while expression of two overt third-persons in a clause requires the use of the middle (2a) or the passive voice (2b), formed by the addition of the middle suffix \(-b\) to one of the causatives (Beck 1996). Both of these result in intransitive clauses where one of the two actants is realized as an oblique contained within a prepositional phrase:

(2) a. \(\text{ʔu-gʷəč-əb ti č’ač’as ?ə ti sqʷəbay?}\)  
PNT–look.for–MD SPEC boy PR SPEC dog  
‘the boy looked for the dog’

b. \(\text{ʔu-gʷəč-əb ?ə ti č’ač’as ti sqʷəbay?}\)  
PNT–look.for–ICS–MD PR SPEC boy SPEC dog  
‘the dog was looked for by the boy’  
(Hess 1993a: 38–39)

Facts such as these have led some writers (e.g., Jelinek & Demers 1983) to posit that Lushootseed has a split ergative system in which third-person NPs such as \(\text{ti sqʷəbay? ‘the dog’}\) in (1c) and \(\text{ti č’ač’as ‘the boy’}\) in (2a) are absolutive subjects and that PPs such as ?ə ti č’ač’as ‘of the boy’ in (2b) would be ergatively-marked agents. While the primary researcher on Lushootseed, Thom Hess, does not accept the ergative analysis, he does feel that Lushootseed has a split system in the sense that sentences with third-person agents such as (1c) allow for only a single non-oblique actant, the “direct complement” (\(\text{ti sqʷəbay?}\) in (1) and (2b)). The absence of an overt agent-pronominal in the sentence in (1c) indicates that it is, in fact, the direct complement—\(\text{ti č’ač’as ‘the boy’}\)—and that their direct complement—the only allowable NP—refers only to a semantic patient.\(^1\)

According to Hess (p.c.), this analysis renders the notion of “syntactic subject” largely extraneous to the treatment of Lushootseed grammar, a claim which seems to be upheld by his accurate and insightful descriptive work on the language.

Outside the immediate domain of Lushootseed, however, such a stand is highly problematic in that the syntactic role of “subject” (or its reflex in a particular theory) is...