Possession Strategies in Yakima Ichishkíin

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Expressing possession of the noun phrases in a clause is a crucial language skill for speakers and learners to become familiar with to help their listener track the different participants and sources in the discourse. In Yakima Ichishkíin, a highly polysynthetic language with a free-word order structure found in current Central Washington state, there are multiple ways to express possession, each with their own grammar patterns and possible semantic inflection on the utterance. Some of these rely on internal possession strategies focused on the identifiable noun phrase units while others create external possession strategies on the verb phrase units. This paper will provide examples of both of these strategies in Yakima Ichishkíin with a focus on the more complex external possession techniques. It will also include pedagogical considerations towards including these linguistic skills into language class curriculum.

Yakima Ichishkíin is a dialect within the Sahaptian language family in the current Pacific Northwest. It is one of a handful of Ichishkíin (Sahaptin) dialects, with mutually inteligible sibling dialects found on the Oregon side of *Nch'iwána* (the Columbia River) on the Warm Springs and Umatilla Indian reservations. Nez Perce is found higher up in the language family as a more distant relative spoken around the current Washington and Idado state border. Grammatical relations are shown with pronominal enclitics, verb indexation, and nominal case-marking. Yakima Ichishkíin is a language in active revitalization, with an estimated 5-25 living L1 speakers (Jansen 2012). The data for this paper comes from Dr. Virginia Beavert's (Tuxámshish) 2017 book *Ttnúwit Átawish Nch'inch'imamí: The Gift of Knowledge*, which includes memoir and cultural process narration writing in both Ichishkíin and English.

## Internal Possession

These strategies focus on inclusion of words that directly modify the possessed noun. One primary strategy is the genitive noun suffix *-(n)mí*. This morpheme is primarily used to

indicate that the noun that it is attached to is a possessor of another noun. There is no

accompanying marker placed onto the possessed noun. The suffix is placed onto a noun stem

before any other oblique case markers. Example (1) shows this type of usage. The possessor and

possessum may be situated next to each other in the clause, but there is no clear noun phrase

continuity or order requirement within the free word order (Rude 1999).

(1)     Íkush   íkw'ak        á-wacha               miimá
        thus    that          3O-COP.PAST           long.ago

        sápsikw'a-t    tiin-ma-mí.
        teach-NZR      Indian.person-PL-GEN
        'That is how the old ways of the People were.' (Beavert 2017:42)

It may also be used to express a more general assocation or relationship between the marked

possessor and unmarked possessum, (Jansen 2010), as evidenced in (2). In both of these cases,

the verb indexation on the verb still agrees with the 3rd person subjects expressed.

(2)     Chɨmyanashyíima    awkú        pa-nák.wɨshuwa-nxa-na
        parents            then        3PL.S-prepare.for-HAB-PAST

        aswan-mí      inawawíksh
        boy-GEN       male.dowry
        'The parents, then, would get the male dowry ready to trade.' (Beavert 2017:50)

In both of these cases, the verb indexation on the verb still agrees with the 3rd person subjects

expressed. This suffix is also used to add to oblique inflections for animate nouns (Rude 1999),

when adding other case suffixes like an ablative (-knik), allative (-kan), benefactive (-ay), dative

(-yaw), instrumental (-ki), or locative (-pa). This genitive often takes on the case marking of its

possessed noun in order to help maintain continuity within the clause.

        Another strategy for including internal possession is the use of the independent personal

possessive pronouns. These are free-standing pronoun words that are lexically inflected for case,

either nominative, accusative, or genitive. A full list of these pronouns are included in Appendix

B. These can be included in a similar fashion to nouns with the genitive suffix attached and

modify the noun in the same manner, except now including first and second person options. The

genitive case pronouns can be included as part of a continuous or discontinuous noun phrase, or

stand in for the entire phrase if needed. Jansen (2010) notes that if these pronouns modify an

explicit noun phrase, it will almost always precede the possessed noun (188). Examples (3) and

(4) show instances of the 1SG and 3SG possessive pronouns modifying the explicit noun.

(3)     Íkw'ak=nash   wachá        inmí                    kútkut.
        that=1SG      COP.PAST     1SG.GEN.PN              work
        'That was my job' (Beavert 2017:26)

(4)     Mish   pink          piná-naktkwanin-ta                     ku      kúshx̱i
        how    3SG.NOM.PN    REFL-be.responsible.for-FUT            and     also

        pinmínk              nisháykt,     iwínsh,      myánash.
        3SG.GEN.PN           reside-NZR    man          child
        'how she will take care of herself as well as her home, husband, and children.'
        (Beavert 2017:40)

While these pronouns are helpful in clearly expressing possession, they are generally used either

to move the utterance into a more formal register, clear away potential misunderstandings or

ambiguity, or emphasize particular participant's roles (Jansen 2010:183). In this regard, it is

unclear how often they are actually used in everyday discourse, as most of the available language

samples could fall into the more formal register in the legends and memoir sources. They should

always be accompanied by the proper pronominal enclitic or verbal prefix, as they cannot stand

alone to indicate person within the clause. That being said, they can also help clarify the number

of participants, as the pronouns can express a dual number in addition to the singular and plural

already possible in the pronominal indexes via enclitics and verbal prefixes.

A third internal possession strategy applies specifically to kinship terms for first and

second person possessors. Each kinship term has reference and vocative as well as 1SG and 2SG

possessive lexical forms that can be used to add possessive meaning to the kinship word (Jansen

2010:151-153). These forms can also then be inflected with the genitive suffix if they are

possessing another noun in the utterance. Example (5) shows an instance of a possessive kinship

term for one's stepfather being used as the subject of the utterance.

(5)     Ku      ínpimx̱              i-támaat-sha               niimí
        and     my.stepfather       3SG.S-take.out-PROG        1PL.GEN.PN

        wíx̱wɨɬx̱wiɬ      wax̱wnaykí
        canvas          tent
        'and my stepfather takes out our canvas army tent out of storage' (Beavert 2017:26)

These forms often appear as if they have either prefixes or circumfixes attached to the vocative

forms of most kinship terms to distinguish the possessive forms from the standalone nominal

forms. There are some cases where using a genitive pronoun form and the reference kinship form

may make more sense, but there is more data collection and analysis needed to distinguish when

each version of possession should be pragmatically used. A list of all of these forms can be found

in Appendix C. Internal possession can be used easily to syntactically indicate possession

through the inclusion of a modifier onto the possessed noun, but it is unclear how often some of

these techniques are used in everyday conversational speech.

## External Possession

The other category of strategies employed to express possession focuses on the possessor

argument manifesting around the verb of the utterance through external possession. Payne and

Barshi (1999) note that these often add an argument to the verb that often functions as the object

of the clause as well as the possessor. These take on a variety of forms, including dative shifting,

locative constructions, noun incorporation, and simple transitive clauses, and are much more

common than previously expected. Rude (1999) writes about the manifestations of external

possession as focusing on topicality of referents and agrees with Payne and Barshi's (1999)

sentiment that it often is used to help disambiguate issues of co-reference by focusing on the

topicality and thus grammatical relations of the participants involved. In order to explore the

possibilities of using external possession in clauses, a brief review of the standard grammatical

relations will set the stage for the additional meaning possession adds to the clause. Then,

modifications to those relations and their significance will be shown in intransitive, transitive,

and ditransitive clauses as they pertain to external possession.

Person marking in clauses is done through 2nd position pronominal enclitics and verbal

prefixes. In intransitive clauses, all speech act participants (SAP, 1st and 2nd persons) are marked

through an enclitic that attaches itself to the end of the first word of the sentence and may change

morphophonologically depending on the word-final sound. 3rd person participants are marked

through prefixes that attach themselves to the very front of the verb word, ahead of any

derivational morphology. A table of this information along with relevant paradigms can be found

in Appendix D. Examples (3) and (5) shown previously include uses of a pronominal enclitic and

verbal prefix respectively. Jansen (2012) describes how transitive clauses combine and modify

these markers to include the second participant into the clause. Most local participant cases (from

a SAP to another SAP) manifest as another 2nd position pronominal enclitic, often in a combined

or altered form to distinguish from the single-argument forms. Mixed participant scenarios (from

a SAP to a 3rd person or vice-versa) are indicated by the appropriate 2nd position pronominal

enclitic along with a verbal prefix for the 3rd person participant either indicating the Nominative

case form if the Agent or the Absolutive object marker if the Patient. Non-local scenarios (from a

3rd person to another 3rd person) are indicated primarily by verbal prefixes, distinguishing

between a direct action (from a topical participant to a non-topical one) or an indirect action

(vice-versa). A specific 2nd position pronominal enclitic (=*pat*) is brought in when the Agent of

the clause is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural participant acting on another 3<sup>rd</sup> person participant. All of these

paradigms are documented in Appendix E in specific detail for further reference.

In intransitive clauses, the grammatically required possessor remains around the verb to

indicate possession of included noun phrases, while optional possessive pronouns can be

included to help disambiguate referents or the intended type of clause. A straightforward

example is the use of the copula *wa* to express possession description. Rude (1999) notes that the

appropriate 2<sup>nd</sup> position pronominal enclitic should be included as the required argument for the

verb along with the possessed noun. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person verb affixes function similarly here. One

twist with these instances of external possession, however, are some alternations to include some

markers found in the transitivity paradigms to express 2<sup>nd</sup> person possession. The 2<sup>nd</sup> person

singular and plural possessors should be marked with the *=mash* and *=matash* enclitics, which

are normally used for 1<sup>st</sup>-to-2<sup>nd</sup> person transitive making. Example (3) previously includes this

type of possession with a pronominal enclitic. The optional possessive pronoun used helps

disambiguate the possession from the other possible existential meaning of the copula (e.g.

comparing 'I *am* that job' and 'I *have* that job'). This makes the independent genitive pronoun an

oblique inclusion, as it is not technically a core argument of the clause while it does provide

helpful context information. Even with these markers in the clause, the possessed noun phrase is

not marked for case or to indicate that it is possessed.

With the 3<sup>rd</sup> person possession in an intransitive clause, the absolutive verb prefix *á-* can

be used to shift focus from the possessed item as the grammatical subject to the possessor as the

subject. Examples (6) and (7) show this difference with indicated emphasis in the provided

translation.

(6)    i-wá                    pinmínk             káatnam           tútanik
       3SG.S-COP.PRES          3SG.GEN.PN          long              hair
       '*she* has long hair'

(7)    á-wa                    pinmínk             káatnam           tútanik
       3ABS-COP.PRES           3SG.GEN.PN          long              hair
       '*her hair* is long'

This usage of pronominal enclitics and verbal prefixes to express possession works on other

intransitive verb stems as well. The same construction parts are utilized for the same purposes of

marking the possessor as a grammatically required participant while shifting focus towards the

possessed noun phrase. This makes it important to recognize the valence of the verb stem to

identify if the verb requires both arguments for transitivity purposes or if it is indicating

possession on an intransitive stem through the inclusion of two arguments.

Transitive clauses can be modified to include the possession depending on whether the

possessor is coreferential with the grammatical subject. If they are coreferential, Rude (1999)

writes that the grammar depends on whether transitivity is maintained in the clause, which

appears to be a choice by the speaker. If it is maintained, then a possessive pronoun should be

included and marked with the accusative noun suffix for agreement with the noun phrase. If

transitivity is not maintained, then the person marking should pull from the intransitive

paradigms with no case marker on the possessed noun phrase, similar to possession around an

intransitive clause. It can be difficult to identify these examples of this type of possession, so

further study and review of existing data is needed to provide examples of this type of

construction.

When the possessor is not coreferential with the grammatical subject, the animacy of the

possessum becomes a major factor. If the possessum is inanimate, a similar detransitivation

occurs while including the appropriate possessive pronoun and noun phrase with no additional

case markers (Rude 1999). If the possessum is animate, two options are possible: accusative

concord between an included possessor pronoun and possessum noun phrase; or external

possession via an applicative verb suffix with the possessor coded as the direct object. The

former refers to strategies mentioned previously, while the latter introduces a more derivationally

complex stem into the clause in order to accommodate a new participant argument. The

applicative/benefactive suffix *-ani* modifies a verb to add a direct object that can act as the

possessor of a topical unmarked noun phrase (explicit or not). Thus, intransitive and transitive

verb stems can be turned into ditransitive applicative stems. In these constructions, the

grammatical subject is acting on the possessed object, but the possessor is coded as the object

while the possessum is included as a theme of the clause (Jansen 2012, Rude 1999). A note about

this suffix is that it can also encode a benefactive meaning towards the direct object (Rude 1999),

so context will be needed to disambiguate which particular meaning is intended or significant to

the utterance's overall meaning.

(8)     ana=nam          á-winp-ani-ta                     ipáp
        SUB=2SG          3O-grab-APPL-FUT                  hand
        'when you grab the [widow's] hand' (Beavert 2017:70)

(9)     shix̲=nam          i-naknúy-ani-ta                   ipáx̲    ku     wáwnakshash
        good=2SG         3SG.S-care.for-APPL-FUT           skin    and    body
        '[the medicine] will take good care of your skin and body' (Beavert 2017:92)

In Examples (8) and (9), the 2nd person singular argument operates as subject and direct object

with respect to the 3rd person participant referenced anaphorically in each sentence. The

included applicative suffixes allow for transitive verb stems ('grab', 'care.for') to take an

unmarked inanimate noun as the possessum. The indicator of which participant is actually the

possessor lies in the transitive verb prefix, in this case. If the 3rd person participant was

mentioned explicitly, they would be marked with the accusative case. Example (9) also has

possession of two noun phrases with a conjunction between them. In Examples (10) and (11), the

transitive person marking is a better indicator of possession as there is no option for confusion

with intransitive person markers.

(10)    pá-chawiluuk-ani-ta              laxsláxs         patún
        INV-raise.up-APPL-FUT        another        belonging
        'they will bring up [the deceased's] personality and occupation' (Beavert 2017:71)

(11)    úyt=pat        áw-imałak-ani-ta                    iníit
        first=3PL>3    3O-clean-APPL-FUT                house
        'first they will clean [the deceased's] house" (Beavert 2017:75)

There are possibilities of more complex constructions that include kinship terms both lexically

and externally possessed with all of these valency types. Instances of these may need more

specific elicitation or re-analysis of existing documented texts in order to identify cases for

further study on this topic. Rude (1999) suggests that the most likely predictor of when a

possessor will be included through external possession is its topicality within the discourse, as it

may be easier to track a more topical argument as a direct object rather than a case marked

pronoun when shifting between focuses and participants in a clause.

## Conclusion

There are many ways to include possessive information in Yakima Ichishkíin, some

notably focusing on the noun portions of the clause and others on the verb-related portions.

Internal possession includes focusing on including or changing lexical items to syntactically

express that possession. External possession involves modifying the valency of the verb stem to

concentrate on the possessor as either a detransitivized subject or a transitive object to modify

unmarked noun phrases. This larger phenomenon has not yet received extensive study nor is

explicitly included in current language curricula, so more examples from additional corpus

materials from other genres would be beneficial to pin down more salient example constructions

as well as directions towards teaching strategies. However, this study begins to show that many

of those strategies utilize pre-existing person markers with different environmental

considerations and semantic intentions. This provides a starting point for instructional ideas and

proficiency prerequisites as to when might be best to include this alongside unit content. An

important skill alongside all of this seems to be how the discourse series is constructed and the

referents are tracked and switched throughout, particularly around 3rd person participants. This

instance of this study has started to gather examples and information about possession strategies

and has helped primed future research on this language function.

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## Appendix A: Glossary

| Abbrev. | Gloss |
|---------|-------|
| ABS | Absolutive |
| APPL | Applicative |
| COP | Copula |
| FUT | Future Tense |
| GEN | Genitive |
| HAB | Habitual Aspect |
| INV | Inverse |
| NOM | Nominal |
| NZR | Nominalizer |
| O | Object |
| PAST | Past Tense |
| PL | Plural number |
| PN | Pronoun |
| PRES | Present Tense |
| PROG | Progressive Aspect |
| REFL | Reflexive |
| S | Subject |
| SG | Singular number |
| SUB | Subordinator |
| 1 | First person |
| 2 | Second person |
| 3 | Third person |

## Appendix B: Independent Personal Pronouns

These tables are derived from Beavert and Hargus (2009).

## Nominative Pronouns

| Person | Singular | Dual | Plural |
|---|---|---|---|
| **First** | ínk | napwiiník | namák |
| **Second** | ímk | imiiník | imák |
| **Third** | pínk | piiník | pmák |

## Accusative Pronouns

| Person | Singular | Dual | Plural |
|---|---|---|---|
| **First** | inák | napwiinanák | niimanák |
| **Second** | imanák | imiinanák | imamanák |
| **Third** | piinák | piinamanák | piimanák |

## Genitive Pronouns

| Person | Singular | Dual | Plural |
|---|---|---|---|
| **First** | inmí | napwiinanmí | niimí |
| **Second** | imínk | imiinanmínk | imamínk |
| **Third** | pinmínk | piinamínk | piimínk |

# Appendix C: Kinship Term List

This table is derived from Beavert and Rigsby (1975).

| Relationship | Reference | 'My' | Vocative | 'Your' |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mother** | pchá | na'íɬas | íɬa | íɬ |
| **Father** | pshít | natútas | túta | itút |
| **Paternal Uncle** | pimx̱ | namáx̱as | máx̱a | imáx̱ |
| **Paternal Aunt** | pishísh | nasísas | shísha | ishísh |
| **Maternal Uncle** | pítx̱ | nakákas | káka | ikák |
| **Maternal Aunt** | pax̱áx̱ | nax̱áx̱as | x̱áx̱a | ix̱áx̱ |
| **Son** | ísht | ínmisht | títa | ímisht |
| **Daughter** | páp | ínpap | ísha | ímpap |

| Paternal Grandfather | púsha | napúsas | púsha | ɨpúsh |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paternal Grandmother | ála | na'álas | ála | ál |
| Maternal Grandfather | tíla | natílas | tíla | ɨtíl |
| Maternal Grandmother | káła | nakáłas | káła | ɨkáł |
| Man's Paternal Grandchild | púsha | ínpusha | púsha | ímpusha |
| Man's Maternal Grandchild | tíla | íntila | tíla | ímtila |
| Woman's Paternal Grandchild | ála | ínala | ála | ímala |
| Woman's Maternal Grandchild | káła | ínkaƚa | káła | ímkaƚa |
| Older Brother/Male Cousin | pyáp | nayáyas | yáya | iyásh |
| Older Sister/Female Cousin | pát | nanánas | nána | anísh |
| Man's Younger Brother/Cousin | ɨsx̱áp | ínkaks | níka | kúks |
| Man's Younger Sister/Cousin | áts | íntsats | nícha | tsníts |
| Woman's Younger Brother/Cousin | pácht | ínpats | nípa | páts |
| Woman's Younger Sister/Cousin | ɨsíp | ínyuks | níya | iyúks |
| Husband | ám | ínmam | ám | ímmam |
| Wife | ásham | ínasham | ásham | ímasham |

## Appendix D: Intransitive Verb Person Marking

Speech Act Participants (SAP) Pronominal Enclitics

| Person | Number | Enclitic | Allomorphs |
|--------|--------|----------|------------|
| **1st** | SG | =nash | =ash, =ish, =sh |
|  | PL.INCL | =na | n/a |
|  | PL.EXCL | =natash | =atash, =tash |
| **2nd** | SG | =nam | =am |
|  | PL | =pam | n/a |

3rd Person Participants Verb Prefixes

| Number | Prefix |
|--------|--------|
| **SG** | i- |
| **PL** | pa- |

## Appendix E: Transitive Verb Person Marking

| Agent | Patient | 2nd Position Enclitic | Verb Prefix |
|-------|---------|-----------------------|-------------|
| **1SG** | 2SG | =mash |  |
|  | 2PL | =matash |  |
|  | 3SG | =nash | á- |
|  | 3PL | =nash | á- |

| 1PL | 2SG | =matash | |
|-----|-----|---------|---|
| | 2PL | =matash | |
| | 3SG | =natash | á- |
| | 3PL | =natash | á- |
| 2SG | 1SG | =nam | pá- |
| | 1PL | =nam | |
| | 3SG | =nam | á- |
| | 3PL | =nam | á- |
| 2PL | 1SG | =pam | |
| | 1PL | =pam | |
| | 3SG | =pam | á- |
| | 3PL | =pam | á- |
| 3SG | 1SG | =nash | i- |
| | 1PL | =natash | i- |
| | 2SG | =nam | i- |
| | 2PL | =pam | i- |
| | 3SG (Direct) | | i- |

| | 3SG (Inverse) | | pá- |
|---|---|---|---|
| **3PL** | 1SG | =nash | pa- |
| | 1PL | =natash | pa- |
| | 2SG | =nam | pa- |
| | 2PL | =pam | pa- |
| | 3SG/PL | =pat | á- |