

Corporeal Incorporation and Extension in Dene Sų́liné (Athapaskan) Lexicalization

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Abstract

Athapaskan languages support a strikingly small set of morphological stems that, historically, have been repeatedly recycled and recombined to achieve the necessary range of lexical expression. There are few mono-morphemic noun stems (most nouns being deverbal) and body-part terms are indeed amongst the simplest nouns morphologically—especially for the major part terms ('head', 'hand', 'heart', etc.). This paper surveys expressions in Dene Sų́liné (Chipewyan) that feature an incorporated body-part term or a body-part term being used figuratively in a referential sense. In the former case, I discuss the nature of the event types (e.g. posture, consumption, perception, ideation, emotion) and verb stems that tend to support the incorporated body-part term, the range of incorporable terms themselves, as well as the overall figurativity of the resulting constructions. In the case of extended body-part terms, I list the items that tend most often to participate in figurative body-based nominals, compounds, and nominalizations. While the productivity of body-part incorporation and figurative extension was likely never robust in the language (nor across the family), and the phenomenon is certainly associated with largely idiomatic constructions by contemporary speakers, one can see clear patterns in the composite structures featuring body-part morphemes highly reminiscent of what other, better studied, languages do. Moreover, a better understanding of these constructional frames may allow both linguists and (semi-)speakers insight into the morphological composition of some otherwise extremely opaque expressions that have long gone unanalyzed.

1 Body (Part Term) Modification in Athapaskan

Athapaskan (or Dene) languages, once spoken by small bands of hunter-gatherers in discontinuous regions across much of western North America, support few morphological stems (circa 1,300–2,100 per language) that, whether cognate or not, have been recycled and recombined over and over to achieve the necessary range of lexical expression in languages across the family. In any daughter language, there are only a couple hundred mono-morphemic noun stems (most nouns are deverbal) and body-part (BP) terms indeed

count amongst the simplest nouns morphologically, especially for the major part terms ('head', 'hand', 'heart', etc.), and amongst the most active derivationally, especially when incorporated into verb word complexes or extended to take on new meanings in isolation, compounds, or other types of constructions. Like kin terms, most Dene BP terms are inalienable, although terms for *effluvia* and what Snoek (in progress) calls body *ephemera* (regularly sloughed off or more temporary parts of the body such as 'hair', 'wart', 'blister') are not.

With respect to the verb stem inventory, Athapaskan languages are renowned for featuring sets of classificatory stems that conflate semantic information about a generic event (static position, spontaneous movement, agentive handling) with information about the shape, animacy, constituency, or containment properties of a central event participant, be it subject or object. Less well known is the fact that nearly *every* verb stem is polysemous in this way (by essentially being a light predicate) as well as classificatory in that it often severely restricts the range of likely event participants. Only through the addition of derivational material does the completely propositional and highly polysynthetic Dene verb achieve lexical status.

Amongst the thematic, locational, and adverbial prefixes that must obligatorily join agreement and TAM marking within the lexical verb word are a small set of incorporated nouns, including a subset of unpossessed body-part terms. Although BP incorporation has been addressed in the Athapaskan literature as a special case of noun incorporation (NI), it has usually been for the express purpose of arguing, on formal theoretical grounds, for the lexical versus syntactic nature of NI in Athapaskan, (cf. K. Rice 1989, Axelrod 1990, or Cook & Wilhelm 1998) or for situating Athapaskan incorporation within the Mithun (1984) typology. There has generally been little interest in the semantic nature of the constructions containing BP terms per se in Athapaskan or in the constructional nature of the resulting expressions that feature an incorporated BP term or one being used in an extended, figurative manner.

In this paper, I survey expressions mainly in Dene Sųliné (formerly known as Chipewyan; ISO 639-3: chp) that feature an incorporated BP term or a BP term being used in an extended and figurative, although still nominal way. In the former case, I discuss the nature of the event types (e.g. posture, consumption, perception, ideation, emotion) and verb stems that tend to support the incorporated BP term, the range of incorporable BP terms themselves, as well as the overall figurativity of the remaining constructions. In the case of BP term extension to new referential domains, I present the BP stems that tend most often to take on new meanings or participate in figurative compounds or nominalizations. While the productivity of BP incorporation and extension was likely never robust in the language (nor in its Dene sisters), and the