

Reflexes of Proto-Algonquian *t in Blackfoot

Natalie Weber
Yale University
natalie.weber@yale.edu

Blackfoot is frequently labelled “divergent” (e.g., Goddard 2018). Despite several studies of Blackfoot historical phonology (Proulx 1989; Berman 2006), there are still many questions about the language’s history. This paper focuses on Proto-Algonquian (PA) roots that begin in PA *t and their reflexes in Blackfoot (B). The main impetus is to investigate a claim in Berman (2006) that word-initial PA *t becomes Blackfoot *k* —a rather unusual sound change.

Using comparative evidence, I argue that PA *t regularly becomes Blackfoot *s* in initial position, merging with the reflexes of the other coronal obstruents (Berman 2006). Interestingly, there is some evidence for a minor PA *t > B *k* rule, though in a more narrow environment than suggested in Berman (2006). There are also some other minor rules: some instances of initial *t pre-assibilate to *st* or geminate *stt*, and other cases geminate with the following consonant after the loss of an intervening short PA *e (Thomson 1978; Berman 2006, 2007).

The evidence for these sound changes comes from 13 cognate sets of Proto-Algonquian roots beginning in *t. I include reflexes in Blackfoot as well as eight other Algonquian languages, chosen to represent all of the major genetic subgroups and areal groups within the Algonquian family. I give full words or stems in the cognate sets to compare roots in context. However, most reconstructions are only of a root or stem (not a full word), because Blackfoot frequently recombines PA initials and finals in novel ways. Because the datasets focus on initial *t, the correspondences for other sounds are not as well represented. Still, there is enough data to discuss a few additional sound changes, as well as hypotheses that could be confirmed with further data. I summarize the relevant correspondences and explain the historical changes and relative chronology.

References

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