Post-syntactic person restrictions: Agreement and V1 across Tsimshianic

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The Tsimshianic languages of northern British Columbia share a number of syntactic properties, including verb-initial order and a complex ergative agreement pattern. In this paper, I illustrate two empirical areas where languages within this small family exhibit a sensitivity to the person features of clausal arguments: in VSO/VOS word order alternations, and in agreement. I demonstrate that across the family these alternations occur independently, and argue that this motivates an account in which they are derived in different ways. I present a unified analysis of the Tsimshianic languages working from the same basic clause structure, where special word order and agreement patterns arise due to a difference in whether the person licensing requirement is syntactic or morphological.

DATA: Both the Interior and Coastal branches of the Tsimshianic family exhibit a base VSO word order, e.g. (1). However, independent-order clauses where a third person subject acts on a first or second person direct object – an 'inverse' configuration – instead show VOS word order, e.g. (2). The following examples are from Nisg̱a'a (Interior) (Jelinek 1986: 9).

(1) Hlimoom-i[-t]=s Ann 'nit.
     help-TR[-3.II]=DET Ann 3.III
     'Ann helped her.' *(VSO)*

(2) Hlimoom-i-t 'nii'y =t Ann.
     help-TR-3.II 1SG =DET Ann
     'Ann helped me.' *(VOS)*

Although the order of subject and object here reverses when the object is local, ergative agreement in the form of a verbal suffix remains consistent. However, in the Coastal branch of the family, the same shift to VOS word order is accompanied by a change in the pattern of agreement.

In fact, the Coastal languages boast three different possible agreement patterns based on the absolute and relative person values of arguments in the clause. When the object is third person (here *pro*), suffixal ergative agreement is used as in (3), cognate with the Interior pattern above. When both arguments are participants, both pre- and post-verbal agreement markers are used, one indexing each argument, as in (4). Finally, if only the object is a participant, the preverbal marker is exceptionally used for the ergative, and the object is realized as a verb-adjacent pronoun, as in (5).

(3) Na anoog-a-**m**.
     PST like-TR-1PL.II
     'We used to like him.'

(4) **Ma** anoog-**u**
     2.I like-1SG.II
     'You like me.'

(5) **T** ap'aga='nu
     3.I remember=1SG
     'He remembered me.'
     (Sasama 2001; Dunn 1979)

In summary, inverse '3-on-participant' contexts in the Interior involve VOS order and postverbal agreement, while on the Coast they involve VOS order and preverbal agreement (compare agreement in (2) and (5)). While local person objects trigger VSO-VOS alternations in both the Interior and Coastal Tsimshianic languages, in the Coastal languages they additionally trigger changes in agreement. This data motivates an analysis of person-sensitive alternations where *word order* and *agreement* are treated independently; shift in linear order does not uniformly trigger shift in agreement, and vice versa.

PROPOSAL: I propose that both the word order and agreement alternations in Tsimshianic result from repair operations to address a *licensing failure* in independent-order clauses. Crucially, the two distinct types of alternation arise due to differences in the grammatical locus of the person-licensing

requirement, which I propose may be based either in syntax or morphology; each motivates a different type of repair. The classic Person Licensing Condition is *syntactic* (Béjar and Rezac 2003); I propose that it may also be *morphological*, and is so in the Interior languages.

(6)   *Two Person Licensing Conditions:*
    a.   **S-PLC:** a [PART] feature must enter into an Agree relation with a functional head.
    b.   **M-PLC:** a [PART] feature must be realized through overt agreement, or else surface in a prominent prosodic position.

I begin with an analysis of the inverse VOS construction in Interior Tsimshianic, demonstrating that VOS order with local person objects can be empirically differentiated from the VOS order of object incorporation constructions with respect to the position of the agreement marker. I propose that object incorporation VOS is amenable to a pseudoincorporation analysis where O remains in situ in a *v*P-raising structure which more generally derives verb initial order (Massam 2001), while local-object VOS is the result of later reordering due to the requirements of the M-PLC. I propose that S and O are multiple equidistant specifiers of Voice, O having risen out of *v*P, and are thus amenable to reordering at the point of linearization with little syntactic consequence. Notably, VOS order is not the result of person-based object shift.

I account for agreement alternations in the Coast languages in terms of a failure for absolutive arguments to receive licensing, required this time by the S-PLC. Independent-order clauses, where person-sensitive agreement arises, typically have only ergative agreement; this leaves absolutive arguments unlicensed. When an absolutive argument is local, this triggers the insertion of secondary, preverbal agreement normally restricted to the dependent order (e.g. Kalin 2018), which opens the door to further hierarchy effects (cf. (4) versus (5)). The Interior languages, which have no syntactic licensing requirement, allow unlicensed absolutives without issue.

Crucially, both versions of the PLC are satisfied by agreement. I suggest that patterns where all arguments agreed were the norm in Proto-Tsimshianic, and that different changes to agreement in each branch contributed to the evolution of two distinct person-licensing generalizations.

CONTRIBUTIONS: This comparative account of the Tsimshianic languages forwards an analysis of person-related asymmetries not only in the domain of agreement, but also word order. I argue for the importance of post-syntactic conditions and operations in person hierarchy effects, encapsulated in the proposal that the post-syntactic component may place conditions on the realization of local person features. An empirical point of particular interest is the fact that no configuration of arguments is outright banned; this suggests that restricted constructions can be rescued. The paper provides insight into various grammatical means of restricting the distribution of local persons, and into possible derivational and post-syntactic repairs able to address different problems.

Béjar, Susana, and Milan Rezac. 2003. *Person licensing and the derivation of PCC effects. In Romance linguistics: theory and acquisition, ed. Ana Teresa Perez-Leroux and Yves Roberge, 49–62. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.* **Dunn, John Asher. 1979.** *Pronominal concord in Coast Tsimshian. International Journal of American Linguistics 45:224–231.* **Jelinek, Eloise. 1986.** *The ergativity hypothesis and the argument hierarchy in Nisgha. In Papers for the 21st International Conference on Salish and Neighbouring Languages. Seattle, WA.* **Kalin, Laura. 2018.** *Licensing and differential object marking: the view from Neo-Aramaic. Syntax 21:112–159.* **Massam, Diane. 2001.** *Pseudo noun incorporation in Niuean. Natural Language and Linguistic Theory 19:75–134.* **Sasama, Fumiko. 2001.** *A descriptive study of the Coast Tsimshian morphology. Doctoral Dissertation, Kyoto University.*