

**David Beck\***  
(Edmonton)

## **FOCALIZATION IN LUSHOOTSEED SYNTAX**

**A b s t r a c t.** Communicative Structure plays a central role in the syntax of the Salishan language Lushootseed. This paper describes the surface syntactic implementation of the Communicative Opposition Focalization, marked by the adverbial particle *dit*. This particle can be used either to signal the Focalization of the Sem-Theme, or the Focalization of a non-Comm-Dominant node of the Sem-Rheme, each of these functions pertaining to distinct syntactic constructions.

**K e y w o r d s:** Communicative Structure; focalization; focus; Theme; Rheme; Lushootseed

### **1. Introduction**

Earlier work on Communicative Structure in the Salishan language Lushootseed has shown that this language, and probably other languages in the family, are unusually sensitive to considerations of Thematicity in the shaping of syntactic structure, particularly in the SemR ↔ DSyntR transition (Beck 2009; 2010). Although the Communicative Opposition Focalization is also addressed in earlier work (Beck 2010), the discussion is incomplete. This paper seeks to fill in some of the gaps by describing the syntactic implementation of Focalization, which is mostly frequently marked by the adverbial particle *dit*. This particle can be used either to signal the Focalization of the Sem-Theme, or the Focalization of a non-Comm-Dominant node of the Sem-Rheme; each of these Focalizations corresponds to a different use of *dit*: Focalization of a Thematic element requires *dit* to be a predicate modifier (that is, an adverbial), while Focalization of a non-Comm-Dominant node of the Rhematic area of the Sem-CommS requires *dit* to be a direct modifier of a nominal element. Thus, the Focalization of elements from different Sem-Comm areas is distinguished by the contrast between the use of *dit* as an A(djunct)- or a D(eterminer)-quantifier (Bach et al., 1995).

### **2. Focalized Theme**

Focalization of a Thematic element in Lushootseed syntax is marked by the adverbial particle *dit*, which appears in DSyntS as a modifier of the matrix predicate:

---

Department of Linguistics, University of Alberta  
dbeck@ualberta.ca



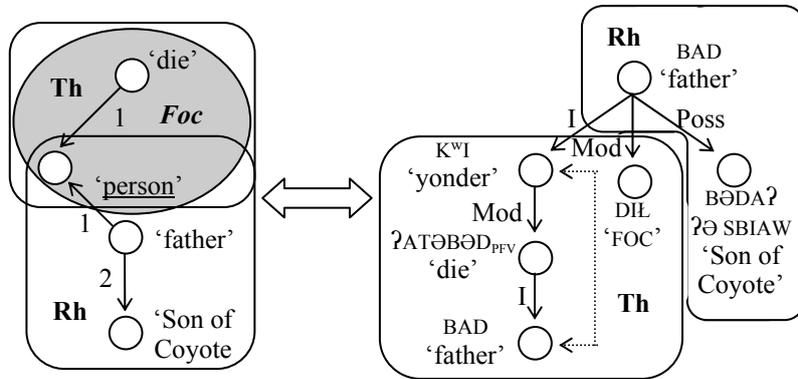


Figure 2: *dił tubads kʷi ʔuʔatəbəd* ‘the one who died was his father’

The sentence occurs at a place in a text where a character, Coyote, has faked his own death and is now impersonating his son (whom he has tricked into becoming lost in the Sky World so that he (Coyote) can appropriate his son’s wives). Coyote, dressed as his son, puts on a show of mourning and repeatedly declaims in a loud voice that the deceased is his father (that is, Coyote himself). The deceased in such a context is Thematic, but is also Focalized in that the deceased is the focal point of the speaker’s attention; the Rhematic content of the utterance is the identity (‘his father’) of that focal point. This gives us the SemR in Figure 2<sup>3</sup>. In this case, the Rhematic configuration of semantemes ‘father’ –1→ ‘person’ is lexicalized as the relational noun BAD ‘father’ in the DSyntR and becomes the top node of the DSyntS (Beck 2009; 2010). The Thematic area of the SemR contains the predicate ‘die’, but also overlaps with the Rheme to the extent that it includes the SemA 1 of ‘die’, ‘person’, as its Comm-Dominant node (hence, the expression of the Theme as a relative clause headed in DSyntR).<sup>4</sup> The entire Semantic Theme is Focalized and, in DSyntR, is realized as DSyntA I.

One thing that is not entirely clear from the examples so far is whether or not the scope of *dił* is determined by syntactic or communicative considerations — in other words, whether the Focalizing particle takes scope over the DSyntA I or over

<sup>3</sup> This diagram has been simplified to avoid getting bogged down in some technical issues. Most notably, temporal and spatial deixis has been omitted from the SemR. The demonstrative pronoun that serves as the head of the relative clause in the DSyntR owes its value (‘remote’) to considerations of discourse which have yet to be carefully unravelled, and are in any case somewhat orthogonal to our discussion. I have also treated *bədaʔ ʔə sbiaw* ‘son of Coyote’ as a proper name rather than as a periphrastic expression which should be decomposed in SemR and represented by a tree in DSyntR.

<sup>4</sup> On overlaps in the Sem-Comms, see Melčuk (2001: 275–276).

the Thematic NP in DSyntR. Given the near-absolute correspondence between subjecthood and Thematicity in Lushootseed, this distinction is difficult to tease apart; however, the sentence in (3) seems to show that it is Sem-CommS rather than syntax that determines the scope of the Focalizing particle:

- (3) *dil čəł gʷəkʷədad tiʔil*  
 dil čəł gʷəkʷədad tiʔil  
 FOC 1PL.SUB SBJ=taken-ICS DIST  
 ‘That’s the one we should get.’ (Hess 2006: 18, line 167)

This sentence is taken from a context where two brothers, looking for someone to help rescue their sister who is trapped in a tree, have been discussing the talents of a particular person (*ł’əł’iq’šəd* ‘Sapsucker’). The SemR of (3) is given in Figure 3. Note, however, that contrary to the usual requirement that the Theme be realized as the DSyntA I (which in a case like this would normally require the passive form of the verb), here the Theme is realized as DSyntA II, passivization being blocked by fact that the agentive SemA 1 is first-person plural whereas Agentive Complements of passives can only be third persons (Hukari 1976; Jelinek, Demers 1983; Beck 2010). Nevertheless, the Focalization clearly pertains to the Thematic DSyntA II rather than DSyntA I (*čəł* ‘we’), showing that the scope of the Focalizing particle is determined by Thematicity rather than syntactic relations.

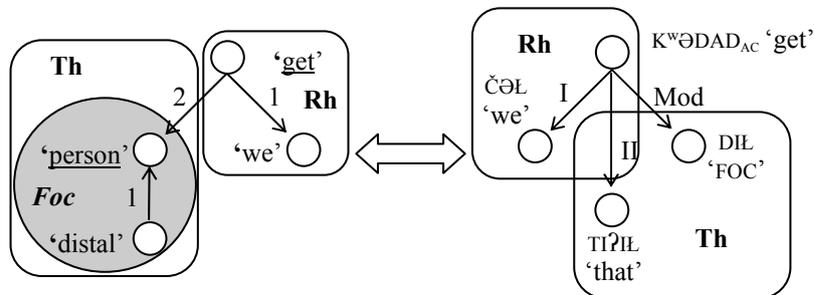


Figure 3: *dil čəł gʷəkʷədad tiʔil* ‘that’s the one we should get’

### 3. Focalization within the Rheme

Focalization within the Rhematic area of the Sem-CommS in Lushootseed seems to be restricted to non-Comm-Dominant nodes within that Comm area. This may follow from the general constraint that the Comm-Dominant node of the Rhematic area of the Sem-CommS be syntacticized as matrix predicate in DSyntR (Beck 2009; 2010), belying the need for further prominence being accorded to this element. Alternatively, it may turn out on further investigation that one or more of

the other adverbial particles in the language signals the Focalization of the Comm-Dominant node of the Rheme.

In the case where a non-Comm-Dominant node of the Rheme is Focalized, Focalization is again marked by *dil*; however, in this case, rather than appearing as a predicate-modifying adverbial particle, *dil* modifies the Focalized element directly:

- (4) *paq'atəbəx<sup>w</sup> ʔə tiʔəʔ dil-ıl qaw'qs*  
 paq'a-t-b=ax<sup>w</sup> ʔə tiʔəʔ dil-ıl qaw'qs  
 distributed-ICS-PASS=now PR PROX INTNS-FOC raven  
 'It was distributed by this very same Raven.' (Hess 1998: 62, line 50)

This sentence comes from a story in which one character, Raven, envies the food that his sister, Crow, has accumulated and so he casts a spell to make her ill. He then advises her that the way to cure her illness is to share her food with all her neighbours. Crow agrees, and Raven offers to take the food around (planning, of course, to eat it himself rather than actually deliver it). Here, the storyteller is describing the steps Crow is taking to prepare herself for her cure, and in (4) she reveals that it is, indeed, Raven who Crow puts in charge of distributing the food. Thus, Raven is both Focalized and Emphasized (as indicated by the intensive reduplication of the focalizing particle).<sup>5</sup>

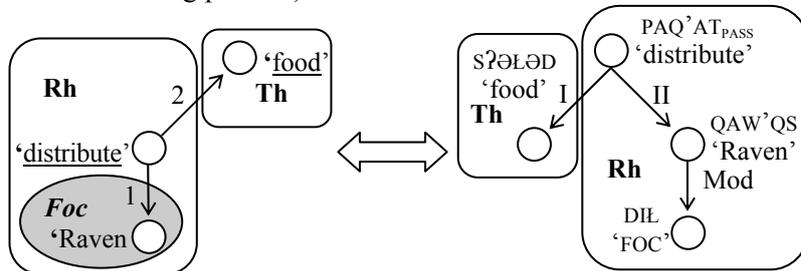


Figure 4: *paq'atəbəx<sup>w</sup> ʔə tiʔəʔ dil-ıl qaw'qs*  
 'it was distributed by this very same Raven'

As seen in Figure 4, the Comm-Dominant node of the Rhematic area of the Sem-CommS is 'distribute', which is lexicalized as a verb PAQ'AT and expressed in the DSyntR as the top node of the DSyntR. The Thematic element 'food' is required by the principles of Lushootseed syntax to be the syntactic subject, requiring passivization of PAQ'AT in the DSyntS; because 'food' is also Given and a discourse topic, it is elided in SSyntR. The Focalized part of the Figure 4, 'Raven', is part of the Sem-Rheme and so must be expressed as part of the DSynt-Rheme as

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis is another of the Communicative Oppositions proposed by Mel'čuk (2001). The reader is referred to that work for further discussion. It is not indicated in Figure 4.

well. In order to mark its Focalization, it is modified by the Focalizing particle *dił*. In these constructions, the Focalizing particle acts as a D-quantifier, modifying the Focalized noun directly, as opposed to cases where *dił* marks the Focalization of a Theme and is realized as an A-Quantifier.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion adds to the growing literature on the role of Communicative Structure on Lushootseed syntax by sketching in broad strokes the role of the adverbial particle *dił* in the expression of Focalization. This particle can be used as a D-quantifier to express the Focalization of non-Comm-Dominant nodes in the Sem-Rheme and as an A-quantifier to Focalize Sem-Themes. In this latter respect, Lushootseed presents a typologically interesting case of the scope of an A-quantifier being determined by Thematicity, rather than by syntactic relations (the normal pattern being where the scope of the A-quantifier is restricted to the syntactic subject). Further investigation is needed to determine in what way the Focalization of the Comm-Dominant node of the Sem-Rheme is implemented — or if this is indeed impossible — and what relation these constructions with *dił* bear to other types of marked sentence structures in the language.

#### Acknowledgements

This work is a by-product of a long, on-going investigation of the morphosyntax of Lushootseed, and draws sustenance and inspiration from a great many people, not least from Thom Hess, who collected the data, and from our friend Igor Mel'čuk, who has given me so many tools to help to understand them. Thanks also to Jasmina Milićević for her helpful comments on this paper.

#### Bibliography

- Bach et al. 1995 — *Bach E., Jelinek E., Kratzer A., Partee B. H.* Quantification in natural languages. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995.
- Beck 2009 — *Beck D.* Thematicity in Lushootseed syntax // *Beck D., Gerdes K., Milićević J., Polguère A.* (eds.). Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Meaning-Text Theory. Montreal: OLST, 2009. P. 55—64.

---

<sup>6</sup> The flexibility shown by *dił* with respect to being an unmarked adverbial or adnominal modifier is typical of the class of adverbial particles in Lushootseed. Lushootseed has no lexical class of adjectives, nominal modification generally being carried out by the relativization of verbal radicals. However, some adverbial particles can also be adjoined to nouns and nominalized verbal elements, their semantics permitting.

- Beck 2010 — *Beck D.* Communicative Structure in Lushootseed syntax: Thematicity and Focalization // *Camacho J., Gutiérrez-Bravo R., Sánchez L.* (eds.), *Information structure in languages of the Americas*. Berlin: Mouton, 2010. P. 41—65.
- Hess 1995 — *Hess T.* Lushootseed Reader with Introductory Grammar. Vol. I. Missoula (MT): University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics, 1995.
- Hess 1998 — *Hess T.* Lushootseed Reader with Intermediate Grammar. Vol. II. Missoula (MT): University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics, 1998.
- Hess 2006 — *Hess T.* Lushootseed Reader. Vol. III. Missoula (MT): University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics, 2006.
- Hukari 1976 — *Hukari T. E.* Person in a Coast Salish language // *International Journal of American Linguistics*. 1976. 42. P. 305—318.
- Jelinek, Demers 1983 — *Jelinek E., Demers R.* The agent hierarchy and voice in some Coast Salish languages // *International Journal of American Linguistics*. 1983. 49. P. 167—185.
- Mel'čuk 2001 — *Mel'čuk I. A.* *Communicative Organization of Natural Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001.