

# Word order variation in interrogative sentences in Northwest Sahaptin texts

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# Introduction

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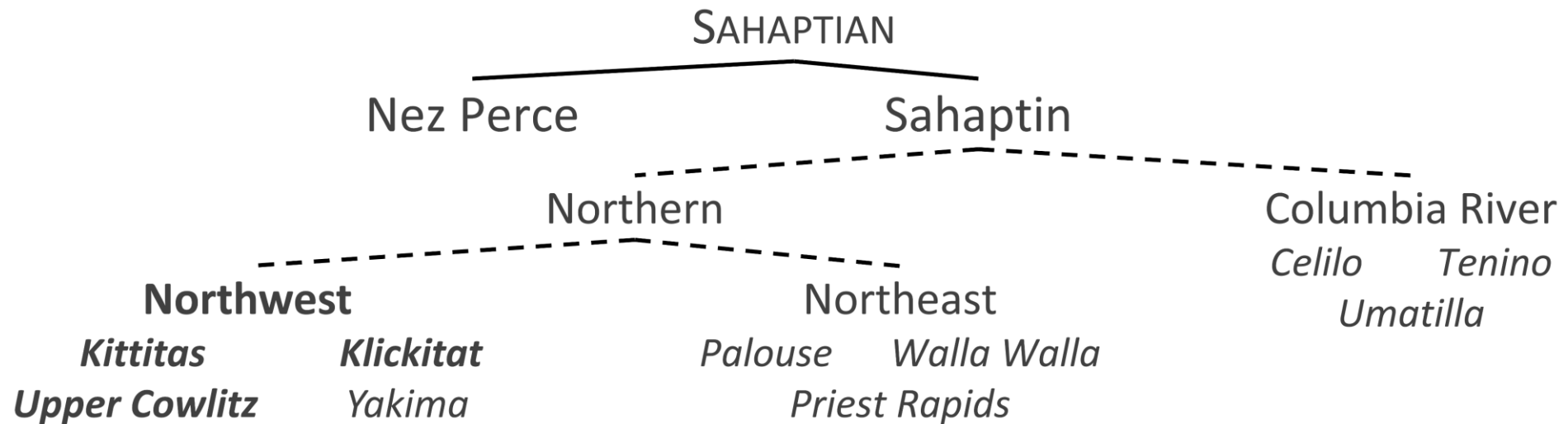
- We analyze **word order variation** in **Sahaptin interrogative sentences**.
  - We focus on interrogative sentences that were produced in Northwest Sahaptin oral narratives collected in 1926–1930 (Jacobs 1929, 1934, 1937).
- In modern varieties of Sahaptin, an interrogative pronoun obligatorily occurs first in interrogative sentences (e.g. Jansen 2010, Rigsby and Rude 1996).
- This pattern predominates among old Northwest Sahaptin interrogative sentences, but we show that **speakers also produced sentences in which the interrogative pronoun occurs sentence-internally**.
  - The obligatory use of sentence-initial pronouns appears to be **innovative**.

# Background on Sahaptin

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# Sahaptin and the Sahaptian language family

- **Sahaptin (a.k.a. Ičiškíin/Ichishkíin)** is spoken along the Columbia River and its tributaries in s. Washington, n. Oregon, and w. Idaho.
- We focus on **NW Sahaptin** dialects: Kittitas, Klickitat, and Upper Cowlitz.



**Figure 1.** Sahaptian language family tree, adapted from Rigsby and Rude (1996) and Rude (2014).

# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- Word order in Sahaptin is generally **flexible**.
    - Discourse/Pragmatic pressures determine the order of most word-sized units in a phrase or sentence (Jansen 2010:4, Rigsby and Rude 1996:673).
    - For example, the following sentences are semantically equivalent:
      - 1) Wawúkiya iwá nčí.
      - 2) Wawúkiya nčí iwá.
      - 3) Iwá nčí wawúkiya.
      - 4) Iwá wawúkiya nčí.
      - 5) Nčí iwá wawúkiya.
      - 6) Nčí wawúkiya iwá.
- 1) Wawúkiya iwá nčí.  
wawúkiya i-wá nčí  
elk 3SG-be big  
'The elk is big'.  
(Umatilla; Kern and Geary 2021)

# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- However, certain linguistic elements follow rigid word order restrictions.
- When a clause contains a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person core argument, a “**second-position” pronominal enclitic** attaches to the **first word in the clause** (Jansen 2010:78–87, Rigsby and Rude 1996:674–675, Rude 2014:12):
  - 7) Awnash anáwisha.  
aw=**nash** anáwi-sha  
now=1SG be.hungry-IMPV  
‘Now I am hungry.’  
(Yakima; Jansen 2010:81)
  - 8) Q̣<sup>w</sup>łtípnam wáta.  
q̣<sup>w</sup>łtíp=**nam** wá-ta  
strong=2SG be-FUT  
‘You should be strong.’  
(Umatilla; Rude 2014:194)
- Second-position enclitics can attach to non-sentence-initial words when the sentence consists of multiple clauses.

# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- However, certain linguistic elements follow rigid word order restrictions.
- When a clause contains a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person core argument, a “**second-position**” **pronominal enclitic** attaches to the **first word in the clause**...
- In contrast, 3<sup>rd</sup> person core arguments are expressed by **verbal prefixes**, and so their position within the clause is **flexible** (e.g. Jansen 2010:75–77):

9) Iwínana áyat.

i-wína-na áyat

3SG-go-PST woman

‘The woman went.’

(Yakima; Jansen 2010:76)

10) Wíyatkan iwínana.

wíyat-kan i-wína-na

far.away-ALL 3SG-go-PST

‘She/He went far away.’

(Yakima; Jansen 2010:176)

# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- When a clause contains a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person core argument, a “**second-position**” **pronominal enclitic** attaches to the **first word in the clause**...
- In contrast, 3<sup>rd</sup> person core arguments are expressed by **verbal prefixes**, and so their position within the clause is **flexible** (e.g. Jansen 2010:75–77).....
- For studying word order, second-position enclitics (pronominals, modals) provide a useful diagnostic for identifying the order of words in a clause: The word to which a second-position enclitic attaches **must be the first word in its clause**, and everything after that is **non-clause-initial**.



# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- However, certain linguistic elements follow rigid word order restrictions.
- An **interrogative pronoun** must occur first in interrogative sentences (Jansen 2010:199, Rigsby and Rude 1996:683–684):
  - This is true of polar questions (11) and content questions (12):

11) Mish aw ipanáti-shamsh?

**mish**    aw    i-panáti-shamsh  
Y/N        now    3SG-climb-IMPV.CSL  
'Are [the salmon] coming upriver?'  
(Yakima; Jansen 2010:77)

12) Tun íkw'ak iwá?

**tun**    íkw'ak    i-wá  
what    that        3SG-be  
'What is that?'  
(Yakima; Jansen 2010:201)

# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- However, certain linguistic elements follow rigid word order restrictions.
- An **interrogative pronoun** must occur first in interrogative sentences (Jansen 2010:199, Rigsby and Rude 1996:683–684):
  - When an interrogative sentence contains a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person core argument, **the second-position pronominal attaches to the interrogative pronoun:**

13) Mishnam wá skuuliłá?  
mish=**nam** wá skuuliłá  
Y/N=2SG be student  
'Are you a student?'  
(Yakima; Jansen 2010:199)

14) Túyaynam wínasha?  
túyay=**nam** wína-sha  
why=2SG go-IMPV  
'Why are you going?'  
(Yakima; Jansen 2010:201)

# Previous work on Sahaptin word order

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- However, certain linguistic elements follow rigid word order restrictions.
- An **interrogative pronoun** must occur first in interrogative sentences.....
- Interrogative pronouns can occur outside of sentence-initial position as **indefinite pronouns** (e.g. Jansen 2010:209–210, Rigsby and Rude 1996:682–684):

15) Čáwnam mún áwaḷawita šína.

čáw=nam **mún** á-aḷawi-ta **šína**

NEG=2SG when 3OBJ-beg-FUT who.OBJ

‘You should never beg from anyone.’

(Umatilla; Rude 2014:294)

- Sentence (15) is NOT interpreted as a question in contemporary Umatilla.

# Interim summary

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- Word order is flexible in contemporary Sahaptin except in that:
  - Interrogative pronouns must occur first in interrogative sentences.
  - Second-position enclitics (1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person pronominals, modals) must attach to the first word in a clause (i.e. the interrogative pronoun in interrogative sentences).
- Was this always the case? **Did older varieties permit greater flexibility?**
  - In older varieties of Northern Sahaptin, Jacobs (1931:270) writes that an interrogative pronoun “usually” precedes the verb which precedes any nominal arguments; nominals can precede the verb for emphasis.
- We survey word order in interrogative sentences in Northwest Sahaptin oral narratives that were collected in 1926–1930 (Jacobs 1929, 1934, 1937).....

# Survey of interrogative sentences in NW Sahaptin texts

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## Survey of interrogative sentences in NW Sahaptin texts

- We surveyed **95** Northwest Sahaptin texts (Jacobs 1929, 1934, 1937) that were produced by **7** speakers of Kittitas ( $N=1$ ), Klickitat ( $N=1$ ), and Upper Cowlitz Sahaptin ( $N=5$ ) for all interrogative sentences.

**Table 1.** Summary of Jacobs' consultants' language backgrounds and text contributions.

Initials	Age	# Texts	Language background notes
JH	elderly	49	<b>Klickitat.</b> Also speaks Chinuk Wawa (a.k.a. Chinook Jargon).
SE-II	~35	13	<b>Upper Cowlitz.</b> Also speaks English. Son of SE-I and ME.
SE-I	~70–80	12	<b>Upper Cowlitz.</b> Native Yakima speaker, retelling Salish narratives.
ME	>60	7	<b>Upper Cowlitz.</b> Native speaker of the Cowlitz dialect of Coast Salish, translating Salish narratives into Upper Cowlitz Sahaptin.
JY	elderly	10	<b>Upper Cowlitz.</b> Uses some Yakima features.
DC	~60	3	<b>Kittitas.</b> Also speaks several Coast Salish dialects.
LC	>60	1	<b>Upper Cowlitz.</b> Speaks fairly pure Upper Cowlitz dialect.

## Survey of interrogative sentences in NW Sahaptin texts

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- We surveyed **95** Northwest Sahaptin texts (Jacobs 1929, 1934, 1937) that were produced by **7** speakers of Kittitas ( $N=1$ ), Klickitat ( $N=1$ ), and Upper Cowlitz Sahaptin ( $N=5$ ) for all interrogative sentences.
- We found **442** analyzable Northwest Sahaptin interrogative sentences.
  - We also found 29 interrogative sentences that lack an interrogative pronoun and 14 that consist only of the interrogative pronoun (and any enclitics), which we do not analyze (they cannot exhibit variation in order of the interrogative pronoun).
- We tagged each sentence based on whether the interrogative pronoun occurs sentence-initially (“**canonical**” order) or not (“**non-canonical**”).
  - We ignored vocatives/interjections, which occur outside of the clause.

# Results: Canonical word order dominates

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- **Most of the interrogative sentences in these Northwest Sahaptin texts** (Jacobs 1929, 1934, 1937) **exhibit the canonical word order** ( $N=375/442$ , 84.8%).
  - All sentences produced by 4 speakers exhibited the canonical order ( $N=86$ ).
- This includes sentences that use a range of interrogative pronouns as well as with or without a second-position pronominal enclitic:<sup>1</sup>

16) Šín iwá miyáwix?

šín i-wá miyáwix

who 3SG-be chief

‘Who is the headman?’

(UC; Jacobs 1934:141, 1937:125)

17) Míšnam íči wiyáninxa?

míš=nam íči wiyánin-xa

how=2SG here walk.around-HAB

‘How [are you] traveling about here?’

(UC; Jacobs 1934:100, 1937:89)

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<sup>1</sup> We present Northwest Sahaptin language data using Americanist orthography (cf. Rude 2014). We obtained glosses from Jacobs’ (1931) grammar and by comparing cognates in Yakima (Beavert and Hargus 2009).



# Results: Non-canonical word orders do occur

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- **Three speakers produced 67 sentences with non-canonical word orders where the interrogative pronoun occurred sentence-internally (15.2%).**
  - For all three speakers, non-canonical orders comprised **less than half** of their interrogative sentences (JH  $N=62/199$ , 31.2%; SE-II  $N=2/95$ , 2.1%; SE-I  $N=3/62$ , 4.8%).
- In **10** sentences, the pronoun immediately follows a “connective” word:

18) Ku tún iwá k'pínk k'waaalyáy?

ku      **tún**      i-wá      k'pínk      k'waaalyáy

and    what    3sg-be    that      Dangerous.Being

‘But what is this Dangerous Being?’

(UC; Jacobs 1934:129, 1937:114)

# Results: Non-canonical word orders do occur

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- Three speakers produced 67 sentences with non-canonical word orders where the interrogative pronoun occurred sentence-internally (15.2%).
- In 51 sentences, a second-position enclitic occurs on the preceding word:

19) Áwnaš tún wáta?

áw=naš      **tún**      wá-ta

now=1SG      what      be-FUT

‘Now what shall I become?’

(Klickitat; Jacobs 1934:86, 1937:77)

20) Kumaš minán wá pápma?

ku=maš      **minán**      wá      páp-ma

and=2SG      where      be      daughter-PL

‘Where are your daughters?’

(UC; Jacobs 1934:267, 1937:232)

21) Áwnaš míš ámita kuš áwiyatnata?

áw=naš      **míš**      á-mi-ta

now=1SG      what      3OBJ-do-FUT

‘What can I do to kill it?’

kuš      á-iyatna-ta

thus      3OBJ-kill-FUT

(UC; Jacobs 1934:128, 1937:112)

# Results: Non-canonical word orders do occur

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- Three speakers produced 67 sentences with non-canonical word orders where the interrogative pronoun occurred sentence-internally (15.2%).
- In 6 sentences (produced by JH), multiple words precede the int. pronoun:

22) Áwnam ímč̣a mĩš p̣x̣<sup>w</sup>íša?

áw=nam    ím-č̣a    **mĩš**    p̣x̣<sup>w</sup>í-ša  
now=2SG    2SG-also    how    think-IMPV

‘How do you feel about it?’ (Klickitat; Jacobs 1934:9, 1937:7)

23) Áw watáy q̣<sup>w</sup>sím p̣ín-ᵾi mĩš ip̣x̣<sup>w</sup>íša?

áw    watáy    q̣<sup>w</sup>sím    p̣ín-ᵾi    **mĩš**    i-p̣x̣<sup>w</sup>í-ša  
now    weasel    mischievous    3SG-too    what    3SG-think-IMPV

‘Now what can the rascal weasel be thinking of again?’ (Kl; Jacobs 1934:23, 1937:19)

# Results: Non-canonical word orders do occur

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- Three speakers produced 67 sentences with non-canonical word orders where the interrogative pronoun occurred sentence-internally (15.2%).
- In 6 sentences (produced by JH), multiple words precede the int. pronoun:
  - In sentence (24), two words precede the interrogative pronoun. Curiously, the second-position enclitic =nam attaches to the second of these words:

24) Íkuš kunam táy ímík tᵾánašana tk<sup>w</sup>íinat?

íkuš ku=nam **táy** ímík tᵾána-ša-na tk<sup>w</sup>íinat

thus and=2SG why 2SG occur-IMPV-PST chinook.salmon

‘Why have you become a chinook salmon like that?’

(Klickitat; Jacobs 1934:68, 1937:61)

# Results: Non-canonical word orders do occur

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- Three speakers produced 67 sentences with non-canonical word orders where the interrogative pronoun occurred sentence-internally (15.2%).
- In 6 sentences (produced by JH), multiple words precede the int. pronoun:
  - In sentence (25), the second-position enclitic =nan occurs twice: Once before and once attached to the interrogative pronoun:

25) K<sup>w</sup>iník áwnan míškiniknan áwinpanita ílk<sup>w</sup>is?

k <sup>w</sup> iník	áw=nan	<b>míškinik</b> =nan	á-winpani-ta	ílk <sup>w</sup> is
there	now=1PL	how=1PL	3OBJ-get.from-FUT	fire

‘Now how shall we get their fire?’

(Klickitat; Jacobs 1929:176, 180)

# Interim summary

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- Most interrogative sentences in the Northwest Sahaptin texts that Jacobs collected (1929, 1934, 1937) exhibit the canonical word order.
- **A small subset of interrogative sentences exhibit non-canonical orders where the interrogative pronoun is non-sentence-initial.**
  - In most such sentences, the interrogative pronoun occurs **after a second-position enclitic** (which reliably indicates the first word in the clause).
- In sum, **old Sahaptin varieties exhibit greater word order flexibility in interrogative sentences** than modern grammars recognize.
  - Yet only 3 speakers produced non-canonical word orders, and all 3 used the canonical order much more frequently than non-canonical orders.....

What is the significance of the use of non-canonical word orders in these texts?

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# Discussion: Legitimacy of non-canonical orders

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- That multiple speakers of multiple dialects used interrogative sentences with non-canonical orders suggests that **this may represent a legitimate question-formation strategy in older varieties of Sahaptin.**
  - All 3 appear to have been native Sahaptin speakers who were raised in Sahaptin-speaking environments. Jacobs notes that JH and SE-II spoke especially pure forms of Klickitat and Upper Cowlitz Sahaptin, respectively (1929:242–243, 1934:126).
  - Thus, there appears to be no reason to doubt the quality of the language they produced.
- **These 3 shared more than 75% of the texts that Jacobs collected, which may explain why they alone are attested as having used such orders.**
  - It seems likely that the other speakers would have at least heard such word orders in the speech of others. For example, ME was married to SE-I and was the mother of SE-II, so she may have encountered non-canonical word orders in their speech.



# Discussion: Possible origins in language contact

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- Is it possible that external factors, namely **language contact**, influenced these speakers' use of non-canonical word orders?
- Both SE-I and SE-II were familiar with the Cowlitz dialect of Coast Salish:
  - ME was a native speaker of the Cowlitz dialect of Coast Salish, and SE-I/SE-II were intimately familiar with her Coast Salish speech (Jacobs 1934:102, 126).
  - Some question particles occur in non-sentence-initial position in Coast Salish (e.g. Rowicka 2006), so perhaps they could have adopted such orders from CS...
- **BUT language contact cannot explain JH's use of non-canonical orders:**
  - JH had little interest in non-Klickitat languages and cultures (Jacobs 1929:242).

# Discussion: Preference for canonical word order

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- Although some alternative word orders were used in NW Sahaptin, **the most common order used the interrogative pronoun sentence-initially.**
- This order is now obligatory in modern Sahaptin dialects, **suggesting that word order in interrogative sentences has become less flexible.**
- This shift corresponds with widespread language attrition and a shift to Sahaptin-English bilingualism among Sahaptin communities, **but it does NOT appear that English word order could have influenced this shift:**
  - 6/7 speakers appear to have lacked English language proficiency, so the preference for this order likely predates any English influence on Sahaptin.
    - SE-II was fluent in English and served as Jacobs' consultant for many of these texts.

# Summary

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- Although the position of interrogative pronouns is fixed in interrogative sentences in modern Sahaptin varieties, **older varieties permit a wider range of word orders where the pronoun occurs sentence-internally.**
  - Yet even in older documentation, there is a **strong preference** for word orders where the interrogative pronoun occurs **sentence-initially.**
- Oral narratives and conversational speech often contain a wider range of language structures than are obtained via traditional elicitation methods and than may be taught in formal language classrooms.
  - The canonical word order should be the focus of new pedagogical materials (e.g. Kern and Geary 2021), but in that learners could encounter alternate word orders in older texts, pedagogical materials may address such variation.

K'w ałanáw ašamataš!

Thank you all!

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