A survey of grammatical voice in Algonquian, with an emphasis on selected semitransitive constructions

Fernando Zúñiga University of Bern fernando.zuniga@isw.unibe.ch

The Algonquian languages of North America have three salient morphosyntactic characteristics that, despite some formal variation, show considerable conceptual uniformity within the family: obviation, transitivity inversion, and the quadripartite stem array that is central to the organization of the verbal lexicon and grammar (an intricate inventory of suffixes categorize verb stems for transitivity and grammatical animacy of the S/P argument). The latter two characteristics are particularly important for descriptive and typological studies of grammatical voice, and have figured prominently in the literature.

What has received comparatively less attention outside Algonquian studies, however, is the fact that grammatical voice also shows some formal variation and considerable conceptual uniformity within the family. Focusing on Western and Central Algonquian, the present paper will address some operations (e.g. valence-increasing operations like causatives and applicatives, and some valence-decreasing operations like reflexives and reciprocals) only briefly. Three phenomena related to semitransitivity, however, will receive special emphasis: passives, antipassives, and what Bloomfield called "pseudo-transitives."

First note than In Plains Cree, e.g., passive-like clauses (independent order) with a 1st- or 2nd-person P appear to be related to inverses (1a), while those with a 3rd-person P are morphologically direct (1b):

(1) Plains Cree unspecified agent forms (Dahlstrom 1986: 68)

a. *Ni-sēkih-ikw-w*.

Ni-sēkih-ikawi-n.

1-frighten.TA-INV-3

1-frighten.TA-PASS-SG.SAP

'S/he frightens me.' (inverse) 'I am frightened.'

(unspecified agent)

b. $S\bar{a}kih-\bar{e}-w$.

Sākih-ā-w.

love.TA-DIR2-3

love.TA-DIR1-3

'S/he loves him/her.' (direct) 'S/he is loved.'

(unspecified agent)

Blackfoot, by contrast, shows less transparent dedicated forms for passive-like clauses (independent order). Those with a 1st- or 2nd-person singular P take the default inverse suffix -ok but also a singular speech act participant (SAP) suffix -oo, which occurs on these forms only (2a). Those with a plural-SAP P take the predictable person-number suffix at the end but a dedicated suffix -ot instead of the inverse (2b). Lastly, those with a 3rd-person P are indistinguishable from (default direct) forms with a 1st-person-inclusive A (2c):

- (2) Blackfoot unspecified subject forms (Frantz 1991: 60-62)
 - a. *Nit-iik-ákomimm-ok-oo(-wa)*.

1-very-love.TA-INV-SG.SAP-PROX.SG

'I am loved.'

b. *Nit-iik-ákomimm-ot-hpinnaan(-wa)*.

1-very-love.TA-PASS-1PL.EXCL-PROX.SG

'We (EXCL) are loved.'

c. Anni miistsísi iiht-waawayáki-aa-wa

imitáá-wa.

that stick with-hit.TA-DIR1-PROX.SG dog-PROX.SG

'We (INCL) hit the dog with a stick.' / 'The dog was hit with a stick.'

Second, the existence of antipassives has been postulated for Algonquian languages only comparatively recently; languages like Blackfoot do not have them, while others, like Ojibwe and West Montagnais (3), do:

(3) West Montagnais antipassive (Drapeau 2014: 238)

a. *Pun* ashtu-ei-m-^u ishkutenu.
P. put.off-TI-DIR.3-3 fire(INAN)

'Paul put off the fire.'

b. Pun ashtu-ei-tshe-u.

P. put.off-TI-AI:APASS-3

'Paul puts off (things).'

Finally, there is a systematic mismatch between some morphologically intransitive verbs that nevertheless occur in transitive clauses; the recent literature tends to treat such verbs as belonging to a fifth, "AI+O", stem class (c) opposed to the other two classes that characterize verbs taking syntactic objects (TA in (a) and TI in (b)):

(4) Blackfoot pseudo-transitive (Russell et al. 2012)

a. Waahkomá't-at-ii-wa n-óta's-yi.

loan-TA-DIR-PROX.SG 1-horse-OBV

'S/he (PROX) borrowed my horse (OBV).'

b. Waahkomá't-atoo-m-wa ni-asóka'siM-yi.

loan-TI-DIR-PROX.SG 1-jacket-INAN.SG

'S/he (PROX) borrowed my jacket (INAN).'

c. Wáahkomá't-aa-wa isspikísola'siM-i.

loan-AI+O-PROX.SG coat-NSPEC

'S/he (PROX) borrowed a coat (NSPEC).'

References

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