

Blurring boundaries: Phrase-level inflection and word-level syntax in the Pacific Northwest

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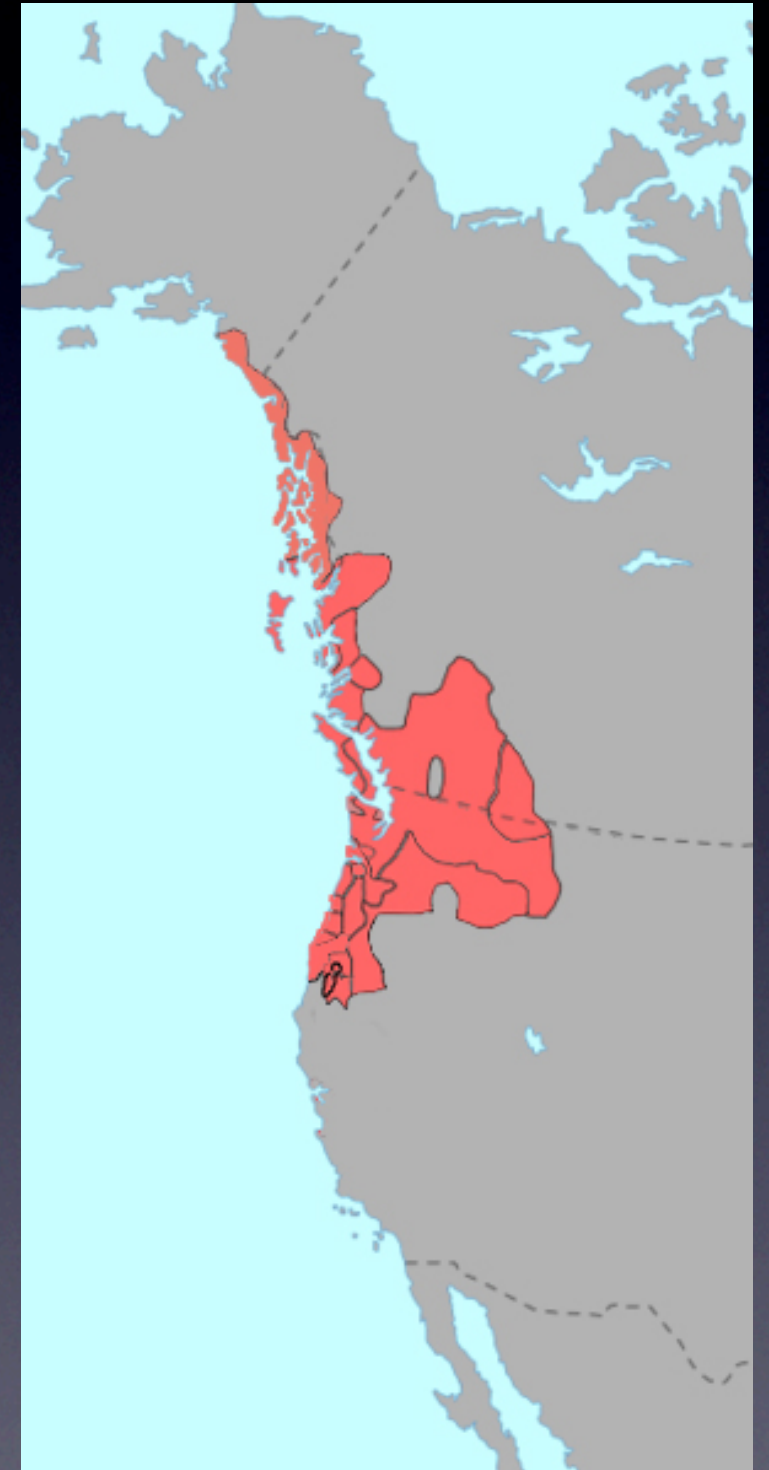
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Pacific Northwest *Sprachbund*

- one of the world's most extensive language areas (Thompson & Kinkade 1990)
- extends from Alaska panhandle to Northern California
- inland to the Rocky Mountains
- encompasses 60 – 80 languages belonging to 8 – 16 stocks





PNW languages

● Na-Dene

- Tlingit
- Eyak
- Coast Athapaskan (5 languages)

● Haida

● [Kutenai]

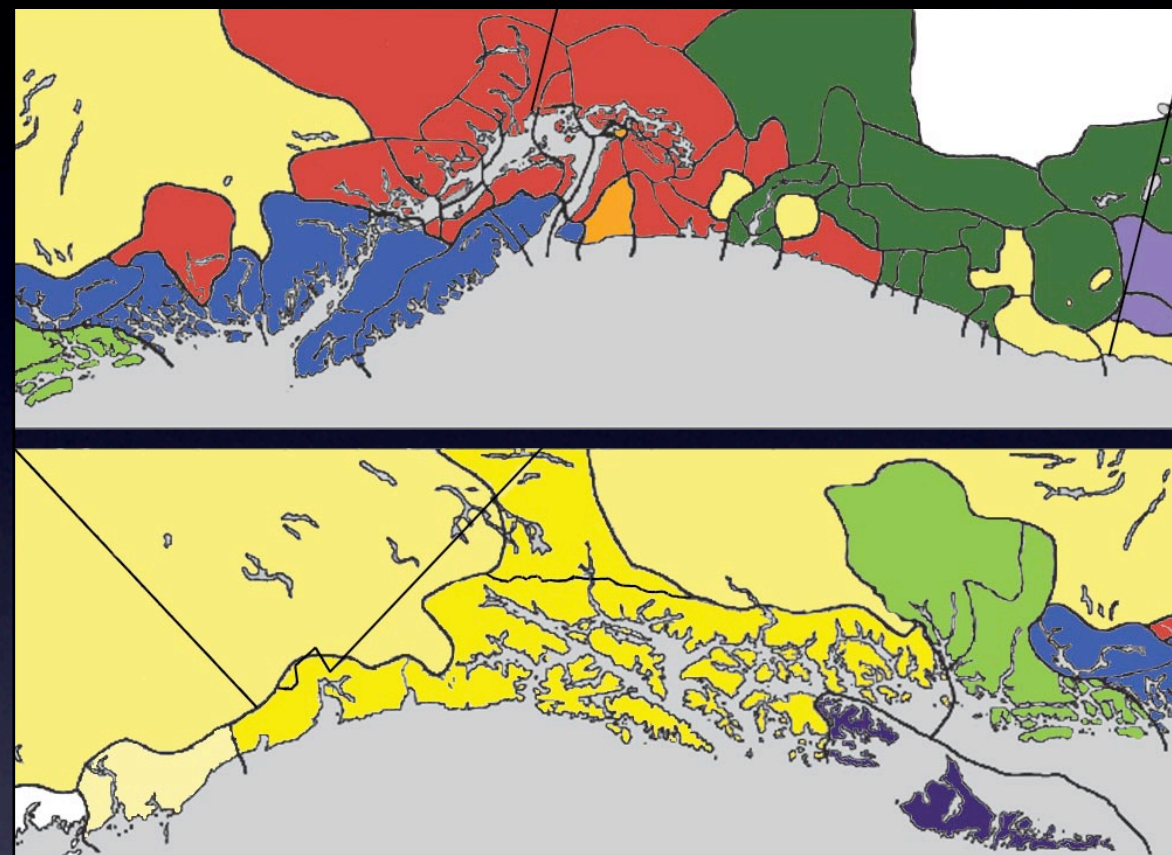
● Wakashan (7 languages)

● Salishan (23 languages)

● Chimakuan (2 languages)

● Tsimshianic (4 languages)

● Hokan (2 languages)



● Penutian (?)

- Chinookan (3 languages)
- Alsean (2 languages)
- Siuslaw
- Coosan (2 languages)
- Takelman (4 languages)
- Plateau Penutian (5 languages)



Shared features: Phonology

- the area is most cohesive and most distinctive on the world scale in terms of its phonology
- large consonant inventories with rare sounds
 - uvular consonants, labialized obstruents
 - ejective consonants and glottalized resonants
 - laterals (/ɸ/ and /ɰ'/)
 - complex syllable structures, 4+ C-clusters
- good summary and context in Dryer (2007)



Shared features: Morphology

- the area is less cohesive in these terms, tends to break up into over-lapping sub-areas
- variation within and between phyla/groups
- shared features (Thompson & Kinkade 1990) include

extensive suffixation
near-absence of prefixes
aspectual system—pfv vs. impfv
tense as an optional category
optional distributive plural
absent-present, invisible-visible deixis
numeral classifiers
... etc.

- these features seem not to link PNW languages to neighbouring area
- how this stacks up on the world stage is still unclear



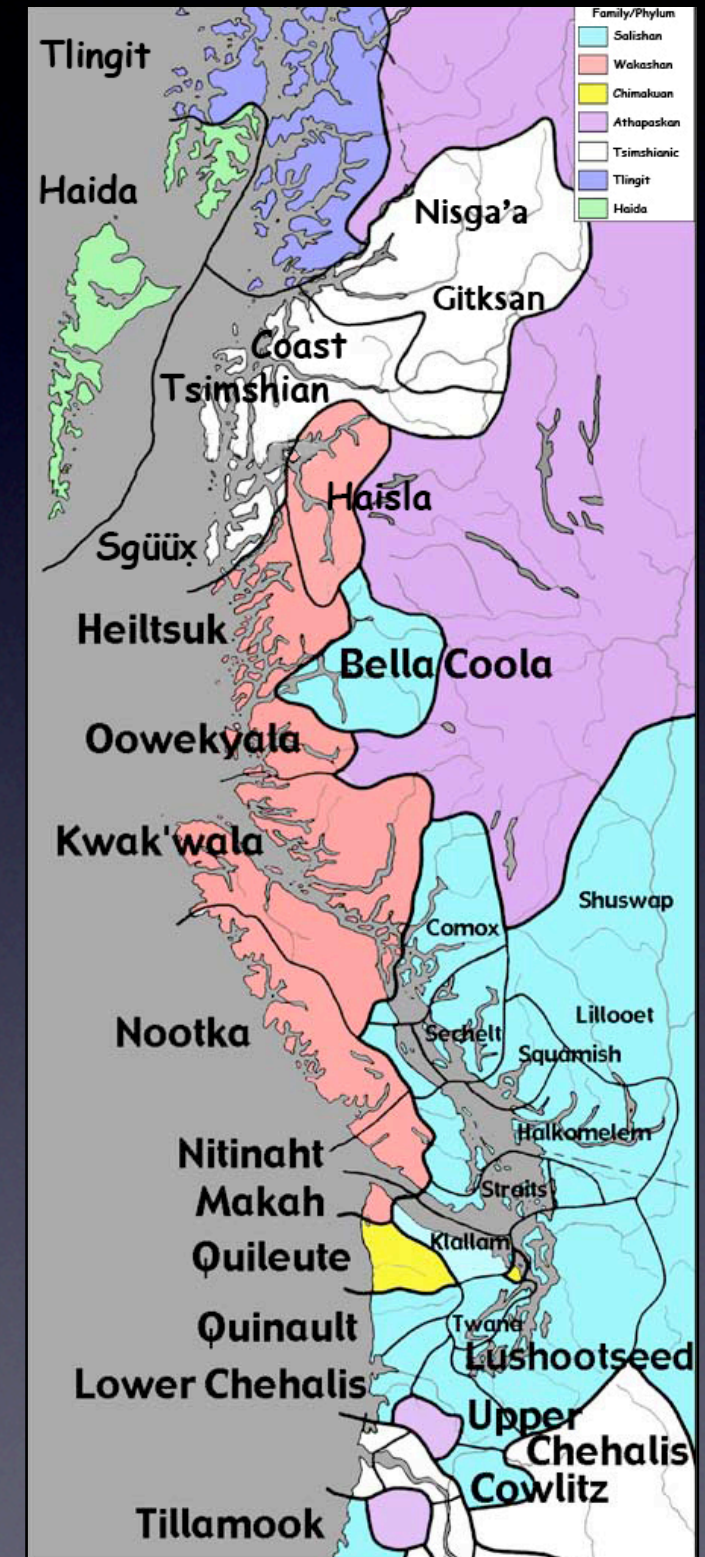
Shared features: Syntax

- even stronger tendency to subdivide languages into sub-areas (Northern Northwest, Northern California, Plateau, Central Northwest)
- constituent order
 - SOV — Northern Northwest (Eyak, Haida, Tlingit) and Southern Oregon/Northern California (Oregon Athapaskan, Takelman southwards)
 - VSO — Central Northwest (Wakashan, Coastal Salishan, Chimakuan, Tsimshianic), Oregon (Chinookan, Siuslaw, Hanis), Plateau (Interior Salishan, Kutenai, Sahaptian[?])



Central Northwest language area

- language area covering the coast between the Nass and Columbia Rivers
- centred on Wakashan, coastal Salishan, and Chimakuan
- features extend into Interior Salishan and Tsimshianic
- to a lesser extent, Kutenai and Sahaptian





CNW syntactic features

- predicate-initial, essentially VSO
- strongly to exclusively head-marking, especially with respect to argument relations
- sentence-second clitics for predicate inflections
- pre-verbal predicate modifiers (Adv or Aux)

CNW syntactic template

Adv/Aux(=Sub.clitic) V–Obj.suffix (NP_{SUB}) (NP_{OBJ})
V–Obj.suffix(=Sub.clitic) (NP_{SUB}) (NP_{OBJ})



CNW template

Halkomelem (Salishan)

ni=cən

AUX=1SG.SUB

‘I looked at you’

ləm-əθ-ámə

look-TR-2SG.OBJ

(Gerds 1998: 311)

Sm'algyax (Tsimshianic)

yæg^wæ=dp

PRES=1PL.SUB

‘we are waiting for you’

bæbu:d-n

wait-2SG.OBJ

(Mulder 1994: 79)

- languages vary for individual templatic features within and across families (Beck 2000, 2002)



S2-clitics

- migrate to follow the first word in the clause, irrespective of lexical class
- mostly enclitics on first word, some right-leaning proclitics on second word
- mark “verbal” inflectional categories
 - person and number of subject
 - sometimes objects as well (Southern Wakashan)
 - frequently also mood and modal categories
 - in some languages, tense and tense-like categories



Predicate-level inflections

Lushootseed (Salishan)

ʔ'ub=čəɸ=?u ʔ^wul' ɸu=t'uk'^w

well=1PL.SUB=INT only IRR=go.home

'should we just go home?' (Hess 1995: 90, ex. 22)

- predicate-level rather than word-level inflections
- some languages (esp. Salishan) use other types of predicate-level inflectional clitics as well

Lushootseed (Salishan)

g^wə=ck'^waqid=ələp g^wə=?u-čala-t-s

SBJ=always=2PL.SUB:SBJ

SBJ=PFV-chased-ICS-1SG.OBJ

'if you folks always chase me' (Hess 1967: 52)



Non-verbal predicates

- “V” position in the template can be filled by words of any open class

Mod (=Sub.clitic) **X** (NP_{SUB})

X(=Sub.clitic) (NP_{SUB})

- pattern strongest in Salishan and Wakashan, also found in Tsimshianic
- reported for Chimakuan by Jacobsen (1979)
- not found in Kutenai (Dryer 2007) or Sahaptian (?)
- creates clauses with nouns apparently inflected for person and tense or modal categories



Nominal predicates

Nisga'a (Tsimshianic)

nóχ-y'=t Mary

mother-1SG.PO=DET Mary

'Mary is my mother'

(Tarpent 1989: 248)

Nootka (Wakashan)

quu?as=ma mamuuk=?i

man=IND work=DET

'the one working is a man'

(Jacobsen 1979: 85)

Lushootseed (Salishan)

ɬu=stubš=čəd

IRR=man=1SG.SUB

'I will be a man'



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(Jacobsen 1979: 85)

Lushootseed (Salishan)

ɬu=hik^w=čəð stubš

IRR=big=1SG.SUB man

'I will be a big man'

(Bates et al. 1994: 109)



Non-nominal arguments

- “NP” slots in the template can be filled by elements other than nouns

Adv/Aux/Mod(=Sub.clitic) X_{PRED} (Y_{SUB}) (Y_{OBJ})
 X_{PRED} (=Sub.clitic) (Y_{SUB}) (Y_{OBJ})

- the “Y” elements in the template are non-nominal elements associated with a determiner (DPs)
- verbal elements contained in these phrases appear to be “headless” relative clauses



Headless RC arguments

Nuxalk (Salishan)

ti=?imlk=tx ti=sp'-is ci=xnas=cx

DET=man=DET [DET=hit-3SG.OBJ:3SG.SUB DET=woman=DET]

'the one the woman hit is the man' (Davis & Saunders 1978: 39)

Nisga'a (Tsimshianic)

q'almó:=ɬ kikíp-ən-y'=əst

crab [=DET (RDP)eat-CTL-1SG.SUB=AFF]

'what I'm eating is crab' (Tarpent 1989: 262)

- verbal elements in headless RCs are associated with spatial deictic and determinative categories
- spatial deictic categories are phrase-level categories



Space is Time

- in Salishan, spatial deixis is used to indicate time

St'át'imcets

šəxšəx ni kəlʔáqštən-š=a ti U.S.=a
silly DET_{absent} chief-3PO=DET DET U.S.=DET

- (a) 'the current (unseen) president of the U.S. is a fool'
(b) 'the past president of the U.S. was a fool'

(Demirdache 1996: 81)

- the absent determiner indicates either
 - (literally) the president is not visible; or,
 - he is not the current president



Information structure

- selection of syntactic predicate depends on Rhematicity rather than syntactic category

Nisga'a (Tsimshianic)

ʔakú=ϕ kikíp-ə-n=əst

what [=DET (RDP)eat-CTL-1SG.SUB=AFF]

‘what are you eating?’

q'almóɿ=ϕ kikíp-ən-y'=əst

crab [=DET (RDP)eat-CTL-1SG.SUB=AFF]

‘what I'm eating is crab’

(Tarpent 1989: 262)

- leads to high-frequency of nominal predicates
- Thematicity of subject important for referent-tracking



Theoretical challenges

- flexibility in lexical classes
 - in part illusory (more about flexible predication)
 - predicate-level vs. word-level inflection
 - not unique to the area, but most “spectacular” case
- primacy of information structure
 - delinkage of word-class, syntactic position (Beck, to appear)
 - seems to be a unique CNW feature
- spatial deixis and time
 - optionality of tense not terribly exotic
 - use of deictics to indicate time unique



Contact-induced convergences

- all of these “exotic” features seem linked to
 - dissociation of inflectional categories from lexical classes and reapplied to phrasal types
 - movement toward a templatic syntax based on “function” rather than lexical class
- contact-induced patterns?
 - constituent-order templates are strong areal features
 - templatic syntax may emerge in contact situations
- the unique Gestalt of CNW languages may be the result of the creation, not just the diffusion, of a grammatical system through contact



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