

The funny medial construction

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Many Algonquian verbs contain morphology with nominal reference. In traditional Algonquian terminology, morphemes in verb construction with nominal reference are called MEDIALS based on where they typically appear in verb stem structure. Medials reference nominal concepts either via abstract classificatory properties as in (1a) or by direct reference as in (1b).

- (1) (a) *pasâpehkesamwa* ‘s/he heats it [metal]’ Meskwaki
pas- âpehk- es- am -wa
warm stone act.w/heat- INAN 3SG
MEDIAL
- (b) *kaxkũnaxkéheew* ‘s/he breaks h/ arm’ Munsee
kaxk- naxkee- h- ee -w
broken arm cause 3.AN 3SG
MEDIAL

Medials are not limited to appearing in the middle of a verb stem. They can also appear as the last lexical morpheme in an intransitive stem as shown in (2).

- (2) (a) *mehkuakamiw* ‘it is red liquid’ Menominee
mehkw- aakame- -w
red water 3SG
MEDIAL
- (b) *maskosite* ‘h/ feet smell’ Passamoquoddy
maski- site- -w
smelly foot 3SG
MEDIAL

In this paper, we will focus on a particular class of medials that are limited to appearing as the last lexical member of a verb stem as shown in (3). We will call them FUNNY MEDIALS.

- (3) *naajimijime* ‘s/he goes to get food’ SW Ojibwe
naad- miijime- -w
fetch- food 3SG
MEDIAL

Funny medials share morphology with garden variety medials referring to body parts, in that they appear to be an ordinary noun stem—or minor variant thereof—plus a long *e* (as can be seen in the examples above). Funny medials, however, also have several properties apart from their limitation to stem final position which confirm the existence of a distinct funny medial construction (*pace* Denny 1978, Goddard, 1990). Funny medials are an open class, whereas ordinary medials are a closed class. Funny medials have transitive verb stems as their initials, and funny medial constructions refer to common activities meeting Mithun’s (1984) characterization: “Some ... activity is recognized sufficiently often to be considered name-worthy in its own right, ...” (pg. 848).

This paper will examine the funny medial construction in detail, focusing primarily on Cree and Ojibwe where the construction is most productive. However, it will be shown that examples of the funny medial construction can be found across the family and that the construction goes back to Proto-Algonquian. We will conclude with a discussion of incorporation.

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