

Noun-Verb Parallelism in Tlingit: Morphosyntactic and Prosodic Consequences

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Tlingit (Na-Dene: Alaska, BC, Yukon) shows complex morphology for both verbs and nouns. Verbs in Na-Dene languages are traditionally analysed with a position-class template (Hoijer 1971). The Tlingit verb template in (1), adapted from Leer (1991), has 13 positions: the root position (“0”), along with seven pre-root (prefixal and proclitic) and five post-root (suffixal and enclitic) positions. Just as verb complexes can be described via a template, so too can noun complexes. The Tlingit noun template in (2), adapted from Naish (1966), has 9 positions: the root position (“0”), along with three pre-root and five post-root positions. In this paper, we explore the observation that Tlingit verb and noun templates are organized in similar ways; the functional equivalence between the root position (0), the rightward position classes (−1, −2, −3), and the leftward position classes (+1, +2, +3) are suggestive. Focusing on these functional parallels highlights a set of morphemes –a, b, c in (2) – that are only found in verbs.

(1) TLINGIT VERB TEMPLATE

[ADV/PP] + [QFR + D_{pro} + MOD + ASP + SUBJECT + CLASSIFIER + [root + VAR] + PL + C] + [AUX + PP]
 +4 +3 +2 +1 a b c 0 −1 −2 −3 −4 −5

(2) TLINGIT NOUN TEMPLATE

[QFR/DET + D_{pro} + MOD + [root + VAR] + DIM/PL + POSSESSIVE] + [ADJ + PP]
 +3 +2 +1 0 −1 −2 −3 −4 −5

We argue that Tlingit shows extensive and systematic parallelism between the morphophonologies of the verb complex and the noun complex. This observation is obscured in templatic accounts which cannot provide a principled explanation for the presence of prosodic domains, nor a unified account for the coincidence of morphosyntactic and phonological domain boundaries in V and N domains. We argue that V/N parallelism reflects a regular mapping between syntactic structure and prosodic domains; we call this the *parallelism hypothesis*. On this view, the surface realization of complex words in Tlingit can be accounted for under two (arguably conceptually necessary) assumptions that: (i) morphology and syntax derive from the same generative component; (ii) phonological domains derive via the mapping from syntactic to prosodic structure. In this model there is no template because it is replaced by regular phono-syntactic mappings, as in the parse tree that represents a hierarchical organization of morphosyntactic elements within the verb and noun complexes (Fig. 1). We propose that this representation corresponds to prosodic constituent structure, which is responsible for domain-sensitive phonological patterns. We show that each of the labelled domains— namely α , β , γ , δ , and ζ — are prosodic constituents that mirror syntactic structure.

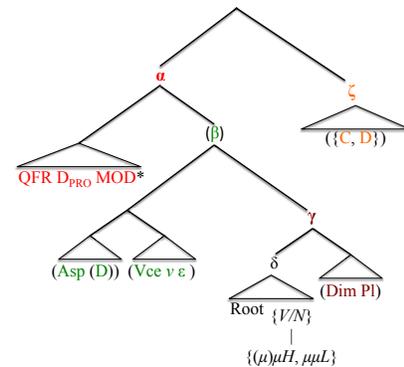


Figure 1 Morphosyntactic-prosodic Parse Tree

Our analysis is conceptually advantageous because it proposes that nouns and verbs in Tlingit derive from the same basic system of morphosyntactic constituent structure, and that the phonological and prosodic constraints are often parallel between the two domains, as evidenced by constraints on the realization of tonal and vowel length contrasts, as well as prosodic size constraints. This account derives naturally from an account which assumes a mapping relationship between syntactic and prosodic constituent structure which preserves this constituent structure (e.g. Match Theory, Selkirk 2011). This not only helps to explain the complex morphological system of Tlingit, but also finds parallels in other Dene languages, and allows for an analysis of Tlingit morphological structure which fits into a larger theory of syntax-prosody mapping.

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