

Topicality, overt participants, and the Algonquian Person Hierarchy: A Plains Cree corpus study

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This talk explores the relative frequency of overt actors and goals for Plains Cree verbs in a 150,000-word corpus of Plains Cree. Previous research using a corpus of 72,000 words of Plains Cree has reported on the relative occurrence of overt third person actors and goals, demonstrating that proximate third person actors and goals occur less frequently as overt nominals than obviative third persons. This pattern holds regardless of whether they are actors or goals; that is, direct nonlocal VTAs occur more often with obviative goals than with proximate actors, while inverse nonlocal VTAs occur more often with obviative goals than proximate actors (Schmirler et al., 2017; Schmirler et al., 2018; Schmirler & Arppe, 2019). These findings confirmed on a larger scale the long-described relative topicality of proximate and obviative participants—topicality both within a given discourse, as well as within the Algonquian Person Hierarchy, which has been used to describe the relative topicality of SAPs and non-SAPs with respect to person and direction morphology (e.g. Blain, 1998; Macaulay, 2005; Wolvengrey, 2011).

Now, with an expanded 150,000-word Plains Cree corpus, I explore first, second, and third persons within and beyond VTA clauses, and the relative frequency of overt first and second person participants in contrast to third persons. Some evidence for slightly more frequent overt first person over second person participants in local VTAs has come to light, as well as for consistency in the occurrence of overt nonlocal participants across mixed and nonlocal VTAs.

References

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