

Case and The (Re)organization of Semantic Roles in Tsimshian Connectives

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The present day Tsimshian languages lack a productive morphological case system, but vestiges of it can be observed in the behaviour of certain syncategorematic morphemes called the 'connectives'. In connective distribution, certain interactions of clause type and transitivity yield typologically unusual groupings or pivots of the semantic roles that cannot be adequately characterized as either ergative or accusative, particularly in Coast Tsimshian. This paper will explore a comparative analysis between Coast Tsimshian and Interior Tsimshian beginning with the hypothesis that CT connectives are in fact morphologically complex, the decomposition of which will uncover a relationship between segment and function that will shed light on the genetic relationship between CT and IT. It will be proposed that these CT connectives are actually the products of a systematic, localized erosion and fusion of a variety of grammatically distinct morphemes, including agreement, determiners and the remnants of a morphological case system.

1 Introduction

A fundamental feature of all the Tsimshian languages is the form, function and distribution of a class of morphemes that have been conventionally labelled as 'connectives' (Boas 1911; Dunn 1979a/b; Tarpent 1987; Mulder 1994). The basic function of the connectives is to mark nouns for their referential properties, number and definiteness, and has thus led to various proposals that treat Tsimshian connectives as determiners (Beck 2002: 49). However, in addition to encoding these semantic properties, the surface shape and distribution of a connective can be conditioned by factors including the grammatical or semantic role of the noun it precedes, animacy and clause type. While no analysis has committed to analyzing Tsimshian connectives as actual case marking, most researchers suggest that it may directly reflect or be analogous to case marking patterns, possibly receiving their case features either through diachronic fusion or some mechanism of feature percolation (Belvin 1985, 1990b:19; Mulder 1994: 130). Given these considerations, nearly all Tsimshianists have acknowledged both the determiner-like and case-like

behaviour of these morphemes and have maintained the linguistically neutral term connective.

The present day Tsimshian languages lack a productive morphological case system, but vestiges of it can be observed in the form and function of the connectives. It will be proposed that these morphemes are actually the products of a systematic, localized erosion and/or fusion of a variety of grammatically distinct morphemes, including agreement, determiners and possibly the remnants of a morphological case system. When the agreement system is coupled with this case system some interesting results emerge, such as the typologically unusual arrangement of ergative agreement with an accusative case system. Also, The Tsimshian languages present a circumstance of case syncretism, which is conditioned by syntactic environment (clause-type) resulting in the neutralization of the core syntactic relations it marks (i.e. subject vs. object). An examination of these phenomena will present a snapshot of how a language (or in this case a family of languages) is evolving and coping with a seeming disparate set of grammatical processes. Two closely related languages, Interior Tsimshian (IT) and Coast Tsimshian (CT) (and dialects)¹ will be compared and analyzed, with the hypothesis that established morphosyntactic properties of one language can provide insight into the other. In this case, ultimately aiding in reconstructing processes of agreement, determiner and case marking in proto-Tsimshian.

2 Tsimshian Connectives

Unlike the patterns of agreement, Interior Tsimshian and Coast Tsimshian connectives diverge significantly in their form and distribution: CT connectives are considerably more complex than those in IT. A review of the distributional properties of the connective system in both CT and IT will be undertaken in this section, using this as a point of departure in section 3 in reconstructing not only the remnants of a morphological case system, but also uncovering the previously assumed lack of nominative agreement in CT (both of which are present in IT). This will be done by demonstrating that CT connectives are actually morphologically complex, the segmentation of which will reveal an isomorphic relationship between CT and IT agreement patterns and determiner distribution. The outcome of this will be a glimpse at the vestiges of both a proto-Tsimshian morphological case system, a more fully-articulated determiner system and ultimately the obviation of the connective system.

IT has a simpler system of connectives than CT, shown in Table 1. Both Nisga'a and Gitksan distinguish two noun classes that correspond roughly to the traditional grammatical distinction between proper nouns and common nouns. Proper nouns are also marked for the additionally number:

¹ See Appendix.

Table 1: *Interior Tsimshian Connectives (Tarpent 1989; Hunt 1993)*

Proper Noun (PNC)		Common Noun (CNC)
SG	PL	
<i>t</i>	<i>tip</i>	<i>=t</i>

In both Nisga'a and Gitksan, common noun connectives encliticize to the preceding word, but the proper noun connectives can either encliticize, procliticize or stand alone:

- (1) IT (Nisga'a)²
- a. c'in=[t hanàq']
 come.in=[CNC woman]
 'The woman came in' (Tarpent 1982: 57)
- b. yu:χk^w [t Mary]
 eat [PNC Mary]
 'Mary ate' (Tarpent 1988: 107)
- c. ʔimó:m-ə-(t)=s=[tip Mary]=[t hanàq']
 help-ASP-3=CASE=[PNC(pl) Mary]=[CNC woman]
 'Mary and them helped the woman' (Tarpent 1989: 481)
- d. ʔimó:m-ə-(t)=[t hanàq']=[t Mary]
 help-ASP-3=[CNC woman]=[PNC Mary]
 'The woman helped Mary' (Tarpent 1989: 480)

IT connectives are not sensitive to the grammatical or semantic function of the noun they mark, and this might be what led Tarpent (1988: 2) and Beck (2002: 51) to treat all connectives in Nisga'a as determiners in function, including the morpheme =s. Tarpent specified (in her terminology) whether a noun is 'determinate' (marked with the connective =s), or 'non-determinate' (common noun), marked with the connective =t; while the proper noun connectives =t and *tip* are simply called 'determinate markers'. Hunt (1993) attempts to reduce the apparent redundancy of doubly marking proper nouns by claiming that =s is in fact a type of case marking (as I have glossed it throughout this paper), a claim motivated by the fact that, unlike the other connectives, =s is sensitive to transitivity, clause type and the semantic role of the proper noun it precedes. For example, in indicative sentences, the distribution of this 'case'

² Abbreviations: '=' = clitic boundary; '-' = affix boundary; ASP = aspect; CNC = common noun connective; PNC = proper noun connective; PROG = progressive; pl = plural; sg = 'singular'; NEG = negation; INCH. = inchoative; FUT = future; POSS = possessive; DEM = demonstrative; 'CONT' = contrastive; PAST = past; PREP = preposition; PN.DET = proper noun determiner; CN.DET = common noun determiner.

marker is ergative, in that it precedes A but not S or O.³ Consider the following Gitksan examples:⁴

(2) kup-ə-t=[s (t)=John]=ɬ smax
eat-ASP-3=CASE PNC=John=CNC (bear)meat
'John ate the meat.' (Hunt 1993: 235)

(3) *w'itx=[s t=John] (cf. w'itx t=John)
come PNC=John
'John came.' (Hunt 1993: 137)

(4) ɬəmo:yə-(t)=s (t)=Tom=[*s t=Mary]
help-ASP-3=CASE PNC=Tom PNC=Mary
'Tom helped Mary' (Rigsby 1986: 260)

However, this pattern holds only in indicative clauses. In subjunctive clauses, =s precedes any proper noun argument that immediately follows the verb. Thus it can potentially appear before A, S or when there is a pronominal subject, O.

(5) ne:ti:-t ɬimo:-t=[s (t)=John]_{AGENT} t=Peter
NEG-3 help-3-CASE PNC=John PNC=Peter
'John didn't help Peter.' (Hunt 1993: 86)

(6) yuk^w=ɬ litsχ^w-(t)=[s (t)=John]_{SUBJECT}
PROG=CON read=CASE PNC=John
'John is reading.' (Hunt 1993: 72)

³ The labels A(gent), P(atient) and S(ubject) will be used in the sense familiar from studies in ergativity (Dixon 1979; Manning 1996) to uniquely identify arguments. 'S' will refer to the single argument of an intransitive verb; 'A' will refer to the agent argument of a transitive verb; 'O' will refer to the theme argument of a transitive verb.

⁴ There are two distinct clause types in Tsimshian, traditionally referred to in the Tsimshian literature as the 'indicative' and 'subjunctive' (Boas 1911) (or 'independent' and 'dependent' respectively in IT. Rigsby 1986). Indicative clauses represent a syntactic construction where the verbal complex is the first element in the sentence. Subjunctive clauses may occur as matrix or embedded clauses and are typically characterized by (but don't always require) the presence of certain types of preverbal morphemes. These morphemes do not form a homogenous grammatical class of their own and typically include discourse particles, temporal/aspectual particles, negation, conjunction and subordinators. The subjunctive clause is associated with different patterns of verbal morphology from those which appear in indicative clauses, as well as differences in the realization of pronouns and agreement.

- (7) ne:ti:=təp kaʔ-(t)=[s (t)=John]_{OBJECT}
 NEG-1pl-CONT see-3=CASE PNC=John
 'We didn't see John.' (Hunt 1993: 33)

Hunt goes on to suggest that =s may be a type of 'generic' case that is only assigned to nominals that are adjacent to a lexical case assigning head, but does not elaborate. Table 2 outlines the distribution of the proper noun =s case-marker in IT:

Table 2: *Proper noun =s CASE-marking of semantic roles in IT*

	<i>Intransitive</i>	<i>Transitive</i>
INDICATIVE		A
SUBJUNCTIVE	S	A, O

One key generalization can be extracted from these IT examples above: in all cases =s 'CASE' patterns with nominative agreement. The distribution of =s appears to be ergative in indicative clauses: it occurs with nominative agreement which marks the transitive subject, and is absent in intransitive clauses because the lack of nominative agreement with intransitive subjects in that clause type. However, =s is neutral in subjunctive clauses: it can mark any semantic role, as long as it accompanies nominative agreement – regardless of the grammatical relation that nominative agreement represents. Ergative agreement is designated as such because it marks subjects in predictable opposition to both zero-marking and nominative agreement, as determined by the type of the clause. Given the link between nominative agreement and =s 'CASE', can this generalization be extended to describe the function of =s as a case marker in IT? In other words, can =s be described as essentially nominative case? There are two general issues with this possibility: first, unlike nominative agreement, =s does not stand in opposition to any other type of morphological case marking in IT. Secondly, how can we account for the neutralized distribution =s in subjunctive clauses? The ability of =s 'CASE' to mark objects in a subjunctive environment would also challenge the typological generalization that there are no reported languages that have ergative agreement and also morphologically mark accusative case (Woolford 2001: 4). These issues will be discussed further in sections 3 and 4.

Connectives in CT are phonologically similar to those in IT in a number of respects: they also encliticize to the preceding word and distinguish between proper and common nouns (but not for number). However, unlike their IT counterparts, CT connectives are sensitive to the semantic role of the nominal they mark. Table 7 illustrates how there are two separate forms marking an transitive subject:⁵

⁵ CT also possesses a set of 'elaborate connectives', which won't be discussed in this paper. See Mulder 1994: 46 for details.

Table 3: CT plain connective systems (Dunn 1979b; Mulder 1994)

	Sm'algyax		Sgüüxs	
	Proper Noun (PNC)	Common Noun (CNC)	Proper Noun (PNC)	Common Noun (CNC)
A	=as/=dit	=a/=da	=as/=dit	=i/=di
S	=as		=as	
O	=at	=a	=it	=i

The marking of an intransitive or transitive subject or object for both proper or common nouns is naturally subject to the transitivity of the clause. With proper nouns, an accusative orientation in connective marking is outlined in the indicative clauses in (8) and (9): Both the transitive and intransitive subject are marked with =as, while the transitive object is marked with =at.

- (8) CT (Sm'algyax)
 ni:c=(a)s Nadine=(a)t Isabelle
 see=PNC Nadine=PNC Isabelle
 'Nadine saw Isabelle.' (Stebbins 2001: 19, cited in Beck 2002)
- (9) nah ts'Im-'wiihawtg=as Madzi da na-waab-u
 PAST into.from-cry=PNC Margie PREP POSS.-house-1sg
 'Margie came to my house crying.' (Mulder 1994: 57)

In both common and proper noun agent-marking connectives, there are two forms available, the selection of which depends on the clause type. The aspect marker *yágwa* in (10) and (11) trigger subjunctive clause ergative agreement (unlike the past tense marker *nah* in (9)), with the ergative clitics cross-referencing with the transitive subjects. The selection of the connective proper noun connective =dit marking *úünal* and common noun =di marking *ól* is dependent on this agreement relation:

- (10) CT (Sgüüxs)
 yagwa-t bfi'gł=dit úünal sá'awansk
 PROG-3 tear=PNC Arnold paper
 'Arnold is tearing the paper.' (Dunn 1979b: 133)
- (11) yágwa-t, nfiis=di ól-i hoon
 PROG-3 glare.at=CNC bear=CNC fish
 'The bear glared at the fish.' (Dunn 1979b: 133)

On the other hand, The tense/aspect complex *nah* *ła* in (12) heads an indicative clause, hence no ergative agreement with the transitive subject noun phrase and the PNC =as and CNC =a surface.

(12) CT: Sm'algyax
 nah ʔa dzab=as Norman na-homework
 PAST PERF do=PNC Norman POSS-homework
 'Norman has just finished his homework.' (Mulder 1994: 115)

(13) nah t'uus=a y'uut=a hanaq'
 PAST push=CNC man=CNC woman
 'The man pushed the woman.' (Dunn 1979a: 63)

(13) and (14) demonstrate the neutral distribution of CNC =a marking A, S or O:

(14) yagwa hadiks=a sts'ool da ts'm t'aaks
 PRES swim=CNC beaver PREP in pond
 'A beaver is swimming in the pond.' (Dunn 1979a: 63)

Emerging from these patterns is four unique groupings, given in Table 4, of the semantic roles from the juxtaposition of the proper/common noun distinction and clause type:

Table 4: *Distribution of Semantic Roles in CT Connectives*

	Proper Noun	Common Noun
INDICATIVE:	A/S:O (accusative)	A/S/O (neutral)
SUBJUNCTIVE:	A:S:O (contrastive)	A:S/O (ergative)

What is notable in CT is that certain interactions of clause type and transitivity yield typologically unusual morphological groupings or pivots of the semantic roles that cannot be adequately characterized as either ergative or accusative: CNCs pattern ergatively in subjunctive clauses, while making no distinction in indicative clauses. The distribution of PNCs somewhat 'mirrors' that of the CNCs: indicative clause connectives pattern accusatively while subjunctive clauses there is a tripartite distinction, marking each semantic role with a different connective. While somewhat unusual, a system such as this may indeed be captured by the generalization that in indicative clauses the proper noun accusative and common noun neutral groupings simply morphologically distinguish the agent in subjunctive clauses, while leaving the S-O relations intact: $A/S:O \rightarrow A:S:O$ or $A/S/O \rightarrow A:S/O$. These alternations would be supported by the general ergative split between indicative and subjunctive clauses in both CT and IT. Recall how A, S and O may be marked all the same in one environment, as with the =s 'CASE'-marking A/S/O in subjunctive IT clauses, while consistently ergative in indicative clauses. While this explanation is tenable, it will be demonstrated in the next section that treating CT connectives as morphosyntactic atoms obscures the genetic relationship between CT and IT in patterns of 3rd person nominative agreement, determiners and morphological case.

3 The interaction of determiners, agreement and CASE: a comparative analysis of Tsimshian connectives

A superficial comparison of IT and CT connective systems shows that the form and distribution of connectives in CT is considerably more complex than those in IT. This section will explore a comparative analysis between CT and IT beginning with the hypothesis that CT connectives are in fact morphologically complex, the decomposition of which will uncover a relationship between segment and function that will shed light on the genetic relationship between CT and IT. This will specifically include the reconstruction in CT of:

1. Connective-initial *d-* in both proper and common noun subjunctive clauses as nominative object agreement. (cf. (10))
2. Connective-final '-*t*' in =*dit* and =*ait* as a proper noun determiner (cf. IT, Table 1).
3. Connective-initial *ali-* as semantically vacuous (possibly epenthetic).
4. Connective-final -*s* as the CT cognate of =*s* 'CASE' in IT.

Teasing apart the segmental components of a CT connective will isolate the potential patterns which can identify determiner marking, agreement, and will in turn lead a simpler organization of semantic role pivots across clause types and noun distinctions (cf. Table 8). The centerpiece of this hypothesis will be the identification of the morphological case marking in CT, which patterns nearly – but not identically – with the =*s* 'CASE' in IT. The benefits that follow from this approach include:

1. Accounting for the unaccounted for gaps between CT and IT in the apparent lack of nominative agreement in CT.
2. A unified description of the lack of (or neutralized) morphological case marking for common nouns in both CT and IT subjunctive clauses.
3. A proto-Tsimshian case morpheme *=*s*
4. The reconstruction of a proto-Tsimshian proper noun determiner: *=*t*.

Ergative agreement of the type described above often occurs in languages with ergative case, such as Hindi or the Daghestan language Avar (Blake 2001: 121; Woolford 2000: 15). However, ergative agreement can also occur in languages without any case morphology, as in the Mayan language Jacaltec. Once a reconstruction of morphological case (=*s*) in Tsimshian is attained, what will be its relationship with the agreement system?

3.1 Decomposing morphologically complex connectives in CT: determiners and case

Dunn (1979b), following observations made by Boas (1911: 354-59), suggested that CT connectives may be morphologically complex, analyzing them as a series of elements occurring from one to three positions and listing their (semantic) function in any given clause:

$$(15) = \left\{ \begin{array}{c} d \\ \emptyset \end{array} \right\} V \left\{ \begin{array}{c} s \\ t \\ \emptyset \end{array} \right\} \quad (\text{where } V = \{i, a\})$$

However, Dunn and Mulder (1994: 62) ultimately reject further exploration of this approach, observing that while decomposition of the connective system in this way may be possible, overlaps in function of the segments would lead to unnecessarily complex and cumbersome portmanteaux (Dunn 1979b: 136). Setting this issue aside, I will take Dunn's description (1979b: 137) and schema in (15) as a point of departure in comparing the connectives in CT with their potential counterparts in IT.

3.2 CT Proper Noun connectives

Given the fact that most Tsimshian connectives are sensitive to clause type and transitivity, it will be necessary to contrast the complete range of clause constructions. Beginning with transitive subjunctive proper noun connective =*dit*, the *d*- in the decomposed form /*d-V-t*/ can be considered voiceless underlyingly: /*t-V-t*/ (also see Stebbins 2001 for a similar approach). From this, it may be possible to relate the outer two segments of this form to the pattern of object agreement (marked on the predicate by the cross-referencing nominative suffix) and the proper noun determiner (now re-glossed 'PN.DET') as marking the transitive subject in a corresponding subjunctive IT clause:

- (16) CT (Sm'algyax) /*dit*/ → /*t-i-t*/
 ʔa-t_i k'yilum-d_j-i[=t Dzodz_i]=a baaysik_j das dzon
 PAST give-3-CASE=PN.DET George=CN.DET bicycle PREP John
 'George gave a bicycle to John.' (Mulder 1994: 58)

- (17) IT (Nisga'a)
 yuk^w=t_i ʔimo:m-(t_j)=s [(t Lucy_i]=t Mary_j
 PROG-3 help-3=CASE PN.DET Lucy=PN.DET Mary
 'John is helping Mary.' (Tarpent 1988: 106)

This leaves the middle segment /-i-/, which, by position, would be related to the IT =*s* case marker.⁶ In transitive indicative clauses, the proper noun connective -(*a*)*s* marking a transitive subject and the connective =(a)*t* marking a transitive object can be decomposed into their component segments: /(*a*)-*s*/ and

⁶ The relation of the middle vowel segment [-i-] of the connective =*dit* to the =*s* in IT is not immediately apparent on phonetic grounds, but I will assume based on its parallel position to =*s* in IT that [-i-] is indeed the position of a case marker (perhaps a historical replacement of [s] with an equally unmarked segment such as [i] in order to aid consonant cluster reduction).

/(a)-t/ respectively. Parallels in position can also be found here with the IT =s case marker and the proper noun determiner *t=*:

(18) CT (Sm'algyax): */(a)s/ → /s/; /(a)t/ → /t/*
ni:c=(a)s Nadine=(a)t Isabelle
see=CASE Nadine=PN.DET Isabelle
 'Nadine saw Isabelle.' (Stebbins 2001: 19)

(19) IT (Gitksan)
ʔəmo:-yə-(t)=s (t)=Tom=t Mary
help-ASP-3=CASE PN.DET=Tom=PN.DET Mary
 'Tom helped Mary' (Rigsby 1986: 260)

Stebbins (2001) originally transcribed (33) as *ni:c=s Nadine=t Isabelle*, and in fact, transcriptions of CT clauses often omit the pre-consonantal 'a' in the connectives (i.e. *[(a)-C]*), but never a post-consonantal 'a' (i.e. *[C-a]*). This serves as preliminary evidence that the post-consonantal 'a' in all of the CT connectives may be analyzed as a common noun determiner (now re-glossed 'CN.DET'), since, as in IT, it is generally phonetically stable. The pre-consonantal vowel 'a' on the other hand is frequently omitted, suggesting its function may be purely phonological. Now under this reanalysis, both CT and IT mark the transitive subject with =s. However, CT appears to lack the transitive subject agreement found in IT indicative clauses and the proper noun determiner. Both Rigsby's transcriptions of Gitksan and Tarpent's of Nisga'a frequently omit both the agreement and determiner, thus exactly paralleling the same construction in CT:

(20) CT: *ni:c=s Nadine=t Isabelle*

(21) IT (Gitksan)
ʔəmo:-yə=s Tom t=Mary
help-ASP=CASE Tom PN.DET=Mary
 'Tom helped Mary' (Rigsby 1986: 260)

(22) IT (Nisga'a)
ʔimo:m-ə=s (t)=Tom t=Mary
help-ASP-3=CASE PN.DET=Tom PN.DET=Mary
 'Lucy helped Mary' (Tarpent 1988: 108)

Turning to intransitive clauses, =s marks the proper noun subject in both CT and IT subjunctive clauses:

(23) CT (Sgüüxs)
 ɬa xúupl manxyáa=s Üünal
 TEMP dark walk.up=CASE Arnold
 'Arnold walked up in the dark.' (Dunn 1979b: 134)

(24) IT (Nisga'a)
 yùk^w=ɬ yú:χk^w=s (t) Mary
 PROG=CNC eat=CASE PN.DET Mary
 'Mary is eating.' (Tarpent 1988: 105)

By treating =s as the morphological marking of case, we should be able to see a pivot emerge in comparing the marking of transitive subjects with intransitive subjects. The reanalyzed CT connective =(a)s marking the proper noun agent in an transitive clause also marks the subject of an intransitive clause, yielding an overall accusative pattern in the marking of proper nouns. However, as we observed earlier, this pattern does not extend to indicative clauses in IT where there is no =s case marking:

(25) IT (Nisga'a)
 yú:χk^w t Mary
 eat PN.DET Mary
 'Mary ate.' (Tarpent 1988: 107)

(26) CT (Sm'algyax)
 nah ts'lm-w'iihawtg=(a)s Madzi da na-waab-u
 PAST into.from.side-cry=CASE Margie PREP POSS-house-1sg
 'Margie came to my house crying.' (Mulder 1994: 57)

This is where IT and CT diverge: recall that in IT indicative clauses, the distribution of this case marker is ergative, in that it precedes A but not S or O. In CT a basic accusative S/A grouping emerges in both clause types. In IT however, this S/A accusative-type grouping holds only in subjunctive clauses – in indicative IT clauses intransitive subjects are unmarked while transitive subjects are marked with =s, producing an ergative grouping, S:A. Table 5 compares distribution of =s in CT with that established in IT:

Table 5: *Distribution of '=s' case marking intransitive and transitive subjects*

	Intransitive		Transitive	
CT: INDICATIVE	V=s	NP _S	V=s	NP _A (=t NP _O)
SUBJUNCTIVE	V=s	NP _S	V=s (-i-)	NP _A (=t NP _O)
IT: INDICATIVE	V—	NP _S	V=s	NP _A (=t NP _O)
SUBJUNCTIVE	V=s	NP _S	V=s	NP _A (=t NP _O)

The next consideration is the marking of objects. Recall that Tsimshian defines a system of ergative/nominative alignment. This is reflected in agreement patterns where in indicative clauses, the subject is marked with cross-referencing

agreement on the predicate, leaving the object unmarked. In subjunctive clauses, the ergative clitics mark the subject and the nominative agreement shifts to marking the object. The =s case-marking of objects occurs when pronominal transitive subjects are used. In this type of subjunctive clause environment in both CT and IT, there is no intervening lexical subject and =s will surface on the predicate marking the object:

- (27) CT (Sm'algyax)
 ʔa n wil niidz-[(a)s Meli]_{OBJECT}
 PAST 1sg COMP see-CASE Mary
 'I've just now seen Mary.' (Dunn 1979a: 65)
- (28) IT (Gitksan)
 ne:-tip-ti: stil-(t)=[s (t)=Peter]_{OBJECT}
 NOT-1pl-CONTR accompany-3=CASE PN.DET=Peter
 'We didn't go with Peter.' (Hunt 1993: 216)

The =s case marking of objects is somewhat unexpected if we are to consider the potential of =s as a type of morphological case-marking of lexical (proper noun) subjects. The result of this object marking is essentially the neutralization or syncretism of case marking in subjunctive environments in both CT and IT, as any proper noun argument adjacent to the predicate will receive =s marking, yielding a pattern that is neither accusative nor ergative. Nonetheless, the parallels in the form, function and distribution of =s in both CT and IT make it plausible to propose a proto-Tsimshian morphological case that marks proper nouns:

- (29) Proto-Tsimshian Proper Noun Case: *=s

A fairly clear morphologically accusative alignment in CT and ergative alignment in IT can be identified in indicative clauses when assigning the '=s' the function of case, illustrated in Table 6:

Table 6: *Proto-Tsimshian Proper Noun Case Marking* (*=s)

	CT	IT
INDICATIVE:	A/S accusative (O unmarked)	A ergative (S/O unmarked)
SUBJUNCTIVE:	A/S/O neutral	A/S/O neutral

In subjunctive clauses however, there is perhaps an overgeneration in case marking, which may have possibly developed through the diachronic development of the language. This proto-case marking also interacts with agreement in interesting ways: it may be the case that instances of '=s' marking are actually overlapping and in some cases, possibly subsuming the function nominative agreement, where they both represent or mark the same subject. It should also be emphasized that it would not be accurate to characterize =s as actually being ergative case in IT and nominative case in CT, but rather that its

function and morphological ability in marking subjects is conditioned by environment, such as clause type and its inherent link with nominative agreement (itself linked to clause type).

3.3 CT Common Noun connectives

The common noun connective ‘=da’ marking transitive subjects in subjunctive clauses can also be treated as its proper noun counterpart, with the first segment /d-a/ unvoiced underlyingly and functioning as object agreement:

- (30) CT: (Sm’algyax) /da/ → /t-a/
 yagwa-t_i k’yilum=**d**_j-[a hana’a_i] **bilhaa**_j das noo-t
 PROG-3 give-CN.DET woman abalone CN mother-3
 “The woman is giving her mother some abalone.”
- (31) IT: (Nisga’a)
 yùk^w-t_i ðimó:m-(t_j)=[**ɬ** hanàq’_i]=**ɬ** ðkí:k^w-y’_j
 PROG-3 help-3=CN.DET woman=CN.DET sister-1sg
 “The woman is helping my sister.”

The bracketing in (30) indicates that the vowel segment in the common noun connective is actually the common noun determiner in CT, paralleling the positional distribution of that in IT. In indicative clauses without agreement, the connective marks a common noun agent. As in with proper nouns, this agreement appears to be optional in IT. This may suggest that overall object agreement in Tsimshian is slowly being eroded, with the 3rd person agreement affix fusing with the subjunctive connectives in CT and the apparent optionality in IT. In indicative CT clauses it has disappeared altogether:

- (32) nah t’uus-[a y’uut]-[a hanaq’]
 PAST push-CN.DET man-CN.DET woman
 “The man pushed the woman.”
- (33) ðimó:m-ə-(t)=[**ɬ** hanàq’]=[**ɬ** ðkí:k^w-t]
 help-TRN-3=CN.DET woman=CN.DET sister-3
 “The woman helped her sister” (Tarpent)

Lastly, a common noun subject is marked in CT with the connective ‘=a’, which can now be reanalyzed as a determiner, since it surfaces in nearly every environment regardless of clause type, transitivity and the semantic role of the NP it marks:

- (34) yagwa húumsg-[a gheen]
 PROG sniff.around-CN.DET skunk
 “The skunk is sniffing around.” (Dunn 1979: 133)

- (35) yú:χk^w=[ɬ ɬkí:k^w-y']
 eat-3=CN.DET sister-1sg
 "My sister ate." (Tarpent)

The proper noun determiners in CT and IT were identical in patterning and phonological shape, allowing for a straightforward proto-determiner designation for proper nouns in Tsimshian:

- (36) Proto-Tsimshian Proper Noun Determiner: *-t

Common noun determiners on the other hand, share the same positional distribution but have a very different phonological shapes:

- (37) Tsimshian Common Noun Determiners:
 CT: *-a
 IT: *-ɬ

Additional evidence for treating for treating non-optional occurrences of CT '=a' as a determiner can be obtained from examining the aspect marker in subjunctive intransitives in both CT and IT. In IT subjunctive intransitive clauses, a common determiner attaches to the aspect marker:

- (38) yùk^w=ɬ yú:χk^w-(t)=ɬ ɬkí:k^w-y'
 PROG=CN.DET eat-3=CN.DET sister-1sg
 "My sister is eating."

Extending this to CT, taking '=a' as a determiner, is straightforward by interpreting the morpheme-final [a] as the determiner:

- (39) yagw-a hadiks-a sts'ool da ts'm t'aaks
 PRES-CN.DET swim-CN.DET beaver CN in pond
 "A beaver is swimming in the pond."

4 Discussion and Summary

CT connectives can be treated as morphologically complex, the segmentation of which produces morphemes which have direct counterparts in IT. Through this, we were able to close the genetic gap somewhat between CT and IT in reconstructing object agreement and proper noun determiners. A summary of this is given in Table 7:

Table 7:

<i>Proper noun agent – transitive subjunctive:</i>				
CT:	<i>dit</i> → <i>t-i-t</i> → ...V- <i>t</i> _{AGR,O}	-i-	[<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _A]
IT:	...V- <i>t</i> _{AGR,O}	s	[<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _A]
<i>Common noun agent – transitive subjunctive:</i>				
CT:	<i>da</i> → <i>t-a</i> → ...V- <i>t</i> _{AGR,O}		[<i>-a</i>	NP _A]
IT:	...V- <i>t</i> _{AGR,O}		[= <i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _A]
<i>Proper noun agent – transitive indicative:</i>				
CT:	<i>as</i> → <i>a-s</i> → ...V= <i>a</i>	s	[∅	NP _A]
IT:	...V- <i>t</i> _{AGR,A}	s	[<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _A]
<i>Common noun agent – transitive indicative:</i>				
CT:	<i>-a</i> → ...V= <i>a</i>		[∅	NP _A]
IT:	...V- <i>t</i> _{AGR,A}		[= <i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _A]
<i>Proper noun object – intransitive indicative/subjunctive:</i>				
CT:	<i>-at</i> → <i>a-t</i> → V [NP _A] [(= <i>a</i>)	<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _O]	
IT:	V [NP _A]	[<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _O]	
<i>Common noun object – intransitive indicative/subjunctive:</i>				
CT:	<i>-a</i> → V [NP _A] [(= <i>a</i>)	∅	NP _O]	
IT:	V [NP _A]	[= <i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _O]	
<i>Proper noun subject – intransitive indicative/subjunctive:</i>				
CT:	<i>as</i> → <i>a-s</i> → ...V= <i>a</i>	s	[∅	NP _S]
IT:	...V(- <i>t</i> _{AGR,S})	s	[<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _S]
<i>Common noun subject – intransitive indicative/subjunctive:</i>				
CT:	<i>-a</i> → ...V= <i>a</i>		[∅	NP _S]
IT:	...V(- <i>t</i> _{AGR,S})		[<i>t</i> _{DET}	NP _S]

With determiners and agreement accounted for, a segment was left over that can be reasonably posited as being a type of case marking in CT, supported by nearly identical parallel patterns found in IT. Affixes typically undergo phonological processes of deletion, reduction and fusion with other neighbouring affixes. One of the effects of this is the reduction in the differentiation of morphological case distinctions (Blake 2001: 169). Syncretism, merging and loss of morphological case is a common diachronic tendency. Languages can make use of different repair strategies to compensate for phonological change and erosion, such as word order or adpositions to mark syntactic relations. Tsimshian offers another option, represented by a kind lexicalization process through fusion – the result of which is the connective system.

Tsimshian pronominal inflection confirms the typological generalization that no language has ergative agreement unless it also has agreement with objects, a pattern borne out in Tsimshian subjunctive clause object agreement. This reduces to the generalization that if a language has agreement at all, it will have agreement with nominatives (see Woolford 2001 for details and explanation of this generalization), and this is also borne out in Tsimshian transitive indicative constructions. What's at stake here is not necessarily defining the ultimate semantic pivot for (29), i.e. as 'ergative', or 'accusative' case. What is of ultimate interest is to track the merging of a case system with other local morphemes such as agreement and determiners in terms

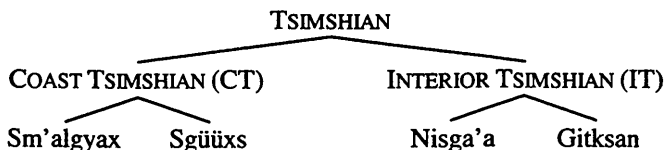
of comparing two genetically related languages. However, once decomposition and reanalysis is applied to CT connectives, a problem is presented in accounting for the typological gap that originally motivated the idea that ergative agreement is parasitic on ergative case: there are no reported instances of ergative agreement in a nominative-accusative case system (Anderson 1977, Dixon 1994). Woolford (2000: 4) notes that the generalization is actually that ergative agreement has not been observed to occur in languages with morphologically marked accusative case, such as presented in the previous section. She reports that Tsimshian-type of ergative agreement can occur in languages with a nominative-accusative case system, as long as the accusative is not morphologically marked. The merging and neutralization of morphologically marked accusative case in CT (and in the future for IT) with ergative agreement may be attributed to the strong tendency for languages not to doubly mark arguments with both case and agreement (Woolford 2000). While IT seems to conform to this notion more closely, CT may be trying to relieve some of the pressure by fusing and reanalyzing agreement and case, creating a hybrid class of morphemes, the connectives.

Appendix

The Tsimshian languages are spoken on the northwest coast of Canada almost entirely in the province of British Columbia and in adjacent areas of the interior. It should be noted that the name of the language family is not entirely uncontroversial. Gitksan and Nisga'a people do not care for the name 'Tsimshian' because it seems to give priority to Sm'algyax and Sgüüxs, which are also known as Coast Tsimshian and South Tsimshian respectively (and researchers who work on Coast Tsimshian usually refer to it as just 'Tsimshian'). With these sensitivities in mind, I will use 'Tsimshian' in this paper to refer to all the languages in the Tsimshian family, since there is no generally accepted replacement name that does not favour one language over the others.

There are two subgroups within the Tsimshian family each containing two languages, as shown in (1): the Interior Tsimshian subgroup is made up of Gitksan and Nisga'a, which are similar enough to be considered to be dialects of the same language (although see Rigsby 1989). The Coast Tsimshian subgroup is divided into Sm'algyax (or Coast Tsimshian proper) and Sgüüxs (South Tsimshian), and are also similar enough to be considered dialects of the same language (although see Dunn 1979b and Mulder 1994).

(1) The Tsimshian Language Family (Rigsby 1986: 25)



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