Reconstructing Proto-Sahaptin Independent Personal Pronouns

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This paper will attempt to reconstruct proto-language forms for the independent personal pronoun systems in the Sahaptin language family. This study will focus on samples from the Yakima, Klickitat, Warm Springs, and Umatilla dialects of Ichishkíin. These languages are all part of the larger Sahaptian family, which includes Sahaptin and Nez Perce languages spoken historically across what is currently Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. While the dialects within Sahaptin are mutually intelligble, Nez Perce is mutually unintelligible to its cousin languages. Additional research has shown that Sahaptian languages are connected within the larger Plateau Penutian family to Molalla and Klamath (DeLancey & Golla, 1997). Sahaptin languages fall into two primary subgroupings: a Northern Sahaptin grouping that includes both a Northwest cluster (Klikitat, Pswanwapam, Taitnapam, and Yakima), and a Northeast cluster (Palouse, Walla Walla, Wanapam, and Lower Snake); and a Southern grouping that is comprised of a Columbia River cluster (Celilo, John Day, Umatilla, Rock Creek, and Warm Springs) (Jansen, 2010; Rigsby, 1965b). A relations diagram has been included as an appendix to this paper. This language family features a phonemic inventory consisting of a large set of consonants and a smaller set of vowels. Stops and affricates are voiceless and exist in both plain and ejective forms. Three high vowels are featured as well as one low vowel. Phoneme charts are included as appendices for further reference.

Previous reconstruction work within the Sahaptian langauge family has occurred between Nez Perce and Umatilla to examine vowel changes (Rigsby, 1965a), but no formal work has been done on the Sahaptin dialect language family. Hymes (1984) remarked upon several differences between the Warm Springs dialect and others, but did not attempt to examine those sound and other changes on a more formal level. Rude (2014) included a table of cognates across dialects to demonstrate lexical variation across the Sahaptian family (p. 2). The data samples used in this paper come from two published dictionaries (Beavert, 2009; Rude, 2014) and two unpublished dictionaries (Rude, 2008; Tukta, personal communication, 2020). These orthographies are relatively young, however, so there may be other forms of these pronouns present in the speech set. Thus, this work may not be fully complete or representative of the sound changes from Proto-Sahaptin to the modern iterations of the sibling dialects. There is also still work being done to understand the role and conventional uses of these independent personal pronouns, as they are not the primary, mandatory markers of person in clauses. They may be used to “be formal, to clear away potential misunderstanding, or for emphasis” (Jansen, 2010, p.183). These words may then be a good sample to use for comparison reconstruction like this to get a sense of overall changes made, but should not be the absolute foundational basis for a family understanding of changes.

	Case	Person	#	Proto-Sah.	Yakima	Klickitat	Umatilla	Warm Springs
1	NOM	1st	Sg	*ˈʔink	ˈʔink	ˈʔink	ˈʔin	ˈʔini
2	NOM	1st	Du	*napiːˈnik	napwiːˈnik	napiːˈnik	napiːˈni ˈnapiːn	napiˈni
3	NOM	1st	Pl	*naˈmak	naˈmak	naˈmak	ˈnama	naːˈmaj
4	NOM	2nd	Sg	*ˈʔimk	ˈʔimk	ˈʔimk	ˈʔim	ˈʔimi
5	NOM	2nd	Du	*ʔimiːˈnik	ʔimiːˈnik	ʔimiːˈnik	ʔimiːˈni	ʔimiˈni
6	NOM	2nd	Pl	*ʔiˈmak	ʔiˈmak	ʔiˈmak	ʔiˈmaj	ʔiˈmaj
7	NOM	3rd	Sg	*ˈpɨnk	ˈpɨnk	ˈpɨnk	ˈpɨn	ˈp(ɨ)ni ˈʔəmni
8	NOM	3rd	Du	*piːˈnik	piːˈnik	piːˈnik	piːˈni	piˈni
9	NOM	3rd	Pl	*ˈpmak	ˈpmak	ˈpmak	ˈpmaj	ˈpmaj
10	ACC	1st	Sg	*ʔiˈnak	ʔiˈnak	ʔiːˈnak	ʔiˈnaj ˈʔina	ʔiˈnaj
11	ACC	1st	Du	*napiːnaˈnak	napwiːnaˈnak	napiːninˈnak	napiːnamaˈnaj	napinaˈmaj
12	ACC	1st	Pl	*niːmaˈnak	niːmaˈnak	niːmaˈnak	naːmaˈnaj ˈnaːman	naːmaˈnaj
13	ACC	2nd	Sg	*ʔimaˈnak	ʔimaˈnak	ʔiːˈmak	ʔimaˈnaj	ʔimaˈnaj
14	ACC	2nd	Du	*ʔimiːnaˈnak	ʔimiːnaˈnak	ʔimiːniˈnak	ʔimiːnamaˈnaj	ʔiminamaˈnaj
15	ACC	2nd	Pl	*ʔimaːmaˈnak	ʔimamaˈnak	ʔiːmaˈnak	ʔimaːmaˈnaj	ʔimaːmaˈnaj
16	ACC	3rd	Sg	*piːˈnak	piːˈnak	piːˈnak	paːˈnaj	paˈnaj
17	ACC	3rd	Du	*piːnamaˈnak	piːnamaˈnak	piːniniˈnak	piːnamaˈnaj	pinaˈmaj
18	ACC	3rd	Pl	*piːmaˈnak	piːmaˈnak	piːmaˈnak	paːmaˈnaj	paːˈmaj
19	GEN	1st	Sg	*ʔinˈmi	ʔinˈmi	ʔinˈmi nɨˈmi	ʔinˈmi	ʔinˈmi
20	GEN	1st	Du	*napiːnaˈ(n)mi	napwiːnanˈmi	napiːnanˈmi napiːnaˈnmink	napiːnaˈmi	napinaˈmi
21	GEN	1st	Pl	*niːˈmi	niːˈmi	niːˈmi	naːˈmi	naːˈmi
22	GEN	2nd	Sg	*ʔiˈmink	ʔiˈmink	ʔiˈmink	ʔiˈmiːn	ʔiˈmin
23	GEN	2nd	Du	*ʔimiːnanˈmink	ʔimiːnanˈmink	ʔimiːnanˈmi	ʔimiːnaˈmi	ʔiminaˈmin
24	GEN	2nd	Pl	*ʔimaˈmink	ʔimaˈmink	ʔiːˈmink	ʔimaːˈmiːn	ʔimaːˈmin
25	GEN	3rd	Sg	*pɨnˈmink	pɨnˈmink	pɨnˈmink	pɨnˈmiːn	p(ɨ)nˈmin
26	GEN	3rd	Du	*piːnaˈmink	piːnaˈmink	piːminanˈmi	piːnaˈmiːn	pinaˈmin
27	GEN	3rd	Pl	*piːˈmink	piːˈmink	piːˈmink	paːˈmiːn	paːˈmin

Looking at the data, one of the most apparent commonalities between Umatilla and Warm Springs as Columbia River dialects is the loss of of word-final /k/ in most forms across grammatical and numerical case. Their consistent presence in most Yakima and Klikitat forms suggests that Columbia River dialects lost the common instance of this sound, thus positing its returned placement in the Proto-Sahaptin forms for most of the pronouns. This can be seen in all 27 instances. This change was also noted more informally in Hymes (1984), as Warm Springs speakers had noted that Washington speakers had more instances of /k/ in their dialects. This compounded evidence makes this sound change a standout marker for the subgrouping of dialects, confirming this regionality established by previous languistic anthropology study.

Following this change, it appears that both Columbia River dialects also added a word-final /j/ sound if the intermediate stage ended with /a/, as seen in instances #3, 6, and 9-18. This addition is present in all cases in the Warm Springs sample and in most cases in the Umatilla, perhaps up to a sub-dialectical point. (Umatilla instance 3 /ˈnama/ does not add the word-final /j/, but does in all other cases present.) The Warm Springs dialect also appears to add a word-final /i/ sound to the single-person nominative cases for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd persons, perhaps following the example of the dual-person cases leftover by the word-final /k/ deletion. This is seen in #1, 4, and 7. This change is not found in the Umatilla as a point of divergence after the major sound shift. The logical reconstruction would strip down the word-final /i/ and /j/ and restore the */k/ to their places in the Proto-Sahaptin sample.

Another common change from the Proto-Sahaptin to the Columbia River dialects is the shift from /iː/ to /aː/ in multiple samples but not across the board. Both the accusative and genitives for the single and plural numbers have instances in Umatilla and Warm Springs using /aː/ in places where Northern dialects have /iː/, as seen in #12, 16, 18, 21, and 27. This difference is also noted in Hymes (1984). This change does not seemed to have affected the dual number cases, which is a unique number within a language and may not have been as common in usage to be as standardized as other cases. There are some additional instances of /a/ being transcribed as /aː/ in the Columbia River dialects, but the length of vowel is not commonly the differentiating factor between different cases. It also appears there is some differences in the length of some /iː/ between the dialects, so these transcriptions may be more subjective than for other, more concrete sounds. The prevalence of these vowel sounds throughout the sample suggest an overall lenition change in the Columbia River dialects from an originally higher vowel in most places. This summarizes most of the overall general changes and attributes of the Columbia River sample.

The Northern dialects, Yakima and Klikitat, retained many of the Proto-Sahaptin sounds and share these commonalities as two spatially-closer dialects. There are instances of a /n/ being inserted ahead of a /m/ in several cases (see #20, 23, and 26) to ease into the nasal sound or to be more similar to the 1st person singular genitive case /ʔinˈmi/. This insertion is also common in Yakima when attaching the genitive case noun suffix following vowels and some other categories of sounds. It would be interesting to compare these Northwest dialect samples to a sample from Northeastern dialects, but that data is not readily available at this time.

There do not seem to be major innovations shared by the two dialects, although each experienced their own sound changes. The Yakima sample has a /w/ glide inserted after between most /p/ and /iː/ instances in the dual cases (see #2, 11, and 20). This /w/ is not present in any of the other dialects, which contain just the /piː/ in those instances, so that was not reconstructed back to the Proto-Sahaptin. The Klikitat data has more forms with slight differences from their respective cognate sets, particularly in the accusative case across all persons and grammatical numbers. There are instances of some /a/ shifting to /i/ (#11, 14, 17) as well as some syllables being duplicated or removed (#13, 15). There is also a more drastic complication with an additional syllable and vowel changes in the 3rd person dual genitive case (#26). There do not seem to be enough substantive instances of these changes to suggest dialect-specific sound changes at this time.

This Klikitat data comes from Rude (2008), an unpublished manuscript that pulled many language samples from Rigsby's 1934 and 1937 *Northwest Sahaptin Texts*, which now feature transcriptions from many different speakers. Because these pronouns are not required in most clauses, there was no guarantee of a plethora of instances to compare to determine the most common form of each of these pronouns. This is the case with much of this data, as it may be difficult to comb through the versions of formal corpus data that linguists have available at this moment. This data is drawn from a lot of now-written monologue or legend-retelling samples compared to conversational or everyday language, which could pose a problem for the validity of these samples in other contexts. Further collection and analysis of independent personal pronouns is needed to make a full approximation of what other sounds would need to be considered in this reconstruction.

This data begins to show, however, that Columbia River dialects experienced a number of word-final changes on their pronouns in addition to the changing of several high long vowels to low ones. Another sample with some similar phonological features that could help provide some additional context on these changes would be the proximate and distal demonstratives. Additional dialects could also be gathered to provide more perspective on Northern dialects from the East as well. This work also

helps inform possible processes for teaching these languages to modern learners, as many would like to incorporate multiple dialects into their learning as many families have relatives in multiple communities around the Plateau. With this information, linguists and language activists can work to better understand these languages in terms of commonalities, differences, and phonetic and morphological underpinnings to go about creating more cohesive and better informed materials and work to share with learners still to come.

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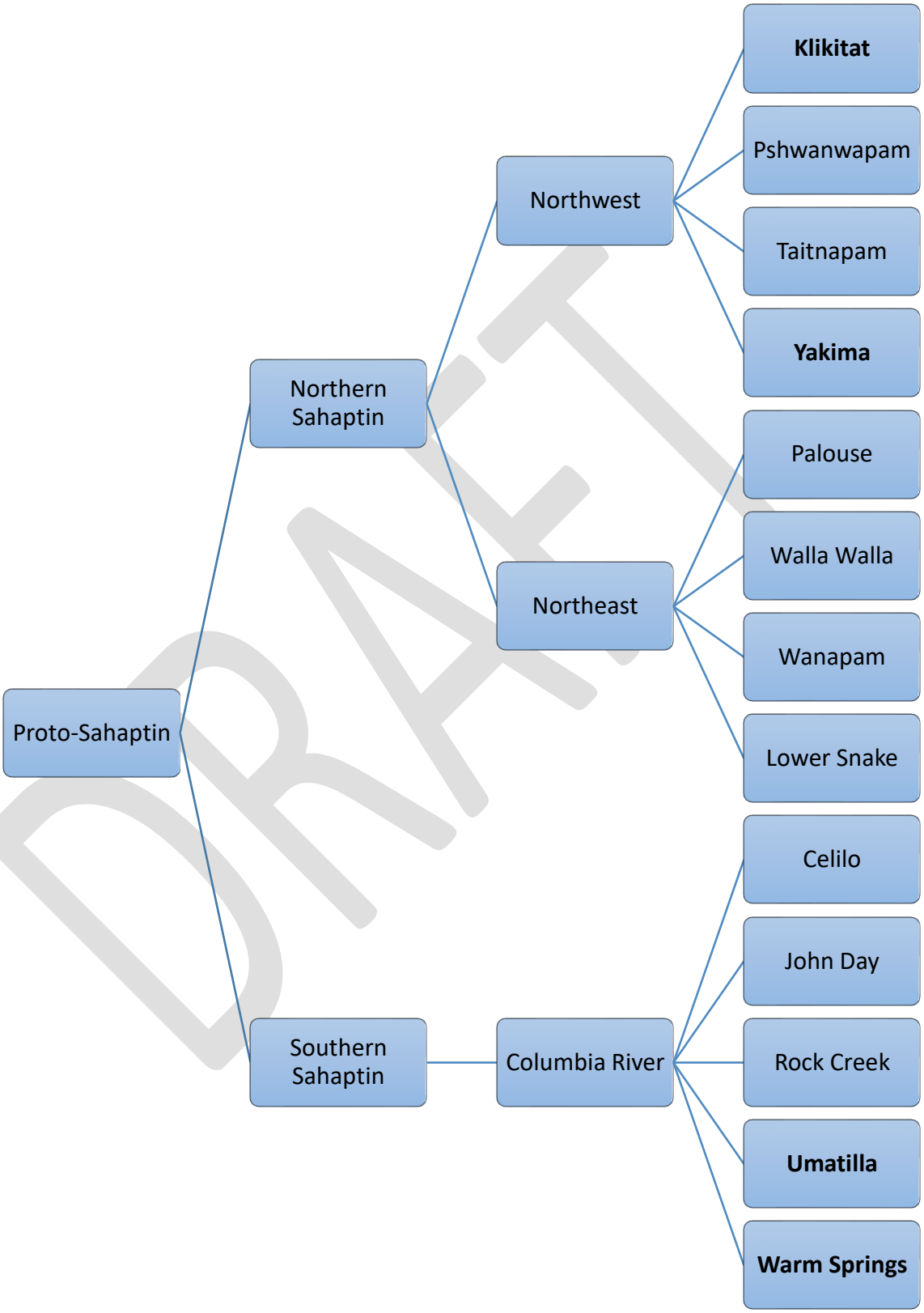
Appendix A: Proto-Sahaptin Language Family Tree



Appendix B: Sahaptin Phoneme Inventory

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labial velar	Uvular	Labial uvular	Glottal
Plosive	p	t			k	k^w	q	q^w	ʔ
Affricate		t͡s	t͡ʃ						
Lateral affricate		t͡ɬ							
Ejective stop	p’	t’			k’	$k’^w$	q’	$q’^w$	
Ejective affricate		t͡s’	t͡ʃ’						
Ejective lateral affricate		t͡ɬ’							
Nasal	m	n							
Fricative		s	ʃ		x	x^w	χ	$χ^w$	h
Lateral fricative		ɬ							
Approximant	w			j			(ʁ)		
Lateral approximant		l							

(Hargus & Beavert, 2014)

i, iː	ɨ	u, uː
	a, aː	