

Verb stem incorporation in Athapaskan language? The case of activity incorporates

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Athapaskan languages are replete with complex predicates, constructions involving two or more predication elements which predicate as a single element. These include, among others, causative constructions, middle voice constructions, preverb+verb constructions, quantifier+verb constructions, and incorporates. In this paper I examine one particular type of incorporated element, activity incorporates.

In many Athapaskan languages, incorporation of elements such as 'sing' and 'laugh' is possible, yielding meanings such as 'I walked around singing' and 'I sat crying.' Such elements do not introduce arguments nor do they enter into the determination of aspectual material, while in most other complex predicates, the non-head part of the complex predicate affects either argument structure or situation aspect. In some Athapaskan languages, the positioning of activity incorporates in the verb poses a potential problem for a theory that seeks to predict morpheme order rather than account for it by an idiosyncratic template. In Athapaskan languages generally, the verb stem is at the end of verb complex, preceded by material that can be considered to be phonologically incomplete with respect to prosodic form; phonologically complete material precedes this; within these phonologically determined zones, semantic and syntactic factors determine ordering. In a language in which the activity incorporates are analyzed as verb stems, the following problem arises: how is the head of the verb identified for purposes of linearization of the morphemes if it contains two verb stems?

A study of the morphology of the activity incorporates reveals the answer to this question: the activity incorporates are not in fact verb stems, but rather are nouns. They do not show the suffixation patterns expected of verb stems, and many can be used independently as nouns as well as occur as incorporated arguments. If the activity incorporates are nouns, their positioning within the verb follows: they are not the head of the verb complex, and thus verbal affixes do not take them as their host, and their phonological and semantic properties account for how they are linearized with respect to other material.