Word order variation in interrogative sentences in Northwest Sahaptin texts

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Introduction: We analyze word order variation in interrogative sentences produced in oral narratives that were recorded in Kittitas, Klickitat, and Upper Cowlitz, three Northwest dialects of Sahaptin (a.k.a. Ichishkíin/Ičiškíin; Figure 1). In the Yakima (Northwest; Jansen 2010: 199) and Umatilla dialects (Columbia River; Rigsby and Rude 1996: 683–684), a question word obligatorily occurs first in interrogative sentences. When a sentence contains a 1st/2nd person core argument, a "second-position" pronominal enclitic attaches to the sentence's first word, i.e. the question word in interrogative sentences (Jansen 2010, Rigsby and Rude 1996, Rude 2014; examples 1–4):[1]

(1) *Míshnam wá skuuliłá?*

mísh=nam	wá	skuuliłá
Y/N=2SG	be	student

'Are you a student?'
(Yakima; Jansen 2010: 199)

(2) *Túyaynam wínasha?*

túyay=nam	wína-sha
why=2SG	go-IMPV

'Why are you going?'
(Yakima; Jansen 2010: 201)

(3) *Míšnam wá?*

míš=nam	wá
how=2SG	be

'How are you?'
(Umatilla; Rude 2014: 181)

(4) *Túnam tkʷátašana čikúuk?*

tún=nam	tkʷáta-ša-na	čikúuk
what=2SG	eat-IMPV-PST	today

'What did you eat today?'
(Umatilla; Rude 2014: 351)

However, we find a wider range of word orders used in Northwest Sahaptin interrogative sentences that were recorded in the early twentieth century (Jacobs 1934, 1937). Furthermore, we find greater variation among older speakers in these texts, suggesting that strict word order is an innovation.

Data: We surveyed 59 Kittitas, Klickitat, and Upper Cowlitz texts that were collected by Jacobs (1934, 1937) and found 238 interrogative sentences that were produced by 4 speakers of these Northwest Sahaptin dialects. The question word occurs first in most sentences, with second-position pronominals attaching to it (5–6). However, in 37 sentences, the question word is non-initial, and second-position pronouns attach to a preceding word (7–10):[2]

(5) *Míšnam áw pxʷíša?*

míš=nam	áw	pxʷí-ša
what=2SG	now	think-IMPV

'What do you think?'
(Klickitat; Jacobs 1934: 5, 1937: 2)

(6) *Míšnam íči wiyáninxa?*

míš=nam	íči	wiyánin-xa
how=2SG	here	walk.around-HAB

'How [are you] traveling about here?'
(U. Cowlitz; Jacobs 1934: 100, 1937: 89)

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[1] Glosses: 1='first person', 2='second person', 3='third person', FUT='future', HAB='habitual' IMPV='imperfective', OBJ='object', PST='past', SG='singular', Y/N='yes/no-question'.
[2] We present Northwest Sahaptin examples in Americanist phonetic orthography (cf. Rude 2014). We obtained glosses from Jacobs' (1931) Northern Sahaptin grammar and by comparing cognates in Yakima (Beavert and Hargus 2009).

(7) *Kúuknaš míš tx̣ánata?*
    kúuk=naš   **míš**   tx̣ána-ta
    then=1SG   what   become-FUT
    'What should I become?'
    (Klickitat; Jacobs 1934: 72, 1937: 64)

(8) *Áwnam ímč̓a míš px̣ʷíša?*
    áw=nam   ím-č̓a   **míš**   px̣ʷí-ša
    now=2SG   you-also   how   think-IMPV
    'How do you feel about it?'
    (Klickitat; Jacobs 1934: 9, 1937: 7)

(9) *Áwnaš míš ámita kuš áwiyatnata?*
    áw=naš   **míš**   á-mi-ta   kuš   á-iyatna-ta
    now=1SG   what   3OBJ-do-FUT   thus   3OBJ-kill-FUT
    'What can I do to kill it?' (Upper Cowlitz; Jacobs 1934: 128, 1937: 112)

(10) *Áw watáy q̓ʷsím pínx̣i míš ipx̣ʷíša?*
    áw   watáy   q̓ʷsím   pín-x̣i   **míš**   i-px̣ʷí-ša
    now   weasel   mischievous   3SG-too   what   3SG-think-IMPV
    'What can the rascal weasel be thinking of again?' (Klickitat; Jacobs 1934: 23, 1937: 19)

Moreover, alternate question orders are common in the speech of an elderly Klickitat speaker and occur in the speech of an older Upper Cowlitz speaker, but are absent from that of the latter's son, suggesting that word order may have been more flexible in interrogative sentences in older forms of Sahaptin. That is, the rigid use of question words sentence-initially may be an innovation.

Rigsby and Rude (1996: 684) report that "younger speakers of all dialects tend to use [the question word] *míš* as a general interrogative marker". This appears to be true of these Northwest Sahaptin texts too: *Míš* is the most common question word, and in a handful of questions *míš* is used sentence-initially with an additional question word added sentence-finally (11):

(11) *Míšnam íči wiyánawi túyaw?*
    míš=nam   íči   wiyánawi   **túyaw**
    Y/N=2SG   here   arrive   why
    'Why have you come here?' (Klickitat; Jacobs 1934: 16; 1937: 13)

Discussion: Oral narratives and conversational speech (which these narratives exemplify through conversations between characters) may contain a wider range of language structures than are obtained via traditional elicitation methods. The position of question words is fixed in modern Sahaptin grammars (Jansen 2010, Rigsby and Rude 1996), but our findings indicate that language learners may encounter alternate word orders in older language documentation, and this can be discussed in Sahaptin pedagogical materials (e.g. Jansen and Beavert 2010, Kern and Geary 2021).

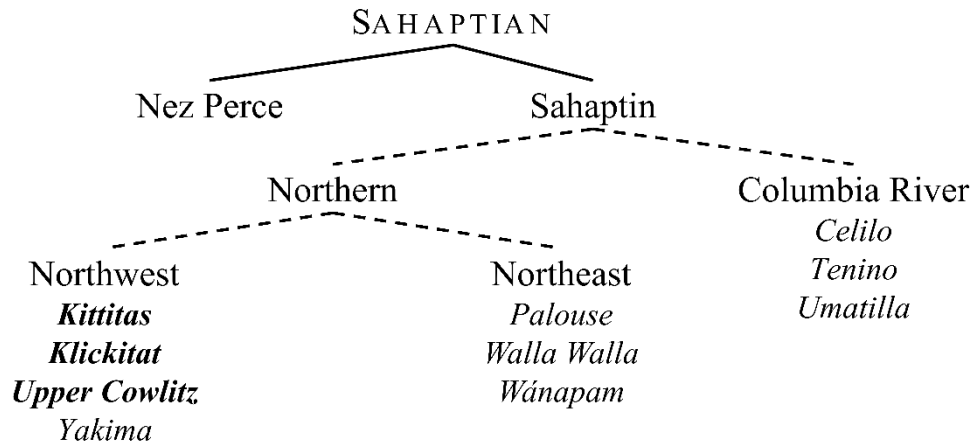**Word count:** 500 words (excluding title, examples, and references)

Figure 1. Sahaptian language family tree, adapted from Rigsby and Rude (1996) and Rude (2014) with the dialects studied here in bold.

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