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Homophonous grammatical markers are not uncommon among languages, but in the absence of an obvious semantic relationship, there can be little justification for relating them diachronically. Sometimes the coherence of a set of grammatical functions is obscured, however, by the loss of a marker that would have provided the semantic link. A general awareness of recurring clusters of functions expressed by homophonous forms cross-linguistically can provide a useful tool in such situations: it can direct our attention to the kinds of missing links that we should reach for in order to uncover relationships that might otherwise escape notice.

Cross-linguistic knowledge can have special value in the reconstruction of languages with small inventories of sounds, where the probability of chance phonetic resemblance among morphemes is particularly high. Consider Mohawk, a Northern Iroquoian language spoken primarily in Quebec, Ontario, and New York State. Mohawk contains only fifteen distinctive sounds, but it is highly polysynthetic, with extensive prefixation, suffixation, and incorporation. Among the prefixes in verbs are obligatory pronouns referring to all core arguments. Compare the intransitive verbs in (1).

(1) Mohawk¹ (Iroquoian): Intransitives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGENTS</th>
<th>PATIENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>katerd:roks</td>
<td>wake:nikyhray:ta?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. AGT-watch-HABITUAL</td>
<td>1.PAT-mind-lay-BEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saterd:roks</td>
<td>sa?nikyhray:ta?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.AGT-watch-HABITUAL</td>
<td>M.PAT-mind-lay-BEN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combinations of agents and patients are expressed by fused transitive prefixes. Traces of the original agent or patient components can still be seen in some of the forms, but all of the transitive pronominal prefixes are now acquired and processed as single units.

(2) Mohawk: Transitive Combinations

The pronominal prefix system in Mohawk is elaborate, distinguishing not only agent and patient case, but also first, second, and third person; inclusive and exclusive in first person; masculine, feminine, and neuter gender in third person; and singular, dual, and plural number. The total number of agent prefixes, patient prefixes, and transitive combinations is thus quite large: over sixty. Each prefix, furthermore, appears in a variety of forms conditioned by context.

1 Two Mohawk morphemes: \(w\)- and \(wa\)-

Among the Mohawk pronominal prefixes are two partially similar elements. In most contexts, the neuter agent prefix, used to refer to animals, things, and some women, appears as \(ka\)-.

(3) Mohawk neuter agent: \(ka\)- ‘it, she’

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kahnekhirha?} & \quad \text{N.SG.AGT-drink-HABITUAL} \\
\text{it or she drinks} & \\
\text{ka?nyá:k4?t} & \quad \text{N.SG.AGT-escape-HAB} \\
\text{it or she is escaping} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Before vowels -\(a\)-, -\(e\)-, and -\(o\)-, however, the form \(w\)- appears.

(4) Mohawk neuter agent \(w\)- ‘it, she’

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tewardáhtats} & \quad \text{DUALIC-N.SG.AGT-run-HAB} \\
\text{it or she is running} & \\
\text{watero:roks} & \quad \text{N.SG.AGT-watch-HAB} \\
\text{it or she watches} & \\
\end{align*}
\]
Number is marked in the pronominal prefix system with a variety of forms. With first and second persons, the most common marker of plurality is -wa-

(5) Mohawk plural of first and second person: -waw-centered
  yaka-waneh-ntireh
  sew-an-waneh
  kw:na:nuks
  tak-wa:nuks
  sh:ky-wa:nuks
  etshisewa:nuks
  etshisewa:nuks
  kw:nuks
  shak-wa:nuks
  tak-wa:nuks
  etshisewa:nuks

The partial resemblance between the w- allomorph of the neuter singular agent, and the wa- plural of first and second person, might in itself arouse little interest, especially in light of the phonological inventory of Mohawk. Mohawk contains only nine surface consonants. The chance of the same consonant appearing in two areas of the vast pronominal prefix system is extremely high, in fact to be expected.

Both of these forms, w- and wa-, appear in all of the other Northern Iroquoian languages (Oneida, Onondaga, Susquehannock, Cayuga, Seneca, Huron, Wyandot, Tuscarora), so they have been in place for a considerable length of time with their modern functions. Comparative evidence does reveal that the two are more similar in form than might be expected from the Mohawk forms alone. In Mohawk, the non-masculine plural agent prefix, used for groups of women or animals, is most often ku:u-. In Seneca and Huron, however, the form is wati-.

  watitha:nta: ‘they (non-masculine) are pounding’

(7) Huron (Iroquoian): Potier in Fraser 1920:8
  watithi:ton ‘[they (non-masculine) wrote]’

The basic form of the plural marker for third person before consonants in Seneca and Huron, as well as in Mohawk, is -ti-. The original form of the neuter singular must
thus have been the remainder of the prefix: wa-. By regular rule, the vowel a disappears in Northern Iroquoian languages before a, e, and ə. These are the very contexts in which the w- form of the pronoun appears. By the same rule, the vowel of the plural marker -wa- disappears from the same contexts.

(8) Mohawk plural w-
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tewərəhtas} & \quad \text{‘we all (inclusive) are running’} \\
\text{tewəhsaks} & \quad \text{‘we all (inclusive) are searching’} \\
\text{tewənuhtənyus} & \quad \text{‘we all (inclusive) are thinking’}
\end{align*}
\]

The neuter singular agent prefix w-, and the plural marker of first and second person wa-, thus had the same basic shape historically: wa-. Yet their similarity in shape, a single consonant plus vowel, in a language with only 9 consonants and 6 vowels, is still not sufficient justification in itself to relate them diachronically.

2 The unidentified

The behavior of a third grammatical category in a number of unrelated languages suggests that the two Mohawk forms actually descend from a common ancestor. Many languages contain affixes indicating the involvement of an otherwise unidentified, unspecified, or indefinite participant. Note the contribution of the Central Pomo proclitic ba to the meanings of the verbs below.

(9) Central Pomo (Pomoan): Frances Jack p.c.
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{baŋəl} & \quad \text{‘to call’} \\
\text{bάbaaŋəl} & \quad \text{‘to call somebody’} \\
\text{kistʾčiw} & \quad \text{‘to be afraid’} \\
\text{bakiistʾčiw} & \quad \text{‘to be afraid of people’}
\end{align*}
\]

In some cases, the diachronic sources of indefinite affixes are still retrievable. The most common sources are free pronouns meaning ‘someone’ or ‘something’, or nouns meaning ‘people’ or ‘things’. The origin of the Central Pomo proclitic ba is a free pronoun báa ‘someone’ that is still present in the language. Indefinite pronouns are likely candidates for affixation, since they typically represent participants whose identity is not especially important to the discourse at hand. Morphologization provides a means of backgrounding their mention. In Mojave, a Yuman language of California, the morphologization of an indefinite object marker Pč ‘something’ can be seen in progress. It still appears both as a separate word and as a prefix (i)č-.
In Koasati, a Muskogean language of Louisiana, the noun for person is d:ti. An obviously related prefix a:ti-/a:t-/a-t-/a- can indicate the participation of otherwise unidentified persons.

(11) Koasati (Muskogean): Kimball 1985:137

ôhyak a:tiöhitiñä:lok
all someone-DISTR-RECIP-hear-SS
‘Everyone heard about it from each other’

hinä:p, atcimärä:lok
lo someone-2.STATIVE.SUBJECT-be.afraid-SAME.SUBJECT.FOC
‘Lo, you are afraid of people.’

In some languages, indefinite affixes serve only one function: indicating the involvement of an unidentified participant. In a large number of languages, however, the same forms serve additional functions as well. The clusters of functions they serve, furthermore, recur with surprising frequency across unrelated languages.

2.1 Detransitivization

In many languages, indefinite pronouns function as detransitivizers. As is well known, indefinite subject markers produce an effect similar to that of passivization, detopicalization of agents or topicalization of patients of transitives. (Note the use of French on in On m’a dit ... ‘I was told’.) With transitive verbs, indefinite direct object markers generally preclude the appearance of additional direct objects, so their effect is akin to detransitivization. The basic Mojave verb ama:-m ‘eat’, for example, can appear with a separate direct object, but the verb îč-ama:-m ‘eat (something)’ does not.

Pipil, a Uto-Aztecan language of El Salvador, contains an unspecified object prefix. Campbell reports that the prefix “is employed to show that the (non-human) object of a transitive verb is not specified. Verbs with this prefix, ta-, are translated with an object ‘something’ or ‘to be doing’ whatever the action of the verb is, without specifying what the object of the action is; ... the ‘unspecified object’ ta- is natural in contexts where the action of the verb is in focus and the object is of little relevance” (1985:77).
Often combinations of indefinite markers and transitive verb roots take on lives of their own as derived intransitive verbs. In Pipil, some verbs with the **ta-** prefix no longer have counterparts without it. Some combinations have developed idiomatic meanings of their own.

(13) Pipil (Uto-Aztecan): Campbell 1985:78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>tamati</strong></td>
<td>‘to imagine, guess’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mati</strong></td>
<td>‘to know’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tane:si</strong></td>
<td>‘to dawn’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ne:si</strong></td>
<td>‘to appear, be seen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>takwi</strong></td>
<td>‘to borrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>kwi</strong></td>
<td>‘to take’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2 Nominalization

Indefinite pronouns appear in many languages in nominalizations, often functioning as nominalizers themselves. Nominals, as names of entities, usually do not refer to specific events: they are generic labels. Food might be characterized as ‘**something people eat**’, for example, not a specific object that a certain person ate at a particular time. A gardener may be ‘**one who gardens**’, an invalid ‘**one who is sick**’, grain ‘**something ground**’. Note the indefinite prefixes in the Koasati nominalizations below.

(14) Koasati (Muskogean): Kimball 1985:137

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>hollon</strong></td>
<td>‘to be dangerous’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>atholló</strong></td>
<td>‘witch’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>incá:lin</strong></td>
<td>‘to write, mark’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>na:sincá:ka</strong></td>
<td>‘that (which) is written’ &gt; ‘book, paper, letter’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.3 Number

With surprising frequency, the same forms that mark unidentified participants in languages also indicate plurality. Unidentified, nonspecific, or indefinite arguments typically lack sharp individuality. Pronouns referring to unidentified participants are
usually translated alternately as ‘one’, ‘they’, ‘people’, etc., or as ‘something’ or ‘things’. Such pronouns are often used to refer generically or distributively to various people or objects at various times or places, rather than to a single specific individual. Sometimes they refer to a group collectively, a group whose members lack pertinent individuality. In many languages, this semantic overlap is reflected in a formal overlap the shapes of indefinite pronouns and number markers coincide. Atakapa, for example, a language formerly spoken in Texas, contains a prefix cak- ‘someone’, a contraction of the noun ickak ‘a person’ (Swanton 1929). The same prefix marks plurality of third Person objects.

(15) Atakapa (Gulf): Swanton 1929:126
    wi cakitsō  
    I    someone woke
    I woke somebody up.

    cakwinēlem    ‘you found them’
    cakhūō       ‘I see them’
    cakhūśel     ‘we saw them’
    cakinō       I ask them’

2.4 Specific reference

In a number of languages, the same forms that designate unspecified or indefinite participants are also used where the identity of the referents is clear. Compare, for example, the use of French on in On arrive à Aix ‘we’re coming into Aix’. The nonspecific character of the indefinite affixes is often exploited for purposes of defocusing direct reference. Sometimes this defocusing is be used when the identification of referents is not important, as in the passivization and detransitivization discussed in section 2.1. above. Sometimes it functions to maintain social distance. Chinook, for example, a language of the Pacific Northwest, contains an indefinite ergative pronominal prefix qa-.

(16) Chinook (Chinookan): Boas 1911a:584, 589
    aqā’witx ‘somebody gave them to them’
    aqLgEmō’txuit ‘somebody stands near it’

The same prefix is used for first person exclusive ergatives when combined with second person absolutes.

(17) Chinook (Chinookan): Boas 1911a:584
    qam- ‘we/thee’   yam  ‘I/thee’
    qamt- ‘we/you two’ yamt  ‘I/your two selves’
    qamc- ‘we/you all’ yamc  ‘I/you’
Similarly in Caddo, indefinite agent and patient pronouns are used for inclusive first person, and for relatives by marriage (Chafe p.c.).

The diachronic reinterpretation of third person nonspecific markers as general third person pronouns can be reconstructed in a number of language families from comparative evidence. Among languages of the Athabaskan family, for example, pronominal prefixes can be reconstructed within the verb referring to first and second person subjects and objects, in singular and plural. No general referential third person prefixes can be reconstructed, and in most of the languages, basic third persons are usually unmarked. (Transitive combinations of two third persons receive special marking.) Several indefinite pronominal prefixes can be reconstructed for Proto-Athabaskan, however (Hoijer 1971).

2.4.1 The Proto-Athabaskan unspecified subject

One prefix, sometimes called a deictic or indefinite subject, can be reconstructed with the meaning ‘someone’. It marks the participation of an unidentified person as subject. Like indefinite pronouns in most languages, it is variously translated as ‘someone’, ‘one’, ‘a person’, ‘people’, etc.

(18) Athabaskan unspecified subject prefix
Navajo: Béésh doo bee njinié da ‘one shouldn’t play with knives’
(Young & Morgan 1980)

Tututni: syac’ ēmiʔa ‘someone gave it to me’
(Golla 1976)

Chipewyan nát’sedé ‘people are staying’
(Li 1946)

Sarcee: ts’āʔás ‘somebody will kick him’
(Cook 1984)

Tanaina: ch’uyu ‘someone is walking’
(Tenenbaum 1978)

Slave: ts’esets’eyéshú ‘someone woke me up’
(Rice 1989)

Like indefinite pronouns in other languages, constructions with the indefinite human marker are sometimes used in place of passives.

jinit ‘people say, it is said’
Similarly, the Slave prefix is also used in forming nominals.

(20) Slave (Athabaskan): Rice 1989:625
náts'ezé gha deyl ‘hunting is hard’

In some of the Athabaskan languages, this indefinite subject prefix is also used for persons whose identity is inferrable. In the Apachean languages of the Southwest, it is used as a polite form for addressing indirectly those one should respect, in particular, siblings, or in-laws of the opposite sex (Hoijer 1946:76, Young and Morgan 1980:187). The reference thus becomes specific through usage.

In Tanaina and Slave, the prefix is used not only for unidentified persons but for first person plural as well.

(21) Tanaina (Athabaskan): Tenenbaum 1978:62
ch'ghiʔan ‘we (or someone) saw him’

(22) Slave (Athabaskan): Rice 1989:624
shéts'uyee ‘let’s (pl) eat’

In the Bearlake dialect of Slave, the semantic extension of this prefix has resulted in a finer number distinction. The prefix ts'e- indicates first person plural, while the original first person plural prefix fá- now marks first person dual only. In some of the languages, this indefinite prefix has gained in specificity in another way. Cook notes that in Sarcee, ts'i- is “chosen not necessarily because the identity of the subject in question is unknown or unspecified, but because the identity is irrelevant or redundant in a given context” (1984:195). The reference of the prefix is thus still unspecified, but it is not necessarily nonspecific. The verb below is often used when the identity of the speaker is known.

(23) Sarcee (Athabaskan): Cook 1984:195
áts'ínlää ‘someone said’

The Apachean languages show a similar development, where the cognate prefix distinguishes multiple third persons in discourse. It represents the central character, presumably the person whose identification would be redundant so long as a single point of view is maintained.

Finally in Hupa, a Pacific Athabaskan language, the development of specificity is complete. Goddard reported in 1911 that the cognate prefix was used when speaking of adult Hupa. (A different prefix was used for “very aged people, members of other tribes and races, and animals” (Goddard 1911:117)). According to Golla (1985) the prefix či- now serves as the regular third person subject pronoun.
2.4.2 The Proto-Athabaskan unspecified human object prefix

A second indefinite prefix can be reconstructed for Proto-Athabaskan that marks spaces, times, events, abstract entities, etc. It also functions as the object counterpart of the unspecified human subject prefixes described above.

(25) Athabaskan unspecified human object prefix
Kiowa Apache:  göddayččel  'he dreams about someone'
(Bittle 1963)

Sarcee:  gůzisxil  'he killed a person'
(Cook 1984)

Like indefinite pronouns in many languages, this indefinite object prefix resembles another Athabaskan prefix used in most of the languages to emphasize plurality of third person.

(26) Sarcee (Athabaskan): Cook 1984:201
gůtdas  'he will kick them'

This indefinite object prefix, like its subject counterpart, is also used in the Apachean languages to refer indirectly to persons one respects and to the deictic center of a discourse involving multiple third persons. It has also developed into a full fledged basic third person specific pronoun in some languages. In Hupa, the cognate prefix ro- has become a fully specific third person referential pronoun: it marks human direct objects.

(27) Hupa (Athabaskan): Golla 1985:44, 46
ch'iwołši  'he hits him'
noxonehčič:  'I set him/her (the baby) down'

2.4.3. The Proto-Athabaskan unspecified inanimate prefix

Finally, a third indefinite prefix can be reconstructed for Proto-Athabaskan meaning 'something'. Compare the pairs of verbs below.
(28) Navajo (Athabaskan): Hoijer 1945:198, 201
    xadldô  ‘he’s drinking’
yildô  ‘he’s drinking it’

(29) Chipewyan (Athabaskan): Li 1946:416
    xeldô ̀t  ‘he is eating (several objects)’
yeldô ̀t  ‘he is eating them’

(30) Sarcee (Athabaskan): Cook 1984:199, 198
    ́idîssàł  ‘I’ll throw something’
dîssàł  ‘I’ll throw it’

(31) Tanaina (Athabaskan): Tenenbaum 1978:63
    chik’dâhyuq  ‘he killed something’
chîydâhyuq  ‘he killed him’

    nâTenehâtu  ‘I am sewing something’
   Êenâkee‘ee nânehâtu  ‘I am sewing a parka’

Tenenbaum (1978:64) notes for Tanaina, and Rice for Slave (1989:629) that this prefix is used additionally for specific objects whose identity is understood from context or general culture.

(33) Slave (Athabaskan): Rice 1989:629
    bebi kâdmewiwa  ‘I undressed the baby’ (clothing)
    (took unspecified.object off the baby)
yek’êpedêʔq  ‘s/he ironed it’ (iron)
    (handled 3-dimensional unspecified.object on it)

It is easy to imagine how the use of this prefix to refer to identifiable objects could lead to its reinterpretation as a referential pronoun. In fact in Sarcee, the prefix is used not only for unspecified nonhuman objects, but also for specific singular objects in some paradigms.

(34) Sarcee (Athabaskan): Cook 1984:202
    ínís?ás  ‘I’ll kick him’
inísî  ‘I called him’

The indefinite prefixes of the Athabaskan languages thus resemble indefinite markers in other unrelated languages, serving in some cases as detransitivizers, as nominalizers, and as pluralizers. Each has additionally evolved in some, but not all,
of the languages into specific referential pronouns, a development perhaps facilitated by the absence of basic third person markers from the parent language.

3 Unidentified cognates of Mohawk \textit{wa-}

Recall that Mohawk contains two prefixes of the form \textit{wa-}, one referring to third person neuter agents, the other marking plurality. In themselves, these two might not appear sufficiently similar semantically to be related diachronically. Specific pronouns and plural markers do recur cross-linguistically, however, in clusters of cognate morphemes related through indefinite markers. (None of the languages described in section 2 is demonstrably related to Mohawk.) If traces of an earlier indefinite pronoun *\textit{wa-} could be found within Mohawk or its relatives, this form could provide the missing semantic link between the modern neuter agent and plural markers.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence in Mohawk or any of the modern Iroquoian languages of an earlier indefinite pronoun \textit{wa-}. But the Iroquoian family is remotely related to another family: Siouan. In the Siouan languages, verbs contain pronominal prefixes for first and second persons, but not third. Third persons are generally designated by separate nominals, demonstratives, or nothing at all.

Nearly all of the modern Siouan languages contain a prefix that indicates the participation of an otherwise unidentified patient: usually \textit{wa-}. Compare the meanings of the two Hidatsa verbs in (35).

(35) Hidatsa (Siouan): Harris & Voegelin 1939:193
\begin{align*}
  \text{wahkiwa'xuc} & \quad \text{wa'wahkiwa'xuc} \\
  \text{l-ask-FINAL} & \quad \text{something-l-ask-FINAL} \\
  \text{‘I asked (him)’} & \quad \text{‘I asked (him) something, questions’}
\end{align*}

Cognate prefixes throughout the family have similar functions, marking the involvement of unidentified patients of either intransitives or transitives.

(36) Crow (Siouan): Lowie 1960:vi
\begin{align*}
  \text{i'kyak} & \quad \text{‘(he) sees’} \\
  \text{ba'i'kyak} & \quad \text{‘(he) sees something’}
\end{align*}

(37) Mandan (Siouan): Kennard 1936:38
\begin{align*}
  \text{suk'ona ce'rekha wà:xkahanamà:kaha'ehe} \\
  \text{children noisily were chasing something it is said} \\
  \text{‘The children were noisily chasing something.’}
\end{align*}

(38) Lakhota (Siouan) Stan Redbird p.c.
\begin{align*}
  \text{śpáwáye} & \quad \text{‘I cooked (it)’} \\
  \text{waśpáwáye} & \quad \text{‘I’m cooking, I cooked’}
\end{align*}
As in most languages, the Siouan indefinite patient markers function as detransitivizers.

Sometimes the resulting intransitive verbs take on lives of their own as lexical items whose meanings are more than the sum of their parts.

Like indefinite markers in other language families, the Siouan prefixes also serve as nominalizers. They are more productive in some languages than others, but all languages retain a large set of nominals containing them. The derived nominals refer to the patient of the base verb, whether it is transitive or intransitive, or sometimes to agents.
(46) Hidatsa (Siouan): Harris & Voegelin 1939:206
   witapa'c  (he) lied'
   wa'witapa's  'the liar'

(47) Crow (Siouan): Lowie 1960
   tsì'  'to carry on back'
   ba'tsì  'a load'

(48) Lakhota (Siouan): Stan Redbird p.c.
   ngōp'i  'wear around the neck'
   wanōp'i  'necklace, choker'

(49) Winnebago (Siouan): Lipkind 1945:17
   šū  'be fat'
   wašū  'fat'

(50) Ioway-Oto (Siouan): Whitman 1947:244
   liège  'to eat'
   walulège  'food, a table'

(51) Osage (Siouan): La Flesche 1932
   batse  'to sew'
   wabatse  'to sew, one who sews, seamstress'

(52) Biloxi (Siouan): Einaudi 1976
   duti  'eat'
   aduti  'food'

(53) Tutelo (Siouan): Hale 1883
   ketgi  'to dance'
   wagiti  'a dance'

Proto-Siouan, remotely related to Proto-Iroquoian, thus contained the very affix needed to link the modern Mohawk third person and plural wa- prefixes: an indefinite patient prefix *wa-. Like indefinite affixes in many languages, Proto-Siouan *wa- functioned as a de-transitivizer and as a nominalizer as well.

Recall that cross-linguistically, it is not uncommon for indefinite markers to function as plural markers as well. There is so much variety among plural markers in the modern Siouan languages that no plural affix can be reconstructed for Proto-Siouan. In a few of them, however, wa- has now developed into a marker of plurality of third person objects.
RECONSTRUCTING THE UNIDENTIFIED

(54) Winnebago (Siouan): Lipkind 1945:22
rahe’ ‘thou buriest (him)’
warahé’ ‘thou buriest them’

(55) Ioway-Oto (Siouan): Whitman 1947:244
ání ‘(she) has it’
wáñi ‘(she) has them’

(56) Ponca (Siouan): Boas & Swanton 1911:915
anáʔaʔa ‘I heard (it)’
awánaʔaʔa ‘I heard about them’

(57) Osage (Siouan): La Flesche 1932:325
shíʔa ‘you see’
wa-‐shíʔa ‘you saw them’

Traces of the same marker can be found in other distant relatives of Mohawk. The Iroquoian and Siouan families are remotely related to a third family: Caddoan. The Caddoan languages, like the Iroquoian and Siouan languages, contain agent and patient pronominal prefixes within their verbs. Several of the Caddoan languages also contain affixes with the shape wa.

In Wichita, a distributive infix wa- appears before the last consonant of the verb stem. According to Rood, this infix “generally refers to a spreading out of the state or event, although it sometimes seems to imply plurality of the patient of the verb instead” (1976:76).

(58) Wichita (Caddoan): Rood 1976:76
tikakics ‘it is getting dry’
tikakiciwaːris ‘everything is getting dry’
iːhkiwas ‘he loses’
hirːhkiwaːwáskih ‘when he was losing everything’

In a few intransitive verbs, a prefix wa- (in combination with the non-singular prefix hiʔ-) marks dual number of the subject.

téʔhíːris ‘she got up’
hútéʔhíːhiskwaːras ‘they two got up’

Both Arikara and Pawnee contain cognate distributive markers wa-. In Arikara, the distributive immediately precedes the verb stem (Merlan 1975:64). In Pawnee, the marker is sometimes a prefix, sometimes a suffix, and sometimes an infix. It ex-
presses variously "an activity or state distributed over a wide area, iterative action, distributive plural object of the verb, and dual and/or plural subject of the verb" (Parks 1976:279). Compare the verb stems in (60).

(60) Pawnee (Caddoan): Parks 1976:186

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ki:ka</td>
<td>'to drink'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ki:kawa</td>
<td>'to drink (various things)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ariki</td>
<td>'stand (sg)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa:ariki</td>
<td>'stand (du, pl)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he:r</td>
<td>'be good (sg, du)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hewa:</td>
<td>'be good (pl)'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like the other Caddoan languages, Caddo contains a variety of number markers. A prefix wa-, which appears between two segments of the verb stem, indicates plurality of an animate agent or patient.

(61) Caddo (Caddoan): Chafe 1976:69

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dibáwnah</td>
<td>'(he) saw (him)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diwabáwnah</td>
<td>'they (pl) saw (him)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hakáywabáwnah</td>
<td>'(he) saw them (pl)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hakáywabáwnah</td>
<td>'they (pl) saw them (pl)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t'áybáwnah</td>
<td>'I saw you (sg)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t'áywabáwnah</td>
<td>'we (pl) saw you (sg)'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recall that cross-linguistically, it is not unusual for indefinite pronouns to be used for specific reference, and even to evolve into general referential pronouns, particularly in languages originally lacking third person pronominal forms. Proto-Siouan contained first and second person pronominal prefixes but not third. Proto-Caddoan contained first and second person pronominal prefixes, and only indefinite third. The modern Iroquoian languages differ among themselves in their sets of third person pronouns. It is probable that their common ancestor, Proto-Siouan-Caddoan-Iroquoian, lacked basic third person pronouns. The most likely source of one of these markers, the neuter agent w(a)-, is a Proto-Siouan-Caddoan-Iroquoian indefinite marker *wa-, a not unusual development cross-linguistically.

4 Conclusion

The partial resemblance between the Mohawk plural marker wa- and the neuter singular agent marker w- is probably no coincidence after all. The two are apparently
related diachronically through an earlier marker of unidentified or indefinite participants that still persists with that function in the remotely related Siouan languages. Similar developments, from indefinite to definite markers, and from indefinite to plural markers, are not uncommon cross-linguistically.

The recognition of the recurring relationships among indefinite, plural, and definite pronominal affixes, has further value even within Mohawk, alerting us to possible diachronic relatives of other third person markers that have previously escaped notice. Recall that the Mohawk neuter agent allomorph w- alternates with ka-, as in kahnekÍhrrha? 'it or she is drinking'. This prefix has cognates with the same meaning throughout the Northern Iroquoian languages; in the sole Southern language, Cherokee, the cognate form is the general third person agent pronoun: \( k_{q}^{2} w_{o}^{3} n_{j}^{2} h_{a} \) '(s)he's speaking' (Pulte & Feeling 1975:275). A prefix of the same shape also appears as plural in two other Iroquoian languages, Tuscarora and Cayuga. In Tuscarora, ka- marks plurality of all third persons: compare wa?gytskà:ri? 'she ate' and wa?kaytskà:ri? 'they ate' (Elton Green p.c.). In Cayuga, ka- marks plurality of feminine and mixed third persons: compare a?é?yò? 'she arrived' and akàé?yo? 'they arrived' (Reginald Henry p.c.). The same form surfaces as a plural marker in the remotely related Caddoan family. In Pawnee, a prefix ka- indicates iteration or plural object with a few verbs: karu 'to make them' (Parks 1976:285). The same prefix appears as an indefinite marker in both Siouan and Caddoan. The indefinite pronoun 'something' in Biloxi (Siouan) is kawa (Einaudi 1976:142). Wichita (Caddoan) contains an indefinite prefix ka-: as in the pronoun ka:-kiya? 'something' or ka:-kiya? 'someone', etc. (Rood 1976:11). A nominalizer of the same shape also appears in some Siouan languages: note for example Mandan karoré 'a speaker' (Kennard 1936) and Lakota waktéka 'a killer'.

Similar clusters of homophones can be found for the Mohawk feminine pronominal prefixes. Within Mohawk and the other Northern Iroquoian languages, the agent prefix ye- is used for both women and for unspecified or indefinite persons. A cognate form is used only for unidentified persons in Cherokee. A cognate prefix, *yi- referring only to unidentified or unspecified agents, can be reconstructed for Proto-Caddoan (Chafe 1976). The development of the modern Mohawk feminine prefix from an original unspecified human agent prefix is clear. In most of the Northern Iroquoian languages, the same pronoun is also used for third person collective referents, groups of people.


Whether or not we can ultimately relate these forms diachronically will of
course depend upon further comparative work. In any case, an awareness of the clusters of functions signalled by homophonous markers cross-linguistically can be a valuable tool in linguistic reconstruction; it can alert us to the possibility of historical relationships among grammatical forms that might otherwise escape notice, and play a major role in guiding us to the discovery of missing links.

NOTE

1 I am grateful to the following speakers who have generously shared their expertise on their languages: the late Mr. Elton Greene, of Lewiston, New York, on Tuscarora; Mr. Reginald Henry, of Six Nations, Ontario, on Cayuga; Mrs. Frances Jack of Hopland, California, on Central Pomo, Mrs. Myrtle Peterson, of Steamburg, New York, on Seneca, Mr. Stanley Redbird, of Rosebud, South Dakota, on Lakota, and the Native language teachers involved in Mohawk linguistics classes at Caughnawaga, Oka, and Akwesasne in Quebec, and the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario.

REFERENCES


