

External and internal topics in Meskwaki

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1. Introduction

As Algonquianists know well, Meskwaki and other Algonquian languages have extremely flexible word order, with discourse functions such as topic and focus playing a greater role in determining word order patterns than syntactic relations such as subject and object. For example, in (1) the object of the verb, *me·hkate-wi-ta* ‘the one who was fasting’, comes first in the sentence because it is the topic – what the sentence is about. (Indeed, judging by Kiyana’s title, the whole story is about this character.)

- (1) *me·hkate-wi-ta*=‘pi *nesekokwe-ni* *mahkwani*
fast 3/PART/3=QUOT kill 3’-3/INTERR bear.OBV
‘They say the one who was fasting must have been killed by a bear.’ L116¹
[from *oškinawe-ha me·hkate-wi-ta* “A young man who fasted”]

In previous work I have proposed a template for word order in Meskwaki which is reproduced in (2).

- (2) Template for Meskwaki word order (Dahlstrom 1993, 1995)

[_S TOPIC [_S NEG FOCUS OBL V {S, O, O2, COMP}]]

There is a position for topic external to the clause; within the clause proper there are slots for Negative, Focus, and Oblique, all to the left of the verb. To the right of the verb, in no particular order, come subjects, objects, and complement clauses which are neither topics nor foci.

In the present paper I suggest that the template in (2) needs to be amended to permit topic elements to appear not only outside the clause but also in a position to the left of the verb and internal to the clause. I first review the evidence for considering topics – at least *some* topics – to be outside the clause, then survey the range of functions associated with focus, and then consider cases of clause internal elements which are clearly not focus but seem rather to be topics. Along the way I have some remarks on the

¹ Abbreviations in the examples: AOR = aorist, CH.CONJ = changed conjunct, CONTR = contrastive, DIM = diminutive, EMPH = emphatic, FUT = future, INAN = inanimate, IND = independent indicative, INTERR = interrogative, ITER = iterative, LOC = locative, NEG = negative, O = object, O2 = second object, OBV = obviative, PART = participle, PERF = perfective, PL = plural, POT = potential, PROG = progressive, PROHIB = prohibitive, QUOT = quotative, RECIP = reciprocal, REDUP = reduplication, X = unspecified subject. Textual abbreviations: J = Jones (1907), L = text in Dahlstrom (1996), N = text in Dahlstrom (2003d), O = Kiyana (1914), R = Michelson (1925), W = Kiyana (1913), Wit = text in Dahlstrom (2003b). Examples with no textual citation are elicited examples.

position of adverbs, and I end the paper by considering recent theoretical claims about external vs. internal topics.

2. Properties of external topics

What are the properties of topics that justify positing a special position outside the clause? First of all, the distribution of second position clitics can be easily explained if we recognize a clause boundary intervening between the topic and the comment, that is, the material following the topic. Consider the following example:

- (3) *metemo·ka=ke·hi='pi*
old.woman=and=QUOT

apina=meko='pi *a·kwi* *nekotahi* *nahi-ihā·čini*,
even=EMPH=QUOT not anywhere habit-go 3/NEG

aye·niwe=meko *e·hawihawiči.*
in.one.place=EMPH REDUP.be.there 3/AOR

‘As for the old woman, it’s said,
she never went anywhere, it’s said,
she stayed at home all the time.’ W289F-H

In (3) *metemo:ka* ‘old woman’ is topic, and host for enclitic *ke:hi* ‘and’ and the quotative *ipi*. The first word of the comment, *apina*, is also a host for enclitics. If the comment is a constituent, specifically a clause, then we can describe the clitics on *apina* as attaching to the first phonological word of a clause.

(4) is a similar example, but more dramatic since the topic is a complex NP.

- (4) *i·niye·ka=ke·hi* *ki·h-kočawičiki* *wi·hča·kiha·wa·či* *apeno·hahi*,
those.absent=and PERF-try 3P/PART/3P FUT.kill.all 3P-3'/AOR child.OBV.PL

waninawe=meko='pi='ni *e·hinohinote·wa·či.*
all.directions=EMPH=QUOT=then REDUP.move.thither 3p/AOR

‘As for those aforementioned ones who had tried to kill all the children,
they then moved away in all directions, it's said.’ W250D

Note that if we do not recognize a clause boundary between the topic and comment in (4) we would have to say that the enclitics on *waninawe* are attaching to the fifth word of the clause, which would be extremely odd.

Further evidence for a significant break between topic and comment comes from adverbs and adverbial clauses. Temporal adverbial clauses containing verbs inflected in the

changed conjunct, iterative, or prioritive modes frequently follow the topic and are adjoined to the comment, as in (5).

- (5) *pašito·ha=ke·hi*
old.man=and

me·h=meko po·ni-ne-ne·sokwe,
before=EMPH stop-REDUP.pant 3/PRIORITIVE

kapo·twe e·ye·ši-šekišekišiki,
at.some.point still-REDUP.lie 3/CH.CONJ

e·hki·ški·škatahokoči okwisani
REDUP.whip 3'-3/AOR his.son.OBV

‘And as for the old man,
even before he stopped panting,
at some point while he was still lying down,
he got a whipping from his son’ Wit 11G-J

This position for adverbial clauses makes sense if we consider the comment itself to comprise a clause, to which the adverbial clause may be adjoined.

In (6) we see that simple adverbs such as *kapo:twe* ‘at some point’ may also follow a topic.

- (6) *o·ni wi·nwa·wa kapo·twe e·hnenno·hta·ti·hiwa·či*
and.then they at.some.point understand.RECIP.DIM 3P/AOR
‘And as for them, at some point they understood each other’ W35H

There will be more discussion of adverbs in section 4 below.

A property of “topic prominent” languages is that the comment need not contain a gap or pronoun coreferential to the topic – there need only be a pragmatic relation of “aboutness” holding between the topic and its comment (Li and Thompson 1976). This property holds of Meskwaki topic constructions as well. In (7), for example, the topic is ‘the way you are thinking about him right now’, which is not an argument of the clause which follows.

- (7) *mani=wi·na i·noki e·ne·nemači,*
this=CONTR now think.thus.about 2-3/PART/OBL

mehto·či=meko ki·na nešiye·kapa mana ko·šiseme·ha
like=EMPH you kill 2-3/POT this your.g.child.DIM.

‘But this way you are thinking about him now,

it's as if *you* would kill your grandchild' W20DE

Likewise, in (8), the topic is 'that bear', which is not an argument of the matrix verb of the comment, 'he (prox) said to them (obviative)'.

- (8) *i·nini mahkwani,*
that.OBV bear.OBV
- “ka·ta ke·ko·hi pešeke·netamawiye·ke·ko,” e·hina·či
don't anything admire.O's.O2 2P-3/PROHIB say.to 3-3'/AOR

'Regarding the bear,
"Don't admire anything about him," he told them.'

The examples so far give a sense of how topic constructions are used in narrative contexts; I will here add a few more instances. The topic construction sometimes expresses a perception by the character named by the topic. For example in (9) 'the Sioux' are topic, the topic is followed by an adverbial clause, and then the comment represents the speech or thoughts of the Sioux: "Here is a great longhouse!"

- (9) *aša·haki wi·nwa·wa,*
Sioux.PL they
- pa·hkawaniki,*
[fog].lift 0'/CH.CONJ
- ayo·h=či·hi kehči·ke·no·te·hi!*
here=EXCL great-longhouse

'And as for the Sioux,
when the fog lifted,
lo and behold, there was a great longhouse!' Wit. 5H-J

In (10), the context is that Wi:sahke:ha's grandmother is trying to stay away from him, but he is tempting her to come over by cooking something which smells really good.

- (10) *metemo·he·ha,*
old.woman.DIM
- e·hki·ša·koči=meko –menwiya·te·niki,*
as.much.as.possible=EMPH -smell.good 0'/AOR
- e·hnana·hišiki=meko.*
lie.down 3/aor=EMPH

'[To] the old woman,

it smelled as good as could be,
but she lay right back down.’ W290BC

The verb in the second line of (10), ‘it smelled as good as could be’, doesn’t express the grandmother as a syntactic argument, but we understand that this is her perception because she is the topic of this sentence.

An extremely frequent pattern in texts is for direct quotes to be preceded by a topic NP. (1), above, has just a short quote after the topic, but the Meskwaki corpus contains examples of quoted material going on for more than a page following a topic. The topic NP often denotes the speaker of the quote, as in (11), but can also pick out the addressee, as in (12).

- (11) *o-ni=’pi wi-sahke-ha “či-kepye-ki! či-kepye-ki!” e-hiči.*
and.then=QUOT W edge.water edge.water say 3/AOR
‘And then, it’s said, Wisahkeha said “On the edge of the water! On the edge of the water!”’ W271DE

- (12) *a-ya-pa-hte-hani=’pi, “[six clauses],” e-hina-či osi-me-hani*
A.=QUOT say.to 3-3’/AOR his.y.brother.OBV
‘[To] Ayapahteha, it’s said, “....” he [Wisahkeha] said to his younger brother.’
W300-301

3. Focus is distinct from topic

I now consider briefly the properties of the other discourse function expressed by an NP to the left of a verb, namely focus.

Examples (14-23) in this section all belong to the type of focus labeled argument-focus by Lambrecht 1994 (see Dahlstrom 2003x, y). In Meskwaki argument-focus is expressed by placing the focused element to the left of the verb. The focused NP follows a negative, if one is present, and precedes any oblique argument that may be present.

The fundamental property of argument-focus is that it presupposes an open proposition – that is, a proposition containing a variable – and asserts something about the identity of that variable. In (14), for example, there is a presupposition that someone will leave; in other words, there is some x such that x will leave. The assertion in (14) is that the value of x is not the speaker.

This sort of presupposition is absent from (13). (13) is a topic construction in which the topic, *ni:na* ‘I’, precedes the negative *a:kwi* ‘not’. In (13) there is no presupposition that anyone will leave. The comment in (13) is simply a statement about the topic.

(15-23) further illustrate the range of functions associated with argument-focus. (15) is an example of contrastive focus: in the first clause ‘I alone’ is in focus and in the second clause ‘you also’ is in focus. An NP in focus position may co-occur with words such as

‘only’ or ‘even’, as in (16). Surprising information is often found in focus position, as seen in (17). Here the presupposition seems to rely on our knowledge about the world (e.g. women give birth to babies) and the contrast may be paraphrased as “it was a squash she gave birth to [not a baby].”

Question words in Meskwaki appear in focus position, as do the answers to question-word questions. Note that (20) and (21) are cleft constructions, with the focal element on the left equated to a relative clause, indicated by brackets, on the right. A zero copula is used in Meskwaki copular constructions.)

(23) shows that quantifiers in Meskwaki pattern with question words in appearing in focus position.

It may be noted that another word order difference between the topic examples in section 2 and the focus examples here in section 3 concerns the position of topic or focus relative to adverbs. We saw in section 2 that topics frequently precede adverbs and adverbial elements, but in (17) the focused element follows an adverb, *ke:hena* ‘surely’. Up until now, however, nothing has been said about the position of adverbs in general. In the following section I therefore offer a few remarks on adverb placement before turning to the question of clause-internal topics in section 5.

The following examples from Dahlstrom (2003c); (see also Dahlstrom 2003a) illustrate the range of functions associated with argument focus:

Minimal pair: topic vs. focus:

- (13) *ni-na a-kwi wi-hna-kwa-ya-nini*
 I not FUT.leave 1/NEG
 ‘As for me, I’m not leaving’

- (14) *a-kwi ni-na wi-hna-kwa-ya-nini*
 not I FUT.leave 1/NEG
 ‘I’m not leaving; it’s not me who’s leaving’

Expressing contrast:

- (15) *a-kwi=na-hkači* [*ni-na nešihka*] *ota-hi-nemiya-nini*
 not=also I alone possess.O2 1/NEG
- [ki-na e-ye-ki]* *ketepe-neta*
 you also own 2-0/IND
- ‘I do not possess them alone, you also own them’ W244NO

With ‘only’, ‘even,’ etc.:

- (16) *a·kwi* [*mo·hči* *nekoti*] *nesakečini*
 not even one kill 1P-3/NEG
 ‘We didn’t kill even one’ N24B

Unexpected information:

- (17) *ke·htena=meko* *ašewa·pikone·hi* *e·hno·ša·taki*
 surely=EMPH little.squash give.birth.to 3-0/AOR
 ‘Surely she [*Wi·sahke·ha*’s wife] gave birth to a little squash.’ W923

Question words, answers, quantifiers:

- (18) *ke·swi=ča·hi* *i·nahi* *awiwaki?*
 how.many=so there be.[there] 3P/IND
 ‘How many [people] were there?’
- (19) *kaši=ya·pi* *išisowaki* *ko·šisemaki?*
 how=may.I.ask be.thus.named 3P/IND your.grandchildren
 ‘What are your grandchildren’s names?’ W573
- (20) *we·ne·h=ča·h* [*ne·sa·ta* *neto·kima·mena·nan*]?
 who=so kill 3-3’/PART/3 our.chief.OBV
 ‘Who is the one who killed our chief?’ J26.13
- (21) *mana=ča·h* *ni·hka·na* [*ne·sa·ta*]
 this=so my.friend kill 3-3’/PART/3
 ‘This friend of mine is the one who killed him’ J26.17
- (22) *ka·ta=ke·h=na·hkači* *owiye·ha* *a·čimohiye·kani*
 don’t=and=also someone tell 2-3/PROHIB
 ‘And don’t tell anyone else.’ W37G
- (23) *kekimesi=meko* *e·hanemo·ma·wa·či* *apahkwayahi*
 everyone=EMPH carry.on.back 3P-3’/AOR mats.OBV
 ‘Everyone carried mats on their backs’ Wit. 4F

4. A digression on adverbs

First of all, it should be pointed out that many concepts which would be expressed as adverbs in English are NOT adverbs in Meskwaki, but rather syntactic arguments – oblique arguments – of the verb, licensed by a relative root. In (24), for example, *a:wasi:me:hi* ‘a little more’ is an oblique, appearing in the typical position for obliques immediately to the left of the verb. It is important to exclude all such obliques from our discussion of adverbs, since adverbs display different word order patterns from that of obliques.

Most adverbs in Meskwaki appear to the left of the verb, as in (25), but it is also possible to find adverbs on the right of the verb, as in (26). In the present discussion I will consider only adverbs appearing to the left of the verb.

It is useful to distinguish among classes or types of adverbs. McCawley (1998), discussing adverbs in English, distinguishes adverbs such as *completely*, which he adjoins to a simple V, adverbs such as *intentionally*, which he adjoins to a V', and adverbs such as *probably*, which he adjoins to S. Now, I do not believe that the configurational phrase structure of English corresponds exactly to the constituent structure of Meskwaki, but the approach of classifying adverbs according to what they have scope over is a useful one. For example, in (27) the adverb modifies the action of the verb; in (28) 'finally' helps structure the narrative itself.

Within the Algonquianist literature Valentine (2001) provides a detailed list of notional classes of adverbs: temporal, locational, manner, conjunctive, quantificational, adverbs of degree, negative adverbs, interrogative adverbs, and evidential.

If we apply Valentine's classification to Meskwaki adverbs we can see that the conjunctive and evidential types tend to occur early in the clause while adverbs more closely tied to the meaning of the verb itself tend to occur in close proximity to the verb. In other words, the linear order of adverbs seems to correspond to their scope, as in (29) where 'four times' is within the scope of 'always'.

It is also possible for adverbs to be in the scope of negation, at least the sorts of adverbs most closely tied to the semantics of the verb, as in (30) and (31). (An example of an adverb preceding the negative may be seen in example (3), above, in the second line.)

Important to exclude syntactic obliques from discussion of adverbs:

- (24) *a-wasi-mehi e-hahpi-hčikiči kwi-yese-ha,*
a.little.more be.so.old 3/AOR boy
'The boy was a little older, ...' O58B [relative root *ahpi-ht-*]

Adverbs usually to left of verb, but not always:

- (25) *ma-maya='pi=mek=a-pehe tašina-ke-wa e-hmayo-či.*
early.morning=QUOT=EMPH=always PROG.sing 3/IND.IND. weep 3/AOR
'Very early in the morning, it's said, he would be singing and weeping.' N2G

- (26) *mehteno-h=meko='pi owiye-hani ne-po-hiničini,*
only=EMPH=QUOT someone.OBV die 3'/ITER

nye-wokoni e-hpemi-anenwi-či ma-maya.

four.days in.succession–swim 3/AOR early.morning

‘Only whenever someone died, it's said,
he would swim for four days in a row early in the morning.’ N3IJ

Some adverbs modify verbs:

- (27) *nye·wenwi=meko* *e·hkotawi·či.*
four.times=EMPH go.under 3/AOR
‘He went under exactly four times.’ N2L

Other adverbs structure the narrative:

- (28) *ke·keya·h=meko* *e·hkehči–kwi·yese·hiči.*
finally=EMPH great–be.boy 3/AOR
‘Eventually he was a big boy.’ N4D

Linear order of adverbs seems to correspond to their scope:

- (29) *ahpene·či=ke·h=meko* *nye·wenwi* *e·hkotawi·či.*
always=and=EMPH four.times go.under 3/AOR
‘And he would always go under four times.’ N1I

Verb-modifying adverbs can follow negation (contrast Adv > Neg in (3)):

- (30) *a·kwi=ke·h=mani* *ke·htena* *nye·wiya·kini*
not=and=now truly be.four 1P/NEG
"But we are not really four now," they told him. N6M

- (31) *a·kwi* *pi·neši* *i·ni* *wi·hto·tawačini,*
not of.own.accord that FUT.do.thus.to 2–3(P)/NEG
‘You won't do that to them without provocation,’ N11J

5. Clause internal elements which are apparently topics

With the above background on adverbs, let us now look at examples (32-35). In these examples we have an NP appearing to the left of the verb, but to the right of an adverb. This is a position which we earlier saw associated with the discourse function of argument-focus.

But the preverbal NPs in (32-35) do not function as focus. There is no presupposition in (32), for example, that there is some x who was tired of waiting for the boy, which forms the background for an assertion that x = ‘his father’. (33-35) are similar: these utterances do not have the semantics or pragmatics of an argument focus construction. Rather, the preverbal NPs seem to be topics. (32), for example, is followed in the narrative by several clauses all with the father as subject; the entire passage is about the father. These

are topics, then, but clause-internal topics, in a position different from that of the external topics we have examined earlier.

I tentatively suggest that the preverbal NPs of (32-35) are occupying the same “slot” of the template as the argument focus NPs of section 3, and that the template given in (2) above should be amended to associate either topic or focus with that position. This suggestion is provisional, and will be discussed further in the final section of the paper.

Further amendments may of course be necessary; space does not permit a discussion here of the extremely interesting examples in (36) and (37) with demonstrative pronouns.

- (32) *i-ni=ke-hi='pi='na* *o:sani* *e-ha-nawapwi-hekoči.*
 then=and=QUOT=that.ANIM his.father.OBV fail.to.wait.for 3'-3/AOR
 ‘And then, it's said, that [boy]'s father got tired of waiting for him.’ N7E

- (33) *kapo-twe* *i-na* *kwi-yese-ha* *e-hki-ši-a-čimohekoči* *ke-temina-kočini.*
 at.some.point that boy PERF-tell 3'-3/AOR bless 3'-3/PART/3'
 ‘Some time later the one who was blessing that boy finished instructing him.’
 N7Q

- (34) *pe-hki=meko* *o:sani* *e-hki-ša-koči-mi-ša-te-nemoniči.*
 really=EMPH his.father.OBV as.much.as.possible-be.glad 3'/AOR
 ‘His father was really as happy as could be.’ N8C

- (35) *aškači mahkwani* *e-hpya-niči*
 later bear.OBV come 3'/AOR
 ‘Later the bear [husband of *Wi-sahke-ha*'s grandmother] came.’ W156

Position of demonstrative pronouns a separate phenomenon?

- (36) *kaši='yo=ye-toke=mana* *i-nihi* *wi-hto-tawa-či?*
 how=for=I.suppose=this.ANIM those.OBV FUT.do.thus.to 3-3'/AOR
 ‘I wonder what this guy will do with those things?’ Wit. 4A

- (37) *ki-na=mana* *kemayo-ha-wa*
 you=this.ANIM make.weep 2-3/IND
 ‘You made this guy weep.’ N28G

6. Claims about external vs. internal topic

A distinction between external and internal topics has been made in several recent works including Aissen (1992) on Mayan and King (1995) on Russian. Aissen claims that Tzotzil and Jaklatek have external topics, which she represents as a daughter of a node E (for Expression), while Tz'utujil has internal topics, in Spec of CP. The E node (cf. Banfield 1982) is found only at the topmost level and cannot occur in embedded clauses.

According to Aissen, external topics may be followed by certain enclitics, need not correspond to a gap or a pronoun, and never occur in subordinate clauses. The internal topics of Tz’utujil cannot be separated from their comment by an enclitic, always correspond to a trace in the comment, and can appear in embedded clauses. The external topics can only announce new or shifted topics, while the internal topic position welcomes continuing topics as well.

King (1995) argues that both types of topic are present in Russian. She places external topics as daughter of E, and observes that they are phonologically separate from the comment, need not bind a pronoun or a gap, as in (40), and always have the option of appearing in nominative case. Internal topics are moved from an argument or adjunct position to be adjoined to IP. They are not followed by a pause, appear the appropriate case, must bind a trace, and may appear in subordinate clauses. Indeed, since they are adjoined to IP it is possible to have multiple internal topics, as in (41).

Aissen (1992) on three Mayan languages: Tzotzil, Jakaltek, Tz’utujil.

(38) External topic (Tzotzil, Jakaltek)

(39) Internal topic (Tz’utujil)

King (1995) on Russian: both external and internal topics in same language.

(40) Russian external topic:

Milicionery, na stole ležalo dve furažki
 policemen on table lay two service.caps
 ‘Policemen (E-topic), on the table lay two service caps.’
 [example from Franks and House (1982), cited by King (1995:103)]

(41) Russian internal topics:

Staruju lodku my prodali
 old-ACC boat-ACC we sold
 ‘We (topic) sold the old boat (topic)’ [King (1995:107)]

7. Testing Aissen's and King's claims with Meskwaki internal topics

Do the claims made by Aissen and King regarding the difference between external and internal topics hold for the two topic constructions seen here for Meskwaki?

Both Aissen and King claim that internal topics must bind a coreferential element in what follows: that the loosely construed “aboutness” relation is possible only with external topics.

The Meskwaki example in (42), however, may be problematic for this claim. Here we seem to have an internal topic, *owi:wani* ‘his wife’, which is not an argument of the following verb.

External topics can't occur in subordinate clauses? (43) textual example; (44-45) elicited examples. Must use the copying to object construction.

Multiple internal topics possible? (further changes will be needed to template!)

A solution to the problem of (46): both preverbal NPs are topic?

Clitic placement different for external and internal topic.

Functions of the two different? External topic marks new episode (cf. Dahlstrom 1996).

- (42) *i·ya·h pye·ya·či*,
there come 3/CH.CONJ

owi-wani *"kašina-kwa, kaši=čā-h ina-čimowa?"* *e-hineči.*
his.wife.OBV well how=so tell.thus 3/IND say.to X-3/AOR

'When he arrived there,
his wife, "Well, what happened? What did he say?" he was asked.' L51-54

- (43) *ni ·na=ke·hi a·kwi ke·ko·hi ašenokini*
 I=and not anything disappear 0/NEG
 ‘As for me, nothing is missing.’ R146.10

- (44) *nekehke·nemekwa*
know 3-1/IND

ni-na e-hpwa-wi- ke-ko-hi -ašenoniki
 I not anything disappear 0'/AOR
 'He knows that as for me, nothing is missing'

(Preverb pwa·wi- ‘not’ is in the Negative position.)

- (45) **kehke-netamwa*
know 3-0/IND

ni-na e-hpwa-wi- ke-ko-hi –ašenoniki
I not anything disappear 0'/AOR
(‘He knows, as for me, nothing is missing.’)

- (46) *našawaye nekoti neniwa okwisani e-hmahkate-wi-na-či.*
long.ago one man his.son.OBV make.fast 3-3'/AOR
‘Long ago a certain man made his son fast.’ L1

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