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Seeking Consensus on the Fundamentals of Algonquian Word Order

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Leonard Bloomfield, speaking of Eastern Ojibwa, declared, “Word order is decidedly flexible.”¹ Surely everyone who has investigated Algonquian syntax would agree with that statement! Likewise, most Algonquianists would agree that at a macro-level—that is, considering the relative ordering of a verb and its arguments—similar patterns seem to obtain across the family.² Consider, for example, clauses from Ojibwa, Miami-Illinois, Menominee, and Meskwaki, all illustrating the tendency for an indefinite pronoun ‘someone’ (in boldface) to precede the verb:³

- (1) **waaya** ngii-waabmaa
 someone I-saw-him
 ‘I saw someone.’ (Ojibwa; Tomlin and Rhodes 1979:309, (5bi))
- (2) Ancaamaci aweeya pyaaci ...
 desiderative, hopefully someone he.comes
 ‘I wish someone would come.’ (Miami-Illinois; Costa 2012:36)
- (3) Eneq-peh taeh weyak kes-pes-pihtikaet
 ‘And then someone came in.’ (Menominee; Shields 2004:385, (8))

- (4) me·kwe:h=ča:h=meko owiye·ha nekahkita·kona·na
 I.believe=so=EMPH someone hide.O2.from.3>1P/IND
 'So probably someone hid it from us.' (Meskwaki; Kiyana 1913:102)

Less agreement, however, can be found in the various accounts proposed for the observed word order patterns. The examples in (1)–(4) could be categorized simply as instances of OV (Object-Verb) or SV (Subject-Verb) order, using notation familiar from Greenberg 1963 and later works on word order typology, or pragmatic or information structure notions may be appealed to. For example, Tomlin and Rhodes (1979) analyze (1) as exhibiting RHEME before THEME order; Costa (2012) counts (2) as an instance of the tendency for INDEFINITES to precede the verb; Shields (2004) classifies (3) as SV and additionally notes that NEW INFORMATION precedes the verb; Dahlstrom (1993 and later articles) analyzes indefinite pronouns in similar Meskwaki examples as a variety of FOCUS, which precedes the verb.⁴

In other words, even though a great deal of work has been done on Algonquian word order in the thirty-five years since Tomlin and Rhodes 1979, there is little agreement in the explanations proposed. With this paper I hope that we can begin to reach a consensus regarding the mix of syntactic and discourse-pragmatic factors influencing the observed word order patterns, in order to discover the areas of agreement across the languages of the family and where individual languages diverge. Though the discussion here is necessarily incomplete given limitations of space, four specific points are emphasized: first, a Greenbergian-style classification of an Algonquian language must resolve issues such as the syntactic status of inverse verbs; second, information structure notions such as topic and focus should be recognized as playing a significant role; third, Algonquian word order investigations should include not only subjects and (first) objects but also the syntactic relations of secondary object and oblique; and fourth, word order investigations must attend to hierarchical structure as well as linear order.

Greenbergian Approaches

Work on Algonquian word order often begins by trying to discover which of Greenberg's (1963) six basic word order types fits the language best, or by using the Greenbergian types as an initial sorting of the data (e.g., Shields 2004, Sullivan 2016).⁵ Algonquianists typically find attestations of nearly all possible permutations.

For example, Thomason (2004), working with a large corpus from 153 Meskwaki texts, found 1,279 clauses containing a verb and two NPs, where the NPs represented subject, object, or second object. Twenty distinct word order patterns were displayed within this set.⁶

Some methodological questions arise in trying to apply the classic Greenbergian approach to Algonquian data. For example, the labels S and O presuppose the existence of subject and object constituents. Some Algonquianists, however, analyze the NPs (or DPs) in construction with the verb as being adjuncts coreferential to the real subject and object, which are instantiated by the inflectional morphology on the verb (following Jelinek 1984, *inter alia*). Junker's (2004) work on East Cree is in this tradition. Wolvengrey (2011) goes further, questioning whether a notion of syntactic grammatical relations is needed at all for Plains Cree: that is, whether semantic and pragmatic notions on their own can provide complete explanations for the observed word order variation, without reference to syntax. In other words, Junker and Wolvengrey are indeed investigating the relative order of constituents, but they are not using the vocabulary of grammatical relations to describe or explain the observed patterns.

For those scholars who do analyze NPs in construction with the verb as subjects and objects, it is necessary to establish the syntactic status of inverse verbs, the morphologically marked form of verbs inflected for a third-person agent and a non-third-person patient, or for a third-person obviative agent and a third-person proximate patient. There seems to be genuine variation across the family in the syntax of inverse verbs. For example, Dahlstrom (1991) argues for Plains Cree that inverse verbs have the same syntax as direct verbs, with the more agentlike argument as subject and the more patientlike argument as object, but Rhodes (1994), using some of the same tests for grammatical relations as Dahlstrom uses for Plains Cree, argues that Ojibwa inverse verbs involve a reversal of grammatical relations. The syntactic analysis of inverse verbs in a given language naturally has consequences for coding the word order pattern of a specific token. Consider the following Cree and Ojibwa clauses (the inverse suffix is in boldface):

- (5) ki·htahtawe ki·mo·c ki·h-kakwe·cimik iskwe·wa kistim ...
 presently secretly PERF-ask.3'>3/IND woman.OBV your.d-in-law
 'Then some women (obv) secretly asked your daughter-in-law (prox).'
 (Plains Cree; Dahlstrom 1991:63)

- (6) *wgii-zaaghigoon nmishoomsan nookmis*
o-gii-zaagih-igo-an ni-mishoomis-an n-ookomis
 3ERG-PAST-love-INV-OBV 1-grandfather-OBV 1-grandmother
 'My grandfather (obv) loved my grandmother (prox).' (Ojibwa; Rhodes 1994:435)

Dahlstrom would count the Cree sentence in (5) as VSO, with the obviative agent as S and the proximate addressee as O; Rhodes would count the Ojibwa sentence in (6) as an example of VOS, with the obviative experiencer as O and the proximate theme as S. Given this variation, it is incumbent upon any Algonquianist asserting that there is an underlying order such as VOS (e.g., Tomlin and Rhodes 1979; Sullivan 2016, both on Ojibwa) to explicitly identify the syntactic status of inverse verbs in the language under investigation.⁷

Another construction frequently encountered in the family, though not unique to Algonquian, is discontinuous constituents: a demonstrative or quantifier appears to the left of the verb with the remainder of the NP to the right, as in (7), with the discontinuous object in boldface:

- (7) *šeški mani ki-hawato'pena či'ma'ni*
 only this FUT.take.2l>0/IND canoe
 'We'll take just this canoe.' (Meskwaki; Dahlstrom 2015:13N.)

Such constructions are challenging for a strict application of a Greenbergian classification. Would (7) be coded as OV or VO, or as an ad hoc category of OVO? Analyses appealing to information structure (e.g., Dahlstrom 1995; Junker 2004; Wolvengrey 2011) argue that the left-hand portion of such split NPs may occupy a focus position to the left of the verb, as in (7), where the demonstrative appears with *šeški* 'only', or a topic position at the left edge of the clause. Without recognizing the discourse functions associated with specific positions at or near the beginning of the clause, it is difficult to accommodate Algonquian data using the classic Greenbergian approach.

Information Structure

Let us now leave the complications of the classic Greenbergian approach and look at some recent work appealing to information structure. A number of researchers

have found that the preverbal instances of subject and object NPs (or DPs) can be explained as overt topics or focused elements. Some examples of this approach are Dahlstrom (1993) and later papers on Meskwaki, Junker (2004) on East Cree, Wolvengrey (2011) on Plains Cree, Costa (2012) on Miami-Illinois, Johnson et al. (2015) on Menominee, among others. A template for Meskwaki word order is given below (Dahlstrom 1993, 1995, 2003), which explicitly includes the information structure relations of topic and focus along with the semantic operator NEGATION and a syntactic relation, OBLIQUE.

- (8) [_S TOPIC [_S NEG FOCUS OBLIQUE V XP*]]
 {SUBJ, OBJ, OBJ2, COMP}

As can be seen in (8), there is a position available for topics at the left edge of the clause. The topic position precedes a negative element, if present. Following the negative position there is a separate position available for focused constituents. Constituents bearing the syntactic relation of oblique (discussed further below) typically appear immediately before the verb. To the right of the verb is the unmarked position for subject, object, second object, and complement clauses that are neither topic nor focus. This word order preference is represented by the notation of XP* (any number of constituents, including zero); those constituent(s) may be associated with any of the set of grammatical functions listed in the curly brackets.⁸

The textual Meskwaki example shown in (9) illustrates the ordering of (8):

- (9) *i'noki=wi'na a'kwī ke'ko'hi kehke'netakini*
 today=CONTRAST not anything know.3>0/NEG
 TOPIC NEG FOCUS V

[*mana mehtose'neniwa*]
 this person
 SUBJ

'But today the people don't know anything.' (Meskwaki; Michelson 1927:18.9–10)

The example in (9) has an overt topic *i'noki* 'today', followed by the negative word *a'kwī* 'not'; the indefinite pronoun *ke'ko'hi* 'anything' appears in focus position immediately after the negative, and the overt subject *mana mehtose'neniwa* 'this

person' appears after the verb, since it is neither the topic nor the focus of the sentence.⁹

The utility of referring to information structure notions can be clearly seen by comparing two recent papers on Menominee. Shields (2004) is a very thorough report using a Greenbergian-style analysis, with numerous charts and figures considering the effects of a number of factors on the various permutations of S, V, and O. As thorough as it is, one is left at the end with a sense of bewildering chaos because there is no clear explanation of what governs the various patterns. Johnson et al. (2015), on the other hand, improve upon the Shields study in two ways: first, by greatly expanding the database of textual examples, and second, by showing that information structure notions of topic and focus explain the distribution of the NPs appearing to the left of the verb in Menominee.

Although there seems to be a growing consensus regarding the utility of topic and focus, here too there are meta-issues to be aware of. First of all, it is notoriously difficult to get linguists to agree on the definition of topic and focus. I follow work by Lambrecht (1994) and others that takes topic to be a pragmatic relation of aboutness; that means that topic cannot be reduced to simply being old or given information. Likewise, focus is not equivalent to new information; rather, it is information asserted against the backdrop of a presupposed proposition.

The relations of topic and focus are quite different in nature from the discourse statuses of ACTIVATION (givenness) and IDENTIFIABILITY (definiteness), as Lambrecht (1994) argues at length. Topic and focus reflect articulations of an utterance into components of information structure: an utterance may contain a topic, which is what the following comment is about. Similarly, one element of an utterance may function as focus, with the remainder of the utterance representing the presupposed open proposition. Givenness and definiteness, on the other hand, reflect the speaker's assessment of the addressee's mental state: whether a particular discourse entity is active in the addressee's consciousness (given versus new) or whether it is identifiable by the addressee (definiteness). Although topics may often be given and definite, neither feature is a necessary or sufficient criterion for establishing topichood, nor is there any requirement that a focused element be new or indefinite.

In my view, it is at this point an open question whether Algonquian word order analyses need to make reference to the notions of givenness or definiteness or both in addition to appealing to topic and focus. What is clear, however, is that using definiteness or given versus new information alone will not account for the full

range of observed data. See, for example, Shields (2004:380) on Menominee, who found that 64 percent of new NPs occurred to the left of the verb and 36 percent after the verb. Likewise, Tomlin and Rhodes (1979) found that many indefinite NPs occur to the left of the verb, but that indefinite NPs may also occur after the verb in presentational constructions or if they are "thematically irrelevant" (Tomlin and Rhodes 1979:316).¹⁰

A further issue arising in Algonquian studies is the relationship between obviation and notions of topic and focus. In a context where a distinction is made between proximate and obviative third persons, is the proximate third person equivalent to topic? For Meskwaki, at least, the answer is no: obviative NPs can appear in topic position (cf. Dahlstrom 1993:14). A separate question is whether the word order patterns of a given language can be explained entirely in terms of proximate versus obviative, as Junker (2004) reports for East Cree.

Grammatical Relations Beyond Subject and (First) Object

The Greenbergian tradition of classifying word order data in terms of subject, verb, and object has the unfortunate consequence of neglecting other grammatical relations that may be significant for word order studies. For Algonquian languages, it is important to distinguish between first and second objects of ditransitive verbs such as 'give', where the recipient is first object and the thing given is second object. Furthermore, Rhodes (1991) and Dahlstrom (2009) argue for Ojibwa and Meskwaki, respectively, that the nonsubject argument of the AI+O class of verbs is a "second object," not an ordinary first object.¹¹ In the Meskwaki clause in (10), for example, the second object of the verb 'depend on' is an independent pronoun *ki-ya-wa-wi* 'you plural' (Dahlstrom 1988).

- (10) ahpe-nemowaki ki-ya-wa-wi
 depend.on.3P/IND you.PL
 'They depend on you (pl)'. (Meskwaki; Kiyana 1913:249)

AI+O verbs are relatively common in Algonquian languages, in part resulting from syntactic operations on ditransitive stems that suppress the first object (for example, reflexivization, reciprocalization, antipassivization) as discussed in Dahlstrom 2009.

In an important study on Southwestern Ojibwe, Sullivan (2016) elicited sentences by showing pictures to a speaker and asking for a description. He found a preference for VOS order, with some unexplained cases of VSO. However, an example he provides of VSO order appears to be in fact VSO2—second object instead of first object—pointing up the need for a more fine-grained classification of arguments:

- (11) Zhakamoonindizo a'aw chi-ogimaa iniw gwekiwebinigan-an.
 spoon.feed.self DET president DET pancake-OBV
 'The president is feeding himself pancakes.' (Southwestern Ojibwa; Sullivan 2016, (17))

As mentioned above, deriving a reflexive form of a ditransitive such as 'feed' results in the AI+O pattern; *gwekiwebinigan-an* 'pancakes' would therefore be a second object in (11). It is worth investigating whether AI+O clauses exhibit idiosyncratic word order.

Another grammatical relation that plays a prominent role in Algonquian syntax is OBLIQUE, a term that I use to denote what is called in traditional Algonquianist terminology an antecedent of a relative root (e.g., Bloomfield 1958:130).¹² In the Meskwaki example in (12), the oblique argument expresses source and is associated with the relative root preverb *oči-* 'from', both in boldface.

- (12) **wa-wi-tawiškwa-te** e'hoči-nowi-wa-či neswi neniwaki
 doors.on.both.ends from-go.out.3P/AOR three men
 'Three men went out from the doors on both ends.' (Meskwaki; Kiyana 1913:163)

In Meskwaki, obliques are subject to much less variation in word order than objects or subjects are: they are nearly always found immediately to the left of the verb. It is important, therefore, in classifying data on word order to distinguish obliques from other grammatical relations. This is not always the case in the literature: for example, Branigan and Mackenzie (2002b:116) analyze quotes as direct objects rather than as the oblique argument of the quoting verb.

Word Order and Subordinate Clauses

A further set of issues for classifying word order data arises when considering sentences in which a single third-person referent is a syntactic argument in more

than one clause. In such contexts it is likely that there will be at most one NP expressing the third-person referent; the referent's role in the other clause(s) will be expressed only by the inflectional morphology on the verb, in this instance functioning pronominally. The question for a linguist collecting data on word order patterns is to which clause does the NP belong? It is important to keep in mind that constituents appearing to the right of the main verb of a sentence display a great deal of flexibility in their word order. As a consequence, a linear order of V-V-NP does not necessarily entail that the NP must belong to the lower clause. Rather, the NP may function as an argument of the higher verb, preceded by a complement clause, as in the Meskwaki example in (13):

- (13) nahi ano'hka-na-ta-we [wi'hni-mihenakwe] kesese'hena-na
 well give.O.job.of.2I<3/IMP FUT.cause.to.dance.3<2I/AOR our.elder.brother
 V COMP OBJ
 'Well, let's get our elder brother to give us a dance!' (Meskwaki; Kiyana 1913:983)

In (13) *kesese'hena-na* 'our elder brother' is the object of the main verb *ano'hka-n-* 'give [object] the job of', and is coreferential with the pronominal inflection for the third-person subject of the lower verb *ni-mih-* 'cause to dance'.

Sequences of V-NP-V, where the referent of the NP plays a syntactic role in both clauses, may also present challenges for word order classification. Dahlstrom (2006) discusses Meskwaki examples like the one in (14), arguing that the NP *o-sani* 'his father' belongs to the first clause and not to the second. Consequently, (14) is an example of VS order. (If *o-sani* 'his father' belonged to the second clause, we would instead have an example of OV order.)

- (14) pye-ya-niči o-sani,
 come.3'/CH.CONJ his.father.OBV
 e-ha-čimoha-či e-na-hpawa-či.
 tell.3>3'/AOR dream.thus.3/PART/OBLIQUE.HEAD
 'When his father (obv) came, he told him (obv) what he had dreamed.'
 (Meskwaki; Dahlstrom 2006:135)

Note further that an NP in such a sequence should not be counted twice, once as an argument of the first clause and again as part of the second clause: syntactically,

the lexical NP can belong only to a single clause. The verb of the other clause bears inflection that is anaphoric to the coreferential NP.

A final pan-Algonquian construction to consider is that known variously as copying to object, or raising to object, or long-distance agreement (Frantz 1978; Dahlstrom 1991; Rhodes 1994; Branigan and MacKenzie 2002a; Fry and Hamilton 2016; among others). In this construction, the matrix verb (often a verb of mental action) is inflected for an object agreeing with one of the arguments of the complement clause. For example, in the Meskwaki example in (15), the matrix verb *ke'hke-nem-* 'know' is inflected for an obviative third-person object, agreeing with *owiye'hani* 'someone-obv', which is the subject of the lower verb *nep-* 'die'.

- (15) *ke'hke-nema-ta owiye'hani na'hina-hi wi'hnepeniči*
 know.3>3'/PART/3 someone.OBV when FUT.die.3'/AOR
 'the one who knew when someone would die.' (Meskwaki; Dahlstrom 2015:12E)

For the purposes of collecting data on word order, it is important to determine the syntactic position of NPs like *owiye'hani* in (15). Does the copying to object construction entail a movement of the NP out of the lower clause, putting *owiye'hani* in the higher clause? If so, it is an example of VO order. Alternatively, the copying to object construction could be analyzed as simply involving a peculiar agreement rule in the morphology, with no change in the syntactic position of the 'copied' NP. In that case, we would count (15) as an instance of SV order in the lower clause.¹³

Conclusion

This discussion, necessarily incomplete, has argued for the necessity of recognizing both syntax and information structure in explaining Algonquian word order: in syntax, we need to establish the status of inverse verbs if Greenbergian classification is undertaken; the relations of second object and oblique must be given as much attention as subjects and first objects; and hierarchical clause structure must be recognized as well. For information structure, the relations of topic and focus play a key role and cannot be reduced to the discourse statuses of given/new or definiteness. I hope this review of issues can initiate fruitful conversations among Algonquianists investigating word order patterns.

NOTES

1. Bloomfield (1958:131), cited in Tomlin and Rhodes 1979. Thanks to the audience in Ottawa and the PAC reviewers for many useful suggestions. All remaining omissions and inadequacies are my own responsibility.
2. At a more local level, differences among the languages may be observed—for example, in the ordering of elements in copular constructions. Plains Cree seems to prefer ordering the predicate first (cf. Wolvengrey 2011:293), while Meskwaki equational sentences tend to have the predicate last (cf. Dahlstrom 1988:176).
3. Abbreviations in Meskwaki and Cree examples: O = inanimate, 1P = first-person exclusive plural; 2I = first-person inclusive plural; 3P = third-person plural; 3' = obviative; AOR = aorist conjunct; CH.CONJ = changed conjunct; CONTRAST = contrastive; EMPH = emphatic; FUT = future; IMP = imperative; IND = independent indicative; NEG = negative; O = (first) object; O2 = second object; OBV = obviative; PART = conjunct participle; PERF = perfective. ">" separates subject and object in the gloss of transitive verbs. In other examples, the glosses (or lack thereof) have been reproduced from the source.
4. Not discussed here due to space limitations are several recent formal analyses of Algonquian word order, for example, Brittain (2001) on Cree-Innu-Naskapi, Bruening (2001) on Passamaquoddy, Bliss (2013) on Blackfoot, among others.
5. For critiques of the classic Greenbergian approach, see Dryer (1997), as well as Dryer (1995), which includes a discussion of Tomlin and Rhodes (1979) on Ojibwa. See also Mithun (1987), which questions the relevance of the notion of basic word order in languages that display a wide variety of surface orders. Indeed, Dryer (2013) marks all Algonquian representatives in the WALS online atlas as lacking a dominant basic order.
6. Thomason's (2004) survey of 1,279 Meskwaki clauses reveals interesting patterns, which Thomason describes in terms of higher- and lower-ranked NPs (animate > inanimate, proximate > obviative, nearer obviative > further obviative). Lower-ranked NPs tend to occur after the verb; higher-ranked NPs tend to occur at the edge of clauses, where they are "strongly focused" if clause-initial, or "strongly defocused" if clause-final. In the terms of Dahlstrom (1995), Thomason's "strongly focused" corresponds to overt topics and focus and "strongly defocused" to ANTI-TOPIC (cf. Lambrecht 1994).
7. A similar issue arises with transitive verb stems inflected for an INDEFINITE ACTOR (cf. Bloomfield 1957:vi). Dahlstrom (1991) and Rhodes (1994) argue for Plains Cree and Ojibwa, respectively, that the indefinite actor construction is an agentless passive. The nonagent argument in the Cree and Ojibwa constructions should therefore be counted as a subject. The passive analysis is, however, not necessarily correct for indefinite actor verbs elsewhere in the Algonquian family.

8. Tomlin and Rhodes's (1979) analysis of Ojibwa can also align with the template in (8) if we take their T-fronted elements to be overt topics, rheme to correspond to the focus position, and theme to correspond to the unmarked postverbal position(s).
9. Note that the contrastive enclitic =*wi'na* may occur with overt topics, as in (9), marking a shift from the topic of the previous utterances. In the translation of (9), the force of the contrastive enclitic is rendered by 'But . . .'. It is clear that *inoki* 'today' is not playing the role of focus in (9). If it were focus, there would be a presupposition that 'the people don't know anything at x time' and the missing time element would be identified as 'today'. Note further that *mana mehtose neniwa* 'this person' is grammatically singular but here used in a collective sense of 'the people'.
10. See Dahlstrom (2003) for Meskwaki word order in presentational constructions.
11. AI+O verbs are inflected as if they are intransitive but require two arguments.
12. Rhödes (2005, 2010) uses the term "oblique" differently: to denote adjuncts (temporal, locative, instrumental) that are NOT complements of a relative root.
13. The appearance of *owiye'hani* to the left of *na'hina:hi* 'when' in (15) may indicate that *owiye'hani* is either in the matrix clause or in topic position in the lower clause.

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Multiple Instances of Agreement in Mi'gmaq Verbs

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Like many Algonquian languages, Mi'gmaq has multiple verbal affixes, which index the phi(ϕ)-features (person, number, gender) of arguments, shown in bold in (1).¹

- (1) mu ges- -al -ugsi -w -eg -pn -ig
 NEG love -VTA -3>SAP.PL -NEG -1PL -PST.DK -3PL
 'They didn't love us (me and another)'

One possible analysis is that verbal affixes are instances of agreement, a relationship (Agree) between a functional head (probe) and a DP argument (goal) resulting in the functional head displaying the ϕ -features of the goal (Chomsky 2000). Another possibility is that verbal affixes are clitics, a D-like pronoun, which is a copy of the ϕ -features of a DP argument and attaches to a functional projection (Preminger 2009). In this paper I show that Mi'gmaq has both agreement affixes (theme signs and inner suffixes) and clitics (outer suffixes).

The presence of multiple agreement affixes is important as it supports the presence of ϕ -feature agreement in the thematic domain (Oxford 2013), as opposed to agreement being solely limited to the inflectional domain (Woolford 2010; Nevins