

# The Morphological Status of *-ʔat* in Nuu-chah-nulth\*

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## 0. Introduction

Nuu-chah-nulth, part of the Southern Wakashan branch of the Wakashan language family, has a suffix *-ʔat*, which appears on the predicate.<sup>1</sup> The presence of *-ʔat* is associated with syntactic and semantic changes. Sapir (1924), Swadesh (1933), and Sapir and Swadesh (1939) treat it as a passive suffix, as do Rose (1981), Rose and Carlson (1984), Emanatian (1988), and Kim (2000). On the other hand, Whistler (1985) analyses it as an inverse marker similar to that found in Algonquian languages, and Nakayama (1997a, b) argues that *-ʔat* only affects the semantics of the predicate in such a way that the whole predication is framed in terms of the effect of an action, event, or state. The goal of this paper is to provide both a morphological and syntactic analysis of *-ʔat*. I claim that *-ʔat* is a passive marker, providing relevant data, which are from my own fieldwork. Interestingly, the use of *-ʔat* is not always optional: the distribution of a *-ʔat* construction is subject to the person hierarchy (cf. Silverstein 1976, Klokeid 1978). This approach will reconcile the morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties of *-ʔat*, leading to the conclusion that *-ʔat* is a passive suffix which is sensitive to the person hierarchy.

## 1. Preliminary Data: Background<sup>2</sup>

In Nuu-chah-nulth, *-ʔat* is sometimes obligatorily present, sometimes optional, and sometimes obligatorily absent with a transitive verb. The distribution of *-ʔat* is determined by a person feature associated with each argument of the verb.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacobsen (1973) for Makah, and Klokeid (1978) for Nitinat (Ditidaht). Both studies provide an analysis of Makah and Nitinat counterparts of *-ʔat*, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations used in this paper are: CAUS = causative, DEIC = deictic, IND = indicative, INDEF = indefinite, INT = interrogative, MOM = momentaneous, POSS = possessive, REL = relative, Quo = quotative, sg = singular, pl = plural.

<sup>3</sup> *-ʔat* appears not only on the predicate, but also in the inalienable possessive structure on a nominal, as shown in (i):

### 1.1. Contexts Where *-ʔat* Is Obligatorily Present

*-ʔat* is obligatory when a 3<sup>rd</sup> person argument acts upon a 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person argument. In (1), where a 3<sup>rd</sup> person *Mary* is the Agent and a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person is the Patient, (1a) is acceptable with *-ʔat* on the predicate. But when *-ʔat* is absent, the sentence is ill-formed as shown in (1b).

- (1) a. yaaʔakapatsiʃ/ʔick (ʔuhʔat)<sup>4</sup> Mary.  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔat-siʃ/ʔick ʔuhʔat Mary  
 care-CAUS-ʔat-1sg/2sg.IND by Mary  
 ‘I/You am/are loved by Mary (= Mary loves me/you).’
- b. \*yaaʔakapʔiʃ Mary siʔa/suʔa.  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔiʃ Mary siʔa/suʔa  
 care-CAUS-3sg/IND Mary me/you  
 ‘Mary loves me/you.’

### 1.2. Contexts Where *-ʔat* Is Optional<sup>5</sup>

The examples in (2) show that if a 3<sup>rd</sup> person acts upon another 3<sup>rd</sup> person, then the presence/absence of *-ʔat* does not affect the grammaticality of a sentence. Therefore, both (2a) with *-ʔat* and (2b) without are acceptable.

- (2) a. yaaʔakapʔiʃ John (ʔuhʔat) Mary  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔat-ʔiʃ John ʔuhʔat Mary  
 care-CAUS-ʔat-3sg/IND John by Mary  
 ‘John is loved by Mary(=Mary loves John).’
- b. yaaʔakapʔiʃ Mary John  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔiʃ Mary John  
 care-CAUS-3sg/IND Mary John  
 ‘Mary loves John.’

### 1.3. Contexts Where *-ʔat* Is Obligatorily Absent

*-ʔat* is forbidden whenever a 1<sup>st</sup> /2<sup>nd</sup> person is the Agent. There are four cases to consider: 1<sup>st</sup> person Agent-2<sup>nd</sup> person Patient, 2<sup>nd</sup> Agent-1<sup>st</sup> Patient, 1<sup>st</sup> Agent-3<sup>rd</sup> Patient, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Agent-3<sup>rd</sup> Patient; each case is illustrated with separate examples.

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- (i) a. ʔuhçitʔatqs ‘my head’      b. ʔuhçitʔatʔi ‘his/her head’  
 ʔuhçiti-ʔat-qs                      ʔuhçiti-ʔat-ʔi  
 head-POSS-1sg                      head-POSS-3sg

Although I do not deal with the latter in this paper, their relationship requires further research. A similar phenomenon is attested in Navajo, where the 3sg pronominal prefixes *yi-* and *bi-* are used in both direct/inverse alternations and possession.

<sup>4</sup> Jacobsen (1979) points out that for Makah, another Southern Wakashan language, all prepositions including the Makah counterpart of the Nuuchah-nulth *ʔuhʔat* are prepositional clauses rather than phrases. I leave this issue for further study.

<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking, in a discourse context, the use of *-ʔat* cannot be free even with 3<sup>rd</sup>-person participants, which I will discuss in detail later. Therefore, by “optional” I mean that its use is SYNTACTICALLY free in a discourse-neutral context.

(3) is an example where a 1<sup>st</sup> person acts upon a 2<sup>nd</sup> person. With *-ʔat* on the predicate, (3a) is ungrammatical. This contrasts with the well-formed sentence (3b), where the predicate occurs with *-ʔat*.

- (3) a. \*yaaʔakapʔatʔick (ʔuhʔat) siʔa b. yaaʔakuksiš suʔa  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔat-ʔick ʔuhʔat siʔa yaaʔak-uk-siš suʔa  
 care-CAUS-ʔat-2sg/IND by me care-CAUS-1sg/IND you  
 ‘You are loved by me(=I love you).’ ‘I love you’

The sentences in (4) have a 2<sup>nd</sup> person Agent ‘you’ and a 1<sup>st</sup> person Patient ‘I/me’. (4a) is ill-formed with *-ʔat* on the predicate, but (4b) is well-formed without *-ʔat*:

- (4) a. \*yaaʔakapʔatsiš (ʔuhʔat) suʔa b. yaaʔakapʔick siʔa.  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔat-siš ʔuhʔat suʔa yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔick siʔa  
 care-CAUS-ʔat-1sg/IND by you care-CAUS-2sg/IND me  
 ‘I am loved by you(=You love me).’ ‘You love me’

In (5), where the Agent is 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person and the Patient is 3<sup>rd</sup> person *Mary*, (5a) is unacceptable with *-ʔat*, but (5b) is acceptable without *-ʔat*:

- (5) a. \*yaaʔakapʔatʔiš Mary (ʔuhʔat) siʔa/suʔa.  
 yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔat-ʔiš Mary ʔuhʔat siʔa/suʔa  
 care-CAUS-ʔat-3sg/IND Mary by me/you  
 ‘Mary is loved by me/you (= I/You love Mary).’  
 b. yaaʔakuksiš/yaaʔakapʔick Mary.  
 yaaʔak-uk-siš/yaaʔak-ʔap-ʔick Mary  
 care-CAUS-1sg.IND/care-CAUS-2sg.IND Mary  
 ‘I/You love Mary.’

## 2. The Morphological and Syntactic Behaviour of *-ʔat*

### 2.1. Word Order

Nuu-chah-nulth has an unmarked word order, VSO, in an active clause with two overt arguments with an Agent NP occupying the subject position and a Patient NP occupying the object position. If the postverbal NP is a subject, we predict that the Patient NP will occupy the postverbal position in a *-ʔat* clause.

Comparison of (6a) and (6b) with respect to word order reveals that this is the case. In (6a), which is an active clause, the Agent *Mary* immediately follows the verb, followed by the Patient *John*. In (6b), which is a *-ʔat* clause, the Patient *John* immediately follows the verb.

- (6) a. Active b. *-ʔat* clause  
 yaaʔakapʔiš Mary **John**. yaaʔakapʔatʔiš **John** (ʔuhʔat) Mary.  
 yaaʔakap-ʔiš Mary John yaaʔakap-ʔat-ʔiš John ʔuhʔat Mary  
 love-3sg/IND Mary John love-ʔat-3sg/IND John by Mary  
 ‘Mary loves John.’ ‘John is loved by Mary/Mary loves John.’

One might suspect that even if the Agent is realized by an oblique PP, this does not necessarily imply that the Patient is the subject in a *-ʔat* clause. However, the changes of argument order in an active/*-ʔat* pair are not simply changes of word order; they are associated with the changes of grammatical relations of NPs. Therefore, the differences in word order between an active and a *-ʔat* clause are syntactically significant.

## 2.2. A Pronominal Suffix Is a Subject Agreement Marker

Nuu-chah-nulth has no morphological case system. Grammatical relations of nominals are disambiguated not only by unmarked word order, but also by a pronominal suffix on the predicate. I argue that this pronominal suffix is a subject agreement marker.

The pronominal subject suffix system is very complicated, exhibiting a different form according to each Mood. There is no object marking system in Nuu-chah-nulth and the pronominal suffixes identify the subject only. When an active transitive verb occurs with only one overt argument, that argument is always interpreted as an object as shown in (7). The identity of the null subject argument is made clear by the subject agreement marker.

- (7) Active
- |    |                                   |       |    |                                    |       |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------|----|------------------------------------|-------|
| a. | yaaʔakapʔiʃ                       | John. | b. | yaakapʔiʃʔat                       | John. |
|    | yaaʔakap-ʔiʃ                      | John  |    | yaaʔakap-ʔiʃʔat                    | John  |
|    | love-3sg/IND                      | John  |    | love-3pl/IND                       | John  |
|    | ‘She loves John/*John loves her.’ |       |    | ‘They love John/*John loves them.’ |       |

Changes in the word order of a transitive clause with two overt NPs accompany changes in the pronominal suffix. In (8a), the subject is *Mary* and the pronominal suffix *-ʔiʃ* ‘3<sup>rd</sup> sg’ is used, while in (8b), the subject is *John and Bill* and here a different suffix, *-ʔiʃʔat* ‘3<sup>rd</sup> pl’, is used. Consequently, these examples establish that the pronominal suffix is a subject agreement marker.

- (8) Active
- |    |                             |      |         |         |       |
|----|-----------------------------|------|---------|---------|-------|
| a. | kaapapʃiʔaʔʔiʃ              | Mary | John    | ʔuhʔiiʃ | Bill. |
|    | kaapapʃiʔaʔ-ʔiʃ             | Mary | John    | ʔuhʔiiʃ | Bill  |
|    | like-3sg/IND                | Mary | John    | and     | Bill  |
|    | ‘Mary loves John and Bill.’ |      |         |         |       |
| b. | kaapapʃiʔaʔʔiʃʔat           | John | ʔuhʔiiʃ | Bill    | Mary. |
|    | kaapapʃiʔaʔ-ʔiʃʔat          | John | ʔuhʔiiʃ | Bill    | Mary  |
|    | like-3pl/IND                | John | and     | Bill    | Mary  |
|    | ‘John and Bill love Mary.’  |      |         |         |       |

Given that the pronominal agreement suffix provides information about the identity of the subject, we expect that if an agreement marker is changed in an active/*-ʔat* pair, this should reflect a change in the grammatical relations of NPs.

We will see how it works by the comparison of (8) and (9). In the pair of (8a) and (9a), the subject marker *-ʔiš* ‘3sg’ identifies the postverbal *Mary* as the subject in an active sentence, (8a), and the subject marker *-ʔišʔaʔ* ‘3pl’ identifies the postverbal *John and Bill* as the subject in its *-ʔat* counterpart, (9a). Also in the pair of (8b) and (9b), the subject agreement marker is different depending on the postverbal NP, *-ʔišʔaʔ* ‘3pl’ and *-ʔiš* ‘3sg’, respectively. This tells us that the presence of *-ʔat* causes a change in the grammatical relation of the Patient NP. That is, the subject agreement marking system provides evidence that the Patient is promoted to the subject in a *-ʔat* clause. The objects *John and Bill* in (8a) and *Mary* in (8b) become a subject in each *-ʔat* counterpart, (9a) and (9b), respectively.

(9) *-ʔat* clause

- a. *kaapapšiʔaʔatʔišʔaʔ*      **John**    *ʔuhʔiis*    **Bill**    *ʔuhʔat*    *Mary*.  
*kaapapšiʔaʔat-ʔat-ʔišʔaʔ*    John    *ʔuhʔiis*    Bill    *ʔuhʔat*    *Mary*  
 like-ʔat-3pl/IND            John    and            Bill    by            *Mary*  
 ‘John and Bill are loved by *Mary*/*Mary* loves John and Bill.’
- b. *kaapapšiʔaʔatʔiš*            **Mary**    *ʔuhʔat*    John    *ʔuhʔiis*    *Bill*.  
*kaapapšiʔaʔat-ʔat-ʔiš*        *Mary*    *ʔuhʔat*    John    *ʔuhʔiis*    *Bill*  
 like-ʔat-3sg/IND            *Mary*    by            John    and            *Bill*  
 ‘*Mary* is loved by John and Bill/John and Bill love *Mary*.’

### 2.3. Subject Control

A subject control predicate requires the subject of the subordinate clause to be coreferential to the subject of the main predicate. In (10a), the subject of *ʔamiʔšiʔ-* ‘try’ and the subject of *kʷikʷixasiʔ-* ‘kiss’ are coreferential to each other, i.e., ‘they’. On the other hand, in (10b), the subjects of each verb, ‘they’ and *Mary*, are not coreferential and the sentence is ungrammatical.

- (10) a. *ʔamiʔšiʔitʔišʔaʔ*            *kʷikʷixasiʔ*    John.  
*ʔamiʔšiʔ-mit-ʔišʔaʔ*        *kʷikʷixasiʔ*    John  
 try-PAST-3pl/IND            kiss            John  
 ‘They tried to kiss John.’
- b. \**ʔamiʔšiʔitʔišʔaʔ*            *kʷikʷixasiʔ*    *Mary*    John.  
*ʔamiʔšiʔ-mit-ʔišʔaʔ*        *kʷikʷixasiʔ*    *Mary*    John  
 try-PAST-3pl/IND            kiss            *Mary*    John  
 ‘They tried for *Mary* to kiss John.’

Based on the syntactic behaviour of a subject control predicate, it is predicted that the presence of *-ʔat* in a sentence with a subject control predicate causes the change of the subject of the predicate on which *-ʔat* appears. The change of the subject results from the promotion of the Patient. (11) shows that this prediction is borne out:

- (11) *-ʔat* clause
- a. \* $\acute{n}ami\acute{t}\acute{s}i\acute{\lambda}it\acute{?}i\acute{s}\acute{?}a\acute{t}$        $k^w ik^w ixa\acute{s}i\acute{?}at$       John.  
 $\acute{n}ami\acute{t}\acute{s}i\acute{\lambda}-mit-?i\acute{s}\acute{?}a\acute{t}$        $k^w ik^w ixa\acute{s}i\acute{\lambda}-?at$       John  
 try-PAST-3pl/IND      kiss-ʔat      John  
 ‘They tried for John to be kissed’
- b.  $\acute{n}ami\acute{t}\acute{s}i\acute{\lambda}it\acute{?}i\acute{s}\acute{?}a\acute{t}$        $k^w ik^w ixa\acute{s}i\acute{?}at$        $?u\acute{h}\acute{?}at$       John.  
 $\acute{n}ami\acute{t}\acute{s}i\acute{\lambda}-mit-?i\acute{s}\acute{?}a\acute{t}$        $k^w ik^w ixa\acute{s}i\acute{\lambda}-?at$        $?u\acute{h}\acute{?}at$       John  
 try-PAST-3pl/IND      kiss-ʔat      by      John  
 ‘They tried to be kissed by John.’

The ungrammaticality of (11a), which is a *-ʔat* counterpart of (10a), shows the subject of the main clause and the subject of the subordinate clause are not identical: the subject position of the subordinate predicate is occupied by *John*, which is in the object position in the active counterpart (10a), while the subject of the main clause is occupied by a 3<sup>rd</sup> pl. ‘they’. On the other hand, in (11b), which is a *-ʔat* counterpart of an ungrammatical active clause like ‘They<sub>i</sub> tried for John to kiss them<sub>i</sub>’, the presence of *-ʔat* makes this sentence grammatical since the Patient object is promoted to the subject of ‘kiss’, in which case the subject is identical with the subject of the main predicate ‘try’.

## 2.4. The Agent in a *-ʔat* Clause

In this section I provide evidence that the Agent NP is an adjunct, not a subject.

### 2.4.1. Possessive Structure

In Nuu-chah-nulth, possession is expressed by attaching a possessive suffix to a possessed nominal root, the antecedent NP of the possessive pronominal expression necessarily occupying the subject position. The position of the antecedent, therefore, determines the grammaticality of sentences, which eventually gives evidence that the Agent NP is not a subject in a *-ʔat* construction. This is illustrated in (12), an active clause, and in (13), a *-ʔat* clause. First, (12a-b) exhibit a subject-object asymmetry in terms of coreference between an antecedent and a possessive pronominal suffix. In (12a), the NP *John* is a subject and the NP *?uušhýumsuk?i* ‘his friend’ is an object, where the possessive and *John* refer to the same entity. In (12b), the NP *?uušhýumsuk?i* ‘his friend’ is a subject and the NP *John* is an object, where again the possessive and *John* refer to the same entity as indicated by the coindexation. Here, note that the same sentence can also mean ‘He<sub>i</sub> saw John<sub>j</sub>’s friend’, which is grammatical if *He* refers to another person, not *John*. On the other hand, in (13a), which is a *-ʔat* counterpart of (12a), the antecedent *John* follows the NP *?uušhýumsuk?i* ‘his friend’, which is in the subject position. This leads to an ungrammatical sentence. In (13b), which is a *-ʔat* counterpart of (12b), the antecedent *John*, in the subject position, precedes the NP *?uušhýumsuk?i* ‘his friend’, and unlike the latter, this sentence is grammatical.

(12) Active clause

- a. naatsiičiʔitʔiš      **John** ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi.  
 naatsiičiʔ-mit-ʔiš    John ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi  
 see-PAST-3sg/IND John<sub>i</sub> friend-3sg/POSS<sub>i</sub>  
 ‘John<sub>i</sub> saw his<sub>i</sub> friend.’
- b. naatsiičiʔitʔiš      ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi    **John.**  
 naatsiičiʔ-mit-ʔiš    ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi    John  
 see-PAST-3sg/IND friend-3sg/POSS<sub>i</sub> John<sub>i</sub>  
 \*‘His<sub>i</sub> friend saw John<sub>i</sub>.’

(13) *-ʔat* clause

- a. naatsiičiʔanitʔiš      ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi (ʔuhʔat)    **John.**  
 naatsiičiʔ-ʔat-mit-ʔiš    ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi ʔuhʔat    John  
 see-ʔat-PAST-3sg/IND friend-3sg/POSS<sub>i</sub> by      John<sub>i</sub>  
 \*‘His<sub>i</sub> friend was seen by John<sub>i</sub>/John saw his friend.’
- b. naatsiičiʔanitʔiš      **John** (ʔuhʔat) ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi.  
 naatsiičiʔ-ʔat-mit-ʔiš    John ʔuhʔat ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi  
 see-ʔat-PAST-3sg/IND John<sub>i</sub> by      friend-3sg/POSS<sub>i</sub>  
 ‘John<sub>i</sub> was seen by his<sub>i</sub> friend./His friend saw John’

2.4.2. Scrambling

In *Nuu-chah-nulth*, an argument can be extracted from its original position, but an oblique PP cannot. In (14b), the object *ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi* ‘his friend’ is extracted from its original position, the position following the subject. However, this sentence is still grammatical. On the other hand, in a *-ʔat* construction, an oblique PP (*ʔuhʔat*) *ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi* cannot move to the front of the subject, as seen in (15b) and (16b) (also see Rose 1981).

(14) Active clause

- a. naatsiičiʔitʔiš      John    **ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi.**  
 naatsiičiʔ-mit-ʔiš    John ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi  
 see-PAST-3sg/IND John friend-3sg/POSS  
 ‘John saw his friend.’
- b. naatsiičiʔitʔiš      **ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi** John.  
 naatsiičiʔ-mit-ʔiš    ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi John  
 see-PAST-3sg/IND friend-3sg/POSS John  
 ‘John saw his friend.’

(15) *-ʔat* clause

- a. naatsiičiʔanitʔiš      John    **ʔuhʔat**    **ʔuušh̥yumsukʔi.**  
 naatsiičiʔ-ʔat-mit-ʔiš    John ʔuhʔat ʔuušh̥yums-ukʔi  
 see-ʔat-PAST-3sg/IND John by      friend-3sg/POSS  
 ‘John was seen (by) his friend/His friend saw John.’

- b. \*naatsiiči?anit?iš      **?uh?at** **?uušḥyumsuk?i** John.  
 naatsiičiχ-**?at**-mit-?iš    ?uh?at    ?uušḥyums-uk?i    John  
 see-?at-PAST-3sg      by      friend-3sg/POSS    John  
 ‘John was seen (by) his friend.’

- (16) a. naatsiiči?anit?iš      John    **?uušḥyumsuk?i**.  
 naatsii-**?at**-mit-?iš      John    ?uušḥyums-uk?i  
 see-?at-PAST-3sg/IND    John    friend-3sg/POSS  
 ‘John was seen (by) his friend/His friend saw John.’
- b. \*naatsiiči?anit?iš      **?uušḥyumsuk?i** John.  
 naatsiičiχ-**?at**-mit-?iš    ?uušḥyums-uk?i    John  
 see-PAST-3sg/IND      friend-3sg/POSS    John  
 ‘John was seen (by) his friend./His friend saw John’

These examples show that the PP oblique is not an argument, since it exhibits differences from an argument with respect to scrambling. This is consistent with the claim that the Agent of a *-?at* construction occupies an adjoined position.

### 2.4.3. Optional Oblique PP

Another property of an adjunct is optionality and an oblique PP in Nuu-chah-nulth exhibits this property as well: it can be omitted. (17b) shows that despite the lack of an Agent NP, the sentence is available, giving evidence that the oblique is an adjunct and thus the Agent is suppressed to an adjunct in a *-?at* clause.

- (17) *-?at* clause
- a. yaa?akap̣at?iš      John    **?uh?at**    **Mary**.  
 yaa?akap̣-**?at**-?iš    John    ?uh?at    Mary  
 love-?at-3sg/IND    John    by      Mary  
 ‘John is loved by Mary/Mary loves John.’
- b. yaa?akap̣at?iš      John.  
 yaa?akap̣-**?at**-?iš    John  
 love-?at-3sg/IND    John  
 ‘John is loved/(someone) loves John.’

In sum, the syntactic tests of active/*-?at* pairs show that (i) the Agent of an active clause is suppressed to an oblique PP or omitted in a *-?at* clause and (ii) the Patient of an active clause is promoted to the subject in a *-?at* clause. However, we have observed that these syntactic phenomena are not observable in every combination of persons. The distribution of *-?at* is sensitive to person features. The next section considers in more detail the person restrictions that are associated with *-?at*.

## 3. The Person Hierarchy

In Nuu-chah-nulth the most salient discourse referent, i.e., the topic, must occupy

the subject position in surface structure.<sup>6</sup> In a discourse context, speech act participants (SAP), which are 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person, are more topical than 3<sup>rd</sup> person. This is a universal phenomenon, which determines the person hierarchy. Therefore, unless the Agent is less topical than the Patient, only an active construction is available as in (18). On the other hand, if the Patient is more topical than the Agent, a *-ʔat* construction is enforced, allowing the more topical Patient to occupy the subject position as in (19). In addition, both an active and a *-ʔat* construction are available in a discourse-neutral context when the participants are all 3<sup>rd</sup> person as in (20).

- (18) a. \*yaaʔakapʔatʔiš Mary ʔuhʔat siya.  
yaaʔakap-ʔat-ʔiš Mary ʔuhʔat siya  
love-ʔat-3sg/IND Mary by me  
‘Mary is loved by me/I love Mary.’
- b. yaaʔakuksiš Mary.  
yaaʔakuk-siš Mary  
love-1sg/IND Mary  
‘I love Mary.’
- (19) a. yaaʔakapʔatsiš ʔuhʔat Mary.  
yaaʔakap-ʔat-siš ʔuhʔat Mary  
love-ʔat-1sg/IND by Mary  
‘I am loved by Mary/Mary loves me.’
- b. \*yaaʔakapʔiš Mary siya.  
yaaʔakap-ʔiš Mary siya  
love-3sg/IND Mary me  
‘Mary loves me.’
- (20) a. yaaʔakapʔatʔiš John ʔuhʔat Mary.  
yaaʔakap-ʔat-ʔiš John ʔuhʔat Mary  
love-ʔat-3sg/IND John by Mary  
‘John is loved by Mary/Mary loves John.’
- b. yaaʔakapʔiš Mary John.  
yaaʔakap-ʔiš Mary John  
love-3sg/IND Mary John  
‘Mary loves John.’

We can also see that, in a discourse context, if the participants are all 3<sup>rd</sup> person, an active or *-ʔat* construction is alternatively used, depending upon whether the topic plays a role of Agent or Patient. Consider the following text, which is excerpted from Sapir and Swadesh (1939), which deals with the Tseshaht dialect.

- (21) *q<sup>w</sup>iʔihtaqaikič tanakmis* ‘What Mosquitoes are made of’
- a. ... ʔiqhok wawaʔatʔitq... (Sapir and Swadesh 1939:15)  
Lit: what he (the chief) had been told ‘what (his child) had said to him’
- b. ...q<sup>w</sup>iqhʔatoʔsi qaħk<sup>w</sup>aʔapʔat... (Sapir and Swadesh 1939:15)  
‘what it was that brought it about that people (neighbours) were killed off’
- c. ...ħawičiʔaħ ھاwītaħʔisʔi... (Sapir and Swadesh 1939:16)  
‘the little young man approach now’
- d. ...witwakʔi poñiqsaʔaħ čačaxpałšiʔat... (Sapir and Swadesh 1939:16)  
Lit: .. and the little young man was speared at by all shooting at one mark.  
‘the warriors ran down to the beach and speared at him, all at once’

<sup>6</sup> According to the definition of “topic” by the Prague school, a topic is a contextually bound element having to do with information known from the context, from the situation, or from general conditions of the given utterance. Also, the topical element must be definite.

This is one of the 44 folk tales published in *Nootka Texts*. In the story, whenever a 3<sup>rd</sup> person topic plays a thematic role of Patient, a *-ʔat* construction is used. At first, in (21a), the topic of the story is the chief, whose daughter's son is killing neighbours. In (21b), the topic is changed to neighbours, who are being killed by the chief's grandson. In (21c-d), the topic is the young man, who is killing neighbours: in (21c), he is the Agent and thus an active construction is used, while in (21d), he is the Patient, who is caught and speared by the warriors.

As seen above, discourse sensitivity applies to a sentence which has 3<sup>rd</sup> person participants only. Also, consider the following examples: a *-ʔat* construction is preferred if one of the participants is more topical than the other, as in (22), or obligatory, as in (23).

- (22) a. ʔaçaqḥaç      kaapap Mary.  
          ʔaçaq-ḥaç      kaapap Mary  
          who-3sg/INT love      Mary  
          ‘Who loves Mary/Who is it (that) loves Mary?’
- b. ʔaçaṣathaç      kaapaṣat Mary.  
          ʔaçaq-ʔat-ḥaç      kaapap-ʔat Mary  
          who-ʔat-3sg/INT love-ʔat      Mary  
          ‘By whom is Mary loved/Who is it (that) Mary is loved by?’
- (23) a. \*ʔuḥmitʔiš                      ḥaa      yaqmitii                      kʷikʷixašiḷ      Mary.  
          ʔuḥ-mit-ʔiš                      ḥaa      yaq-mit-ii                      kʷikʷix-as-šiḷ      Mary  
          3sg/pl-PAST-3sg/IND      DEIC      REL-PAST-3sg/REL      kiss-cheek-MOM      Mary  
          ‘This is (the one) who kissed Mary on the cheek.’
- b. ʔuḥʔanitʔiš                      ḥaa      yaṣanitii                      kʷikʷixašiḷ      Mary.  
          ʔuḥ-ʔat-mit-ʔiš                      ḥaa      yaq-ʔat-mit-ii                      kʷikʷix-as-šiḷ      Mary  
          3sg/pl-ʔat-PAST-3sg/IND      DEIC      REL-ʔat-PAST-3sg/REL      kiss-cheek-MOM      Mary  
          ‘This is (the one) by whom Mary was kissed on the cheek.’

A 3<sup>rd</sup> person *Mary* occupies the object position in (22a), which is an active construction, and the subject position in (22b), which is a *-ʔat* construction. The Nuuchah-nulth speakers strongly prefer the latter, however, when the discourse topic is *Mary*.

In the case of relative structures such as (23), only a *-ʔat* construction is possible. This is due to a clash between topic and focus. According to Bresnan and Kanerva (1989), the extracted element in a relative clause is focused, and elements cannot simultaneously be foci and topics. This means that in the subject extraction context, the canonical topic cannot be in the subject position, and thus passivization is enforced as in (23b). This leads to a sentence where a subject position is occupied by a promoted Patient, which provides another piece of evidence that the Patient is promoted to a subject position in a *-ʔat* construction. As a result, an extraction process occurs from an adjunct position, which is an oblique. This raises a question: is it generally possible to extract obliques in Nu-

chah-nulth? As we discussed above, we cannot extract an oblique from its original position in a simple sentence. Therefore, it seems that the availability of the extraction of an oblique is structure-dependent. This requires further research.

Section 2 provides much syntactic evidence that a Patient NP is promoted to a subject position and an Agent NP is suppressed to an adjunct position in a *-ʔat* construction. These two syntactic processes are typical of the passive. An apparently unique property of the Nuu-chah-nulth passive is that it is sensitive to the person hierarchy, unlike Indo-European languages (like English, German, etc.). Some previous studies, however, show that the person/animacy hierarchy is involved in the formation of passive as well (cf. Jelinek and Demers (1983) for Lummi, Forrest (1994) for Bella Coola, and Jelinek (1990) for Southern Tiwa, among others). These findings dismiss the argument that the person hierarchy is the only criterion to determine whether a construction is active or inverse.

In sum, a topic, which is higher in the person hierarchy, must occupy a subject position in Nuu-chah-nulth, and if this convention is disrupted, then a *-ʔat* construction, i.e., passivization, is enforced. On the other hand, if both the Agent and the Patient are in the same hierarchy, i.e., 3<sup>rd</sup> person, then topicality determines the proper construction: if the topic is Patient, then a *-ʔat* structure; if Agent, then an active structure.

#### **4. Conclusion**

I have investigated the morphological (and syntactic) status of *-ʔat*. The distribution of *-ʔat* turns out to be determined by person features associated with arguments of a verb. In addition, when a less topical element is an Agent, *-ʔat* appears on the predicate, and when a more topical element is an Agent, an active construction is used. I have provided evidence for both the morphological and syntactic properties of *-ʔat*. The person hierarchy explains the distribution of *-ʔat* and the grammaticality of a sentence, which is basically associated with changes of a grammatical relation of an argument. To conclude, the *-ʔat* construction is a passive sensitive to the person hierarchy.

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