

File ID 203036
Filename Chapter 7: Conclusions and further research

SOURCE (OR PART OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCE):

Type Dissertation
Title Semantic and pragmatic functions in Plains Cree syntax
Author A.E. Wolvengrey
Faculty Faculty of Humanities
Year 2011
Pages xviii, 435
ISBN 978-94-6093-051-5

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS:

<http://dare.uva.nl/record/365251>

Copyright

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Future Research

The Cree language has been described as both a language without case-marking and a free word order language. Through the current work, I have sought to dispell both of these myths, specifically for Plains Cree, but also by extension for its closely comparable sister dialects. The “comparatively free” word order so often attributed to the Cree dialects is the result of a combination of two main features of Cree syntax which may differ greatly in form but parallel in function the universal building blocks of syntax.

The usual interpretation of both nominal case-marking and strict word order is in the rigid representation of syntactic functions (i.e. grammatical relations such as subject and object) which in turn allow for mediation between semantic and pragmatic functions resulting in our ability to understand who does what to whom within a multitude of contexts and perspectives. At its most extreme, the position that Cree has neither case-marking nor word order allows for the dangerously incorrect interpretation that Cree is somehow devoid of the basic components of syntax. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, we have now observed the combined function of the direct-inverse system and some initial word order templates in accomplishing the functional equivalent of what is variously achieved by case-marking, word order and even intonational variation across languages.

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to making these observations in the past lay in the frequently narrowed scope of syntactic investigation to “syntax” writ large and equated almost exclusively with syntactic functions. Such an approach only sometimes admitted semantic functions a minor role and generally ignored the role of pragmatic functions altogether. Such an approach is bound to fail to accurately depict the systems that we find in place in the Cree language. The efficiency with which the direct-inverse system merges semantic and pragmatic considerations completely obviates the need for syntactic functions. Semantics, primarily instantiated through the Semantic Function/Animacy Hierarchy, and Pragmatics, represented prototypically by the Algonquian Person/Topicality Hierarchy, interact directly without recourse to the grammaticalization of subject and/or object roles. Thus, neither case-marking nor word order need be tied to syntactic

functions whatsoever, and a functional approach such as that taken in Functional (Discourse) Grammar provides a more appropriate framework for analyzing their uses within Plains Cree syntax.

With the direct-inverse system providing the role-indexing alignment that allows for the identification of who does what to whom, word order is largely freed from the necessity of specifying the syntactic or semantic role of arguments. Without such a role, word order merely appears free from the perspective of languages like English in which this is an essential function of word order. Nevertheless, we have observed a number of syntactically and semantically motivated constraints which serve to build much of the core of the clause around the central position of the verb. In the word order templates developed through the latter half of this work, the verb fulfills the role of predicate and generally occurs in the medial position (P^M) around which everything revolves. This matches well with the common impression voiced by speakers and teachers of Cree that the verb is truly central to the language. However, this remains only a small part of the picture provided by the full clausal and extra-clausal templates. While the verb is typically placed in P^M which is medial within the clause proper (P^{centre}), we still have successive layers built around this centre, consisting primarily of pragmatically- or hierarchically-defined constituents in P^I , P^F , P^{pre} , and P^{post} . Thus, only an approach that treats pragmatic functions (e.g. topic, focus, contrast, orientation, etc.) as potential determinants to word order will prove capable of accounting for the facts of Plains Cree.

It is hoped that the current work, couched within just such a framework, but even more importantly centered on actual data from Plains Cree discourse, has begun to offer such an account. Yet it is also recognized that this is just a beginning and much further work is required in the functional domain of Cree word order. For instance, despite the strong motivation for the central placement of the verb in P^M , we have at least briefly seen the possibility that the verb can be focussed in P^I (see section 6.1.4). The consequences of such placement, with regard to the possible constituency of both P^2 and P^M , require much further investigation. In the former case, focus particles associated with the verb must be detailed and compared with those found to co-occur with nouns, pronouns, and particles. In the latter case, the full affect on the medial field in the absence of a verb requires more detailed observation.

Whether in P^M or P^I , both of these possibilities still presuppose the presence of a verb within the clause, but is this essential? Or is it possible instead to have clausal structures without verbs? Existential and presentative structures are one type of non-verbal predication, investigated in the current work (see section 5.3.2), in which P^M is often simply left unfilled. But what

are the possibilities for the placement of something other than a verb in P^M as a predicate? Examples such as (1), in which the negative expression *nama kīkway* ‘nothing; there is none’ appears to fill P^M, certainly suggest that at least some non-verbal expressions can pattern like verbs and act as predicates.⁹⁸

- (1)
- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|----------------|---|-----------------------------|
| | P ^I | P ^M | P ^F | |
| | <i>ēkwa</i> | <i>wiyawāw</i> | <i>nama kīkway</i> | <i>nētē</i> , ... [HP10:11] |
| | IPC | PR.3s | IPC PR.0s | PL |
| and | | NEG | something | over.yonder |
| | | | “Over there, they had none of that, ...” | |
| | | | [lit: ‘and they had none of that over yonder, ...’] | |

If so, what is the range of expressions that can serve this function?

The occurrence of a negative expression in (1) highlights another important topic which requires analysis: Cree negation. Reinholtz (1999b) observes that negative particles must precede the verb, and negation itself is commonly held to occur in a position equivalent to P^I. However, examples such as those in (2) suggest that negative particles in Plains Cree can form negative constituents with a wide variety of elements and thus simply occur in the appropriate clausal position for each constituent, negated or not.

- (2) a)
- | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|----------|
| | P ^{I/M-1} | P ^M | | |
| | ..., <i>namōya</i> | <i>ē-wī-nēhiyawēt</i> ... | | [HP1:22] |
| | <i>namōya</i> | ē- wī- nēhiyawē | -t | |
| | IPC | IPV IPV VAI | 3s | |
| | NEG | CNJ PRSP | speak.Cree | |
| | | “..., they will not speak Cree ...” | | |
- b)
- | | | | | |
|--|------------------|---|------------------------|----------------------------|
| | P ^{M-1} | P ^M | P ^{M+1} | |
| | <i>ēkwa</i> | <i>namōya ēkosi</i> | <i>ta-kī-itōtahkik</i> | <i>osk-āyak</i> . [HP1:13] |
| | <i>ēkwa</i> | <i>namōya ēkosi</i> | <i>ta- kī- itōt</i> | <i>-ah -kik</i> |
| | IPC | IPC IPC | IPV IPV VTI TH | 3p |
| | now | NEG | CNJ PST | do.so 3p-0’ |
| | | <i>oski-ay</i> | <i>-ak</i> | |
| | | NA | 3p | |
| | | young.person | | |
| | | “Now, the young people should not do that.” | | |

⁹⁸ In this example and others below, *ēkwa* (or other coordinators and subordinators) is not counted within the clause (see section 5.2.1).

- c) P^I P^{M-1} P^M P^{M+1}
namōya wīhkāc ēkosi isi ohci-wīcēwākanihtow osk-āyisiyiniw.
 [HP2:37]

namōya	wīhkāc	ēkosi	isi	ohci-	wīcēwākanihto	-w
IPC	IPT	IPC	IPC	IPV	VAI	3s
NEG	ever	thus	thus	PRF	pick.a.partner	

oski-ayisiyiniw

NA.3s

young.person

“Young people never picked a partner just like that.”

- d) P^I P^{I+1} P^{I+2} P^M
āta tāpiskōc ēkāya kīkway
wiyasiwēwin wiyawāw ē-ohci-tāwiskākocik ...
 [HP3:59]

āta	tāpiskōc	ēkāya	kīkway	wiyasiwēwin
IPC	IPC	IPC	PR.0's	NI.0's
although	seems	NEG	something	law

wiyawāw ē- ohci- tāwiskaw-iko -cik

PR.3p IPV IPV VTA-InAct 3p

CNJ PRF be.struck.by

“..., even though it looked as if they were not subject to any formal law ...”

- e) P^I P² P^{M-1} P^M
ēkwa onēhiyāwiniwāw anima namōya
kakētihk ē-itēyihākwaniyik.
 [HP1:16]

ēkwa	o-	nēhiyāwiniw	-iwāw	anima
IPC	3	NI.0's	3p	IPC
and		Creeness		FOC

namōya kakētihk ē- itēyihākwan -iyik

IPC IPC IPV VII 0's

NEG inconsiderable CNJ be.so.thought.of

“..., and that their Creeness means a great deal.”

In both (2a) and (2c), the negator *namōya* appears to be in initial position. However, in (2a), this is ambiguous with its possible interpretation as a verbal modifier in P^{M-1} . This latter pattern is represented in (2b) where the negative merely modifies the relative root particle *ēkosi* “thus” required by the verb in P^{M-1} (see section 5.1). In (2c), the negator is certainly in P^1 , but as part of the temporal phrase *namōya wīhkāc* “never” which patterns with other temporal settings in P^1 (see section 5.2.2). In (2d), the negator *ēkāya* occurs as part of the negative nominal phrase *ēkāya kīkway wiyasiwēwin* “no such thing as law” which appears in P^{1+1} .⁹⁹ Finally, (2e) shows the negative modifying another particle in the frozen expression *namōya kakētihk* “a great deal” which unambiguously patterns with other degree expressions in P^{M-1} and clearly follows a focussed expression in P^1 . This returns us to the questionable identification of the negative in (2a) as occurring in initial position. The majority of examples here suggest that P^1 is not the essential position for Cree negation, or at least that other constituents might take precedence in initial position. In contrast, however, there is some morphological evidence that would suggest that negation has and can still at times be identified with the important pragmatically-motivated initial positions. This is seen in the historical compounding of two common negative roots with the focus particle *wiyá* (e.g. *namōyá* (from *nama wiyá*), *ēkāwiyá* (cf. *ēkā*)). Clearly, a much closer examination of Cree negation is required as it pertains to the clausal templates suggested in the current work.

Similarly, much remains to be explored in the domain of focus particles and the status of second clausal position (P^2). A variety of particle types, including coordinators and subordinators, demonstrative pronouns converted to focus marking, and other dedicated emphatic and/or interrogative particles have been illustrated in clausal and/or phrasal P^2 in Chapters 5 and 6, but this has by no means constituted an exhaustive treatment. Little attention has as yet been given to evidentials and modals, at least some of which (e.g. *ēsa* “reportedly”, *ētikwē* “possibly; doubtfully”) have been characterized as P^2 constituents (cf. Blain and Déchaine 2007). Another particle that will surely prove interesting in this respect is the verbal modifier *māna* “usually, habitually”, which can take a number of positions within the clause including immediately postverbal (3a), immediately preverbal (3b), and clause-second (3c).

⁹⁹ This analysis depends on the precise interpretation of the position and use of the particle *tāpiskōc*, here suggested as in P^1 . It is entirely possible, as suggested below, that this particle is itself predicational and thus takes the remainder of the clause as a complement, in which case the negated nominal phrase would be in P^1 .

- (3) a)
- iyikohk ē-kī-misi-wīhkwēstēki māna mīkiwāhpa ōhi, ...*
- [HP3:9]

iyikohk	ē-	kī-	misi-	wīhkwēstē	-ki	māna
IPC	IPV	IPV	IPV	VII	0p	IPC
so.much	CNJ	PST	big	encircle		usually

mīkiwāhp	-a	ōhi
NI	0p	PR.0p
tipi		these

“..., so big was the circle of these tipis, ...”

- b) “...,
- konita māna ē-kitāpamicik ōki oskinīkiskwēwak ...*
- ” [HP8:100]

konita	māna	ē-	kitāpam	-it	-ik
IPC	IPC	IPV	VTA	INV	3p
merely	usually	CNJ	look.at	3p-1s	

ōki	oskinīkiskwēw	-ak
DEM.3p	NA	3p
these	young.woman	

“ ‘..., and these young women would just look at me ...’ ”

- c)
- āskaw māna nēmitanaw itahtotāpānāsk ē-kī-kapēsicik anita*
-
- ōcēnāsikh, ...*
- [Masuskapoe 2010:5]

āskaw	māna	nēmitanaw	itahtotāpānāsk
IPT	IPC	NUM	IPC
sometimes	usually	forty	wagon

ē-	kī-	kapēsi	-cik	anita	ōcēnās	-ihk
IPV	IPV	VAI	3p	PL	NI	LOC
CNJ	PST	camp		there	village	

“At times, forty wagons of them used to camp in a village there.”

The position of *māna* in (3a), between the verb and the argument (which has otherwise been analyzed as occurring in P^{M+1}), is problematical unless *māna* forms a constituent with the verb in P^M . This is at least a possible analysis, and might be extended to (3b) where *māna* again occurs adjacent to the verb, though in this case immediately preverbally. However, *māna* in (3b) could also be seen as a P^2 constituent, and this is certainly the case in (3c) where *māna* is clearly not adjacent to the verb and is unambiguously in P^2 . In all occurrences, *māna* serves to provide aspectual information and so is a modifier of the verb, even when separated from it and placed in P^2 . If we can

combine the occurrence of *māna*, and certain other particles like the aforementioned evidentials, with the suggestion from section 5.3.2 that the use of certain demonstrative/focus particles are developing a copular function, it is possible that we are witnessing the emergence of P² as an increasingly important syntactic position in Plains Cree, akin to a position dedicated to auxiliary verbs.

These are merely some of the possible topics which remain to be fully explored. Each of these issues and many more will constitute further necessary steps along the road to a full, functional analysis of Plains Cree syntax.

ēkota isko pitamā.