

Distinguishing VoiceP subjects and ν P subjects in Algonquian

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Context. Much recent work has drawn a distinction between the verbalizing head ν and the agent-introducing head Voice (e.g. Pykkänen 2002; Harley 2013; Legate 2014). This distinction raises a question: in which position does the subject of an unergative originate? If we follow Hale & Keyser (1993) in regarding unergatives as concealed transitives, we would expect unergative subjects to originate in the specifier of Voice, like transitive subjects. Massam (2009), however, has argued that this is not the case in Niuean: VoiceP introduces transitive subjects only, while unergative subjects originate in ν P (see also Tollan 2015).

Proposal. We argue that Algonquian data strongly supports a model in which unergative subjects originate in ν P rather than VoiceP. We also show how the distinction between VoiceP subjects and ν P subjects enables an account of two apparent morphology-syntax mismatches.

1. The inflectional realization of Voice. The key evidence regarding the status of unergative subjects comes from an inflectional suffix known as the THEME SIGN. This suffix occurs in full-fledged transitive forms and is the locus of passive marking, object agreement, and inverse marking. The Plains Cree transitive form in (1a), for example, contains the theme sign *-am* (Wolfart 1973), which marks the form as active and agrees with the inanimate object. The theme sign is completely absent in unaccusative forms such as (1b). Given its suite of properties, we analyze the theme sign as the Voice head, which introduces the agent of a transitive verb and agrees with the object (Bruening 2005; Oxford 2014; cf. Legate 2014). The absence of a theme sign in unaccusatives follows from the lack of a VoiceP layer.

(1) a. Transitive	b. Unaccusative
<i>miyon -am -w</i>	<i>miyosi (*-am) -w</i>
hold.well-IN.OBJ-3	be.good(-IN.OBJ)-3
‘She holds it well.’	‘She is good.’

2. Unergatives lack Voice. The examples in (2), from the authors’ fieldwork on Oji-Cree, show that unergative forms consistently lack a theme sign—even when a cognate object is present, as in (2b). Since the theme sign realizes Voice, we take its consistent absence from unergatives to indicate that a VoiceP layer is absent *even when the*

(2) a. <i>niimi (*-am) -w</i>	b. <i>niimi (*-am) -w niimiwin-ini</i>
dance(-IN.OBJ)-3	dance(-IN.OBJ)-3 dance.NOM-OBV
‘She’s dancing.’	‘She’s dancing a dance.’

structure is overtly transitive. The subject of an unergative must therefore be introduced in some projection other than VoiceP. Following Massam (2009), we propose that unergative Doer arguments are introduced by ν rather than Voice, which introduces transitive Agent arguments only.

3. Accounting for mismatched verb classes. The distinction between ν P subjects (Doers) and VoiceP subjects (Agents) allows us to account for two marginal verb classes that display a mismatch between morphology and syntax (Bloomfield 1946, 1962):

- “Pseudo-transitive” verbs are syntactically transitive (like (1a)) but lack a theme sign. We propose that such verbs lack a VoiceP despite being transitive; they consequently have a ν P Doer subject rather than a VoiceP Agent subject (cf. Dahlstrom 2013).
- “Pseudo-intransitive” verbs are syntactically intransitive (like (2a)) but nevertheless have a theme sign. We propose that in such intransitives, the subject is an Agent rather than a Doer and is thus introduced in VoiceP rather than ν P, hence the spellout of a theme sign.

Conclusion. Unlike full-fledged transitives, Algonquian unergatives lack a VoiceP layer, with the external argument instead introduced in ν P. This typology of thematic subject positions sheds light on the otherwise puzzling existence of “pseudo-transitive” and “pseudo-intransitive” verbs.

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