THREE ALGONQUIAN METASYNCRETISMS

WILL OXFORD
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

MoMOT 3 • Toronto • 16 Nov 2018

The problem(s)

Three restrictions on the realization of phi-features in Algonquian languages, infamous among specialists:

1. **Obviative number syncretism:** "central agreement" marks person and number for 1st, 2nd, and proximate 3rd persons, but only person for obviative 3rd persons.
2. **SAP number syncretism:** when the arguments of a verb are 1pl and 2, the number of the second-person argument is not marked on the verb and is thus ambiguous.
3. **Inanimate/obviative syncretism:** inflection for inanimate plural and animate obviative singular has the same form.

See handout for citations and references

The solution(s)

- Two alternative analyses for each syncretism:
  - **Deep analysis:** the syncretism is a consequence of the underlying syntactic representation (“baked in”)
  - **Shallow analysis:** the syncretism is a consequence of the specification of particular vocabulary items
- However, in each case, **neither alternative** is correct.
  - Each syncretism shows **variation** in its patterning (~~deep~~)
  - Each syncretism is in fact a **metasyncretism**, holding across different paradigms and exponents (~~shallow~~)
- The correct analysis must lie **between** syntax and vocabulary insertion. (e.g. **impoverishment**)

1 Obviative number

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

	1	2	3PROX	3OBV
SG	**n-**VERB**-n**	**k-**VERB**-n**	**’-**VERB**-n**	**’-**VERB**-li-n**
PL	**n-**VERB**-n-en**	**k-**VERB**-ni-ya**	**’-**VERB**-ni-ya**	

- Passamaquoddy **central agreement** on intransitive verb
- Number contrast for 1, 2, 3PROX, but not for 3OBV

’təlintun **’- əlintu-n** **3-sing -N** ‘so she sings’	’təlintulin **’- əlintu-li -n** **3-sing -OBV-N** ‘so she/they (obv) sing(s)’
’təlintuniya **’- əlintu-ni -ya** **3-sing -N -PL** ‘so they sing’	

All data from Passamaquoddy (Francis & Leavitt 2008) unless noted

Deep analysis

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- Maybe there's just **no number contrast** in the syntactic representation of an OBV nominal?
- No: **central agreement** doesn't distinguish OBV number, but **peripheral agreement** does.*

	3PROX	3OBV
SG	VERB-**w**-Ø	VERB-**w**-**əl**
PL	VERB-**w**-**ək**	VERB-**w**-**ə**

lintuwəl
əlintu-**w** -**əl**
sing -**3** -**OBV.SG**
'she (obv) sings'

lintu
əlintu-**w** -**ə**
sing -**3** -**OBV.PL**
'they (obv) sing'

* Some Algonquian languages (e.g. Cree, Delaware) have **lost OBV number in peripheral agreement**; for such languages, a deep analysis might work.

Shallow analysis #1

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- Maybe there's **no central agreement vocabulary item** that can spell out [plural] in an obviative context?

-en ↔ [spkr, pl]
-ya ↔ [prox, pl]

	1	2	3PROX	3OBV
SG	**n-**VERB**-n**	**k-**VERB**-n**	**'-**VERB**-n**	**'-**VERB**-li-n**
PL	**n-**VERB**-n-en**	**k-**VERB**-ni-ya**	**'-**VERB**-ni-ya**	

- No: "conjunct" has **different VIs, same syncretism**:

	1	2	3PROX	3OBV
SG	VERB**-an**	VERB**-ən**	VERB**-t**	VERB**-li-t**
PL	VERB**-ek**	VERB**-ekw**	VERB**-hti-t**	

Shallow analysis #2

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- Maybe obviative **-li** and 3pl **-ya**/**-hti** **compete for the same slot**, and the obviative suffix wins?

	1	2	3PROX	3OBV
SG	VERB-**an**	VERB-**ən**	VERB-**t**	VERB-**li-t**
PL	VERB-**ek**	VERB-**ekw**	VERB-**hti-t**	

- No. **Ojibwe** conjunct passive: obviative is marked in a **separate slot**, but we still can't get 3pl central suffix:

	3PROX	3OBV
SG	VERB-**aː-ssiw-int** -3OBJ -NEG -3.PSV	VERB-**im-aː-ssiw-int** -OBV-3OBJ -NEG -3.PSV
PL	VERB-**aː-ssiw-int-waː** -3OBJ -NEG -3.PSV-PL	

The verdict

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- The obviative number syncretism is incompatible with both a **deep analysis** (can't handle variation) and a **shallow analysis** (can't capture metasyncretism).
- The correct analysis must lie at a level **between** syntax and vocabulary insertion.
- Impoverishment: [T, obv, pl] → [T, obv]
  - Explains why the syncretism is found in **central agreement** (**T**) but not in **peripheral agreement** (**C**)
  - And why the same syncretism affects central agreement in the **independent** and **conjunct** paradigms even though the VIs are completely different

2 SAP number

- The **central agreement** suffix is the only position in which SAP number can be marked (1pl **-pən**, 2pl **-pa**).
- Awkward when a verb's arguments are *both* SAPs.
- Outcome: if the arguments are 1pl and 2, 1pl is marked and the number of 2 is ambiguous.
- Often described as a **hierarchy effect** (1pl > 2), but the result is a syncretism.

First acts on second		Second acts on first	
1s:2s	**k-**VERB**-əl**	2s:1s	**k-**VERB**-i**
1s:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pa**	2p:1s	**k-**VERB**-i-pa**
1p:2s 1p:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pən** 1pl	2s:1p 2p:1p	**k-**VERB**-i-pən** 1pl

Shallow analysis

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- McGinnis 2008: **1pl>2** hierarchy follows from **VIs:**

  1pl **-pən** ↔ [speaker, pl]
  2pl **-pa** ↔ [pl]

- Result: if node has features of both 1pl [spkr, pl] and 2pl [addr, pl], it will be spelled out as **-pən** '1pl'.

First acts on second		**Second acts on first**	
1s:2s	**k-**VERB**-əl**	2s:1s	**k-**VERB**-i**
1s:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pa**	2p:1s	**k-**VERB**-i-pa**
1p:2s 1p:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pən** 1pl	2s:1p 2p:1p	**k-**VERB**-i-pən** 1pl

Shallow analysis: pro

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- In Swampy Cree, the hierarchy is **reversed** to **2pl>1**
- McGinnis 2008: follows from different VIs

Passamaquoddy (1pl > 2)

1pl **-pən** ↔ [spkr, pl]
2pl **-pa** ↔ [pl]

1s:2s	**k-**VERB**-əl**
1s:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pa**
1p:2s 1p:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pən** 1pl

Swampy Cree (2pl > 1)

2pl **-inâwâw** ↔ [addr, pl]
1pl **-inân** ↔ [pl]

1s:2s	**ki-**VERB**-it-in**
1s:2p 1p:2p	**ki-**VERB**-it-inâwâw** 2pl
1p:2s	**ki-**VERB**-it-inân**

- Swampy Cree is problematic for a **deep analysis** that builds the 1pl>2 hierarchy into the syntax (Xu 2018).

Shallow analysis: con

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- Conjunct: different VIs, **same syncretism** (Xu 2016)
  - in Passamaquoddy *and* Swampy Cree (Cenerini 2017)

Passamaquoddy (1pl>2)

INDEPENDENT	1s:2s	**k-**VERB**-əl**
	1s:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pa**
	1p:2s 1p:2p	**k-**VERB**-əl-pən** 1pl
CONJUNCT	1s:2s	VERB**-əl-an**
	1s:2p	VERB**-əl-ekw**
	1p:2s 1p:2p	VERB**-əl-ek** 1pl

Swampy Cree (2pl>1)

INDEPENDENT	1s:2s	**ki-**VERB**-it-in**
	1s:2p 1p:2p	**ki-**VERB**-it-inâwâw** 2pl
	1p:2s	**ki-**VERB**-it-inân**
CONJUNCT	1s:2s	VERB**-it-ân**
	1s:2p 1p:2p	VERB**-it-akok** 1:2pl
	1p:2s	VERB**-it-âhk**

The verdict

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- The SAP number syncretisms are incompatible with both a **deep analysis** (can't handle variation) and a **shallow analysis** (can't capture metasyncretism).
- As with the obviative number syncretism, the correct analysis must lie between syntax and vocab insertion.
- Impoverishment:
  - **Passamaquoddy** impoverishes 2pl in context of 1pl
    - {T, [spkr, pl] [addr, pl]} → {T, [spkr, pl] [addr]}
  - **Swampy Cree** impoverishes 1pl in context of 2pl
    - {T, [spkr, pl] [addr, pl]} → {T, [spkr] [addr, pl]}

3 Inanimate/obviative

- The **peripheral suffix** appears on verbs (3rd-person agreement) and nouns (inherent phi-features).
- The **animate obviative singular** and **inanimate plural** peripheral suffixes have the same shape:

Passamaquoddy peripheral suffix

	AN PROX	AN OBV	INAN
SG	-Ø	**-əl**	-Ø
PL	-ək	-ə	**-əl**

- Surely this is a coincidence? (→ shallow analysis)

Not a coincidence

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- The syncretism recurs in pronoun and demonstrative paradigms that use different morphology from the peripheral suffix (Wolfart 1973: 14, 33). **Plains Cree:**

		AN PROX	AN OBV	INAN
Peripheral suffix	SG	-Ø	**-a**	-Ø
	PL	-ak		**-a**
‘this’	SG	awa	**ôhi**	ôma
	PL	ôki		**ôhi**
‘where is’	SG	tâniwâ	**tâniwêhâ**	tâniwê
	PL	tâniwêhkâk		**tâniwêhâ**

Deep analysis

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- Maybe AN.OBV.SG and INAN.PL are featurally identical?
- Piriyawiboon 2007: obviation is gender shift AN→INAN, and plural is the default number for inanimates.
  - Gender shift effected by deleting [person] **in the narrow syntax** (not impoverishment: affects interpretation)
- Piriyawiboon's analysis can't easily handle a language in which OBV.SG and OBV.PL are distinguished.
- But setting this aside, **any** analysis involving a deep equivalence of INAN.PL and AN.OBV.SG is too strong.

Against a deep analysis

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- *Proto-Algonquian:*
  INAN.PL / AN.OBV.SG syncretism

	AN PROX	AN OBV	INAN
SG	-a	**-ari**	-i
PL	-aki	-ahi	**-ari**

- *Miami-Illinois:*
  INAN.PL / AN.PROX.SG syncretism

	AN PROX	AN OBV	INAN
SG	**-a**	-ali	-i
PL	-aki	-ahi	**-a**

- *Massachusett:*
  no syncretism of INAN.PL with anything

	AN PROX	AN OBV	INAN
SG	-Ø	-ah	-Ø
PL	-ak		**-aš**

The verdict

1 Obv number
2 SAP number
3 Inanimate/obv

- Again, an analysis that lies somewhere between syntax and vocabulary insertion seems desirable.
- Impoverishment could hopefully do the job, but I have no specific proposal to offer at the moment!

Conclusion

- Three restrictions on the realization of phi-features
  - **metasyncretisms:** can't depend on specification of VIs
  - **variation:** can't be "baked in" to the syntax
- Need an "in-between" operation like impoverishment
  - conditioned by particular configurations of features, so applies throughout a language
  - language-particular rules, so variation is possible
- Linking metasyncretisms and impoverishment is not new (Bobaljik 2001; Frampton 2002; Harley 2008), but:
  - new understanding of the Algonquian patterns
  - new evidence that impoverishment is needed

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS This presentation grew from my work on nominal syncretisms with Heather Bliss (Bliss & Oxford 2016, 2017). The discussion of SAP syncretisms builds on the research of Yadong Xu (2015, 2018) and Chantale Cenerini (2017).

THREE ALGONQUIAN METASYNCRETISMS

WILL OXFORD
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

MoMOT 3 • Toronto • 16 Nov 2018