

Meskwaki (Algonquian) Evidence Against Basic Word Order and Configurational Models of Argument Roles

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The syntax of Meskwaki (Algonquian; spoken in Iowa) is sensitive to grammatical relations such as subject, object, secondary object, and oblique, but word order is not used to distinguish subject from object.¹ In other words, Meskwaki is an example of the type of language proposed by Mithun 1987 in which none of the six permutations of subject, verb, and object familiar from Greenberg 1966 can be identified as the basic word order. Instead, Meskwaki word order is sensitive to a template including positions specialized for discourse functions such as topic and focus. The word order template is largely flat, with no VP constituent grouping together a verb and its direct object and excluding the subject. We here present a corpus-based study of a set of clauses in which word order might be predicted to play a role in distinguishing subjects from objects: clauses in which the subject and object are both marked as obviative, used for third persons peripheral to the discourse. We show below that even in this context word order is not determined by grammatical relations. Instead, word order is sensitive to the relative ranking of the two obviatives in the discourse, rather than functioning to indicate which argument is subject and which is object.

A secondary goal of the paper is to emphasize the value of older written texts for language documentation. For Meskwaki there is an extraordinary corpus of nearly 27,000 pages of traditional narratives and ethnographic information, written during 1911-1918 in the Meskwaki syllabary (Goddard 1996) by mostly monolingual speakers of Meskwaki for Smithsonian ethnologist Truman Michelson. This corpus is stored at the Smithsonian Institution's National Anthropological Archives (NAA). As discussed in Goddard 1990b, these texts constitute a remarkably accurate record of connected speech by fluent speakers who were skilled narrators: they preserve an oral culture on paper. For linguists, the NAA corpus is invaluable for discovering the discourse conditions influencing the order of constituents in Meskwaki, a language with extremely flexible word order, or for investigating the discourse-based opposition within third person known as *OBVIATION* (Thomason 2003). Both obviation and word order are extensively discussed below. Most examples in the present paper are drawn from this corpus; some simple elicited sentences from fieldwork illustrate basic descriptive facts.²

¹ We are delighted to offer a contribution to this volume honoring our friend and colleague Lyle Campbell with whom we share an interest in the insights to be gained from close study of Native American languages in all their diversity. We are indebted to Lucy Thomason for the examples from the texts she has edited and for sharing her knowledge of Meskwaki discourse. And we acknowledge our great debt to our consultants in the Meskwaki community, especially Adeline Wanatee (1910-1996) and Everett Kapayou (1933-2006).

² Abbreviations in the examples for the manuscript sources, listed by author:
Charley H. Chuck

C-G: Giants. NAA 2794.12.

C-WH: Wampumhead: a Winter Story. NAA 2794.46(b).

Jim Peters

JP-Apay: Apayashihaki. NAA 2674.2.

JP-GTF: The Girl Who Had Ten Friends. NAA 2794.47(3)

1. BACKGROUND ON MESKWAKI

Meskwaki verbs are subcategorized for grammatical relations including subject, (primary) object, secondary object, and oblique, with relation-changing syntactic processes such as causative and antipassive sensitive to these grammatical relations. Verbs exhibit inflectional morphology that encodes the following features of the subject and (primary) object: person, number, gender (animate vs. inanimate), and OBLVIATION. Obliviation is a discourse-based opposition within third person: the third person most central to the discourse is referred to by unmarked third person forms, called PROXIMATE; other, more peripheral third persons are referred to by marked OBLVIATIVE forms. The opposition of proximate and obviative is overtly marked on animate gender nouns and demonstrative pronouns, and it also appears in verb inflection. For example, in (1) the man is the third person participant of central interest so the noun stem *neniw-* ‘man’ is inflected with the unmarked third person animate singular suffix *-a*. The drum, grammatically animate in Meskwaki, is of less interest and is marked obviative singular with the suffix *-ani* (underlyingly *ahkohkw-ani*). The verb is inflected with a complex

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- Dahlstrom (2015). Edition of A Man Who Fasted Long Ago. NAA 2664-2.
- K-Auto: Autobiography. NAA 1834.
- K-CDWP: Ceremonial Dances, War Practices, and Traditions of the Whiteman. NAA 2656.2.
- K-EGC: The One Who Had an Elm Tree Growing Out of His Chest. NAA 2720.6.
- K-Fish: The Story of the Fish Clan. NAA 2667.
- K-IML: When Some Indians Moved Camp Long Ago. NAA 2730.6.
- K-Kin: Kinship Terminology and Archaic Vocabulary. NAA 2232 and 2277.
- K-MBES. A Man Who Was Blessed by an Evil Spirit Long Ago. NAA 2656.
- K-MFWB. The One Who Made Four War Bundles. NAA 2779.
- K-MMD. The Man Who Married His Daughter. NAA 2664.3.
- K-O. The Owl Sacred Pack. NAA 2693.
- K-SD: The Snail Dance. NAA 2606.
- K-SGG. Shooter, and His Grandmother and Grandfather. NAA 2794.66.
- K-Spot. The Spotted Cow Sacred Bundle. NAA 2007.
- K-W. Wisahkeha, His Father, His Mother, His Younger Brother, His Grandmother. NAA 2958a.
- K-Wewi. Wewipeha and His Wife. NAA 2794.88.
- K-WYB. Wapasaya’s Younger Brother Meskwasona. NAA 2121.

Sam Peters

- SP-SH: Summer Hunters. NAA 2794.45(b):20-24.

Some of the examples contain English translations offered by bilingual consultants working with Michelson. These translations are enclosed in double quotes; the abbreviation for the text source is followed by the initials of the translator (tr):

Translators:

- HP: Horace Poweshiek (Meskwaki)
- IP: Ida Poweshiek (Ida Snowball; Meskwaki)
- TB: Thomas Brown (Sauk)

third person obviative if there is a third person proximate present in the context (often as possessor of one of the obviative NPs):

- (4) *ô*s-ani *ašâ*h-ahi êh=nes-ekoniči
 3.father-OBV Sioux-OBV.PL AOR=kill-3''>3'/AOR
 'The Siouxs (obviative) killed his (proximate) father (obviative).' (K-MBES 1)

The proximate third person of (4) is a young boy, the possessor of *ô*sani 'his father', and both the father and the Sioux are obviative. More examples of this type are presented in (37-47) in the discussion of word order.

Although in the narrowest contexts—bare-minimum possessed noun phrases and transitive verb clauses—there cannot be two proximates, speakers have considerable latitude in assigning proximate and obviative status within more complex clauses and sentences and in connected discourse. Proximates may cooccur if they are conjoined, but alternatively one of a pair of conjoined nouns may be obviative. A third-person-possessed obviative that is central to the narrative may immediately show agreement as a proximate. A temporarily highlighted proximate can be followed in the same sentence by a higher ranked or more central proximate. It is a fundamental characteristic of the proximate and obviative categories that to a significant extent they are not dictated by grammatical considerations but are deployed for discourse purposes. The speaker has the option to manipulate both who or what is proximate and the length of the narrative span over which proximate status is maintained, which may extend over many sentences (Goddard 1990a, Thomason 2003). In informal narratives as opposed to storytelling Thomason (1995) found “a different (less elaborate) set of criteria for establishing relative discourse prominence.” And a speaker may also assign obviative status in the absence of an overt proximate to indicate a point-of-view outside the narrative, especially one that has shifted (see (38-39, 41, 44) below). It is not possible to account for the use of proximate and obviative in Meskwaki by referring only to inflectional morphology within sentences, as proposed, for example, for Potawatomi by Halle and Marantz (1993).

Meskwaki verbs indicate features of subject and object in relation to a hierarchical ranking of person and animacy categories. That is, the person and number features of both subject and object are expressed by affixes which are unspecified for grammatical function; a separate suffix on transitive verbs, known as a THEME SIGN, indicates which cluster of person and number features is to be interpreted as the subject and which as the object. Consider the following pair of verbs inflected in the independent indicative mode, used for main clause assertions, with the theme signs in boldface:

- (5) a. *newâpamâwa* 'I looked at him or her.'
 ne-wâpam-**â**-w-a
 1-look.at-DIRECT-3-(3)SG
- b. *newâpamekwa* 'He or she looked at me.'
 ne-wâpam-**ekw**-w-a
 1-look.at-INVERSE-3-(3)SG

The verb forms in (5a-b) are identical except for the theme sign, labelled DIRECT in (5a) and INVERSE in (5b). Both verbs bear a first person prefix *ne-*, and both exhibit a third person suffix

–*w* followed by a third person singular suffix –*a*. The direct suffix in (5a) indicates that the subject outranks the object on the following hierarchy:

- (6) non-third person > third person proximate > third person (first) obviative >
third person second obviative > inanimate

Since the subject outranks the object, in (5a) the cluster of non-third person features must be associated with subject and the cluster of third person features must be associated with object. Conversely, the inverse suffix in (5b) imposes the opposite interpretation: the object of (5b) outranks the subject on the hierarchy so the third person features are mapped onto subject and the non-third person features are mapped onto object. Note, however, that in the glosses of examples other than (5) in this paper the theme signs are not separately glossed. Instead, the cumulative information about subject and object features is expressed in glosses such as “1>3”, to be read “first person singular subject acting on a third person singular object”.

The opposition of direct and inverse morphology on transitive verbs holds not only for verbs involving one third person argument and one non-third person argument, as in (5), but also for verbs in which both arguments are third person. (Verbs with two non-third person arguments are expressed with different theme signs.) If a proximate subject acts upon an obviative object, a direct theme sign is used; if an obviative subject acts upon a proximate object, an inverse theme sign is used. When both arguments are obviative third person a ranking must be imposed upon the two obviatives, making one a FIRST OBVIATIVE (also called ‘nearer obviative’) and the other a SECOND OBVIATIVE (or ‘further obviative’). In (4) above the father, as a relative of the proximate character and as a Meskwaki, is higher on the scale of empathy. The Siouxs, on the other hand, were the traditional enemies of the Meskwaki. The father in (4) is therefore the first obviative and the Siouxs are the second obviative, and the verb contains an inverse theme sign.

It must be emphasized that the opposition of direct and inverse is a morphological phenomenon associated with the hierarchical type of casemarking system, and it does not reflect a change of grammatical relations. That is, the agent argument of the inverse verbs in (4) and (5b) are subjects and the theme or patient arguments are objects.

Only subjects and (primary) objects trigger agreement on the verb; secondary objects and obliques do not. Ditransitive verbs encode the recipient or beneficiary as primary object and the theme or patient argument as secondary object, as in (7).

- (7) nehtamaw-i k-ôhkomesêh-enân-a mâhani kîhčêw-ani
kill.O2.for-2>3/IMP 2-grandmother-1P-SG this.OBV turkey-OBV
‘Kill this turkey for our (inclusive) grandmother’ (K-W 189)

Pronominal third person secondary objects are expressed by zero anaphora:

- (8) ke-mîn-ene ‘I gave him, it, them (anim., inan.) to you (sg.)’
2-give-1>2/IND

A subset of verbs in Meskwaki require a subject and a ‘secondary’ object, with no primary object, as in (9) below. See Dahlstrom 2009 for discussion of the syntax of these verbs.

- (9) ahpênemo-wa o-sîmêh-ani

rely.on.O2-3/IND 3-younger.sibling-OBV
'He relies on his younger brother.' (K-W 712)

As with ditransitives, pronominal third person secondary objects are expressed by zero anaphora:

(10) wêpâhkê-wa 'he threw him, it, them (anim., inan.)'
throw.O2-3/IND

Note that the verb of (10) does not have an intransitive meaning such as 'engage in throwing': it requires a second argument expressing the object thrown.

OBLIQUE arguments in the Lexical Functional Grammar inventory of grammatical functions are ones in which a thematic role is explicitly encoded, perhaps by choice of preposition, as in English, or by semantic case marking, as in Finnish. In Algonquian languages it is special morphology (known as RELATIVE ROOTS) in verb stems and preverbs which typically encodes the thematic role associated with particular oblique arguments. For example, in (11) the initial morpheme of the verb stem (underlying form *lot-l*, with mutation of the *t* to *č* by the following high front vowel) signals that the verb requires an oblique argument expressing source.

(11) menes-eki êh=očiwen-ekoči,
island-LOC AOR=carry.O.from.{somewhere}-3'>3/AOR
'It (an eagle) carried him from the island' (Dahlstrom 2015:161)

Further examples of obliques may be found below in (13, 15, 26); see Dahlstrom 2014 for more discussion of this grammatical relation.

2. WORD ORDER TEMPLATE

We are assuming here an informal version of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) in which grammatical relations such as subject and object are represented separately from constituent structure (cf. Bresnan et al. 2015). This is a departure from theories such as Chomsky's Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995) and earlier proposals in which grammatical relations are a secondary notion, derived from a universal asymmetry in phrase structure in which a verb and its direct object form a constituent which excludes the subject. A consequence of divorcing the grammatical relations of a clause from the constituent structure expression of that clause is that there is no need to assume a universal configuration of phrase structure. Instead, LFG analyses require that constituent structure represent only those categories and constituents for which positive evidence can be found in the language under investigation. As a consequence, a wide variety of constituent structures is permitted within the LFG framework.⁵ With that in mind we argue that Meskwaki constituent structures are sensitive to the template in (12):

⁵ In LFG a separate component, functional structure, represents the relationship between predicates and the grammatical functions like subject, oblique, etc. which the predicate requires. The component of functional structure exhibits relatively little cross-linguistic variation in comparison to constituent structure in LFG analyses and many of the linguistic universals posited by LFG make reference to functional structure notions. See Bresnan et al. 2015 for more discussion.

(12) [_S TOPIC [_S NEG FOCUS (FOCUS) OBL V {SUBJ, OBJ, OBJ2, COMP}]]

The schema in (12) indicates that if an overt topic is present it appears in initial position, followed by a comment which is a full clause (S). Within the clause proper, a negative element, if present, will be leftmost, followed by slots for focused elements, such as contrastive focus or the answer to a question-word question. To the immediate left of the verb is the unmarked position for arguments bearing the syntactic relation of oblique. Other syntactic types of arguments, such as subject, object, second object and complement clauses (COMP), appear to the right of the verb unless they are in topic or focus position. In contrast to the generalizations that can be made about relative order of elements to the left of the verb, it is difficult to predict the relative order of the righthand elements when more than one argument follows the verb, as will be seen in the word order discussion below. The template in (12) indicates only that any number of constituents may occur in post-verbal position, and that they may be associated with the grammatical functions listed in the curly brackets.

Note that the structure of (12) is largely flat, except for the topic position, which is outside the clause proper. Evidence that the topic position is higher in the structure than the remaining portion of the utterance comes from coordination, placement of adverbial clauses, and placement of second position enclitics (Dahlstrom 1993). For example, in (13) a second position enclitic appears after the first phonological word in the complex topic NP, and other second position enclitics appear after the first phonological word in the clause following the topic. The enclitics are underlined in (13).

(13) [[_{TOP} îniyêka=kêhi kîh-kočawi-čiki wîh=čâkih-âwâči
 those.ABSENT=moreover IC.PERF-try-3P/PART/3P FUT=kill.all-3P>3'/AOR
 apenôh-ahi],
 child-OBV.PL

[_S waninawe=meko=pî=ni êh=inoh~inotê-wâči.]]
 all.directions=EMPH=HRSY=then AOR=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.’ (K-W 250)

Analyzing the material following the topic as a clause provides an explanation for the appearance of second-position enclitics attached to *waninawe* ‘all directions’.

Comparable evidence cannot be found to justify placing the negative element of the template or focus in a similarly asymmetric position, higher than what follows. For example, a single negative word cannot be used to negate two conjoined clauses, nor can a single question word be used to question two conjoined clauses

(14) * âkwi [[nîmi-čini] nâhkači [nakamo-čini]]
 not dance-3/NEG also sing-3/NEG
 (‘He didn’t dance and sing’)

(15) * kêswi=čâhi [[înahi awi-waki] ôni [nîmi-waki]]?
 how.many=so there be.{somewhere}-3P/IND and dance-3P/IND

(‘How many people were there and danced?’)

If the material following the negative *âkwi* ‘not’ in (14) or the question word *kêswi* ‘how many?’ in (15) were a constituent, it should be able to be conjoined. (14) and (15) demonstrate that those strings are not constituents.

It should also be noted that the template in (12) contains no constituent corresponding to a VP in which a verb and its object form a constituent, excluding the subject. There are a number of justifications for positing such a template for Meskwaki. First of all, there is no positive evidence for a VP constituent. In English, for example, the existence of a VP constituent is shown by a number of tests: two VPs may be conjoined to form a single VP constituent; the verb and its object may be moved together to the front of the sentence; a VP may be deleted, or replaced by the pro-form *do so*. However, none of these phenomena is found in Meskwaki: there is no anaphor comparable to English *do so* which stands for a verb plus object; nor does a verb plus object function as a constituent in any other construction.

Furthermore, it must be emphasized that any putative verb-object collocation in Meskwaki can be interpreted as a full clause with a pronominal subject. For example, suppose we wanted to test whether the Meskwaki equivalent of the English VP ‘see a bear’ is a VP constituent. Meskwaki has no infinitive form of the verb – no bare form of the stem which lacks subject agreement. We must therefore choose one of the inflected forms to use for constituency tests, such as *wâpamêwa mahkwani*, with third person animate proximate singular subject agreement, as well as third person animate obviative object agreement, since the verb is transitive. But in the absence of an external subject the subject agreement is interpreted pronominally. That is, *wâpamêwa mahkwani* in isolation will always be interpreted as a clause ‘he or she (proximate) sees a bear (obviative)’, and can never be forced to have a reading as only a VP ‘see a bear’. As a consequence, the fact that the collocation *wâpamêwa mahkwani* behaves as a constituent reveals only that the full clause is a constituent, a trivial result.

The fact that the tests in favor of a VP constituent in English do not work in Meskwaki does not, in itself, argue against there being a VP node in Meskwaki; it simply does not provide evidence one way or the other. However, clear evidence against a VP may be found in examining weak crossover constructions in Meskwaki. The weak crossover constructions show that subject and object NPs stand in a symmetrical relationship to the verb, rather than following the English pattern in which the verb and object form a constituent which is sister to the subject. In other words, both (16) and (17) are grammatical in Meskwaki, in contrast to the ungrammaticality of the English gloss of (17) with the pronoun *his* interpreted as bound by *anyone*.

(16) *âkwi owiyêh-a kakâčim-âčini ôhkom-ani*
 not anyone-SG tease-3>3'/NEG 3.mother-in-law-OBV
 ‘No one_i teases his_i mother-in-law.’

(17) *âkwi owiyêh-a kakâčim-ekočini ôhkom-ani*
 not anyone-SG tease-3'>3/NEG 3.mother-in-law-OBV
 As if: ‘His_i mother-in-law doesn’t tease anyone_i.’
 [but meaning ‘No one_i is teased by his_i mother-in-law.’]

5. POSSESSOR AND POSSESSED

The order of possessor and possessed is also free. The possessor more often precedes, however, and this order is highly favored if the noun phrase is discontinuous. (28) illustrates a possessor preceding the possessed noun and (29) illustrates the opposite order:

(28) *neniw-a* *o-kwis-ahi* ‘a man’s sons’ (K-Kin 4)
 man-SG 3-son-OBV.PL

(29) *ôs-ani* *neniw-a* “the man’s father” (K-FC 82; tr. HP)
 3.father-OBV man-SG

(30) and (31) exhibit discontinuous possessor-possessed constructions: in (30) the possessor is clause-initial while the possessed noun *okyêni* ‘his mother’ follows the verb. (31) is an example of the rare ordering of the possessed head noun preceding the verb and the possessor following.

(30) *îna* *kwîyesêh-a* *êh=pemi–nowî-niči* *o-kyêni*
 that.ANIM boy-SG AOR=along–exit-3’/AOR 3-mother.OBV
 “the boy’s mother went out” (K-FC 224; tr. HP)

(31) *înoki=čâhi* *kîna=mekoho* *o-nôkênaw-ani* *ke-kîwâčihtaw-âwa*
 now=so you=EMPH 3-soul-OBV 2-make.O2.lonely.for-(2)>3/IND
 ke-tânes-a.
 2-daughter-SG
 “you have made your daughter’s soul lonely by doing that” (K-FC 40; tr. HP)

6. EQUATIONAL SENTENCES

In equational sentences, both possible word orders are found for the two terms of the equation, Given and New. Given precedes New in (32) and New precedes Given in (33). A New term that is indefinite tends to precede the Given term (as in (33)), and Thomason 2003 points out that preverbal position is favored for certain other indefinites, but this preference is not completely consistent.

(32) *manaha*⁷ *ne-tôtêm-enân-a* ‘this is our (excl.) brother’ (K-FC 113)
 this.ANIM 1-sibling-1P-SG

(33) *mesâpêw-aki* *mâhaki.* ‘These are giants.’
 giant-PL these.ANIM (=‘This is a story about giants.’) (C-G 1)

FIXED WORD ORDER IN SPECIAL CASES

In certain contexts Meskwaki exhibits fixed word order. For example, if the possessor is itself possessed the possessor always precedes its possessed noun. (34) is an example of this order:

⁷ *manaha* is the pre-pausal form of ‘this (anim.)’.

- (34) o-mešôh-ani o-tôtêm-ani “his grandpa’s brother”
 3-grandfather-OBV 3-sibling-OBV (K-FC 332; tr. HP)

If a demonstrative and its associated head noun are discontinuous, the demonstrative always occurs earlier in the sentence than its noun. (35) illustrates this pattern with a discontinuous subject NP and (36) provides an examples with an object NP:

- (35) mâhaki menwihčikê-waki wâkošêh-aki
 these.ANIM do.well-3P/IND fox-PL
 “These Foxes have done very good” (K-FC 588; tr. HP)

- (36) mani manetôw-a⁸ anawit-amwa ôtêwen-i.
 this.INAN monster-SG sneak.up.on-3>0/IND town-INAN.SG
 ‘A monster is sneaking up on this town.’ (K-SGG 174)

7. CLAUSES WITH OBVIATIVE SUBJECT AND OBVIATIVE OBJECT

In most Meskwaki clauses subject and object are unambiguously distinguished from each other by morphology. As stated above, nouns are marked for animate or inanimate gender; animate nouns are overtly marked for obviation (proximate or obviative). Verbs are inflected for the gender and obviation status of subjects and primary objects. The system of obviation does not permit both subject and object to be proximate. Thus the only cases in which word order might conceivably have any role in disambiguating which of two nouns is the subject and which the object would be sentences in which the subject and object are both obviative and it is thus clearly of interest to examine such sentences.⁹

⁸ *manetôwa* ‘god, snake, monster’

⁹ Another context in which word order might be predicted to play a role in disambiguating subject and object is that in which both subject and object are inanimate gender. The use of two full inanimate NPs, however, is apparently avoided with ordinary transitive verbs inflected for a first object. (There are also no inanimate possessors in Meskwaki.) In our corpus of several thousand pages of text we found only a single example of a two-place verb with the two arguments expressed by full inanimate NPs; it is given below in (i).

- (i) mâhani=čâhi nakamôn-ani îni nâtawinôn-i
 these.INAN=so song-INAN.PL that.INAN medicine-INAN.SG
 êh=onakamônîmikahki.
 AOR=have.O2.as.song(s).0/AOR
 ‘And these songs are the songs of that medicine.’ (K-Spot 220)
 (lit. ‘And that medicine has these songs as its songs.’)

The verb of (i) belongs to the class exemplified above in (9-10): two-place verbs which require a subject and second object. Here the second object precedes the subject but the meaning is clearly unambiguous. As is common with Meskwaki verbs of possession, the verb is inflected only for subject agreement and the item possessed is a second object. The verb in (i) bears an added suffix *-mikat* (with the final *t*

For this purpose, we used several thousand pages of the Meskwaki texts in the NAA corpus edited by Goddard and Lucy Thomason. Although sentences with an obviative subject and obviative object are not common, 54 examples were found in which the subject and object are overt noun phrases (not merely inflectional) and both are obviative. These were found by searching for the verbal inflections that Meskwaki has for a first or nearer obviative acting on a second or further obviative, or the reverse. (Recall that if first obviative is acting on second obviative the direct inflection, with direct theme sign, is used, and if second obviative is acting on first obviative the inverse inflection, with inverse theme sign, is used.)

Below we report on the distribution of the various word order possibilities in clauses with both the subject and object in obviative status, with examples of each type. Of the 54 total examples, 34 exhibit verbs with direct inflection and the subject preceding the object. Three of these are VSO, 25 are SVO, and 6 are SOV. (37) illustrates VSO order:

- (37) êh=anemi-pîtahôn-âniči mešemôk-ani¹⁰ pešekisiw-ani.
 AOR=go.on-drag.in-3'>3''/AOR old.woman-OBV deer-OBV
 '(He [prox.] watched as) the old lady (obv.) dragged the deer (obv.) off inside.'
 (C-WH 14)

By far the largest group of examples of a nearer obviative subject acting on a further obviative object displays SVO order, presumably due to the nearer obviative subject occupying one of the pre-verbal positions associated with focus, as in (38):

- (38) nenemehkiw-ahi êh=pakam-âniči îmini mači-manetôhêh-ani.
 thunder-obv.pl AOR=hit-3'>3''/AOR that.OBV evil-manitou-OBV
 "The Thunderers [obv.] had struck that evil manitou [obv]."
 (In the presence of the man [prox].) (K-WYB 48; tr. TB)

Six examples in our corpus exhibited SOV order with a nearer obviative subject and a further obviative object. In (39) the two preverbal NPs are presumably in the two pre-verbal focus positions; focus NPs are often found in expressions of surprise (cf. Dahlstrom 1995).

- (39) ayôh=čîh=wîna pašitôhêh-ahi nesêmâw-ani êh=tašîhkaw-âniči.
 here!=he old.man-OBV.PL tobacco-OBV AOR=be.dealing.with-3'>3''/AOR
 'Suddenly here he (prox.) saw some old men (obv.) working on tobacco (obv).'

(37-39) all contain verbs inflected in the direct form with a nearer obviative subject preceding a further obviative object. The opposite order – further obviative object preceding a nearer obviative subject, with a direct verb – is found in ten examples in our corpus. Of those ten, five exhibit VOS order, as in (40) and (41):

becoming *h* before the suffix *-ki*) that attaches to intransitive verb stems that require animate subjects and derives an intransitive stem that requires an inanimate subject.

¹⁰ *mešemôkani* 'old woman (obv.)' (with humorous deformation).

- (40) êh=anemi-nôm-âniči îhini apenôhêh-ani ow-îw-ani.
 AOR=go.on-carry.on.back-3'>3''/AOR that.OBV baby-OBV 3-wife-OBV
 'His wife (obv.) went along with the baby (obv.) on her back.' (K-Fish 127)
- (41) êh=wêpi=čîhi='pi -nasâhkohw-âniči îhini konwâškêh-anî='nini.
 AOR=start.to-==!=HRSY -roast.on.a.stick-3'>3''/AOR that.OBV frog-OBV=that.OBV
 'And to their surprise, they saw him (obv.) set about roasting that frog (obv.) on a stick.'
 (JP-Apay 65)

In (41) the second *îhini* 'that (obv.)', cliticized to *konwâškêhani* 'frog (obv.)' is the subject. Again, the enclitic =*čîhi* is more accurately translated as 'it was suddenly observed', conveyed in the translation by "... to their surprise, they saw...".

We have found four examples of direct verbs with a further obviative object preceding the verb and a nearer obviative subject following, as in (42):

- (42) čêwinâh=meko mešihkêhêh-ahi êh=nôšân-âniči
 at.the.same.time=EMPH baby.snapping.turtle-OBV.PL AOR=give.birth.to-3'>3''/AOR
 ow-îw-ahi.
 3-wife-OBV.PL
 'At exactly the same time his wives (obv.) gave birth to baby snapping turtles (obv.)'
 (K-MMD 27)

A single example in our corpus exhibits OSV order with a further obviative object preceding a nearer obviative subject, both in pre-verbal position:

- (43) neniw-a ow-îw-ani ahpenêči kotak-ani neniw-ani
 man-SG 3-wife-OBV always another-OBV man-OBV
 mana~man-ânite,¹¹ . . .
 REDUP~copulate.with-3'>3''/SUBJ
 'If another man (obv.) is always screwing a man (prox.)'s wife (obv.), ...' (K-Kin 63)

We turn now to inverse verb forms with a further obviative subject acting on a nearer obviative object. In this set, there are no examples in which the further obviative subject precedes the nearer obviative object; there are ten examples in which the nearer obviative object precedes the further obviative subject. There is one instance of VOS order, given below in (44):

- (44) nâhkači êh=myâhkeškâkoniči¹² ihkwêw-ahi apenôh-ani, ...
 also AOR=injure.3'>3''/AOR woman-OBV.PL child-OBV
 'Also, when women (obv.) are injured by (giving birth to) a child (obv.), ...'
 "And when the women are being made ill by the birth of a child, ..." (tr. IP)
 (K-Auto 279)

¹¹ The subject of *man-* 'copulate with' must be male.

¹² The gloss of *myâhkeškaw-* is more specifically 'injure by foot or body'.

There are five examples of OVS order in which the nearer obviative object appears in pre-verbal position and the further obviative subject follows the verb. (45) and (46) exemplify this pattern.

(45) kahôni='pi ow-îhkân-wâw-ani êh=mawinan-ekoniči nenosôni...
 and.then=HRYSY 3-friend-3P-OBV AOR=attack-3''>3'/AOR buffalo.OBV
 'And then one of their friends (obv.) was attacked by a buffalo (obv.), ...' (SP-SH 20)

(46) nâhka nekoti neniw-a, âkwî oškinawêh-a,
 also one man-SG not young.man-SG
 o-wîw-ani êh=mešen-ekoniči ašâh-ahi.
 3-wife-OBV AOR=capture-3''>3'/AOR Sioux-OBV.PL
 'And there was a certain man, no longer young,
 whose wife (obv.) was captured by the Siouxs (obv.)' (K-SD 1)

Four examples in our corpus exhibit OSV order with the nearer obviative preceding the further obviative, as in (47):

(47) o-mesôtân-ahi=kêhi='pi ašâh-ahi nes-ekoniwahi.
 3-parent-OBV.PL=moreover=HRYSY Sioux-OBV.PL kill-3''>3'/IND
 'The thing was, they say his parents (obv.) had been killed by the Siouxs (obv.)'
 (K-MFWB 1)

8. DISCUSSION

The data in (37-47) show that, in Meskwaki, syntactic role (as subject or object) does not determine word order. The first obviative usually precedes the second obviative (44 out of 54 times), regardless of syntactic role. It is, of course, entirely to be expected that the obviative of higher interest would precede the obviative of lesser interest. This is always the case if the verb is inverse (ten examples like 44-47). The rarity (absence in this sample) of the lower-ranked noun (the second obviative) coming first if the verb is inverse is also expected. Selecting inverse inflection means selecting the object as of current interest, and it would clash with this to select the lower ranked subject for primary focus.

The 10 sentences that have second obviative before the first obviative (40-43) but, despite this, a direct verb—the default inflection—all also have no possibility of ambiguity for semantic reasons. Despite the clash with the word order, the meaning is unambiguous.

It might be claimed that in (38) the syntactic roles are made clear by the order subject-object, but the sentence simply has the default interpretation that the first obviative is the subject of a direct verb. Where the roles might be reversed, as here, only this order is possible. Note that (45), with the order instead object-subject, has the default interpretation that the first obviative is the object of an inverse verb.

These patterns must be described by referring to obviation and meaning. Obviation is fundamentally discourse-generated and cannot be accounted for by a theory that examines nothing above or beyond the syntax of sentences.

9. CONCLUSION

Meskwaki evidence supports an analytical model in which there is an abstract mapping of syntactic roles and of the relations between words and grammatical elements, but Meskwaki appears to refute the claim that syntactic roles can be read off sentence structure as a universal property of language. The Meskwaki facts can be accommodated by a model in which syntactic roles are base-generated, and syntactic structures are generated in surface structure and labeled in situ, without movement, by the abstract map of relations. After all, if there is no basic word order, the notion of movement for purely syntactic reasons becomes otiose.

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