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Obviation, Coreference and Relational Verb Forms in East Cree

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It is usually claimed in the Cree linguistic literature that "any third person possessor automatically causes [a possessed] noun to be obviative" (Wolfart 1973:28; Dahlstrom 1991:13, 97; Ahenakew 1987:33; Ellis 1983:452). Such claims often extend to other Algonquian languages (Voorhis 1974:30, Aissen 1997, to cite a few). We show that the above claim is only valid for animate nouns. East Cree offers evidence that there exist cases where nouns possessed by a third person possessor do not bear overt obviative marking. These are inanimate nouns in coreference constructions. We also show that the use of relational or regular verb forms depends on the disjoint reference or coreference status of the verbal arguments.1

Eastern James Bay Cree is a variety of Cree where inanimate nouns bear obviative marking. This is shown in the paradigm table in (1). This obviative marking is distinct for the singular only. The inanimate obviative plural looks like the proximate plural.

(1) **Inanimate 'knife'**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PROXIMATE (0')</th>
<th>OBVIATIVE (0')</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mûhkûman</td>
<td>mûhkûman-iyû</td>
<td>mûhkûman-h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL</td>
<td>mûhkûman-h</td>
<td>mûhkûman-h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paradigm for animate nouns is illustrated in (2) and follows the same pattern as Western Cree languages in marking the obviative singular and plural in the same fashion:

(2) **Animate 'man'**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PROXIMATE (3)</th>
<th>OBVIATIVE (3')</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nâpeu</td>
<td>nâpeu-h</td>
<td>nâpeu-h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL</td>
<td>nâpeu-ch</td>
<td>nâpeu-h</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Normally, obviation takes place between an animate subject and inanimate object in East Cree. This is shown in (3). If we fail to inflect the object for obviative, and leave it in the unmarked proximate form, like in (4), the sentence becomes ungrammatical.

(3) Wâpahâm mûhkûman-iyû.

see.TI-3>0' knife-OBV

'S/he sees a knife.'

(4) *Wâpahâm mûhkûman.

see.TI-3>0' knife-(PROX)

Now, contrast (3) with (5), where the object is possessed:

(5) a. Wâpahâm u-mûhkûman.

see.TI-3 >0 3-knife-(PROX)

'S/he sees his/her own knife.'

b. Wâpahâm u-mûhkûman kâ pîkipay-iyich.

see.TI-3 >0 3-knife-(OBV) be.broken.II-0'

'S/he sees his/her own broken knife.'

In (5), the possessor of the knife is the same as the subject or agent of the sentence: the one who sees. There is coreference between the object’s possessor and the subject of the sentence and there is no obviative marking on umûhkûman, 'knife'. However, agreement with an embedded verb like in (5b) shows that umûhkûman is not proximate and that obviation is covert.2

If, instead of sentence (5), we want to say that she sees someone else’s knife, we have to use a special verb form, called “the relational”, as in (6)3:

1. We would like to thank the Cree speakers we interviewed in the Summer of 2000 in Mistissini: Mr. Albert Coon Come, Ms. Harriet Coon Come, Ms. Hattie Trapper, Mr. Isaac Trapper, Ms. Emma Shecapio and Mr. Johnny Shecapio. Thanks to Marguerite MacKenzie for comments on the draft, and to Bill Jancewicz for his help with the syllabics. This work was partially funded by SSRHC grant # 410-1998-0350.

2. Compare the embedded verb forms in (5b) with that given below:

mûhkûman kâ pîkipay-iîch

knife-(PROX)is.broken.II-0

'a broken knife'

In (5b), there is an obviative subject ending -iîch, while here the verb indicates a proximate subject (-îch). John Nichols (p.c.), who brought the notion of covert obviation to our attention, indicates that the facts are similar in Severn Ojibwe.
Wáp̱ahtam-uw-eu u-mūhkumān-iyū.
see.TI-REL-3>0' 3'-knife-OBV
'S/he sees his/her (someone else's) knife.' (Peter sees John's knife.)

For such disjoint reference between the possessor and the subject of the sentence, we could not use the regular verb form, as in (7):

*Wáp̱ahtam u-mūhkumān-iyū.
see.TI-3 > 0' 3'-knife-OBV
'S/he sees his/her (someone else's) knife.' (Peter sees John's knife.)

According to Clarke (1982), a sentence like (7) is acceptable in Montagnais, but it is not in East Cree, where when you wish to express disjoint reference between a 3rd person subject and the 3rd person possessor of the object, you must use a sentence like (6), with a relational verb form. The relational verb form is found in the transitive inanimate verb paradigm, i.e., for verbs that take an inanimate object. Note that it cannot be used for coreference, as (8) shows:

*Wáp̱ahtam-uw-eu umūhkumān.
see.TI-REL-3>0' 3'-knife-(PROX)
'S/he sees his/her own knife.'

Further evidence that relational verb forms are prohibited for coreference comes from animate intransitive verbs (which also have relational verb forms). For 3rd person coreference between the subject and a possessed locative for example, the regular verb form must be (9). The relational is only available with disjoint reference interpretation, as in (10).

3. Southern speakers write the relational morpheme -uw- for TI verbs ending with a consonant. In the Northern dialect it is just -w-, like for AI verbs. (Marguerite MacKenzie, p.c.).

4. Clarke (1982:31) observes for Montagnais: "an expected obviative does not occur when the 3rd person possessor of the noun object is identical to the subject of the sentence." She contrasts the following examples:

Miskam u+maskheikan.
'He finds his own book.'

Miskam u+maskheikan+nu.
'He finds his (i.e. someone else's) book.'

Note that her verb forms are regular verb forms and that the equivalent of the second is not acceptable in East Cree.

Nipāu u-nipewin-ihč.
sleep.AI-3 3-bed-LOC
'S/he sleeps in his/her (own) bed.'

Nipā-w-eu u-nipewin-ihč.
sleep.AI-REL-3 3'-bed-(OBV)-LOC
'S/he sleeps in his/her (someone else's) bed.'

Observe the lengthening of the vowel on the locative NP in (10). This indicates that the possessor is obviative, different from the subject of the sentence.

Summary of Findings:

In Eastern James Bay Cree, inanimate nouns in coreference constructions do not bear overt obviative marking, unless the possessor itself is obviative. When there is coreference between the subject and the possessor of the object (TI verbs) or the subject and the possessor of a locative (AI verbs) the regular verb form is used. When there is disjoint reference between the subject and the possessor of the object (TI verbs) or the subject and the possessor of locative (AI verbs), the relational verb form is used for 3rd person possessors and the regular verb form is used for other person possessors.

Appendix

Corresponding examples for TI verbs

To give a complete picture of all possible cases, we illustrate our findings with the corresponding examples for TI verbs.

Coreference: regular verb forms.

Possessed Noun is proximate with 2, 1 possessors, and bears no overt obviative for 3 possessors:

Niwāp̱ahten ni-mūhkumān (kā pi̱kupay-ihč).
1-see.TI-1>0 1-knife-(PROX) (preverb be.broken.II.0)
'I see my own (broken) knife.'

5. Marguerite MacKenzie (p.c.) suggested to us that this form might be the obviative morpheme -iyu- found elsewhere on nouns and verbs as -iyū.
    see.TI-3>0 3-knife-(OBV) (preverb be.broken.II-0')
    'S/he sees her/his own (broken) knife.'

Possessed Noun bears an overt obviative in one case only: when the
subject/possessor itself is obviative (3'):

    see.TI-3'>0 3'-knife-OBV (preverb be.broken.II-0')
    'S/he (the other) sees his/her own (broken) knife.'

DISJOINT REFERENCE: WITH 3RD PERSONS POSSESSORS, RELATIONAL
VERB FORMS:

Subject is 3 → Obviative object

    see.TI-REL-3>3' 3'-knife-OBV (preverb broken.II-0)
    'S/he sees his/her (someone else's) (broken) knife.'

Subject is 2 or 1 → Covert obviative object

    2-sec.TI-REL-2>3 3-knife (preverb broken.II-0)
    'You see his/her (broken) knife.'

DISJOINT REFERENCE: WITH 1,2 POSSESSORS, REGULAR VERB FORMS.

Subject is 3 → Obviative object

    see.TI-3>0' 1-knife-OBV (preverb broken.II-0)
    'S/he sees my (broken) knife.'

Subject is 2 or 1 → Proximate object

(17) Chiwápəhāte ni-máhkumān (kā píkupay-ih ich).
    2-sec.TI-2>0 1-knife (preverb broken.II-0)
    'You see my (broken) knife.'

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can Philosophical Society, n.s. v. 63, part 5.
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1. $\nu \text{ A}^{\text{p}} \text{L}^{\text{q}} \text{J}^{\text{r}}$, $\nu^{\text{s}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{t}}$, $\text{A}^{\text{u}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{v}}$, $\text{A}^{\text{w}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{x}}$, $\text{A}^{\text{y}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{z}}$
2. $\text{A}^{\text{a}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{b}}$, $\nu^{\text{c}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{d}}$, $\nu^{\text{e}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{f}}$, $\nu^{\text{g}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{h}}$, $\nu^{\text{i}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{j}}$, $\nu^{\text{k}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{l}}$, $\nu^{\text{m}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{n}}$, $\nu^{\text{o}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{p}}$, $\nu^{\text{q}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{r}}$, $\nu^{\text{s}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{t}}$, $\nu^{\text{u}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{v}}$, $\nu^{\text{w}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{x}}$, $\nu^{\text{y}}$ $\text{A}^{\text{z}}$
(6) \( \text{_details of the text} \)

(7) \( \text{_details of the text} \)

(8) \( \text{_details of the text} \)

(9) \( \text{_details of the text} \)

(10) \( \text{_details of the text} \)
Rethinking a “Native Fishery”

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In the aftermath of a 1993 court ruling (commonly referred to as the Fairgrieve decision) which recognized the native fishing rights on the waters around Southern Ontario’s Bruce Peninsula, I began my Ph.D. research, which involved fieldwork within the peninsula’s reserve communities at Saugeen 29 and Nawash (or Cape Croker). While I was engaged in this research, confrontations between supporters and opponents of native fishing rights occurred regularly (see Koenig 1997, 2000).

My initial research goal was to construct a history of the region’s fisheries. I envisioned my project as a blend of ethnohistory and historical ecology, but I also considered it more broadly as applied anthropology, since it was clear that my work could have implications for ongoing fishing conflict issues. I was hopeful that my findings would be beneficial for the native communities and also for the local ecology. Through the course of my fieldwork, my research focus shifted from the more descriptive details of past and present fishing activities to the political contexts of the ongoing fishing conflict. This shift reflects my effort to incorporate community concerns in the design of my research: native community members repeatedly pointed to the importance of the political dimensions of the fishery. My new focus forced me to address the naivety of my assumption that the research findings might speak for themselves. Situating my research in more explicit political contexts also entailed other challenges. An increased focus on political dimensions problematized the very concepts I was dealing with in my research.

The concept of a “native fishery” was central to both my original research goal and my revised objectives. In the former, cultural/historical depictions of fishing activities could be effectively highlighted by contrasts between a “native fishery” and a “non-native fishery”. But the idea of a distinct “native fishery” was applicable only some of the social and political involvements that I later saw as in need of clarification. In many instances, the exclusive connotations of this term impeded insight into the complexity of past and present fishing activities that the region’s native peoples have been a part of.

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1 Terminology we used:

\( \forall_b \ ALC^{an} \) (that which is not alive) inanimate noun

\( \forall_{an} \ ALC^c / ALC^{an} \) (that which is alive) animate noun

\( \forall_{ps} \) (one) singular

\( \forall_{ps} \) (many) plural

\( \forall_b \ ALC^o / ALC^{an} \) (0) proximate inanimate

\( \forall_{an} \ ALC^o / ALC^{an} \) (0) obviative inanimate

\( \forall_b \ ALC^o / ALC^{an} \) (3) proximate animate

\( \forall_{an} \ ALC^o / ALC^{an} \) (3) obviative animate