

Determiners, evidentiality and tense in Oowekyala texts

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Oowekyala is a virtually extinct Upper North Wakashan language once spoken in the village of Rivers Inlet (British Columbia). Its first documentation is a text corpus published in Boas (1928), whose reliability is however doubtful (see Howe 2000). The much more reliable corpus by Hilton & Rath's (1982) is a transcription of 15 traditional oral narratives, carefully transcribed, annotated and provided with interlinear translations.

Like other North Wakashan languages, Oowekyala is noteworthy for the formidable richness of grammatical distinctions displayed by its systems of deictics, definite articles and pronominal enclitics (marking possession on nouns and argument structure on verbs). Bach (2006) shows the complex internal structure of the system, paying special attention to the articles and the possessive clitics. In both domains, the existence of proximal, medial and distal forms, each additionally specified by visibility ($3 \times 2 = 6$), as well as what I termed the *absentive* category in Muro (2015), which appears to be a kind of nominal past tense category ($6 + 1 = 7$), generate an extraordinarily complex system where a possessed NP such as *his(/her/its/their) pencil* may receive no less than 49 different translations ($7 \times 7 = 49$). Here are two examples:

- (1) a. *k'adayug^wask*
k'adayu-ga-∅-sk
pencil-DEFINITE.ARTICLE(PROXIMAL)-VISIBLE-3POSSESSOR(PROXIMAL.VISIBLE)
'his/her/its/their (proximal, visible) pencil (proximal, visible)'
- b. *k'adayug^wack*
k'adayu-ga-c-sk
pencil-DEFINITE.ARTICLE(PROXIMAL)-INVISIBLE-3POSSESSOR(PROXIMAL.VISIBLE)
'his/her/its/their (proximal, visible) pencil (proximal, invisible)'

In addition, the Oowekyala verb displays a two-way (*future* vs. *non-future*) tense marking, as well as a category of *hearsay* evidentiality. Bach (2006) does note that there seems to be at best a weak analogy between the Upper North Wakashan nominal absentive and the verbal past tense of other languages.

In this paper, I would like to explore two working hypotheses on the correlations between nominal and verbal categories in Oowekyala:

- a) I will try to test the preliminary observation put forth in Bach (2006). The prediction to be verified is that the nominal *absentive* category should be incompatible with *future* tense marking.
- b) I will explore the additional hypothesis of a correlation between the nominal *visibility* category and the verbal *hearsay* evidentiality. The prediction to be verified is that nominal forms marked with *medial* and *distal* forms of the articles and *invisible* morphemes should be favored in sentences whose verbal forms contain the *hearsay* morpheme.

The study will be carried out mainly on Hilton & Rath (1982), with occasional (and cautious) references to the earlier texts collected by Boas, which are nevertheless interesting in that they may show us a slightly more archaic stage of the language. The generalizations arrived at will be compared to (partially) similar phenomena found in Korean, a language unrelated to Oowekyala but which shows similar categories of tense and evidentiality in verbs, as well as a tripartite demonstrative system.

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