

Kanien'kéha noun incorporation: A dichotomous reanalysis

Kanien'kéha is an Iroquoian language spoken by 700 people in eight communities across Ontario, Québec, and New York (DeCaire forthcoming). It is well-known for its polysynthetic morphosyntax, which features frequent noun incorporation (NI). Descriptively, NI involves the co-occurrence within the same phonological word of both a nominal and a verbal element.

NI has been studied extensively, both cross-linguistically and in Kanien'kéha specifically. The core debate focuses on whether NI is *syntactic* or *lexical*. The syntactic approach views NI as derived during computation, through a movement operation that raises the verb-external noun into the verbal complex (Baker 1988, 1996, 2009; Sadock 1980, 1986). The lexical approach views NI as the result of morphological compounding, which creates new verbal stems inside the lexicon (Mithun 1984, 1986, 2009; DiSciullo and Williams 1987; Rosen 1989). Neither side of the debate has fully engaged with the other side's points, even though this is ultimately an empirical issue.

I assume that NI is necessarily "syntactic", in the basic sense that the nominal and verbal elements *must merge on some level*; although not obligatorily via Move. But on which level does this composition occur? I am currently working with an L1 speaker to elicit the relevant data, by testing several criteria that distinguish between the syntactic vs the lexical approach (in that order): compositional vs idiomatic meaning; presence vs absence of a periphrastic variant; high vs low productivity; referential vs non-referential incorporated noun (IN); theme vs unpredictable θ -role of the IN; and altered (the IN saturates one argument position) vs unaltered argument structure.

I claim, as shown by my initial results, that these two views are in fact compatible to some extent, as two types of NI are attested in Kanien'kéha: an *active* type, in which fully compositional NI forms are derivationally related to truth-conditionally (but not information-structurally) equivalent periphrastic variants, as seen in (1); and an *inactive* type, in which NI forms are heavily lexicalized and idiomatic, lacking a compositional meaning and a non-NI variant, as seen in (2).

1	o-nenhst-e N-corn-NSF 'I bought corn (and not potatoes).'	wa'-k-hninon-'. FAC-1SG.A-buy-PUNC	wa'-k-nenhst-a-hninon-'. FAC-1SG.A-corn-JR-buy-PUNC 'I bought corn (in general).'
2	te-wak-'nikonhr-har-e. DUP-1SG.P-mind-hang.up-STAT 'I am worried.' ('My mind is hung up.')	*o-'nikonhr-a N-mind-NSF Intended: 'I am worried.' ('My mind is hung up.')	te-wak-har-e DUP-1SG.P-hang.up-STAT

Presumably, active forms can diachronically lexicalize into inactive ones (Mithun 1984).

Baker (1996:319) recognizes that some forms can be lexical, but maintains that NI is primarily derived by head-movement into the V. However, additional evidence suggests that, in the active type, NI is the obligatory default used for predicate focus, while INs are *excorporated* to receive object focus (Rooth 1992; DeCaire et al. 2017). This suggests instead that INs are base-generated inside V (Van Geenhoven 1998, 2002). There is also no need to recognize that inactive NI forms are given as atomic stems by the lexicon; rather, the roots corresponding to the nominal and verbal elements are never categorized as such individually, and directly merge into a whole predicate, which is then categorized as V (Harley 2014). Following Arad (2003) and Embick and Marantz (2008) in assuming that categorizing heads are phase heads, the syntactic and semantic contrasts between the two types then follow from the fact that, in active forms, Vs and INs are separately categorized as such before merging, but only together as whole V predicates in inactive ones. Finally, I argue contra Baker (1996) that there is no basis for viewing either type as primary.

Irrespective of whether this dichotomous analysis can be extended cross-linguistically, a broader implication of this work is that NI may essentially be only a descriptive label, covering not a unified natural class of phenomena, but rather a continuum of distinct underlying processes.

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