

The Assumption of a Further Obviative

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss a grammatical category found in descriptions of a number of Algonquian languages and dubbed 'further-obviative' or 'second-obviative'. While early accounts of this category posited a further-obviative nominal affix (Hockett 1939; Bloomfield 1946), this morpheme has also been analyzed as an obviative-possessor morpheme (Bloomfield 1946, Wolfart 1973, Muehlbauer 2012), and recently, claims for further-obviative nominal morphology seem to have been largely abandoned. Yet further-obviatives continue to be posited for some Algonquian languages, notably, Meskwakie (Goddard & Dahlstrom 2018), on the basis of verbal agreement morphology. The argument may be reconstructed as follows: 'Algonquian languages exhibit direction-marking. Direction-marking presupposes transitive clauses with ranked arguments. In some transitive clauses, both arguments are obviatives and hence appear not to be ranked. So, either these clauses do not exhibit direction-marking or, the arguments are ranked after all. These clauses do exhibit direction-marking: they may be either direct or inverse. Therefore, despite appearances, the obviative arguments *must* be ranked: the object in a double-obviative direct clause, and the subject in a double-obviative inverse clause, must be further-obviatives.'

Inescapable as this conclusion may seem, I'll argue that this argument does not provide evidence for the existence of further-obviatives. For while direction-marking requires ranked arguments, it does not require ranking specifically in terms of obviation status. This is an additional assumption. The difficulty is that to defend this latter assumption, given the existence of double-obviative constructions, one must assume the existence of further-obviatives. That is, the argument is circular: the assumption of further-obviatives depends on the assumption that obviation status determines direction marking, but this assumption itself depends on the assumption of further obviatives. The argument reduces to no more than the claim: further-obviatives exist, if further-obviatives exist. Thus, the argument from verbal agreement does not justify the assumption of a further-obviative.

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