Patterns of the generic and particular in Wintu narrative texts

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1. Introduction.

Wintu is a nearly extinct Penutian language, originally spoken in the Shasta, Trinity, and Siskiyou counties of northern California (Schlichter 1981). A number of texts in Wintu have been collected and published, mostly in a large volume by Alice Shepherd (1989) who has texts published also under the name of Schlichter (1978, 1980). Several other texts have been collected by Harvey Pitkin (1977, 1978, 1984). These texts are based upon recordings from three native Wintu speakers—Grace McKibbin, Carrie B. Dixon, and Joe Charles, all of whom are now deceased. Data from some of these texts will be used in this discussion.

One of the most striking characteristics of the Wintu language is a morphological distinction between generic and specific entities. Two published sources that specifically discuss this distinction for Wintu are Dorothy D. Lee's "Categories of the Generic and Particular in Wintu" (1944) and Pitkin's Wintu Grammar (1984). According to Pitkin (1984:210,157), "generic" refers to mass, a continuum, unboundedness, the more abstract, the less focused, or "an unspecified, not particularized, individual, class, or genus". "Particular" refers to individuality, boundedness, the less abstract, the more focused, or "a particular individuated from the mass or general type".

This paper explores the functions of generic and particular markers on three levels of structure: the word, the sentence/idea, and the discourse. At each level different motivations determine which marker is used.

2. Morphemes marked as generic/particular.

Pitkin (1984:205,213-214) lists the forms of the morphemes as follows:

Generic

(m) -> /m/ (imperative verbs; denotes syntactic object)

(s) -> /s/ /t/ /w/ /y/ /m/ /n/ /·/ /ŋ/ (nouns, nominalized verbs) The varied allomorphy reflects the different noun classes, and appears to be historically conditioned by patterns of verb derivation (Pitkin, pp.203-206).
(to·) (disjunctive enclitic): "foregrounds, topicalizes, focuses, marks new information, and in the subject case marks agency" (Pitkin, p. 223). Note that (to·) is inflected differently when in the particular.
-> to- (subj), to-num (obj), to-nun (genitive), to-nin (locative)

Particular

(i-1) -> /i·il/ /wil/ (imperative verbs; denotes syntactic object)
{t} -> /t/ /·t/ (imperative verbs; denotes syntactic patient)
{t} -> /t/ /·h/ (nouns, nominalized verbs; varies according to noun class)
{to·} (disjunctive enclitic)
-> to- (subj), to- (obj), to-n (locative)
[no genitive case for the particular]

3. Word Level Patterning.

At this level, the choice of a generic or particular morpheme is motivated by inherent characteristics of the word itself, and is largely unaffected by context. Words such as "land" and "water", which can represent a seemingly boundless or undifferentiated mass, have become permanently fused with the generic morpheme, and do not occur without it. This concurs with the findings of Pitkin (1984) and Lee (1944), who state that unbound entities always occur in the generic.

(1) me·m sometimes mem -> me 'water' + m G
From Shepherd (1989: 100, translations from p. 106):

(1a) piya piyat' e-t ma-n pip' uri-t me·mpo·m
he alone-P EX they-P ocean (lit. 'water land')
wint' u·h-to-t suker memwint' u·h
people-P-CL.P being sea.lions-P (lit. 'sea people') EX
'There were only sea lions.' line 29'

(1b) me·m-to-n harpaq-t tintiniskar harpaq-t
water-CL.P go.for-P talk.trying go.for.as-P
'When he went to the water trying to speak with them,
me·m-in hulu·ta.
water-in swarm
they disappeared into the water.' line 35

(1c) me·m kenti hara·
water under go
'They went under water.' line 36
(2) po-m also pom -> po 'land, ground' + m G  
From Pitkin (1978:33; translation pp.37,38):

(2a) "nompom net bo-spom hara.-wirabi.-da,  
west.land 1 POSS dwell.land go-FUT.IMP-I  
'I'm going to Trinity Valley where I come from,  
nompom λilepom-to-n hara.-wirabi.-da."  
west.land acorn.land-CL.P go-FUT.IMP-I  
to Trinity Valley to the acorn country will I go." line 13

It may seem strange that the word "fire" is always particularized, but in the Wintu texts there is another term to denote a fire that is overwhelming or otherwise out of control, and this appears in verbal form, usually as (hir-):

Shepherd 1989:122; translation p.125:

(3) ko-m pʰuyuq hirc-wira  
all mountains burn-going to  
'All the mountains will be on fire.' line 6

(4) pʰo-h -> pʰo- 'fire' + h P  
From Pitkin (1978:34; translation p.38):

(4a) ?u-t pi k'aysa-s-to-t ?unibuha sede-t-to-t buha  
then-P that fast.walker-G-CL.P thus DUR Coyote-P-CL.P stay  
'So then Grey Squirrel and the Coyote remained there,

?una. pʰo-h c'an-to-nin ..  
then fire side/half-CL.G  
on opposite sides of the fire, ..' line 18

Some words can appear in the generic, but usually occur in the particular. Terms denoting immediate family members and Wintu people in general fit this category:

(5) wintʰu-h -> wintʰu- 'person, people, Wintu, Indian(s)' + h P  
(Pitkin 1984:273;1985:696)

(6) ḵabeh (or ḵabet) -> ḵabe 'older brother' + h/t P  
 ḵabey  -> " " "  + y G  
(Schlichter 1981:127)

Certain plant and animal species names are always either generic or particular. The reason for this is not clear except in one case: the Wintu word tʰe-rít (10) was extended to serve as a generic translation for the English word bird (Schlichter 1979:242).

(7) čirčahas -> circaha 'mountain chipmunk' + s G  
(Shepherd 1989:12)

(8) žomu-š -> žomu- 'rat' + s G  
(Schlichter 1981:134; see also Pitkin 1985:304)

At this level, the choice of either the generic or particular can make a difference in referentiality. The examples below show ways the speaker encodes the concepts of Coyote (the mythical character), common coyotes, and a certain coyote she had difficulty trapping. Examples (11) and (12) are from a mythical tale; (13)–(16) are from a personal narrative:

In (11) and (12) the particular -h and generic -y provide a contrast between two sets of coyote—Coyote (the main protagonist), and Coyote's children, who are themselves coyotes.

Shepherd 1989:227; translation p. 230:

(11) \( \text{ni ma’n pik’ete’t be-lebada ni ma’n,} \)
I EX alone be-I'll I EX
"I will be alone,

bo-laheres ċ’arawa-h.
tales coyote-P
the Coyote of the tales."

(12) yečuna-lebada ċ’arawa-y po’ilah netomen ?ilawi-h-to-t.
name-I'll coyotes-G little my children-P-CL.P
"I will name my children, 'little coyotes.'" line 129

Examples (13)–(15) show a generic/particular contrast, but in a different way. Since the generic and particular are homophones in the accusative case (for coyote), the speaker always uses the pronoun/demonstrative putam when referring to a certain coyote, as in (13–14). In other languages speakers may use demonstratives to distinguish referents in narratives (see Mithun 1987), and here the speaker does the same, using the particular form.

Shepherd 1989:479; translation p. 491:

(13) putam\(^2\) ?ile-s ċ’arawa-y-um-to-n\(^3\) K’o-mi-kar,
that being coyote-SF-OB-CL.P kill-wanting

k’iyemti-nis biya ċ’arawa-h-to-t\(^4\).
wise be coyote-P-CL.P

'I wanted to kill that foxy coyote.' line 636
(14) putam q'apma- č'arawa-y-um-to-n.
that catch coyote-SF-OB-CL.P
'I caught that coyote.'

In (15) the speaker does not use the particular demonstrative. This signifies a change in idea, allowing the listener to think in terms of the generic homophone (common coyotes). The particular clitic in (15) adds emphasis to the idea that the speaker only had to deal with common, non-troublesome coyotes from then on.

(15) ?una hi?an č'arawa-y-um ?uwe č'arawa-y-um-to-n
and again coyote-G-OB just coyote-G-OB-CL.P

q'apma- hi?uni.
catch again

'Then I caught common coyotes again.'

This example also illustrates how the enclitic (to ) marks a conceptual distinction between genera (first noted in Lee 1944:364), in this case between common and trap-springing coyote (a further example of this distinction is seen in (17e) below).

5. Discourse Level Patterning.

At this level, the generic/particular distinction can mark the reactivation (and sometimes the discontinuity) of a referent as a topic (Marianne Mithun p.c.). The enclitic (to ) is often seen at work here since part of its function involves foregrounding and topicalizing (Pitkin 1984:223). An example of this patterning is shown using a portion of the text, Grizzly (Shepherd 1989:157; translation pp.158-9).

(17a) piya wima-h-to-t piya wima-h yečuheres.
that grizzly-P-CL.P that grizzly-P named.was
'He was the one named 'Grizzly'. '

(17b) wima-y-um žikup'ure wima-y-um yičam
grizzly-G-OB fight.with grizzlies-G-OB real

wint'ú-h wima-h yečuna-s,
person-P grizzly-P named

wima-y-um žikup'urikoyit.
grizzly-G-OB fight.with.wanting

'He had to fight with grizzlies, real grizzlies, the person named Grizzly.'

(17c) wima-h-to-t yečuna-s.
grizzly-P-CL.P named

'His name was Grizzly.'
It is significant that in line 63 (17a) Grizzly first occurs with piya—a singular emphatic pronoun/demonstrative form (Pitkin 1984:231; 1985:419)—and -to-t. The last (3rd person) mention of Grizzly before then is in line 36 as purkururto-t 'his son', since in that part of the text Grizzly is talked about from the point of view of his father, who is the topic at that time. Grizzly's younger sister 'Fast One' becomes the next topic, and remains so until line 63 (17a) when Grizzly is reintroduced. (17b) demonstrates the level two structure discussed in 4., since using the generic -y- for grizzlies and the particular -h- for Grizzly helps maintain a conceptual distinction. The protagonist is brought back into focus again in (17c), with -to-t. In (17d) the referent paq k'elek'ele '(two) bone knives' appears, and is marked with the particular -to-n when it is reintroduced two lines later (17f). It is itself a sub-topic, however brief, and does not compete with the protagonist in topicality. In line 67 (17e) the generic grizzly occurs with -to-n, but in this instance the clitic is functioning at level two structure: the listener must call to mind a set of two grizzlies (and not a set containing just one grizzly, for example), to comprehend that the protagonist is powerful enough to fight with two bears. Finally, in (17e) the extra particularization Grizzly receives not only serves to bring him back into focus, but to mark a climax in the story about him: he was so physically strong and powerful that he could kill two grizzlies with his bare hands.

6. Conclusion.

To understand the functional motivations that determine the appearance of generic or particular markers their use must be examined on (at least) three levels: word, sentence/idea, and discourse. At the first level the inherent characteristics of the word motivate the choice of one over the other, resulting in fusion in some cases. At the sentence/idea level the choice of markers can make a difference in the way the the referent is understood. Finally, at the discourse level the generic/particular distinction can mark the reactivation of a referent as well as significant
points within a story. It remains to be seen whether this
distinction at all its levels is evident in texts of languages
related to Wintu, such as Patwin and Nomlaki. Such would be an
interesting avenue of research.

Notes

1. For clarification of the generic and particular markers
all examples have minor additions to the morphemic divisions in the
text and interlinear glosses.

The following abbreviations are used in the interlinear
glosses: CL, disjunctive enclitic; DUR, durative; EX, exclamation
word; FUT, future; G, generic; IMP, imperfect; OB, object; P,
particular; POSS, possessive; SF, stem formant; SG, singular.

2. particular singular object (Schlichter 1981:167)


4. Compare this to c'arawah that occurs in line 646:

čelew tepin-to-n c'arawah tilčumina puqehes.
not afterwards-CL.P coyote-P spring-not traps
'After that no coyote sprung my traps.'

It is not clear why the particular -h is used instead of the
generic -v. Nonetheless, it is not exactly analogous to (13), which
has additional particularization (-h-to-t).
References


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The 1990 meeting was the twentieth anniversary of the First Hokan conference, which met at the University of California, San Diego. From time to time, the conference has met with other groups such as the Penutian conference and the Uto-Aztecian conference. It now regularly meets with the Penutian conference.

The conference is again indebted to Margaret Langdon and the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, San Diego, for hosting the conference. Our thanks are also due to the various graduate students who took care of the numerous details such as supplying the endless coffee.

The papers in this volume appear in the same order as they did on the program at the conference. Unfortunately, a few of the presenters were not able to send in a paper for publication. All of the papers in the volume except the last one were presented at the 1990 meeting.

In 1983, 1984, and 1985, very few of the presenters sent in their papers for publication. In 1986, a few papers from each of these years were assembled into a single volume. Werner Winter sent his 1983 paper in as early that the editor lost it in the files, and Winter's paper was omitted from the 1986 volume. It is now egg-on-the-face time for the editor. Winter's paper is included in this volume as the last paper. Mea culpa.

Arrangements have been made with Coyote Press, P.O.B. 3377, Salinas, CA 93912, 408-422-4912, to reprint the various Hokan and Hokan-Penutian conference volumes. Dr. Gary S. Brechini of Coyote Press has told me that he will try to keep all the volumes in print. I have just sent him part of the original manuscripts and will be sending him the rest of the manuscripts very shortly. Only a very few of the original publications are still available. Please see the list at the end of the volume for details on the few remaining original volumes. I do not know how long it will be until Coyote Press will begin issuing reprints of the backissues.

James E. Redden

Carbondale, December 1990

Historical Note: The proceedings of the First Hokan conference were edited by Margaret Langdon and published by Mouton. I have edited all the other volumes of proceedings except those of 1988 and 1989, when I was in Africa. The 1988 and 1989 volumes of proceedings were edited by Scott Delancey in the series published by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Oregon. Please do not request these two volumes from me. Please address orders for the 1988 and 1989 volumes to: Department of Linguistics, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403. I hope that Scott will be willing to publish the Hokan-Penutian volumes regularly, when I retire in a few years.

JER
# CONTENTS

Nominalization in Jamul Diegueno  
Richard Epstein  

Lenition in Jamul Diegueno  
Michel Achard  

Some Differences between Two Speakers of Jamul Diegueno  
Amy Miller  

The Use of Auxiliary Verbs in Jamul Diegueno  
Kim Kellogg  

The Perfective-Imperfective Opposition in Kishaya  
Robert L. Oswalt  

Suffixal Aspect and Tense-Aspect in Northern Pomo  
Mary Catherine O'Connor  

The Role of Lexicalization in Shaping Aspectual Systems: Central Pomo  
Marianne Mithun  

Glottalized and Aspirated Sonorants in Kishaya  
Eugene Buckley  

Kishaya Swith Reference  
David Gamon  

Agentivity and the Animacy Hierarchy in Kishaya  
Kira Hall  

Patterns of the Generic and Particular in Wintu Narrative Texts  
Suzanne Wash  

Vowel Length and Pitch in Yavapai  
Kimberly D. Thomas and Alan Shaterian  

Aspiration in Tolkapaya Yavapai  
Pamela Munro  

Noun Incorporation in the Yuman Languages: The Relationship between wa- and ya-  
Joshua T. Katz  

Walapai Kinship Terminology  
James E. Redden  

Diegueño: How Many Languages?  
Margaret Langdon  

Non-Walapai Words in Walapai  
Werner Winter  

Publication Notice  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominalization in Jamul Diegueno</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenition in Jamul Diegueno</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Differences between Two Speakers of Jamul Diegueno</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Use of Auxiliary Verbs in Jamul Diegueno</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perfective-Imperfective Opposition in Kishaya</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffixal Aspect and Tense-Aspect in Northern Pomo</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Lexicalization in Shaping Aspectual Systems: Central Pomo</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glottalized and Aspirated Sonorants in Kishaya</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kishaya Swith Reference</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agentivity and the Animacy Hierarchy in Kishaya</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of the Generic and Particular in Wintu Narrative Texts</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel Length and Pitch in Yavapai</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration in Tolkapaya Yavapai</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun Incorporation in the Yuman Languages: The Relationship between wa- and ya-</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walapai Kinship Terminology</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diegueño: How Many Languages?</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Walapai Words in Walapai</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication Notice</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>