



Optional subject marking in Chitimacha

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Swanton (1909)

NOTE.
The names of tribes, whose linguistic position is not beyond question, are underlined.



Documentary Materials

- 1802: Jefferson List (Duralde 1802, Jefferson 1808)
- 1881–1882: lexicon, a few texts (Gatschet 1881a, b)
- 1907–1921: dozen texts, sketch grammar (Swanton 1908–1931a, b, c; 1920)
- 1930–1934: 120 texts, 3,500-word lexicon, 200-page grammar (Swadesh 1939a, b, c)

Chief Benjamin Paul (1867-1934)

25 PICAS



Ill. 2. Benjamin Paul

Mrs. Delphine DuCloux (1872-1940)

46.0

24 PICAS



5. Delphine Ducloux.

Nominal Marking

“Nouns are uninflected except for certain ones, including kinship terms and several others, which distinguish singular and plural.”

(Swadesh 1939a: 101)

Swadesh and Swanton both describe various “postpositions” that sound suspiciously like case markers.

Previous Analyses: $-(n)k$

$-(n)k$ is used mainly in postvocalic position as an equivalent of either *hiš* [ERG/INSTR] or *hup* [‘to’] and occasionally for *ki* [‘in, at’]. It is very common as a substitute for *hiš* or *hup* in cases where no ambiguity is likely because of the nature of the context. (Swadesh 1939a: 115)

Previous Analyses: $-(n)k$ (cont.)

A common special usage is with the auxiliary forms *hiki*, *hiʔi*, *naka*, *naʔa* in expressions like *ʔiʃ hikink* ‘to my home’ (literally, ‘to where I am’), *him hiʔink* ‘to your home’, etc. (Swadesh 1939a: 115)

Previous Analyses: *-k*

-k, *-tk* (after /n/) indicates mild contrast or emphasis ('...on the other hand'). The meaning is often so attenuated that one can hardly be certain of the basis for use. It occurs only with terms [nouns] and is apparently limited to use only after a consonant. Formally it coincides in at least some phonologic positions with *-(n)k* and it is often difficult to know which of the two is involved in a given context. This is especially true in view of the semantic weakness of the present postposition. In cases where the use of *-(n)k* is optional (marking the subject), one is quite at a loss. (Swadesh 1939a: 134)

Hypothesis

- Nominative case marker
- Discourse-optional
- Polysemous

Data & Methods

- 110 texts (Benjamin Paul: 88; Delphine DuCloux: 22)
- 35,401 word tokens
- 5,315 word forms
- DLx database (digitallinguistics.io)
- Isolate functions of $-(n)k$ one at a time, starting with the clearest
- Attribute tokens of $-(n)k$ to non-nominative functions first
- Not comprehensive – mostly $/nk/$ forms

Functions of $-(n)k$

singulative	SING	7
similative	SIMIL	39
instrument	INSTR	72
location nominalizer	LOC.NZR	361
agent nominalizer	AGT.NZR	456
nominative/absolutive	NOM/ABS	383

Singulative (n=7)

- 1) waši ki:cti ʔunk'u-**nk**=k'iš nam č'aht-'iš-i
hand point one-**SING**=only brand emboss-PRES.IPFV-NF.SG
'she embosses only one thumb'

Singulative (n=7)

2) wašti k'an-**tk**=š č'a: kap šan-i-**nk**=k'iš
day NEG-**SING**=TOP sun up go.out-NF.SG-**SING**=only
'for just six days and six nights'

Singulative (n=7)

- 3) ?iš-k kaci-**nk** hokt'a-ɿ-ki
1SG-ABS bone-**SING** leave-BEN-1SG.PAT
'they left me only the bones'

Similative (n=39)

- 4) siksi-**nk** te:t peš-k
eagle-**SIMIL** COP(SIMIL) fly-SS
'flying like an eagle'

Similative (n=39)

5) we ka:ci-**nk**=š te:t hana=nki
DET owl-**SIMIL**=TOP COP(SIMIL) house=LOC

hi hokt-ki-:k'
DIST leave-1SG.PAT-SS

‘leaving me like the owl in the house’

Similative (n=39)

6) kamčín suʔu ʔakun suʔu-**nk**=š te:t k'an
deer skin bear skin-**SIMIL**=TOP COP(SIMIL) NEG

nič-a:š-naʔa

soak-PRES.IPFV-NF.PL

‘deer skin, unlike bear skin, they soak’

Instrument (n=72)

- 7) hus ka:cpa-**nk** hus tep ʔuk-a:š-iʔi
3SG stick-**INSTR** 3SG fire count-PRES.IPFV-NF.SG
'he kept count of his fire with his stick'

Instrument (n=72)

- 8) hus waši-**nk** we kimu pek'is ʔapš ʔi:-m-i
3SG hand-**INSTR** DET limb above about turn-PLACT-NF.SG
'he motioned with his hands about the limb'

Instrument (n=72)

8) ʔo:š hepši-**nk** kap mesti-:k'
buzzard feces-**INSTR** STAT be.white-PTCP

či-ʔuy-i

COP(HORIZ)-PAST.IPFV-NF.SG

‘he was all white with buzzard excrement

Location Nominalizer (n=361)

- 9) še:ni-**nk** hup hi ničw-iʔi
pond-**LOC.NZR** to AND to.water-NF.SG
'he came to the edge of a pond'

Location Nominalizer (n=361)

- 10) še:ni-**nk** hi ničw-i-nki-š
pond-**LOC.NZR** AND to.water-NF.SG-TEMP=TOP
'when he got to the edge of the pond'

Location Nominalizer (n=361)

- 11) we šexni waʔa-**nk** hi peš-iʔi
DET pond other-**LOC.NZR** AND fly-NF.SG
‘he flew toward the opposite side of the pond’

Location Nominalizer (n=361)

12) ha-**nk** ʔap nenšw-iʔi
PROX.DEM-**LOC.NZR** VEN cross.water-NF.SG
'he came over here'

Location Nominalizer with Auxiliaries

13) we ʔašinč'at'a=š hus hi-ʔi-**nk** kas čuy-i
DET old.man 3SG be-NF.SG-**LOC.NZR** back go(SG)-NF.SG
'the old man went back home'

14) we pu:p panš naʔa-**nk** hi ču-:k'=š
DET rabbit people be(NF.PL)-**LOC.NZR** AND go-SS=TOP
'the rabbit went to some people (lit. 'where the people were)'

Agent Nominalizer (n=456)

15) huyk'i we paňš ni:k-ma-**nk**
well DET person be.sick-PLACT-**AGT.NZR**

ʔuč-a:š-naʔa

do-PRES.IPFV-NF.PL

'they made sick people well'

Agent Nominalizer (n=456)

16) hi t'ut-ma-**nk** his nuyt-i?i
AND go(PL)-PLACT-**AGT.NZR** back answer-NF.SG
'he answered the travelers'

Agent Nominalizer (n=456)

17) ho panš k'uš-ma-**nk** nus haktiš
DIST.PL person eat-PLACT-**AGT.NZR** west side

ʔap t'ut-uy-naʔa
VEN go(PL)-PAST.IPFV-NF.PL

‘those cannibals [people-eaters] came from the west’

Agent Nominalizer (n=456)

18) we panš kap keču-**nk**=š
DET person STAT drown-**AGT.NZR**=TOP

ʔapš ʔeh-pa-m-iʔi
back arrive-CAUS-PLACT-NF.SG

‘he caused the people who were drowned to return’

Absolutive

This function only occurs with noun phrases high in topicality:

- independent pronouns
- human animate nouns
- sentient beings

Absolutive

Independent Pronouns, Intransitive Clauses

- 19) ?iš-**k** ču:-ču-ki-š
1SG-**ABS** go(SG)-IRR(SG)-1SG.AGT-COND
'if I go'
- 20) him-**k** samis ša:-čuy-i-nk'
2SG-**ABS** front sleep-IRR(SG)-NF.SG-DEB
'you must sleep in front'

Absolutive

Independent Pronouns, Transitive Clauses

21) ʔiš-**k** kap k'et-ki-:k'
1SG-**ABS** PUNC kill(SG)-1SG.PAT-SS
'when they killed me'

22) him-**k** his he:čt-iki
2SG-**ABS** response meet-1SG.AGT
'I met you'

Ergative =*hiš*

- 23) *ʔiš=hiš* hi koʔ-mi-ču-ki-š
1SG=**ERG** AND call-PLACT-IRR(SG)-1SG.AGT-COND
'if I call them'
- 24) *him=hiš* ʔapš kim-pa-ki
2SG=**ERG** REFL believe-CAUS-1SG.PAT
'you remind me'

Ergative + Absolutive

25) ʔiš=**hiš** we kič-**k** hi koː-mi-iki
1SG=**ERG** DEM women-**ABS** AND call-PLACT-1SG.AGT
'I called to the women'

Nominative

This function only occurs with noun phrases low in topicality:

- non-sentient animates
- inanimates
- unexpected topics

Nominative

25) činš-**k** hani čuht-i=š
wren-**NOM** house build-NF.SG=TOP
'if a house wren builds a house'

26) we kiš-**k** hesik'en ?unk'u kap nuhč-pi-na?a
DEM dog-**NOM** again one up run-CAUS-NF:PL
'the dogs [again] chased up another one'

Nominative

27) kamčín-**tk** ya: hi waytm hi čuy-iʔi
deer-**NOM** fast AND exceeding AND go(SG)-NF:SG

‘the deer went faster’

28) him šiš-**k** ʔuyp’ik’-a:š-iʔi
2SG nose-**NOM** bleed-PRES.IPFV-NF:SG

‘your nose bleeds’

Nominative

29) kaya-**nk** ni k'ap-čuy-i
rain-**NOM** DEF get-IRR(SG)-NF.SG
'the rain will get you'

Nominative

- 30) ni ti:km=iš ʔuyp'i-**nk** pi:hni-:k'=š či-ʔuy-i
Governor=TOP blood-**NOM** be.red-SS=TOP be-IPFV-NF.SG
'the Governor's blood was red'

Discourse Optionality

Nominative does not typically appear on continuing topics

Double Case Marking

Subject of transitive verb is less topical than the object

31) we siksi-**nk=hiš** ni wop-m-iʔi
DEM eagle-**NOM=ERG** DEF hear-PLACT-NF.SG
‘that eagle asked (him)’

32) ʔiš mahči=š ku:-**k=hiš** kap ni:-ki
1SG tail=TOP water-**NOM=ERG** STAT sit.in.water-1SG.PAT
‘the water soaked my tail’

Contact

- Double-marking is suggestive of a system in shift
- Ergative seems to be more recent
- Contact-induced alignment shifts in Chitimacha verbal marking

Polygrammaticalization

1. locative nominalizer
2. agents reinterpreted as nominatives/absolutives
3. other oblique functions remained (instrument, location)

Conclusions

- Split alignment system
 - ergative – high on topicality hierarchy
 - nominative – low on topicality
- Discourse-optional nominative
- Marked nominative is typologically rare (Handschuh 2014)
- Unusual polygrammaticalization pathway
- Additional evidence for contact

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