Pronouns and Possessives in Kwak̓wala

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The goal of this project is to document and reanalyse the extensive paradigms of pronominal and possessive clitics as used by modern speakers of Kwakwala, a critically endangered Indigenous language spoken in British Columbia. These patterns have been previously documented especially in the work of Boas (1947), who worked with fluent speakers in the late 19th-early 20th centuries, as well as Anderson (2005), who worked with fluent speakers in the 1970s. In this presentation, we propose a revised analysis of these paradigms as based on the speech of one modern fluent speaker in comparison with previous documentation, primarily using the methods of elicitation and speaker introspection.

Word order in Kwakwala is by default VSO, and is typically classified as a polysynthetic language, owing to a rich system of enclitics and suffixes, including person and deictic and information, as well as three cases (nominative, accusative and instrumental). This can be seen in (1); note that the enclitics =da and =x̱a modify busi 'cat' and kwa̱nikw 'bread', respectively.

(1) ha̱mapida   busix̱a   kwa̱nikw
    ha̱m-ap=i=da   busi=x̱a   kwa̱nikw
    eat-ap[DP=INVISIBLE=DET   cat][DP=ACC   bread]
    'The cat (not visible) is eating the bread (not visible).'

We focus on the analysis of possessive paradigms in Kwakwala, which show distinctions in terms of person and deixis (proximity/visibility to the speaker) (Boas 1947:254V(a-b)). In addition, a lesser-discussed syntactic aspect of possessives can be seen in (2). In (2), 2nd-person possession of the subject is marked by both a *prenominal enclitic* (=is) and a *postnominal enclitic* (=us), rather than just a prenominal enclitic as is typical in other constructions.

(2) ha̱mapis   x̱wa̱nukwusx̱a   kwa̱nikw
    ha̱m-ap=is   x̱wa̱nukw=us=χa   kwa̱nikw
    eat-ap[DP=2POSS. INVISIBLE   child=2POSS][DP=ACC.INV   bread]
    'Your (sg.) child (not visible) is eating the bread (not visible).'

The current project has found that while many of the possessive clitics identified by Boas (1947) and discussed in Anderson (2005) are also present in the modern language, there are also lexical as well as morphosyntactic differences. For example, while the 1st and 2nd person prenominal enclitics are similar to those reported in earlier documentation, the postnominal enclitics for the 1st person possessives do not appear to be used, and those for 2nd person take different forms.

We propose a reanalysis of the pronominal and possessive system proposed by Boas (1947) and Anderson (2005) which may better represent the grammar of modern speakers. For example, Boas (1947) documented distinct forms for 3rd person possessives depending on whether the possessed form is near the speaker (*near 1st*), the addressee (*near 2nd*), or neither (*near 3rd*). We argue that this distinction for possessives in terms of proximity to the speaker is better analyzed as part of the general morphological encoding of deixis in the language, which independently includes deictic information, including proximity as well as visibility. In addition, we argue that prenominal enclitics for 1st and certain 3rd person possessives can be reanalyzed as pronouns, while the postnominal clitics contain information about possession. With respect to the postnominal enclitics, we also observed patterns where it is possible to omit the postnominal enclitic in certain contexts, such as in object position, as well as variable use of the plural enclitic =xdaxw in 2nd and 3rd person plural possessive forms, which was not discussed in previous documentation. We propose that this reanalysis provides a unified account of pronouns and possessives within the language, and also provides a cleaner analysis of the complex paradigms documented by Boas.

References:

Anderson, Stephen R. 2005. *Aspects of the Theory of Clitics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boas, Franz, ed. by Helene Boas Yampolsky and Zellig S. Harris. 1947. Kwakiutl grammar with a glossary of the suffixes. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series* 37:203-377.