Oblique argument licensing in Algonquian: head marking vs. dependent marking

Yadong Xu

University of Manitoba

Overview. This paper presents a varying degree of robustness of the non-core argument licensing in Algonquian. In contrast to core arguments (i.e., the subject and the object), oblique arguments usually are coded in a special way, such as by an adposition or a semantic case. In this paper, I focus on two types of strategies that Algonquian languages use for indicating oblique arguments: the type that NPs bear a locative case (PA *-enki*, case type hereafter) and the type that NPs are selected by a small set of preverbs known as RELATIVE ROOTS (Rhodes 1990, 2010; RR type hereafter). After surveying three languages, the availability of oblique arguments indexed by agreement varies. In particular, I show that the RR type reveals an interesting cline: agreement for the oblique argument is unavailable in Ojibwe but is selectively available in Unami Delaware (definite obliques only), and robustly available in Maliseet-Passamaquoddy.

Data. To begin with Ojibwe, the case type oblique is signaled by the locative suffix *-ing* in (1a); the RR type oblique refers to an antecedent, *mdaaswi-shi-naanan* 'fifteen' as in (1b), anaphoric to the RR, *dso-* 'so many'. Note both verbs in (1) use the AI inflection agreeing with the third person animate subject. No agreement indexes the oblique arguments.

(1) a. mhiing-**ing**   zhinaazi-w-ag   gonad   nimookajiiny-ig
        wolf-**LOC**   look.so-3-AN.PL   these.AN.PL   dog-AN.PL
        Those dogs look like **wolves**. (Valentine 2001:664)
    b. mdaaswi-shi-naanan   **dso**-bboon'-gizi-Ø
        fifteen   so.many-winter-be-3.SG
        'He's **fifteen** yeas old.' (Valentine 2001:160)

However, languages like Maliseet-Passamaquoddy and Unami Delaware display an interesting split. The case type remains unavailable for agreement. The Unami example in (2a) illustrates both types can co-occur but (2a) provides further evidence that, as long as the NP is case marked, it is not indexed by agreement. For the RR type, the NP becomes available for agreement, characterized by the appearance of the N-FORMATIVE (Goddard 2007) and PERIPHERAL AGREEMENT (Goddard 1979). In (2b), the emphatic locative oblique is indexed by the n-formative and the null peripheral suffix. Note that only the definite obliques can be indexed while indefinites cannot (cf. Goddard 2020). Maliseet-Passamaquoddy patterns like Unami with no restrictions on argument's definiteness.

(2) a. mux·ó·link lí-pó·s·o·p
        mux·ó·l-**ink**   **əli**-po·si·-w-əp-Ø
        boat-**LOC**   **to**-embark-3-PRET-AN.SG
        'He went aboard **a boat**.' (Goddard 2021:45)
    b. ná=ni ktə́nta-pənó·ləne·n
        ná=ni   kt-**ənta**-pənaw-əl-**ən**-e·n-**Ø**
        FOC=that   2-**somewhere**-look.at-2.OBJ-**N**-1p-**IN.SG**
        '**That's where** we (incl.) watched you.' (Goddard 2021:73)

Implications. I argue that these two types of obliques represent the two morphological markings used for indicating grammatical relations (Nichols 1986) -- the case type reflects the dependent marking while the RR type reflects the head marking. The variation shown in three languages suggest that distinct morphological markings have a profound consequence on argument licensing.

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Appendix

Table 1. Robustness of oblique arguments for agreement

	Ojibwe	**Unami**	**MP**
Case type	✗	✗	✗
RR type	✓	✓(*def)	✓