A discourse-based analysis of obviation in Moose Cree: factors determining the ranking of entities

J. Terraza and A. Machado Estevam

Algonquian languages exhibit a great number of morphological mechanisms which allow speakers to maximize animate referents and to minimize inanimate ones: only animates are indexed on ditransitive verbs, inanimate agents are banned, and there are some constructions that simply aim at minimizing inanimates, such as impersonal verbs, classifiers, etc. (Drapeau, 2012; Anderson 1997; Junker, 2011).

Obviation, a typical mechanism of this language family, which allows the speaker to distinguish between multiple third persons, is another way of maximizing animate referents, inasmuch as obviation is always triggered by an animate referent (called *proximate*). When two referents differing in animacy co-occur (either in the same sentence, portion of discourse or speech act), the animate is always proximate and the inanimate, obviative (Wolfart, 1973; Dahlstrom, 1991; Valentine, 2001; Thomason, 2003; Drapeau, 2014). When two animate referents co-occur, there are numerous instances in which the choice of proximate or obviative appears to rest on discourse factors, such as topicality, point of view, previously introduced participants (Bloomfield, 1962). However, there are some tendencies that narrow the latitude of choice of the storyteller (Hasler, 2002): the kind of narrative (autobiographies use less obviative forms, Thomason, 1995), the type of verbs (verbs of perception generally have proximate subjects, Dahlstrom, 1991), etc.

In this talk, we will concentrate on three parameters that roughly correspond to the ones proposed by Yamamoto (1999), which seem to limit the choice of the speaker and interact with the topicality of the proximal participant:

- The general animacy scale: in some Algonquian languages there is a semantic constraint demonstrated by Goddard (1984) which is based on a 'quasi-universal animacy hierarchy'. This hierarchy requires that an animate noun designating a non-human never be higher in rank than an animate human noun.
- The semantic role: Hasler (2002) noticed a correlation between proximates and agentive participants where active third persons are proximate and less active third persons, obviative.
- The degree of accessibility: in Algonquian languages, the use of a proximate NP generally signals a new topic; however, Goddard (1990) has observed in Fox that a highly accessible referent need not be expressed as a NP when introduced as a new proximate.

Our analysis will be based on a Moose Cree (Cree dialect from the West Coast of James Bay) narrative told by a fluent speaker from Moose Factory, Ontario, Canada. It narrates a historical encounter between Iroquois (Natowak) and Cree people (Illiluwak) at the time when Iroquois would attack Cree people to scalp them.

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