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East Cree Dependent Nouns and Disjoint Reference¹

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Algonquian nouns fall in two classes, depending on whether or not they obligatorily take a personal prefix. Building on an observation made by José Mailhot for Montagnais, I show here that the latter ones, called 'dependent nouns', do not randomly appear with a possessed theme sign in East Cree. The possessed theme sign appears on dependent nouns if they denote body-parts in disjoint reference contexts. There are therefore two personal prefixes involved in such cases, one for the original possessor, who is always a third person, and another one, for the 'new' possessor.

Possessed nouns in East Cree, in addition to taking personal prefixes, seem to randomly appear with an *-(i)m* suffix. As noted by (Wolfart 1973) for Plains Cree, the distribution of this possessed theme sign is subject to a great deal of irregularity. In East Cree it seems to be sometimes governed by phonetic rules, or to be totally random, with some (independent) stems taking the possessed theme, and some not. For example the independent stem *siisiip* 'duck' takes *-im-* in all possessive forms with no apparent added meaning (1), while the independent stem *iiniminaan* 'blueberry' does not (2):

- (1) *siisiip* 'a duck'
 duck
 ni-*siisiip-im* 'my duck'
 1-duck-**im**
- (2) *iiniminaan-h* 'blueberries'
 blueberry -PL
 chi-t-*iiniminaan-h* 'your blueberries'
 2-t-blueberry-PL

To further complicate the matter, there is a tendency amongst young speakers to add the morpheme *-(i)m* to all possessed independent nouns (Louise Blacksmith, p.c., the same applies to Fox, Ives Goddard, p.c.), which makes it difficult to study. However, if we focus on a subset of possessed nouns, namely dependent nouns denoting body-parts,²

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² In order to conduct this research a list of the dependent nouns listed in the East Cree lexicon (MacKenzie et al., 1987) was presented to three different speakers. They were asked if the nouns could take the *-im* suffix, if they could take the *mi-* prefix, if they could take the *-imaau* ending, and how they would say 'my own...'/ 'her own...' and

a clear pattern emerges: the *-(i)m* suffix, or possessed theme sign, is used to indicate that the body-part is someone else's instead of one's own, as shown by the contrast in (3a-b).

- (3) a. *u-shkashii-h* 'his nail(s)/claw(s)'
 3-nail/claw(animate)-OBV
 b. *u-shkashii-m-h* 'his nail/claw (but not his own)'
 3-nail/claw-m-OBV

Thus, the *-(i)m* morpheme appears to indicate disjoint reference. José Mailhot already observed for Montagnais. (cited in Clarke 1982) that where a part of the body is treated as a detached entity, the (dependent) noun will take the possessed theme sign. Now, observe the formation of the dependent noun used with — in (4c). The first or second person prefix must occur in a slightly different phonetic form: *nu-* and *chu-* instead of *ni-* and *chi-*, as shown by the ungrammatical (4b).

- (4) a. *ni-shkashii* 'my (own) nail'
 1-nail
 b. **ni-shkashii-m*
 c. *nuushkashiim* 'my nail/ claw (but not my own)'
 ni-u-shkashii-m
 1-3?-nail-m

Is the long *uu* of *nuushkashiim* the result of two pronouns, one indicating the new possessor (*ni-*) and the other one the original (3rd person) possessor (*u-*), as shown by the gloss in (4c)? Or is the *u-* a different morpheme, homophonous to the 3rd person prefix, which would simply turn dependent nouns into independent nouns (as suggested by Ives Goddard, p.c.)? The homophonous morpheme hypothesis is apparently supported by the fact that kinship terms, typically form their unpossessed forms with a *u-* prefix and an *-(i)maau* suffix. Examples are given in (5), (6), and (7). The nouns involved are kinship terms, and always refer to people.

- (5) a. *ni-kaawii* 'my mother'
 1-mother
 b. *u-kaawii-h* 'his/her mother'
 3-mother-OBV
 c. *u-kaawii-maau* 'a mother'
 3-mother-imaau
- (6) a. *ni-mushuum* 'my grandfather'
 1-grandfather
 b. *u-mushuum-h* 'his grand father'
 3-grandfather-OBV
 c. *u-mushuum-imaau* 'a grand father'
 3-grandfather-imaau

'my...but not my own'/ 'her... but not her own'. Not all nouns could enter all patterns, but for pragmatic reasons, like being able to imagine the context of, for example, a criminal collecting upper-lips!

- (7) a. n-iichishaan 'my sibling'
1-sibling
- b. w-iichishaan-h 'his sibling'
3-sibling-OBV
- c. w-iichishaan-imaau 'a sibling'
3-sibling-imaau

One could argue that the *u-* or *w-* in the © examples no longer refers to a third person, and is a different prefix than the third person prefix. However, David Pentland (p.c.) confirmed that the *u-* in kinship terms is indeed also a personal pronoun because a verb of possession can be formed from any noun stem (including a dependent noun) by adding *u-* (3rd person) and the AI final *-i-* (as in *umushuumi-*, citation form *umushuumuu* 's/he has a grandfather'). From this AI verb, a transitive verb can be derived in other Cree dialects by replacing final *-i-* with *-(i)m-*, which he calls the comitative suffix, giving *umushuumimeu* 'he has him as his grandfather'.³ The form *-imaau* is the so-called indefinite actor acting on 3rd, '(someone) has him as grandfather', and this can be freely used as a noun, 'the one who (someone) has as a grandfather'. David Pentland's explanation also shows that the suffix *-im* in East Cree *u-mushuum-im-aau* for example, is used to express disjoint reference, with the meaning that "a grandfather" is necessarily somebody else's grandfather. I therefore conclude that there is no homophonous morpheme *u-* but only one third person *u-* in all these kinship examples. Furthermore, there is no synchronic derivation attested where a *u-* prefix alone is used to create non-possessed nouns out of dependent nouns in East Cree. If there was a *u-* prefix, homophonous to the third person prefix, and used to create non-possessed nouns, *ushkashiih* in (8a) below should also mean 'a nail' or 'a claw'. But it does not. *Ushkashiih* only means 'his/her nail' or 'his/her claw'. Forms like *ushkashii*, *ushkashiich*, without obviative, do not exist. To say 'a nail', 'a claw' in East Cree, you must use the prefix *mi-*, as shown in (8) and (9). This applies to all dependent nouns denoting body-parts in East Cree, context permitting.⁴ More examples are given in (10).

- (8) a. u-shkashii-h 'his nail/ claw'
3-nail-OBV
- b. *u-shkashii-maau 'a nail/claw'
- (9) a. mi-shkashii 'a nail'
mi-nail

³In East Cree the form **umushuumimeu* is not attested. rather one says: *umushuumitutuweu* 'she has him as a grandfather', and *umushuumitutakuu* 'someone has him as a grandfather'.

⁴David Pentland (p.c.) observes that Ojibwa, instead of using the *mi-*, has extended the kinship term strategy of the indefinite actor derivation to inanimate dependent nouns, e.g. *wiibidimaa* 'a tooth'. East Cree and Montagnais on the other hand, use the indefinite actor derivation for kinship terms and the *mi-* prefix for body-parts (animate and inanimate).

- b. mi-shkashii-ch 'nails'
mi-nail-PL
- (10) a. mi-tehii 'a heart'
- b. mi-stikwaan 'a head'

I thus conclude that there are two personal prefixes in *nuushkashiiim*. Dependent nouns constructed with *-im* indicate two possessors: the original possessor, denoted by the 3rd person prefix *u-* and a new possessor. Other examples showing that there are two personal prefixes involved, one Speech Act Participant (SAP) prefix and one Third person prefix, are given in (11) and (12).

- (11) a. nitehiih 'my (own) heart'
ni-tehiih
1-heart
- b. *ni-tehiih-im
- c. nuutehiiim 'my heart (but not my own)'
ni-u-tehiih-im
1-3-heart-im
- d. utehiiim 'his/her heart'
u-tehiih-im
3-hear-im
- e. mitehiih 'a heart'
mi-tehiih
mi-heart
- (12) a. chistikwaan 'your own head'
chi-stikwaan
2-head
- b. *chistikwaan-im
- c. chuustikwaan-im 'your head (but not your own)'
chi-u-stikwaan-im
2-3-head-im
- d. ustikwaan 'his/her head'
u-stikwaan
3-head
- e. mistikwaan 'a head'
mi-stikwaan
mi-head

Forms combining only Speech Act Participants (SAP) like **chi-ni-shkashii-im* 'your-my nail' or **ni-chi-shkashii-im* 'my-your nail' are not possible. The second personal prefix is always the third person *u-*. Furthermore, this third person possessor is never plural. There is no such thing as 'my-their-nails'.

A last objection to a two-pronouns analysis could be that the phonological process that assimilates the *-i-* of the SAP prefix into *-u-* was not attested elsewhere in East Cree. However, this vowel coalescence is quite common for possessed independent nouns starting with *u*, like *utaapaanaskw*.

(13)utaapaanaaskw 'a sled'

chi+ utaapaanaaskw = chuutaapaanaaskw 'your sled'

ki + utaapaanaaskw = kuutaapaanaaskw 'your sled'

ni + utaapaanaaskw = nuutaapaanaaskw 'my sled'

utaapaanaaskw-h 'his/her sled'

The conclusion is that the possessed theme sign *-(i)m* is used with dependent nouns to indicate disjoint reference. There is a new possessor, different from the original possessor. Two personal pronouns are prefixed to the noun: one for a new possessor, and another one for the original, third person possessor. This use is attested only for body-parts, regardless of animacy. It is most likely limited by the contexts in which such situations can occur, such as bringing back animal parts after hunting, or possibly, some criminal acts. It could be that this *-im* possessed theme sign is not so different after all from the VTA theme sign *-im* marking obviative objects or patients, since they are both found in disjoint reference contexts involving an additional third person; but that is another story...

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