

## Particle t'a in Snowdrift Chipewyan\*

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0. Some problem has arisen in accurately characterizing the general nature, the morphosyntactic description, and, in particular, the function of the putative relative clause marking particle t'a in Chipewyan. This paper attempts to provide a preliminary account of t'a, expanding on work which has preceded.

Section 1 of the paper briefly describes the general nature of Chipewyan syntax with concentration on word order and verb morphology. Section 2 presents the research of Fang Kuei Li (1946) and Richard Carter (1979), with a critical appraisal of the claims made by Carter. Section 3 provides the justification for positing two quasi-homophonous particles, one serving as an instrumental/causative marker and the other marking subordinate constructions. Sections 4 and 5 present the data which were collected in Snowdrift, North West Territories in June of 1979 and which clarify and support the claims I make here. Section 6 presents the residual problems that remain concerning t'a, and Section 7 summarizes the paper.

1. Chipewyan is generally a verb-final language. The verb-complex may stand as an independent sentence in all circumstances. When nominal forms occur with the verb-complex in a sentence, the ordering is subject/complement/verb-complex, with "complement" here understood to encompass nominals, locative, instrumental, and/or temporal phrases, etc. The following examples illustrate simple sentences in Chipewyan:

1. ʔeʔeʔe hesbes  
egg I cook/boil it  
'I am cooking/boiling the egg.'
2. setθi néðel  
my head it is hot  
'My head is hot.' (i.e. 'I have a fever.')
3. nən sənaðer  
you you play  
'You are playing.'
4. a. hástá  
'I do it.'  
b. hástá-ile  
I do it-NEG<sup>1</sup>  
'I don't do it.'
5. ts'elt'ui bastθi  
tobacco I want it  
'I want a cigarette.'
6. si tθ'áy hánasday-xa  
I cup I get it-FUT  
'I'll get the cup.'

7. sekuaze ts'i-aze-t'á sanahede  
children boat-DIM-INSTR they are playing  
'The children are playing with a little boat.'
8. diri ké náñíní déti-(i)le  
these shoes you pay expensive-NEG  
'You can buy these shoes cheap.' (or 'These shoes are cheap.')

Examples (1) through (7) are relatively straightforward, illustrating various Chipewyan sentence constructions. I note that the independent pronouns are related to the pronominal prefixes in the verb-complex, as will be clear in the discussion of verb morphology below. Sentence (8) illustrates the fact that certain adverbial constructions may follow the verb. The verb may also be followed by suffixes which attach to the verb (e.g. -ile NEG; -xa FUT, etc.) (examples (4b) and (6)).

Chipewyan verb morphology is extremely complex and it is virtually certain that it is not yet fully understood. Li (1946) provides the best known and most complete description of verb morphology and I make use of his material extensively in the discussion to follow.

The following schematic diagram illustrates the positioning of prefixes, stem, and suffixes in the verb-complex:

10 - 9 - 8 - 7 # 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 + STEM + suffixes

Position	Category
<u>10</u>	Incorporated postpositions
<u>9</u>	Adverbial, adjectival
<u>8</u>	Iterative (aspect)
<u>7</u>	Incorporated nouns
#	Conjunct-disjunct boundary
<u>6</u>	3pl subject pronouns
<u>5</u>	Direct object pronouns
<u>4</u>	Mode
<u>3</u>	Aspect
<u>2</u>	Pronominal subject
<u>1</u>	Classifier

Prefix positions 7 to 10 are disjunctive and positions 1 to 6 are conjunctive. The conjunct-disjunct boundary defines a point over which no phonological assimilation may occur. There seem to be some phonological interactions at the boundary between the classifier and the stem, but these are at present poorly understood. The suffixes which may attach to the stem are, e.g. future (-xa), future intensive (-xa-si), negative (-(h)ile or -(h)ile), interrogative (-husá, -ú, -á), etc.

Of primary interest here will be the pronominal subject and object prefixes, the remainder of the verb morphology being of little consequence to the discussion to follow.

The pronominal subject prefixes, appearing in position 2 (except for the 3pl prefixes which appear in position 6), are as follows:

	Singular	Dual/Plural
1	-s-(-i-)	-id-
2	-ne-(-n-)	-uh-
3	Ø (-i-)	-he-, -dá-



13. a. [desyər] <---- /de # s - 1 + yəd/  
adj. 1sg clas. STEM  
'I shiver' 9 # 2 - 1 + STEM
- b. [delyəɾ] <---- /de # Ø - 1 + yəd/  
adj. 3sg clas. STEM  
'He/she shivers' 9 # 2 - 1 + STEM

This completes the preliminary sketch of Chipewyan syntax and morphology. The remainder of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the particle t'a.

2. Scrutiny of Li's (1946) traditional taxonomic analysis of Chipewyan yields several listings for the particle t'a, which are summarized as follows:

14. t'á (high tone): a postposition meaning "by means of" (p. 403)
15. a. "The relative pronouns are t'ahi 'that which', t'ahi 'the one who', t'ahú 'the time when', which are used to introduce a relative clause..." (p. 421)
- b. "-i relative suffix. The verb with this suffix is often introduced by the particles [listed in (15a) above]." (p. 419)

Li's examples for this function are listed in (15c) and (15d):

15. c. t'ahi sas-xéí θeti-i  
the one bear-with he is sleeping-who  
'the one who is sleeping with the bear'
- d. t'ahú sas-xéí nēōti-i hots'i  
the time bear-with he has lain down-when it-from  
'since the time when he slept with the bear' (p. 420)
16. hít'ú [ <-- hít'úú ] 'while' (p. 421)
17. ʔedlá·t'ú [ <--- ʔedlá·t'úú ]; ʔedlá·t'ε 'how?' (p. 421)
18. "The indefinite pronouns are: t'así [ <--- t'asíi ] "anything, something," nahéi "something, some of the things," nā·ne "some one, some of them," etc." (p. 421)
19. a. ʔet'axa 'suddenly'  
b. ʔeyit'a 'therefore'  
c. kút'a 'enough' (p. 422)

Finally, in a section which briefly describes Chipewyan word order, Li gives the following example of a sentence containing a subordinate clause:

20. t'ahú sas-xéí nēōti-i hots'i, ʔekú  
the time bear-with he has lain down-when it-from then  
húíduú sas yets'ón xáyayíitei  
afterwards bear him-to he spoke  
'Since the time when he slept with the bear, only then the bear spoke to him.' (p. 423)

Many of these listings ((16), (17), (18), (19a), and (19c)) are not relevant at present.<sup>3</sup> That is, considerable research would be required to relate all of these listings, if, indeed, they are all related.

Carter (1979) presents a more contemporary treatment of t'a, terming it "a clause-initial relative subordinator" (p. 2) which acts in conjunction with the clause-final complementizer -i. The following sentences are examples from Carter's paper (his examples (5) and (6)):

21. denəyu [t'a ʔi he'eð-i] bér ɣəʃéti  
man REL dog kicked-COMP meat ate  
'The man who kicked the dog ate the meat.'
22. ʔi [t'a denəyu ye'eð-i] bér ɣəʃéti  
dog REL man kicked-COMP meat ate  
'The dog that the man kicked ate the meat.'

It is apparent both from Li's paper and from the Chipewyan material which we collected in Snowdrift that this is an incomplete statement of the ways in which t'a functions.<sup>4</sup>

3. At the outset, it must be stated that the existence of two quasi-homophonous particles must be accepted, one being an instrumental/causative marker and the other serving as a subordinate clause marker. These two particles, assuming that there are two, differ in the tone which marks them. The instrumental/causative marker commonly appears with high tone and the subordinate clause marker commonly appears with low tone. It is the case, however, that the correlations between phonemic tone and grammatical function are not perfect. Athapaskan tone systems are largely unresearched to date, hence leaving open the question as to whether some phonological or morphological conditioning is operating to mark the particles for tone. For the purposes of exposition, I will assume that the instrumental/causative postposition is marked with high tone and that the subordinate clause marking particle is unmarked for tone.<sup>5</sup>

4. It seems reasonable to assume both the causative and the instrumental functions of t'a under one semantic class. The justifications for doing so are (1) there is a single semantic characterization which is sufficiently broad to include both uses;<sup>6</sup> (2) the particle always appears as a postposition in this function; and (3) the particle almost invariably appears with high tone, thus making the instrumental marker phonetically indistinguishable from the causative marker. The following are examples of the instrumental/causative usage of t'a:

23. ʔeyi-t'á xət'e kúlu yets'én daθeya hik'ela  
this CAUS it was though to it he went up it is said  
'Despite this fact, he went up to it, it is said.'
24. húštšū yeheniðən k'ít'á yets'én he'as  
we take it they thought it-CAUS to it they went  
'Because they thought they would like to take it, they went to [the rainbow].'

25. ts'ákui adiú, "dúwela, setθ'əne-t'd hesal-xa dúwela"  
old woman said NEG my leg-CAUS I walk-FUT NEG  
'The old woman said, "No, because of my leg I won't/cannot walk.'"
26. ts'ákui teθ-t'd yeka héya  
old woman cane-with for it she went  
'The old woman went with a cane.'
27. bílá-t'd yekarelniy  
her hand-with she was feeling him  
'She was feeling [the baby] with her hand.'
28. detšən-t'd yeḗ-ye natθiy hik'éla  
stick-with den-in he felt/prodded it is said  
'It is said that he prodded inside the den with a stick.'
29. sas heḗáθ kon-t'd  
bear they singed/cooked fire-with  
'They cooked the bear meat with fire.'

To summarize briefly, instrumental/causative t'á (1) operates as a postposition following nominal elements (although it can follow verb forms);<sup>7</sup> and (2) the particle appears more often with high tone in this function.

5. T'a as a subordinate clause marker (with unmarked or low tone) operates in the following narrow classes: (1) marking indirect questions; and (2) marking subordinate qualifying clauses.<sup>8</sup> Sentences (30) to (34) are examples of the former:

30. [t'ay ʔeyáana] bek'órešyá-ile  
PART he works I know it-NEG  
'I don't know who is working.'
31. [t'ay horél'í] bek'órešyá-ile  
PART he wants it I know it-NEG  
'I don't know what he wants.'
32. [t'a-ts'ən ʔeyáana] bek'órešyá-ile  
PART-LOC he works I know it-NEG  
'I don't know where he works.'
33. [t'o yuyé nade-xa] bek'órešyá-ile  
PART (over) there he goes-FUT I know it-NEG  
'I don't know when he's leaving.'
34. [ʔeɪ-t'ay ʔeltθ'i] bek'órešyá-ile  
RECIPROCAL-PART it is right I know it-NEG  
'I don't know which one is the right one.'

Examples (30) and (31) illustrate a minimal semantic (morphological) contrast in that the only distinctive difference between t'ay and t'ay is the nasalized vowel, which is underlyingly a nasal consonant as Cook (1979) points out.<sup>9</sup> The underlying nasal consonant marks the feature [human], as

it does with the interrogatives ?edláyē 'what?' versus ?edláyí 'who?'. The incorporation of -u into the particle t'a yields t'o 'when' (in example (33)), analogous to the interrogative ?edláu or ?edló 'when' (i.e. [temporal]).

These phenomena are consistent throughout the data, as are the general principles for the formation of indirect questions. The following rule is a first approximation for the formation of these constructions:

35. a. Place t'a at the beginning of the embedded clause.  
b. Attach the appropriate morpheme which marks the feature [human], [temporal], or [locative].

Some problems arise with trying to accurately determine the principles for the use of t'a as a subordinate qualifying clause marker. Several strategies seem to be possible and we see a considerable amount of variability in the surface forms for the subordinate structures. Consider the sentences in examples (36) through (38):

36. [t'ay nék'e ?ahet'i-sí] yek'órelyā-ile  
PART country they were-PART they knew it-NEG  
'They didn't know what country they were in.'
37. [etθén íajide-ú t'ólasi] ?egēne  
caribou they killed them-NOM PART dry meat  
héhetsi-ú bér-ú íuw-ú t'ólasi<sup>10</sup>  
they made-NOM meat-CONJ fish-CONJ PART  
'Having killed the caribou, they made dry meat, meat, and fish.'
38. [t'ohú tsāba sets'í lasí] bewuli-destše-ts'én nast'ay-xa  
PART money I have it PART Yellowknife-to(ward) I fly-FUT  
'When I have money, I will fly to Yellowknife.'

In examples (36) and (38), clause-initial t'a is associated with a clause-final particle -sí (or -lasí). This latter particle seems to distinguish indirect question forms from subordinate qualifying clause forms. Sentence (36) is not entirely clear, however, in that it has an identical structure to the sentences containing indirect questions (examples (30) to (34)). The best suggestion at this point is that either (1) the particle -sí (or -lasí) does distinguish indirect questions from subordinate clauses and there is some subtle semantic distinction which is not apparent in the English translation; or (2) the appearance of sí (or -lasí) is in some way dependent on the main verb form, i.e. in (30) through (34) the verb is 1sg subject, while in (36) the verb is 3pl subject.

Sentence (37) shows the interesting fact that t'a does not invariably appear clause-initially. It seems reasonable to predict that there is an optional movement rule which either (1) fronts the particle t'a to the left of the embedded sentence, or (2) moves the clause-initial particle to a position between the verb form in the embedded construction and the clause-final particle -sí (or -lasí).

The general principles involved in the formation of this type of

subordinate clause are quite similar to those employed in indirect question formation:

39. a. Place *t'a* at the beginning of the embedded clause and si

# Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>The following abbreviations will be used: NEG-negative; FUT-future; DIM-diminutive; INSTR-instrumental; REL-relative (marker); COMP-complementizer; CAUS-causative; PART-particle; LOC-locative; NOM-nominalizer; CONJ-conjunction; asp.-aspect (prefix); clas.-classifier; adv.-adverbial (prefix); adj.-adjectival (prefix); dem. pron.-demonstrative pronoun; dl-dual; lsg-first person singular (prefix); 3pl-third person plural; etc. The particle *t'a/t'á* is italicized in full sentence examples.

<sup>2</sup>The *peg* prefix *he-* appears when no other aspect, mode, adverbial, etc. prefixes are present.

<sup>3</sup>I list the seemingly irrelevant forms only for the purpose of completeness. It is to be hoped that one day all of the forms can be related through some abstract semantic concept such as 'source.'

<sup>4</sup>The reasons for claiming this are (1) we were completely unable to elicit examples of the form of Carter's (sentences (21) and (22)); and (2) Carter did not mention that *t'a/t'á* serves as an instrumental/causative marker as well.

<sup>5</sup>There are some examples in the data to follow which do not adhere to this "ideal" phonemic contrast.

<sup>6</sup>Furthermore, it is translated into English as "by means of" in virtually all cases.

<sup>7</sup>Although they are seemingly rare, the following are examples of *t'á* following a verb:

- (i) *yuní-təð e-k'é ?edláyí nek'e naǰdər-t'á ts'éni*  
last night who there he fought-PART he is (my) friend  
'The fellow who fought last night (at your place) is my friend.'
- (ii) *kú bebiáze adíú, "setsuné ?edlá-nedža-t'á*  
so baby said my grandmother what happened to you-PART  
*adinit'á ?enayá-tšo(g) ?onídelya lasí" héní k'e bebiáze*  
you say that eye-big PART he said baby  
'So the baby said, "Grandmother, what happened that led you to  
say ?'enayá-tšo(g) ?onídelya?'"'

<sup>8</sup>It may be the case (in the final analysis) that there is no distinction between these classifications in Chipewyan.



paper (in preparation). A large body of text material will provide the basis for the analysis. This paper is only a preliminary working version.

<sup>12</sup>Examples (42) and (43) are termed "intensive" (i.e. "emphatic") because of the glosses we were given. In (42), beyā translates as 'give to him' although it is simply the 3sg objective pronoun be- and the post-position -yā 'to.' In this case, it serves as a verbal form as evidenced by the postverbal suffixes -xa FUT and -hīle NEG. In example (43), ʔaṇi 'you say it' followed by -t'a yields "emphatic saying" (i.e. 'you expect it').

<sup>13</sup>I.e. I have circumvented these problems in anticipation of a definitive statement concerning t'a/t'a (Jehn, in preparation).

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