The grammatical coding of the inverse category in Sahaptin

Category: either oral or poster

Sahaptin, a Plateau Penutian language of Washington and Oregon States, has a
typologically unusual inverse system. This paper examines the form and function of the Sahaptin
inverse using data from Klickitat, Umatilla and Yakima dialects, and demonstrates that in
Sahaptin, the full hierarchy of 1>2>3Prox>3Obv is present. However, different grammatical
systems interact to code inverse clauses. An overlapping combination of speech act participant
(SAP) clitics, verb prefixes and case marking is used depending on whether the scenario is local
(as in examples 1-2), mixed (examples 3-4) or non-local (examples 5-6). In direct configurations
1A2O the complex second position pronominal enclitics =mash and =matash are used (example
1). There is no additional verbal morphology indicating person. In an inverse 2A1O clause
(example 2), the pronominal enclitic references second person only. In mixed scenarios
(examples 3-4) pronominal enclitics, underspecified for case, reference the SAP. Verb prefixes
indicate hierarchy as well. In local and non-local inverse scenarios, the stressed inverse prefix
pá- codes inverse (examples 2 and 6). In mixed scenarios, the verb takes the nominative prefix i-
rather than accusative prefix á- (examples 3-4). The final grammatical strategy indicating inverse
is case marking. There are two separate case markers used to indicate a third person agent: the
case marker -nim is used when the object is a SAP (example 4); the case marker –in is used in
3A3O scenarios (example 6).

The paper also focuses on the function of the Sahaptin inverse voice in 3>3 scenarios. Hypotheses presented by Rude 1994 (Klickitat Sahaptin), Blackburn Morrow 2006 (Umatilla
Sahaptin) and the author’s research (Yakima Sahaptin) suggest that the inverse voice is a patient
topicalizing construction, also affected by animacy and global frequency. Blackburn Morrow
notes that factors such as episode theme, episode boundaries, and the backgrounding of A may
also be important factors (2006). The discourse conditioning that affects the inverse voice when
3 acts on 3 represents an opportunity to test Givón’s (1994) hypothesis, that hierarchical effects
in inverse alignment are the reification of topicality.

Sahaptin constitutes an interesting study in the structural expression of functional
categories, with the familiar category of inverse expressed through a unique set of distinct but
overlapping structures. The system has similarities to more typical systems of inverse marking,
split ergativity, and hierarchical agreement, but is organized in a way that has relevance for
typological studies of inverse voice. And, since Sahaptin grammar does not obligatorily make a
third person participant that is more highly ranked under Givón’s (1994) system into 3Prox, it
provides a useful laboratory to examine whether the counter-hierarchical residue is “not yet
reanalyzed”, or perhaps a leading wedge in the loss of a formerly obligatory system.
Local:
1. (direct 1A2O)
Kúmatash  tɬ’áaxw  ítɬ’yawita
ku=matash  tɬ’aaxw  ítɬ’yawi-ta
and-1>2PL  all  kill-FUT
‘I will kill all of you’

2. (inverse 2A1O)
páyshnam  chaw  pá’inta
páysh=nam  chaw  pá-in-ta
maybe=2SG  NEG  2>1INV-tell-FUT
‘if you don’t tell me.’ (ḵ’áxnu.056.057_VBYS)

Mixed:
3. (direct 1A3O)
Cháwnash  ánach’ax̱i  áwitɬ’yawita  ḵ’áxnumaman.
chaw=nash  ánach’ax̱i  á-ítɬ’yawi-ta  ḵ’áxnu-maman
NEG-1SG  again  3ABS-kill-FUT prairie.chicken-OBJ.PL
‘I’ll never again kill prairie chickens’ (ḵ’áxnu.113_VBYS)

4. (inverse 3A1O)
kush  kwnak  awkú  iwawshúwyana  tamanwitmí  naktkwanínłání
ku-sh  kwnak  awkú  i-wawshúwyán-a  tamanwit-mí  naktkwanínłá-nim
and-1SG  there  then  3SG.NOM-examine-PST  law-GEN  nurse-INV.ERG
‘and that’s where the government nurse examined me’ (tuxamshish.033_VBYS)

Non-local:
5. (direct 3A3O)
iskáwskawna  tíin-maman  k’usík’usi
i-skáwskawn-a  tíin-maman  k’usík’usi
3SG.NOM-scare-PST people-OBJ.PL  horse
‘the horse frightened the people’ (BB2.010_VBYS)

6. (inverse 3A3O)
ku  kwnak  wítx̱uptin  páwinpa  tíin-maman
ku  kwnak  wítx̱upt  -in  pá-winp-a  tíin-maman
and there  blizzard-OBV.ERG  3INV-take-PST  people-OBJ.PL
‘and there the bitter blizzard caught those people’ (tuxamshish.019_VBYS)