem-Tr-3A	:	X			} (Active: A is focal)
		X = stem-Tr-3A	Obl NP _A		

--resulting in the ergative pattern of CM.

Functional pressure to disambiguate A and O case roles may in part account for the direction of analogy--from passive clauses, where A and O are differently marked, to active clauses, where originally both roles were marked identically. The sheer greater frequency of overt As in passive clauses as opposed to active clauses which it seems plausible to attribute to most Salish languages was surely also important in determining the direction of the proportion. As I noted earlier, neighboring languages with case systems may have had some influence too, but this is hard to show conclusively, since no case affixes have been borrowed into Southern Interior Salish languages.

7. To strengthen the historical account offered here, I should briefly argue against a reverse course of events, in which the ergative case marking of SIS would be taken to represent the Proto-Salish pattern and the rest of the family would be taken to have innovated a non-ergative pattern. It is difficult to come up with plausible analogical sources for the putatively innovative pattern in this alternative account.

(a) As I noted in sec. 1 above, Salish verbal person/number inflection follows a partly ergative pattern if anything, with $3O \emptyset = 3S \emptyset \neq 3A$ *-as in particular. Consequently the marking of case roles in verbal inflection could not provide a good model for loss of ergative case marking.

(b) As I mentioned in sec. 2, Salish languages also have antipassive constructions, in which the verb loses its Tr suffix (usually taking a suffix -m instead) and is inflected as an intransitive verb, the underlying A being treated as an intransitive subject--so getting no case marker in any Salish language--while the O becomes oblique and is marked with a preposition.

Such constructions also do not provide a particularly good model for the non-ergative, non-accusative pattern of most of Salish. Apart from the fact that the match between active and antipassive verbal morphology is not as close as that between active and passive verbal morphology, one would need to explain why the oblique CM of the demoted O of antipassives should not have been carried over into active clauses along with the zero CM of the underlying A in antipassives. Moreover, impressionistically at any rate, the omitted O in antipassives in Salish seems mostly to be indefinite, rather than being used in anaphorically, in contrast to the omitted A in passive constructions.

In view of these difficulties, there would seem to be no attractive alternative to the account presented in this paper, in which ergative CM arose in the Southern Interior languages on the analogy of the passive.

Notes

¹ Thanks to John Richardson, Barbara Need, Doug Varley, David Testen, John Myhill, and Richard Rhodes for comments on oral versions of this paper. Any errors are of course my responsibility. Sources of examples are cited with page number, and also paragraph, sentence or line number if this is marked in the source. I have made a few purely cosmetic changes to the transcriptions of my sources for orthographic consistency; the transcription used here is the standard Americanist one. I am responsible for morpheme divisions, morpheme-by-morpheme glosses, and translations of cited examples. The following abbreviations not explained in the text are used in glosses: 1,2,3 = first, second, third person; s,p = singular, plural; Det = determiner (article or demonstrative); Nom = Nominalizer; Obl = oblique marker (preposition); Pass = passive; Tr = transitive; prf, ptc, sf = prefix, particle, or suffix whose explicit glossing would be cumbersome and irrelevant; act = active; intr = intransitive. -- For background on Salish, see Thompson (1979).

² Bella Coola and Tsamosan have yet other prepositions. This formal diversity of functionally similar prepositions is hard to interpret: are ?a and t both to be attributed to Proto-Salish? At any rate t seems to be the typical Obl marker in IS.

Note, by the way, that in the Southern Interior languages to be discussed below prepositions follow Det rather than being external to the NP.

³ Unfortunately shortage of data leaves it uncertain whether there are any covert syntactic differences between active and passive clauses in the various Salish languages. If there are no such differences, of course, it becomes questionable whether one really wants to speak of 'passive' constructions at all. Gerdts (1981:198) claims that the A of passive clauses in Hk cannot be extracted (e.g. in relative clauses and cleft-like constructions), unlike

S, O, or A of active clauses: this suggests that the A of passive clauses has been syntactically demoted. In Sh, however, it seems that the A of passive clauses can be extracted (i); and, despite Kuipers' denial of the possibility (1974: 83), I have found a text example of extraction of A from an active clause (ii):

- i) 1 k^wséltktn-s t [m lwél-nt-m]
 Det relatives-her ptc [ptc abandon-tr-Pass]
 'her relatives who(A) had left her(O) by herself'
 (Kuipers 1974:116.4)
- ii) [t'x^w-nt-és y xyúm t k^wúk^wpy']
 Det [beat-Tr-3A Det big ptc chief(O)]
 'the one who(A) had beaten the big chief(O)' (113.85)

(t in these examples marks the attributive relation within the NP, not case roles in the clause.) This suggests that despite the different surface CM of A in active and passive clauses in Sh there may be no syntactic demotion of A in the Sh passive. But more data on this and other points is needed from more languages--especially SIS--before one can speak with certainty about anything but surface morphosyntax. I continue to use the term 'passive' for its convenience as a morphological label, but do not necessarily intend the label to have deep syntactic significance.

For an account of development of ergative CM in Polynesian somewhat similar to that presented here for Salish--but in which Passive survives with quasi-aspectual functions, not the rhetorical functions to be outlined below--see Chung 1978.

⁴ Shuswap often uses a nominalized construction for sequential discourse conjunction ('and then'); this does not affect inflection or morphosyntax of transitive verbs.

⁵ Less extensive text counts in Kalispel so far show about equal distribution of overt A between active and passive clauses--perhaps not surprisingly, given that this language has eliminated overt syntactic differences between the two sorts of clauses. Overt A in the passive, impressionistically, may possibly be less frequent than in Sh. It is interesting that Sh should show such a strong differentiation in treatment of A between active and passive clauses, given that there is a bit of evidence that the syntactic difference between those clause types may be just a superficial one of CM (fn.3).

Scancarelli (1985) noted that overt NPs were rare in the A role in the Austronesian language Chamorro; she attributed this fact to the tendency of A, as opposed to S and O, to carry old information.

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