The Algonquian inverse: syntax or morphology?
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Algonquian languages show a morphological alternation between DIRECT and INVERSE forms. The syntactic status of this alternation is controversial: is the inverse a voice construction that reverses the syntactic positions of the agent and patient (Rhodes 1994; Bruening 2001, 2005), or is it simply a special form of agreement morphology (Dahlstrom 1991)? In this talk I present new evidence in support of a syntactic analysis. The evidence involves clauses in which both arguments have the same rank on the person hierarchy. In such clauses there is no morphological motivation for a direct-inverse alternation, and yet the alternation still exists. Here the syntactic voice analysis is the only option, and its validity is confirmed, I will show, by data from variable binding.

Background. Bruening (2001) has shown that in Passamaquoddy, variable binding relations are reversed in inverse forms, a fact that weighs in favour of a syntactic analysis. I have found the same binding patterns in Oji-Cree, as shown in (1). In the direct form in (1a), where a PROXIMATE (topical) agent acts on an OBVIATIVE (non-topical) patient, the agent is able to bind a variable in the patient. In the inverse form in (1b), where an obviative agent acts on a proximate patient, the reverse is true: it is the patient that can bind a variable in the agent.

(1) a. *kahkina ihkwewak   otociimaawaan otawaashiimowaan.*   DIRECT:
        all   women.PROX kiss.3>3.DIR   their.child.OBV   agent binds patient
        '**All the women**$_{i,j,...}$ (PROX) kissed **their**$_{i,j,...}$ child (OBV).'   (PROX)   (OBV)

    b. *kahkina ihkwewak   otociimikowaan otawaashiimowaan.*   INVERSE:
        all   women.PROX kiss.3>3.INV   their.child.OBV   patient binds agent
        '**Their**$_{i,j,...}$ child (OBV) kissed **all the women**$_{i,j,...}$ (PROX).'   (PROX)   (OBV)

Bruening takes the inverted binding relations in (1b) to indicate that the patient in an inverse-marked clause is mapped to a more prominent syntactic position than the agent, in contrast to the crosslinguistic default mapping of the agent to the most prominent position as in (1a).

Although the contrast in (1) is striking, the degree to which it necessitates a syntactic analysis could be disputed. Note that the binding relations in (1a) and (1b) can in fact both be given the same characterization: the *proximate* argument binds into the *obviative* argument. We could thus imagine an alternative proposal in which Algonquian binding relations do not reflect the syntactic structure at all, but rather are sensitive to the proximate-obviative morphological contrast: a proximate can bind into an obviative, regardless of the syntactic positions of the two nominals.

New evidence. I present new data that adjudicates between the two alternatives. If the sentences in (1) are embedded under a predicate that has a proximate subject, then *both* of the embedded arguments will be obviative. This allows us to control for the effects of obviation on binding. The result, as shown in (2), is that even when both arguments are obviative, the direct-inverse alternation still reverses the binding relations: the obviative agent binds the obviative patient in the direct (2a) while the obviative patient binds the obviative agent in the inverse (2b). This data, along with further properties of "double obviative" clauses that I will present, constitutes a strong new argument in favour of a syntactic analysis of at least some Algonquian inverse forms.

(2) a. *Tepit   okii-waapamaan* [*kahkina ihkwewan   e-ociimaawaac otawaashiimowaan*].
        David.PX saw.3>3.DIR   [all   women.OBV   kiss.3>3.DIR   their.child.OBV]
        'David (PROX) saw [**all the women**$_{i,j...}$ (OBV) kiss **their**$_{i,j...}$ child (OBV)].'

    b. *Tepit   okii-waapamaan* [*kahkina ihkwewan   e-ociimikowaac otawaashiimowaan*].
        David.PX saw.3>3.DIR   [all   women.OBV   kiss.3>3.INV   their.child.OBV]
        'David (PROX) saw [**their**$_{i,j...}$ child (OBV) kiss **all the women**$_{i,j...}$ (OBV)].'

References

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