The derivation of theme-signs in Algonquin Ojibwe: a Multiple Agree approach
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The goal of this paper is to argue that the Algonquin Ojibwe (henceforth Algonquin) theme-sign is the morphophonological correspondance to a syntactic Multiple Agree relation holding between a \[u\phi\] probe on a functional category F, located within TP and above vP, and the \[\phi\] goals of two nominal elements within the c-command domain of F.

The following examples serve to illustrate the phenomenon under investigation. In both (1) and (2), the prefix \(n\)- indicates first person. In (1), the theme-sign -\(aa\) indicates that the first person is the subject and that there is a third person object, while in (2), the theme-sign -\(ig\) indicates that the first person is the object and that there is a third person subject.

(1) nwaabmaa
    n-waabm-\(aa\)
    1-see-DIR(NL)
    ‘I see him/her.’

(2) nwaabmig
    n-waabm-\(ig\)
    1-see-INV(NL)
    ‘He/She sees me.’

Contrary to claims that (some) Algonquian theme-signs are object agreement markers (McGinnis 1999; Oxford 2014), Algonquin theme-signs must be calculated on the basis of the person features of both the subject and the object. For example, the second person feature of the object is necessary but insufficient to determine the theme-sign in (3) and (4): if the subject bears a first person feature, the theme-sign -\(in\) must be inserted but if the subject bears a third person feature, the theme-sign -\(ig(w)\) must be inserted.

(3) gwaabmin
    g-waabm-\(in\)
    2-see-INV(L)
    ‘I see you.’

(4) gwaabmig
    g-waabm-\(ig\)w
    2-see-INV(NL)
    ‘He/She sees you.’

From a theoretical standpoint, then, it seems that in the derivation of Algonquin theme-signs, a single category enters into more than one Agree relation. Although such a proposal has taken the form of Cyclic Agree in the literature (Béjar and Rezac 2009; Lochbihler 2012), the present contribution argues against such an implementation on both conceptual and empirical grounds. Instead, it is proposed that the theme-sign is the morphophonological correspondance to a Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa 2001; Nevins 2007, 2011) relation holding between a \[u\phi\] probe on a functional category F and the \[\phi\] goals of two nominal elements within the c-command domain of F.

Furthermore, it is argued that the object must undergo movement to an outer spec-vP position. Algonquin exhibits a pattern of cross-clausal agreement in which the matrix verb may show agreement with its local subject and either the subject or the object of its complement clause. If this construction is the result of an Agree relation between a functional category in the matrix clause and a nominal in the embedded clause (Polinsky and Potsdam 2001; Branigan and MacKenzie 2002; Lochbihler and Mathieu to appear), then it must be the case that the subject and the object are equidistant from the relevant probe. In particular, the subject and object are in specifier positions of the same projection, vP. The structure of the Algonquin clause is, then, as in (5), where arrows represent Agree relations.

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(5) \quad [CP \ C[TP \ T[F[u\phi,u\phi] \ [vP \ DP_{object} \ [vP \ DP_{subject} \ [vP \ V \ \overrightarrow{DP_{object}} \ ] \ ] \ ] \ ] \ ] \ ]
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References


