Revisiting *–ɬ* and controllability in Kwak'wala

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Kwak'wala (Wakashan) has a set of suffixes which have been described variously as 'passives' (Boas 1947; Rosenblum 2013), 'focus' suffixes (Levine 1980a, 1980b) and 'voice' suffixes (Sherer 2014) that promote arguments to subject position which otherwise appear case-marked in unmarked clauses. Voice suffixes in Kwak'wala are traditionally differentiated in terms of the thematic role of the arguments they promote: however, in certain cases more than one voice suffix is capable of promoting the same argument, as shown in (1) and (2) with *–(ə)ɬ* and *–suʔ*, respectively.

(1) duqʷ-**əɬ**=i=da gənanəm=a (=sa bəgʷanəm)
see-NOM=3LOC=OST child=VIS (=O.POSS man)
'The child was seen (by the man).' (Levine 1980: 4)

(2) duqʷaχ-əl-a-**suʔ**=i Katie (=s Pat)
see-CONT-FV-NOM=3LOC Katie (=O.POSS Pat)
'Katie was seen (by Pat).' (Sherer 2014: 28)

Finding a precise characterization of the semantic differences between *-ɬ* and *–suʔ* has proven somewhat of a puzzle. Boas (1947) presented *-ɬ* as a passive of verbs of 'sensation or mental action' in contrast with *–suʔ* which promotes accusative-marked arguments more generally. However, Levine (1980) revealed an analysis of *-ɬ* as a 'stimulus' promoting passive to be too narrow by showing that this suffix can also appear on agent transitives such as *gəls-* 'to paint', as well as on some unaccusatives such as *mənk-* 'to be rusty', in the latter case forming 'passives' with no active counterparts. He also observed that in some cases, *-ɬ* clearly generates out-of-control readings. This led Levine to propose that the meaning of *-ɬ* is always associated with out-of-control semantics.

Two findings from recent fieldwork suggest there is more to the meaning of *-ɬ* than out-of-control. To begin with, *-ɬ* does not *always* have out-of-control semantics – in fact, such readings appear to only arise when *-ɬ* attaches to lexically agentive verbs. Secondly, *-ɬ* has an even wider distribution than previously thought: it is able to promote the direct argument of many propositional attitude verbs. This deepens the puzzle about how to account for its distribution.

In this talk, I will attempt to answer two questions: 1) why *-ɬ* is constrained to occur with the particular verbs that it does; and 2) how *-ɬ* gives rise to out-of-control readings with a subset of these verbs. My proposal will build on Sherer's (2014) analysis of voice morphemes as nominalizers, and will take into account the observation that *-ɬ* attaches directly to the root while *–suʔ* attaches outside of aspectual suffixes. In essence, I propose to account for differences in interpretation between *-ɬ* and *–suʔ* not in terms of thematic roles, but in terms of the position in the event structure at which nominalization occurs. In particular, I will investigate the hypothesis that differences between *-ɬ* and *–suʔ* can be explained with reference to whether an agent is present in the structure or not.

References (abbreviated)

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