Dependency and Insubordination in Sliammon Salish

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Sliammon Salish, spoken in British Columbia, Canada, is a language of the Salishan language family. It shows elaborated morphology, characteristic of "polysynthetic" languages.

Typically, main clauses and subordinate clauses are differently marked in Sliammon. The subjects of main clauses are, for the most part, marked by the Indicative Subject clitics. There are two types of non-matrix clauses, and each of them takes different subject markers: Conjunctive (subjunctive) clauses take the Conjunctive Subject suffixes, and Nominalized clauses take the Possessive markers.

In this paper, I first give a brief survey of how complex sentences with main and subordinate clauses are formed in Sliammon. Then, I explore cases in which clauses are formally "subordinate" in their morphology but whose matrix clauses are omitted. We find that both Conjunctive and Nominalized clauses appear in this manner in natural discourse. Some of these cases are instances of "insubordination", i.e., the conventionalized main clause use of formally subordinate clauses (Evans 2007).

Conjunctive clauses are used for (i) conditional clauses, (ii) jussive complements (complements of predicates expressing requests or orders), (iii) interrogative complements, and (iv) complements of negative predicates. However, they can occur by themselves and convey meanings of speculation, desire, or weak imperative.

Nominalized clauses are used for (i) temporal expressions, (ii) complements of immediate perception, (iii) irrealis complements (non-jussive, non-negative, non-interrogative), (iv) evaluative and causal complements, and (v) complements of cognition and indirect discourse. The following example from a text, however, is a nominalized clause without a matrix clause. Note the use of the third person possessor suffix *-s* on the initial predicative negator:

(1) (immediately preceding sentence: 'We always had lots of food.')

xʷaʔ-s	saysaǰ'-as	tᶿ=kʷukʷpaʔuɫ
NEG-3POSS	be.afraid-3CONJ.SBJ	1SG.POSS=deceased.grandfather

'My deceased grandfather was not afraid.'

A consultant, different from the speaker of this narrative, was able to provide a possible matrix clause for this construction:

(2)

hi=ga	ʔə=xʷ=xʷaʔ-s	saysaǰ'-as	tᶿ=kʷukʷpaʔuɫ
it's=CLT	CLEFT=NOM=NEG-3POSS	be.afraid-3CONJ.SBJ	1SG.POSS=d.grandfather

'That is why my deceased grandfather was not afraid.'

The possessive suffix in (1) can be left out, and the construction would be a well-formed indicative clause. By placing the suffix, the speaker is able to allude to the construction in (2) and thereby connect the line to the larger context of the discourse (as explored in Mithun 2008).

As a way of conclusion, I also show that the dichotomy between the dependent and

independent use of formally subordinate clauses is by no means clear-cut. I provide examples of formally subordiante clauses whose independent status is questionable.