Structure and Agreement in Ojibwe Transitive Verbs

The Algonquian language family has a complex transitive verbal agreement morphology, and a number of people have proposed ways of accounting for it (e.g. Bruening 2005; Béjar & Rezac 2009; Lochbihler 2012; Oxford 2013). However, it is my view that an adequate account of Algonquian agreement morphology cannot be constructed without first having a thorough understanding of the structure of the Algonquian verb phrase, and how this might contribute to the realisation of agreement.

To that end, this paper examines the verbal morphology in the Algonquian language, Ojibwe. I propose, on both theoretical and empirical grounds that Ojibwe verbal morphology is best accounted for assuming the external argument is introduced in the specifier of Voice (Kratzer, 1996; Marantz, 1997), and the internal argument is introduced in the specifier of vP (Larson 1988; Hale & Keyser 1993, 1998). Further, building on work by Hirose (2001) and Mathieu (2014), I show that Ojibwe verb phrases may contain multiple vPs, a structure that, following a Distributed Morphology account (Halle & Marantz, 1993; Embick & Noyer, 2007), must be built in the syntax, as at all stages in the derivation, if the verb stem has at least one vP, it may be used as a fully-formed verb. The following Ojibwe ditransitive sentence is an example of the kind of structures I’m looking at.

(1)  Aw kwe ndazhtamaag nbabgiwayaan.
    aw ikwe nid- izhi -it -amaw -ig ni- babagiwayaan
    that.DEM woman.NA 1- thus -cause.VT I -for.X.V TA -3>1 1.P OSS- shirt.NI
    “That woman is making me a shirt.”

(Valentine, 2001, p700)

With this greater understanding of the internal structure of the Ojibwe verb phrase, I then turn to examining one of the more successful accounts of Ojibwe verbal morphology, Cyclic Agree (Béjar & Rezac, 2009; Lochbihler, 2012) and show that it cannot, in fact, completely account for the Ojibwe data. Ditransitives, and other multiple vP structures cannot be accounted for in the Cyclic Agree model without theoretically undesirable stipulations. Problems also arise for the articulated vP probe argued for in Cyclic Agree accounts of Ojibwe morphology (Béjar & Rezac, 2009; Lochbihler, 2012) when applied to multiple vP structures, namely, how is it that only one vP acts as a probe and causes spell out of agreement morphology?

I will, instead, outline a proposal, partially based on Oxford (2013) to account for Ojibwe agreement morphology using multiple Agree (Hiraiwa, 2001) and multiple equi-distant specifiers (Chomsky, 2001). In this model, the internal argument moves up to spec-VoiceP, so that both the internal and external arguments are equi-distant and will both check against the same agreement head.
References


