

Rhythm and Stress in Winisk River Oji-Cree

Matthew Windsor

SIL Americas

The prosody of northern varieties of Ojibwe has yet to be fully described (see, for example, Valentine's 1996 overview of phonological variation in Ojibwe). This presentation lays out an analysis of word rhythm in Winisk River Oji-Cree, a northern variety of Ojibwe which differs significantly from southern dialects in underlying structure. The analysis is based on close work with fluent speakers and analysis of natural speech, and has been verified by acoustic analysis.

The rhythmic innovations of Oji-Cree lie in the development of left-headed (trochaic) rather than right-headed (iambic) feet, and the alignment of rhythmic structure with the beginning of the grammatical word stem, disregarding prefixes. Primary stress typically falls on the prominent syllable of the last complete foot. In other respects, the system retains the patterns characteristic of Ojibwe: it is quantity-sensitive, treats the final syllable as "extrametrical," and organizes syllables into feet from left to right (Kaye 1973, as summarized in Valentine 2001). A list of rules in the spirit of Hayes's *Metrical Stress Theory* (1995) is sufficient to capture the basic pattern (1).

- (1) 1. the final syllable of a phonological word is always rhythmically strong (is "extrametrical")
2. all syllables containing a long vowel are rhythmically strong
3. syllables are organized into trochaic feet starting from the beginning of the stem

The most recognizable effect of this prosodic restructuring is to produce triplet-like rhythms in strings of light syllables which would otherwise cause a rhythmic clash. In comparison to southern varieties of Ojibwe, it also serves a functional purpose in maintaining the initial rhythm of lexical stems, improving their ability to be recognized. This research documents an area of linguistic innovation within the Ojibwe language complex and is part of a larger community-based initiative by Mishamikoweesh corp. to document and revitalize local knowledge for future generations.

References

- Hayes, Bruce. 1995. *Metrical stress theory: Principles and case studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kaye, Jonathan. 1973. Odawa stress and related phenomena. In Piggott and Kaye (eds), *Odawa Language Project, second report*, pp. 42-50. Toronto: University of Toronto Linguistic Series.
- Valentine, Rand. 1996. Phonological parameters of Ojibwe dialect variation. In David H Pentland,(Ed) *Papers of the 27th Algonquian Conference*, University of Manitoba.
- Valentine, Rand. 2001. *Nishnaabemwin reference grammar*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.