

Blind Wolf – starting a sentence

tu st'kwas stqeeye' (The Blind Wolf)

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How to start sentences in stories

Because I heard the language through my youth from fluent first language speakers, my Elders, much of the structure of Hul'q'umi'num' is programmed in my memory. Before I started working in the language, I started telling these stories in English to my students from memory, without ever thinking of the structure of the story in either language. I don't ever think about how the story may be in terms of sentence structure, as it just rolls off my tongue, and I don't think about the structure of the English translation sentence either. But it was an interesting exercise to take a look at how sentences begin in the two languages by comparing the Hul'q'umi'num' with its English translation.

What I noticed is that Hul'q'umi'num' sentence structure is often completely opposite of English sentence structure. English often starts with a subject noun phrase. You can see this in example (1). (The subject NP is underlined.)

(1) Mary was excited that the day had finally come.

But in Hul'q'umi'num', you wait until the end of a sentence to mention the subject as in example (2), from the Blind Wolf story. In Hul'q'umi'num', which has a verb–subject word order, the eagle comes at the end of the sentence.

(2) 'i' hwun' 'eey' 'ul' tu yuxwule'.

But the eagle just continued on.

You can see other examples of the subject coming last in Hul'q'umi'num' in the following examples:

(3) wukw'luh'q' tu shelh kwsus hwtqetus kwsus thuw'nilh tens.

His mom just slammed the door.

(4) suw' thuytus tthu ti 'i' tu s'ulhtun thunu ten.

So mother made tea and something to eat.

(5) hwun' 'i'tut 'ul' tu tth'upsi'a'thun'.

The squirrel was still asleep.

In some ways, the formation of Hul'q'umi'num' sentences can seem contradictory. It takes time to teach learners when and where a subject should be mentioned if it is mentioned at all.

The fact that Hul'q'umi'num' almost never starts sentences with subjects raises the question: how do you start a sentence in Hul'q'umi'num'? For many sentences in our language exercise materials, an auxiliary verb is used to start a sentence that describes an action. Here are some examples with *ni'* (indicates 'there' and 'then').

(6) ni' p'ukw 'i' 'uwus stqeeye'us, ni' 'uye'q ni' hwu q'ullhanumutsun.

When it surfaced he wasn't a wolf any more—he had changed into an orca.

(7) ni' kwu'elh tuw' sht'es kw'un's nan 'uw' hwtsukwilum.

So that's what happens when you go too far.

(8) ni' qul'et kwunlhnenum 'u tthu swe's s'ulhtuns.

And he was once again able to get his own food.

This, however, is uncommon in stories, as you can see by looking how out the sentences start in the two stories given above.

Time phrases can start Hul'q'umi'num' sentences too. There are a variety of words that can be used in this way to notate a certain point of time or a certain amount of time. The beginning of the sentence can also indicate that something is still happening, has

suddenly happened, or finally happened. All of these expressions are commonly found in the beginning of the sentence.

- (9) **hwun' netulh** 'i' ni' wulh nem' tsam 'a'luxutus tu stth'oom.

And it was early morning and they went up to gather berries.

- (10) **tahw skweyul** 'i' yelh sis hwuynamut.

It was noon before he woke up.

- (11) **nuts'a' skweyul** 'i' ni' tsun q'aqi'. ni' tsun 'a'mut 'ul' sq'uq'a' 'u thunu tenulh.

One day I was sick, so I stayed home with my mother.

- (12) **'uwu hithus** 'i' m'i tus tu kwuhwtsum.

It wasn't long after and there was a knock on the door.

- **hwun' xut'u** 'still doing' = 'suddenly,' 'finally'

- (13) **hwun' xut'u** 'i' ts'elhum'utus tu ni' qwaqwul'.

Suddenly he heard a voice.

- **tl'e' wulh qul'et** 'also now again' = 'again'

- (14) **tl'e' wulh qul'et** ts'elhum'utus tu stqeeye', q'e'wum'.

And again he heard the wolf, howling.

In Hul'q'umi'num', using a quantifying expression such as *mukw'* can pull a noun to the front of a sentence

- (15) **mukw' tu hwulmuhw** nem' 'u tl' pestun tsts'its'i'yu.

The natives all used to go to the States picking strawberries.

- (16) **mukw' lhwet** 'uw' hwu saay' kws huye's.

Everyone was ready to leave.

- (17) **mukw' sil'anum** 'i' nem' shaqwul 'u tu pestun tu hwulmuhw...

Every year the First Nations people would go to the States...

Some sentences use more than one sentence starter: the following example has both a time phrase and a quantified phrase.

(18) **nuts'a' skweyul mukw' lhwet 'uw' nem' lhum'ts'els.**

One day everyone was going picking.

The following example has three starter phrases, a quantified phrase, a time phrases, and then another quantified phrase.

(19) **mukw' netulh hwun' yutth'etth'ukw'ul's, mukw' lhwet nem' huye' nem' lhumts'els.**

Every morning the people would wake up at daybreak to go picking

Second language learners can concentrate on learning the story itself, and understanding the flow, before delving into the details. Sentence structure is important to the structure of the story. But practicing how to start up sentences, even if you do it immersion style in Hul'q'umi'num' without giving a translation, will help language learners become better at listening and understanding stories and also better at telling stories.