

Feature inheritance and contextual allomorphy in Ojibwe theme-signs

Brandon J. Fry, University of Ottawa

Theoretical work on independent and conjunct clause types in Algonquian has concentrated on differences at the clausal level. Here, we concentrate on a difference between these types concerning an agreement morpheme. In particular, the Vocabulary Insertion (VI) rules for v , which spells out this morpheme, may make reference to the featural content of C, depending on the clause type, but C is not local enough to v to condition its allomorphy. We argue that Infl, between T and v , inherits features from C and that since Infl is local to v , it can trigger v 's allomorphy.

Previous work on different clause types in Algonquian has focussed on differences at the clausal level. Lochbihler and Mathieu (2016) and Déchaine et al. (2017) conclude that the differences stem from different types of C heading each clause type. Another difference between the independent and the conjunct concerns differences in the spell-out of an agreement morpheme in transitive verbs, namely the theme-sign (TS). This morpheme indicates the relation between the person features of the subject and the object. McGinnis (1999) describes an asymmetry between independent and conjunct TS: conjunct TS are simply object agreement markers, whereas independent TS mark features of both the subject and the object. Clearly, then, the clause-type conditions allomorphy of TS. If v spells out the TS (Béjar and Rezac, 2009; Lochbihler, 2012, etc.), this means that C must condition the allomorphy of v . However, given locality conditions on contextual allomorphy (e.g., Embick, 2010; Ostrove, 2016), C is not local enough to v to trigger its allomorphy. It is this puzzle the current paper seeks to solve. Our solution is to relate C and v indirectly, by feature inheritance (FI) from C to a head that is local to v .

Our starting point is the asymmetry noted by McGinnis. This situation indicates that in the conjunct, there is one $[u\phi]$, borne by v and valued by the object; while in the independent, there are two $[u\phi]$, one borne by v and valued by the object, the other borne by a higher head and valued by the subject. We propose that the locus of this second probe is Infl, located between T and v . Lochbihler and Mathieu (2016) argue that in Ojibwe, independent C bears $u\phi$ whereas conjunct C bears discourse features. These features are inherited by T and trigger person prefixes in the independent and initial change (qua *wh*-agreement) in the conjunct. Therefore, the locus of the second probe proposed here cannot be T, yet it must be local enough to v to trigger its allomorphy. We conclude that the locus is Infl.

Importantly, Infl does not inherently bear $[u\phi]$ but inherits them from independent C in the course of the derivation. Following Branigan (2016), FI can take place between multiple heads. This process first takes place between C and T, as argued by Lochbihler and Mathieu (2016), then between C and Infl. The combination of valued $[u\phi]$ on Infl and on v spells out the independent theme-sign. On the other hand, since conjunct C has no $[u\phi]$, only the $[u\phi]$ on v spell out the conjunct theme-sign. This accounts for the asymmetry between the clause types and relates this asymmetry to the content of C.

This proposal is compatible with a number of specific models of theme-sign insertion, including Oxford 2014, and we deliberately remain agnostic regarding this issue. Importantly, however, those models where v agrees with both the subject and the object (e.g., Béjar and Rezac, 2009; Lochbihler, 2012) cannot be maintained, since there is no relation between v and a higher head in these models, and consequently no indirect relation between v and C.