

Kwak’wala “Agreement” as Partial Subject Copy*

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1. Introduction

This project investigates a frequent but incompletely understood agreement-like pattern in Kwak’wala, a Northern Wakashan language of British Columbia spoken on northern Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland, and the islands in between.¹ This pattern involves a second-position person-marking element that agrees deictically with a later subject, but several properties make it unlike “agreement” in the sense used of (for example) Indo-European languages: that of an inflectional category of a predicate marking a relationship to its subject. I argue instead that these elements are best treated as copies of the subject, albeit partial ones.

The canonical Kwak’wala sentence is verb-initial², with the subject immediately following, and any further constituents (such as objects or prepositional phrases) following the subject:

- (1) Dał-al =u \underline{x} w Jon.
 laugh-IMPF =3MED Jon
 “Jon is laughing.”

A Kwak’wala subject consists of an enclitic person-and-location deictic marker (such as the 3rd person MEDIAL³ marker =u \underline{x} w in (1)) and an optional NP (in this case, *Jon*). If the NP is missing, the =u \underline{x} w serves as a 3rd person MEDIAL pronoun.

The main predicate may be (and often is) preceded by one or more “auxiliary” (Anderson, 1984) or “co-ordinate” (Boas et al., 1947) verbs, such as *la* (“go”, also “at this time...”) or *gwəl* (“stop”). In such sentences, the subject need not occur *in situ* following the verb, but can follow an auxiliary instead.⁴

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¹This language has also been known in the linguistic literature as “Kwakiutl” (Boas, 1911; Boas et al., 1947), after one of the tribes that speaks it. Some speakers currently prefer the designation *Bakwamkala*.

²Or, more properly speaking, predicate initial; nominal and adjectival predicates are common, and WH elements are predicative (Anderson, 1984).

³Kwak’wala 3rd persons are systematically distinguished according to whether they are PROXIMAL, MEDIAL, or DISTAL. PROXIMAL 3rd persons are usually those within reach of the speaker, often in physical contact with them; MEDIAL 3rd persons are usually nearby, and almost always in sensory range, and DISTAL 3rd persons are far away or absent, exist only in the past or future, or are entirely abstract entities (such as names or reasons).

⁴In sentences with more than one auxiliary, it is ordinary the first that hosts the subject. Subjects following a subsequent auxiliary are rarely produced, although my consultants have always accepted constructed examples as grammatical. The only condition I have found in which a second auxiliary tends to host the subject are those in which

- (2) \underline{G} wał = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ **Jon** dał- \underline{a} la.
 stop =3MED Jon laugh-IMPF
 “Jon stopped laughing.”
- (3) $\underline{L}\underline{a}$ =’m = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ **Jon** \underline{g} wał dał- \underline{a} la.
 at.this.time=FOC =3MED Jon stop laugh-IMPF
 “Then Jon stopped laughing.”

The “agreement” phenomenon occurs in auxiliary sentences when the subject *does not* appear after the first auxiliary. In such sentences, this position can be filled instead by just the D head of the subject DP (in these examples, the = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$).⁵

- (4) $\underline{L}\underline{a}$ =’m = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ \underline{g} wał dał- \underline{a} l = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ **Jon**.
 at.this.time=FOC =3MED stop laugh-IMPF =3MED Jon
- (5) $\underline{L}\underline{a}$ =’m = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ \underline{g} wał = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ **Jon** dał- \underline{a} la.
 at.this.time=FOC =3MED stop =3MED Jon laugh-IMPF

Only a single “copy” of the D occurs; two copies are judged to be strange or awkward.

- (6) ? $\underline{L}\underline{a}$ =’m = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ \underline{g} wał = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ dał- \underline{a} l = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ **Jon**.
 at.this.time=FOC =3MED stop =3MED laugh-IMPF =3MED Jon

Copies of the D to the right of the subject DP are rejected as ungrammatical:

- (7) $\underline{L}\underline{a}$ =’m = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$ **Jon** \underline{g} wał (*= $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$) dał- \underline{a} la (*= $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$).
 at.this.time=FOC =3MED Jon stop =3MED laugh-IMPF =3MED

The challenge for a theory of Kwak’wala agreement is to generate the accepted examples in (3-5) while not generating rejected ones such as (6-7).

Fig. 1: Sentence schema to be accounted for.

AUX	=DET	AUX		MAIN	=DET SUB
AUX	=DET	AUX	=DET SUB	MAIN	
AUX	=DET SUB	AUX		MAIN	

2. Other possibilities

Before I propose my account, it is worth briefly addressing several more straightforward or more obvious accounts, to show that they are not entirely successful at capturing this phenomenon.

One possibility is that this marking is “agreement” in the traditional sense, inflecting a predicate to indicate a relationship to one of its arguments. However, these enclitics only appear with certain

said auxiliary is a focus-sensitive operator such as *higa* (“only”) (cf. Beaver & Clark 2003, regarding extraction of foci out from the scope of focus-sensitive operators).

⁵I say it *can* appear here, rather than *will* appear here, since there are other circumstances that can prevent an agreement enclitic from surfacing, such as co-occurrence restrictions between certain enclitics under certain conditions. For example, the 3rd person DISTAL enclitic =*i* does not seem to appear following the focus-related enclitic =’m unless another element (such as the future =*h* or the additive focus = $\underline{x}\underline{a}$ ’) intervenes or the =*i* is part of a larger subject DP. The circumstances under which Kwak’wala’s many enclitics can and cannot co-occur are not well-understood, so I have mostly chosen examples featuring the 3rd MEDIAL = $\underline{u}\underline{x}\underline{w}$, which to my knowledge is not subject to any such restrictions.

predicates in a way that is difficult to account for if they are an obligatory inflectional category of the verb. In particular, they only occur on predicates that occur before the subject (presumably, higher predicates) – they are not marked on predicates when their subject immediately follows (**Dal-ǫl=uxw=uxw Jon*) nor is it marked on lower predicates (such as those in relative clauses or the remnants of clefts) whose subjects have “moved on” (7-10):

(8) *Ǫotł-ǫla='m=ǫn tła=xǫ bagwanǫm hǫnł-'i xǫ ǫǫla.*
 know-IMPF=FOC=1 CONN=ACC man shoot-CHANGE ACC bear
 “I know the man who shot the bear.”

(9) *He=tlǫ =i Pat la=ł la=xǫ Sweden.*
 be.3DIST=FUT =3DIST Pat go=FUT PREP=ACC Sweden
 “It’s Pat who is going to Sweden.”

In such sentences in (for example) English, we expect agreement even in the embedded clause: “the man who shoots/*shoot the bear”, “it’s Pat who is/*be going...”, etc. That Kwak’wala systematically lacks agreement enclitics on these predicates argues that this is not “agreement” in the familiar sense.

It is also possible that the agreement enclitic is a purely phonological copy of the DP’s D, appearing in second position due to enclitic effects (à la Wackernagel, 1892). However, these enclitics do not appear in *any* second position, but only those second positions in which the full subject *could* have appeared. For example, in sentences with a fully left-dislocated subject (10), the agreement enclitic does not appear at all: not after the first word (*dza’stu*), nor after the dislocated subject (*dza’stu babagwǫm*), nor after the first word of the remnant (*mixa*).

(10) *Dza’stu babagwǫm mixǫ la=xǫ tseyǫ.*
 blue boy sleep PREP=ACC chair
 “The boy in blue, he sleeps in a chair.”

This is not to argue that the appearance of the D in second position does not or could not have a phonological motivation – there are certainly examples in Kwak’wala where the placement of enclitics is phonologically motivated – but that its position here is not *solely* a second-position effect. An account that solely depended on second-position enclitic effects would, in addition, not explain the movement of the entire subject in (3) or (5).

Given that *=uxw* can itself act as a pronoun, it is also possible that these agreement enclitics are simply pronouns, coreferent with a later R-expression. Assuming that the later subject is indeed lower, this would presumably violate Condition C, but Davis & Wojdak (2004) suggest that Condition C may not be active in the related Wakashan language Nuuchahnulth, in any case. However, given the ungrammaticality of (7), this would not merely be a violation of Condition C, but an odd sort of Reverse Condition C, in which these pronouns *could not* be bound by a higher R-expression.

3. A proposal

I propose that the reason that these agreement-like enclitics appear only where the subject could have moved to because they *are* copies of the subject, albeit partial ones. This proposal involves three assumptions:

- Multiple-AUX sentences have a hierarchical, rather than flat, structure.⁶ Kwak’wala auxiliaries are verb-like clausal predicates that take embedded clausal projections (I assume TPs here⁷) as their internal arguments.
- A subject appearing after an AUX is the subject of that AUX, having raised out of the embedded TP.
- Kwak’wala subject movement can produce a full copy or just a partial copy (only the =DET head). A lower copy is deleted if an identical higher copy exists.

Fig. 2: Proposed derivations.

[AUX =DET_i [AUX =DET_i [MAIN =DET SUB_i]]]
 [AUX =DET_i [AUX =DET SUB_i [MAIN =DET SUB_i]]]
 [AUX =DET SUB_i [AUX =DET SUB_i [MAIN =DET SUB_i]]]

The difference between the surface realizations of the subjects is, then, not a case of whether the subject moves to the higher subject position, but at which stage in its movement it is only partially copied. Partially copying at the outset gives us the first pattern, fully copying at each movement gives us the third, and switching to partial copy at an intermediate stage gives patterns in which the subject occurs neither first nor *in situ*.⁸

This produces the attested range of sentence patterns, while disallowing the generation of multiple agreements (6), enclitic doubling (**Dalaluxwuxw Jon*), agreement within the subject (10), and agreement to the right of the subject (7-10).

References

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⁶This can be supported by scope interactions between auxiliaries like *ki’s* (“not”), *’wi’la* (“all”), *higa* (“only”), etc.

⁷Since each of the auxiliaries can take tense markers like the future enclitic =*tl*, this suggests that the embedded constituents are at least TPs. In addition, assuming that these are TPs and subjects are in [Spec,TP] allows us to capture a crucial generalization about the positions of subjects in these sentences: where tense marking can occur, so can the subject.

⁸Stephen R. Anderson (p.c.) notes that, given the rarity and restricted distribution of sentences in which this “intermediate” subject surfaces, this proposal could be simplified by allowing the full- or partial-copy choice only upon the first movement. This change would only allow us to generate the 1st and 3rd possibilities in Figure 2. In order to generate the intermediate-subject sentence, we would need to posit that there is a further prosodic or syntactic boundary (such as a full CP boundary) before the intermediate auxiliary.

Some support for this can be found in the position of the focus-related enclitic =*m*: although in most sentences =*m* occurs in second position, in these intermediate-subject auxiliary sentences it is usually found before the subject. This suggests that there is indeed some sort of clausal boundary before the intermediate auxiliary.