

# **PARTICIPANT REFERENCING IN CASHINAHUA**

**Richard Montag**

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## Abstract

The Panoan language group called Cashinahua are deep jungle hunter, horticulturalists living on the headwaters of the Purús River in eastern Peru and the Tarauacá River of western Brazil. They have a complex switch-reference system used to identify participants in dependent clause relations in any multiple clause utterance. This system is used in any speech situation to relate one clause to a following clause which may or may not be the next clause in the sequence; its referencing capacities are more obvious in narratives. After the participants have been introduced in narratives, hearers are able to track subjects and objects in long sentences, sometimes hundreds of clauses, when very few nouns or pronouns have been used to identify participants. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how this switch reference system works.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Participant identification

The Cashinahua language is a split-ergative language with a basic SOV word order but with a possible OSV arrangement for emphasis or focus. On rare occasions one can even find SVO or OVS arrangements with the last element marked by a tag morpheme. The details and uses of these word order variations are beyond the scope of this article. In both independent and dependent transitive clauses the agent **noun** (transitive subject) is marked by adding nasalization to the final vowel. If the final vowel is already nasalized or followed by a sibilant, an appropriate vowel is added and carries the nasal marker to indicate the subject.<sup>2</sup> The syllable patterns are CV and CVsibilant. (CVsibilant is treated as an open syllable because the sibilant does not stop the flow of air.) All direct and indirect objects and the subjects of intransitive clauses are left unmarked. Note that, because of the participant referencing system, none of the above noun phrases need appear in a given independent or dependent clause. Cashinahua is a **split** ergative language in that the first, second, and third person **pronouns** have nominative-accusative forms when they appear in either transitive or intransitive clauses.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Independent clause markers

I need to say a little about the independent clause to help the reader understand some of my examples. Each independent clause ends in a mood marker: declarative, declarative reportative, imperative,

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Kensinger started working with the Cashinahua living on the Curanja River of Peru in 1955 under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. He learned to speak their language and did the initial phonetic transcription and phonological analysis that resulted in the orthography which is basically still in use. Later, Robert Cromack joined Kensinger in the investigation of the language and culture. Cromack specialized in analyzing Cashinahua grammar at the discourse level. His Ph.D. dissertation "Language Systems and Discourse Structure in Cashinawa," Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1968 (published in *Hartford Studies in Linguistics* 23), was written in the stratificational model and demonstrates the use of the suffixes explained in this paper. It was available to me in 1969 when my wife and I started learning the Cashinahua language; it later became a great help in understanding the dependent clause relationships. My understanding of these suffixes increased as I spoke the language and studied folklore texts and personal histories which led to a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1998. My dissertation is entitled "A Tale of Pudicho's People: Cashinahua Narrative Accounts of European Contact in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." At present I am working among the Cashinahua under the auspices of Mission to the World.

<sup>2</sup> The pronunciation of the Cashinahua letters is like Spanish with the following exceptions: e = ɛ, x = sh, n before a vowel is a normal n but a syllable final n (Vn) is nasalization on the preceding vowel or contiguous vowels, and intervocalic d is a flap r.

<sup>3</sup> There is some evidence that the pronouns also used to be ergative-absolutive or that the system is moving in that direction since an object pronoun can now appear with a nasal marker Vn and be the subject of a transitive clause. We understand it when it occurs in regular speech or a text, but we have not attempted to systematically study why and where these forms are used.

permissive, interrogative, suggestive interrogative, possibilitive interrogative, or suppositional marker. Just prior to the mood marker, there is usually a time marker that indicates the time of the action in relation to the time of speaking:

*completed action* of a little while ago, of today, of yesterday (may mean up to several months ago), of a month ago (may mean more than one year), of two or three years ago, of more than about five years ago back to distant past, or

*incompleted action*: the present (now), the very recent past and the rest of today, or

a *future* marker can be put in front of incompleted markers to mean future of tomorrow or later but can also be used for later today. There are no hard and fast boundaries between the time indicated by these markers except that the ‘of today’ marker cannot stretch to mean ‘of yesterday’.

There are many more suffixes and prefixes that can go on a verb stem in various combinations but they are not germane to this article.<sup>4</sup> I use the word “marker” instead of “morpheme” because some of the markers can be parsed into morphemes but are thought of and act as single units.<sup>5</sup> At first the system will appear confusing; it certainly did to us in the early years, and the Cashinahua are still coming up with variations which are new to us. However, what follows is the basic system.

### 3 Dependent clause markers

The Cashinahua switch-reference system consists of ten suffixes that are attached to the verb stem of dependent clauses. They indicate participants, relative internal time relationships, and the transitivity of the subsequent clause to which it is referenced. I have chosen to describe each marker by features rather than the Stratificational model of Cromack’s dissertation or by tree diagrams of generative grammars because, even though they both can show the relationships, they do not serve well for someone who wants to decode a Cashinahua narrative to gain further insight into their culture or encode meaning into Cashinahua as in translating texts from a majority language

The main feature is the completeness of the verb action, marked “com” (complete) or “inc” (incomplete), as I indicated in my discussion of the independent clause. The second most important feature is Same Subject (SS) or Different Subject (DS) and then the transitivity *of the subsequent clause* to which the clause that has the marker is being *referenced*. When the feature Same Subject (SS) is in focus, the number of the Subject of the referenced clause must be taken into account. Basically, Cashinahua nouns are not singular and plural, they are plural of few, which is unmarked and plural of many, usually marked by *-bu*. The singular can be considered as a subset of the default plural of few. This is usually understood by the context but sometimes *bestichai* ‘one only’ is added for clarity if the context is not sufficient.

The ten markers fall logically into five pairs based on one feature difference and are illustrated in the following table 1. The table is intended as a summary and each marker will be explained and illustrated later.

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<sup>4</sup> For a sketch of these suffixes see “Notas gramaticales,” by Richard Montag, pp. 549–607 in *Diccionario Cashinahua, Tomo II*, Susan Montag, compiler, Serie Lingüística Peruana 9, 1981, Pucallpa Peru: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano. To avoid confusion in the examples, I must also point out that the causative morpheme *-ma* and the negative morpheme *-ma* (in all moods except imperative) are homophonous but contextually there is no ambiguity; they are even used together with the causative preceding the negative.

<sup>5</sup> A generative semantics description of these markers, based on my earlier study of Cashinahua is given in Richard Montag, “La estructura semántica de las relaciones entre frases verbales in Cashinahua” in Eugene E Loos, ed., *Estudios Panos II*, pp. 107–159, Serie Lingüística Peruana 11, 1973, Pucallpa, Peru: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.

Table 1. Cashinahua dependent clause switch-reference markers

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>-kin</i> (incomplete, SS, transitive)                                    | 2. <i>-xun</i> (complete, SS, transitive)                                      |
| 3. <i>-i</i> (incomplete, SS, intransitive)                                    | 4. <i>-a /-abu</i> (plural of few/plural of many; complete, SS, intransitive)* |
| 5. <i>-ai/-aibu</i> (plural of few/plural of many; incomplete, DS, transitive) | 6. <i>-a /-abu</i> (plural of few/plural of many; complete, DS, transitive)    |
| 7. <i>-aya /-aibun</i> (plural of few, plural of many; incomplete, DS)         | 8. <i>-ken</i> (complete, DS)  |
| 9. <i>-tan</i> (completed series, SS)  | 10. <i>-nun</i> (completed series, DS)   |

\*The markers numbered 4 and 6 in the second column appear to be the same in form and were originally analyzed as one marker with contextual differences, and that is how my wife Susan and I learned to use them. But in the mid-70s Eugene Loos of SIL, based on his knowledge of Capanahua and other Panoan languages, suggested (private communication) that one of these had originally been longer in form but was shortened because the context made the extra segments unnecessary. After that conversation I realized that the first of the two lined up with the incomplete *-i*, and the second one lined up with the incomplete *-ai/-aibu*, thus forming a balanced five-pair dependent clause marker system.

At this point I want to say something about the third incomplete marker, *-ai/-aibu*, that we learned during the past year. The Cashinahua speakers can add an *n* (nasalization marker) if there are lots and lots of people involved (more than the normal plural of many), thus making it look and sound like the marker below it in the chart, *aibun*, but there is no confusion because of the context. Over the years many nuances on this system have presented themselves but none has changed the basic analysis of the system.

Now I need to say more about how I use the terms “complete” (com) and “incomplete” (inc). Complete means that the action of the clause with the marker is complete prior to the starting time of the action of the clause to which it is grammatically referenced. Incomplete means that the action of the clause with the marker is incomplete at the starting time of the action of the clause to which it is grammatically referenced. Moreover, the action of this incomplete clause may not even have started when the action of the clause to which it is referenced happens.<sup>6</sup>

- (1) *Atsa be-i bai anu en ka-aii*  
 Cassava bring-inc garden there I go-inc.decl  
 In order to bring back cassava, I am going to the garden.

<sup>6</sup> Abbreviations used in examples:

- ben benefactive or malfactive
- com complete
- caus causative
- decl declarative
- fut future
- imp imperative
- inc incomplete
- inst instrumental
- inter interrogative
- neg negative
- pl pluralperson (number only may appear)

- (2) *Atsa be-i bai anua en ju-xu-ki*  
 Cassava bring-inc garden from I come-today-com.decl  
 Bringing cassava, I came from the garden today.

In example (1) the bringing of the cassava will happen later and is not even started at the time of the going. The incomplete is used as a purpose clause whereas in example (2) the bringing of the cassava is contemporaneous with the coming.

### 3.1 The dependent clause reference markers

#### 3.1.1 The marker *-kin* (incomplete, SS, transitive)

The action of this clause is *incomplete* and the next *transitive* clause with the same number of participants will have the *same* subject as this clause. This may not be the next clause in sequence; there may be intervening intransitive clauses or transitive clauses with a different number.

- (3) *Ka-kin, nun tsaka-mis-ki.*  
 go-ing we hunt-always-decl  
 While going, we always hunt.

#### 3.1.2 The marker *-xun* (complete, SS, transitive)

The action of this clause is *complete* and the next *transitive* clause with the same number of participants will have the *same* subject as this clause. This may not be the next clause in sequence; there may be intervening intransitive clauses or transitive clauses with a different number.

- (4) *Bai anu ka-tan-xun, nukun ainen nuku bava-xun-mis-ki*  
 garden there go-return-com our wives us cook-ben-always-decl  
 After having gone to the gardens and returned, our wives always cook for us.

#### 3.1.3 The marker *-i* (incomplete, SS, intransitive)

The action of this clause is *incomplete*, and the next *intransitive* clause with the *same number of participants* will have the *same subject* as this clause.

- (5) *En kadu wa-i ka-aii*  
 I firewood do-inc go-inc.1&2.decl  
 I am going to cut firewood. (already going or soon will)

#### 3.1.4 The marker *-a/-abu* (plural of few/plural of many; complete, SS, intransitive)

The action of this clause is *complete* and the next *intransitive* clause with the same number of participants will have the *same* subject.

- (6) *Ma badi ka-aya daya-tan-a juni kuin-bu naxi-kan-ikiki*  
 now sun go-inc work-return-com men genuine-pl wash-pl-inc.3.decl.  
 Now that the sun is setting, the Genuine Men (Cashinahua) have returned from work and are bathing.

### 3.1.5 The marker *-ai/-aibu* (plural of few/pl. of many; incomplete, DS, transitive)

The action of this clause is *incomplete* and the next *transitive* clause will have a *different* subject than this clause and the *subject* or *object* of this clause may become a direct or indirect object of the referenced clause.

- (7) *Yava kuin be-baun-aibu ichapa nukuna-bun tskaka-xina-ki*  
 peccary come-all.around-pl many our-people shot-yesterday-decl

While the peccary were coming all around them, our people shot lots of them yesterday.

### 3.1.6 The marker *-a/-abu* (complete, DS, transitive)

The action of this clause is *complete* and the next *transitive* clause will have a *different* subject than this clause and the *subject* or *object* of this clause *may* become an object of the next clause (culturally determined).

- (8) *Ainbun ma bawa-a pi-tidu-bu-ki*  
 women now cook-com eat-able-pl-decl

Now that the women have cooked, they (people other than the women) can eat.

- (9) *Inu keneya ju-a tsaka-xina-ki*  
 jaguar come-com (he)shot(it)-yesterday-decl

After the jaguar came, he shot it yesterday.

Examples (8) and (9) illustrate different object identifications using *-a* (complete, DS, transitive). In the first example the food was cooked and then eaten. In the second example the jaguar came and was then shot.

### 3.1.7 The marker *-aya/-aibun* (plural of few/plural of many; incomplete, DS)

The action of this clause is *incomplete* or is just being completed and the subject of the next clause will be *different* from the subject of this clause; this is a pure change-subject signal, i.e., it does not indicate transitivity of the referenced clause.

- (10) *Yava kuin be-baun-aibun pia-uma ji pixta en ina-ni-ki*  
 peccary come-all.around gun-without tree small I climb-long.ago-decl

While the wild pigs were coming all around, not having a gun I climbed a small tree long ago.

(See example (6) for *-aya*.)

### 3.1.8 The marker *-ken* (perfect, DS)

The action of this clause is *complete* and the subject of the next clause will be *different* than the subject of this clause; this is a pure change-subject signal.

- (11) *ui ichapa ju-xin-ken xaxu-wen nun manankidi ka-tidu-ma-ki*  
 rain lots come-last.night-DS canoe-inst we upstream go-able-neg-decl

Because very much rain came last night, we cannot go upstream by canoe.

I want to add a clarification on *-ken* of example (11). As listed above, it is strictly a change of subject signal. It could be the case that *-ken* signals a causative relationship, but this is only by implication. It is true that *-ken* is often used to state a situation that does have implications for the actions of following

clauses, similar to, “He fell down the stairs and broke his leg,” meaning, *it being the case that he fell down the stairs and the logical(cultural) result being his leg broke*, as opposed to the clearly grammatically indicated relationship in, “Because he fell down the stairs, he broke his leg.” The equivalent example in Cashinahua with a clearly marked causal relationship would be (12).

(12) *ui ichapa ju-xian-wen tae-a,*  
rain lots come-yesterday-com **because-com**

*xaxu-wen nun manankidi ka-tidu-ma-ki.*  
canoe-inst we upstream go-able-neg-decl

Because lots of rain came yesterday, we cannot go upstream by canoe.

### 3.1.9 The marker *-tan* (completed series, SS)

The action of this clause is *complete* and is the end of a series of events *or* an aspect of greater completeness, and the next clause will have the *same* subject as this clause if it is the same number of participants (transitivity of the next clause is not an issue).

(13) *Sepa-xun deda-xun ji mexte-a uxe besti mana-tan javen bai kua-xan-ikiki*  
cut.brush-com fell.trees-com trees cut.up-com moon one wait-com his garden burn-fut-3.inc.decl

He cut the underbrush, felled the trees, cut the limbs down to the ground, and then after having waited one month he is going to burn it.

### 3.1.10 The marker *-nun* (completed series, DS)

The action of this clause is *complete* and the end of a series of events *or* an aspect of greater completeness, and the next clause will have a *different* subject from this clause (transitivity of the next clause is not an issue).

(14) *Javena kua-tan pewa-xun, yunu bana-nun, jawen ainin xapu bana-xu-ki*  
his burned made.good-com crops plant-com his wife cotton planted-today-decl.

After he burned his land, cleaned up all the unburned sticks and had planted his crops, his wife planted cotton today.

We have mentioned that a referenced clause may not always be the next following clause but several clauses later. The following example will demonstrate a situation where a hearer has to keep a participant in his/her memory until a clause with the right characteristics is realized.

(15) *Pia-ya ka-kin ui ju-aya, xenpan tsau-xun, bixi inu ju-ai, tsaka-xina-ki*  
gun-with go-inc rain come-inc palm.tree sit-com ocelot come-inc shoot-yesterday-decl

While he was going with a gun and while rain was coming, he sat down under a palm tree, and then while an ocelot was coming he shot it.

Although not referred to by means of a noun phrase, the subject of the first clause can be identified by the phrase ‘with a gun’ which indicates a man who is twelve years old or older. The suffix *-kin* (incomplete, SS, transitive) on *ka* ‘go’ signals that the action of that clause is incomplete (he was still going *away from* where the narrator was located at the time of the action) and that the subject of the first clause will be the subject of the next *transitive* clause with the same number. At this point a hearer holds that participant in memory waiting for a transitive clause. The suffix *-aya* (incomplete, DS) on *ui ju* ‘rain come’ signals incomplete action and that the subject of the next clause will be different. The coming of the rain

occasioned someone sitting under a palm tree. This, by inference, has to be the man, which is not signaled grammatically. However, the suffix *-xun* (complete, SS, transitive) on *tsau* ‘sit down’ signals that the next transitive clause will have the same subject. This subject will also be held in memory and then joined with the subject of the first clause as the subject of the final clause *tsaka* ‘shoot.’ After the man sat under the palm tree, a new participant ‘ocelot’ is introduced by a noun in the next to last clause *bixi inu ju-ai* ‘ocelot coming’; the suffix *-ai* (incomplete, DS, transitive) signals incomplete action, and in addition indicates that the subject of this clause ‘ocelot’ is an object of the next transitive clause. Thus the final clause receives its two arguments, subject ‘man’ kept in memory and object ‘ocelot’ from the previous clause, thus ‘man shot ocelot’ is clear in the final clause. If the suffix on the next to last clause of example were changed to *-a*, it would be interpreted in slightly different manner:

- (16) ... *bixi.inu ju-a tsaka-xina-ki*  
 ... ocelot come-com shoot-yesterday-decl  
 ...after the ocelot came, he shot it yesterday.

In example (16) the suffix *-a* (complete, DS, transitive) on the verb *ju* ‘come’ indicates that the ocelot came and stopped before it was shot. By using these two suffixes *-ai* and *-a* in the clause before a transitive clause, the Cashinahua can indicate relative time of actions and coordinate the identification of participants in the object positions. In the above example, the time marker *-xina* glossed as ‘yesterday’ occurs preceded by an even number of syllables in the verb and its allomorph *-xian* occurs when it is preceded by an odd number of syllables.

The next longer example comes from a story about indigenous people contacting Peruvian or Brazilian rubber collectors sometime in the 1890s. Prior to this episode an indigenous man named First Shot wanted to make contact with the outsiders and get some metal things. Upon hearing a motor boat coming, he dressed up in his finest ceremonial garb and stood on the riverbank and called to the passing boat. Those in the boat saw him and turned toward shore:

- (17a) *keti ik-aya, ja ixchu-kain ixchu-kain bapu-ki ina-tan*  
 bank nose.into. that.one jump-going jump-going boat-to climbed.in  
 as it was nosing into the river bank, he ran, jumped and climbed in the motorboat,
- (17b) *dintu medan bichi-abu Ea kuyai inan-xun-wen. En kuyai bi-katsi ik-aii ak-a*  
 room inside escort Me spoons give-ben-imp I spoons get-want am-1.inc. do  
 They escorted him into the cabin and he said, “Beneficially, give me spoons. I want spoons,”

Note: they rarely open quotes but normally close quotes with some form of “do.”

- (17c) *kuyai inan-xun, xeamati inan-xun, mane.chi inan-xun,...*  
 spoons give-com fishhooks give-com matches give-com  
 they gave him spoons, they gave him fishhooks, they gave him matches,...
- (18a) *nichin-kin nichi-an jawen xaxu xubu-ya manankidi ka-i*  
 send-inc send-com their boat roof-with upstream go-inc  
 sending they sent him ashore and were going upstream in their boat with a roof
- (18b) *unu bin bin wa-xun maspu wa-ima-bu*  
 there rubber rubber do-com pile make-months.ago-pl

*mani-a xina-in<sup>7</sup> ka-ken*  
 wait-com think-inc go-com

and thinking of rubber that was waiting, that some other men had repeatedly collected and piled months ago, they went,

(18c) *ja yaminawa kain-baun-i*  
 those Yaminahua come.out-all around-inc

then those Yaminahua were coming out of hiding all around,...

In the first clause of line (17a), the rubber collector's boat is nosing into the bank, *keti ik-aya*, the suffix *-aya* (incomplete, DS) signals change of subject. Thus the *ja* 'that one' which is the demonstrative 'that' or a very rare appearance of the third person singular pronoun, signals the only singular participant, the hero First Shot whose name means he always hits the target on the first shot. He is thus the subject of the repeated 'jump going' *ixchu-kain*, *ixchu-kain*, indicating intensity of action. Both of these dependent clauses have the suffix *-i* (incomplete, SS, intransitive) which signals that the next intransitive clause will have the same subject, which makes First Shot the subject of *ina-tan* 'climb in/on'. The suffix *-tan* (completed series, SS) on 'climb' signals completed action and the end of a series of events which included calling the boat to shore and also signals that the next clause will have the same subject if the number is the same. However, the next clause, (17b) *dintu medan bichiabu* (pl) 'into the room they escorted him', does not have the same subject, which can be determined by the fact that it is marked as having a plural subject. The storyteller at this point carefully used singular *ja* 'that one' as subject of jump-going and climbed into the boat, so that a hearer would know to skip this plural clause as the place to assign the subject that is looking for the next clause. The next available singular clause is the performative of the embedded quote, *ak-a*, 'he did', so the hearer knows that First Shot produced the reported speech even if it was already semantically obvious that he had to have been the one who spoke. The suffix *-a* on *ak-a* 'he did (said)' signals completed action and can signal same subject if followed by an intransitive clause but it is followed in (17c) by transitive clauses, *kuyai inan-xun*, *xeamati inan-xun*, *mane chi inan-xun*, (they gave him spoons, they gave him fishhooks, they gave him matches), so the suffix *-a* must signal a change of subject, i.e., to the people in the boat as subject of the three 'give' clauses. The suffix *-xun* (complete, SS, transitive) on each of these three verbs signals completed action and same subject on the next transitive clause. Thus the people in the boat are the subjects of the transitive clauses *nichin-kin nichian*, 'sending (they) sent (him)' (18a). The *-a* suffix on *nichian* 'send' can signal change of subject if the next clause is transitive. However, in this case the next clause *kai* 'going' is intransitive, so the same subject is retained 'the people in the boat' for *ka-i*. But the suffix *-i* (incomplete, SS, intransitive) on *ka* 'go' signals that the next intransitive clause will have the same subject if it has the same number, plural. However, the next two clauses (18b), *unu bin bin wa-xun*, *maspu wa-ima-bu*, (after doing rubber repeatedly there, they piled it months ago) are transitive, so they do not qualify to take the subjects of 'go'. The next clause *mani-a* 'await' is intransitive and singular, so it is grammatically incompatible with the plural subjects of 'going' thus this clause and the next clause *xinain* 'thinking' (transitive) are passed over as taking the subject of the previous *ka-i* 'going' thus arriving at *ka-ken* 'gone' or 'went'; it being intransitive, 'they' in the boat are identified as its subjects.

We must now return to the first clauses of (18b). The first two clauses act as an embedded string of clauses which identify the rubber as subject of intransitive *mani-a* 'await' (being in a completed gathered state); the suffix *-a* on *mania* (complete, DS, transitive) indicates that its subject 'rubber' becomes the object of *xinain* 'thinking of' in (18b). The suffix *-i* (incomplete, SS, intransitive) on *xinain* 'thinking'

<sup>7</sup> The word 'xina-in' is the orthographic form for /xinan-i/. Similarly, 'kain' of 'ixchu-kain' (17a), phonetically [kãi], is the orthographic form of /kain-i/, and 'nichian' of (18a) is /nichin-a/.

signals incomplete action and that the subjects of thinking will be the subjects of the next intransitive clause, *ka-ken* 'gone'. In this manner two sub-strings of dependent clauses come together at *ka-ken* 'gone', though it required us to do some grammatical backtracking to discover the referencing. However, because of their cultural knowledge, the Cashinahua would have recognized it as a sub-string of clauses and would not have needed to backtrack. And finally the suffix *-ken* (complete, DS) on *ka-ken* 'gone' signals completed action and a change of subject, and because *-ken* does not signal any participant correlation other than different subject, the next clause in (18c) names the Yaminahua as the ones who were coming out of hiding all around where First Shot had contacted the boat.

The Cashinahua system clearly signals when a speaker wants to retain the same subject or change the subject by using various suffixes that are attached to the verb stem of a dependent clause under specific grammatical conditions. The ability to identify the subject of one clause as an object of the 'next clause' is an extension of the system beyond its basic function of participant identification. In those situations the Cashinahua rely on their local cultural knowledge to resolve any ambiguity. As we continue to work with them we are continually challenged by this very productive system.