



On the syntactic nature of Nishnaabemwin roots

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Main points

- In Nishnaabemwin (Algonquian), animacy conditions suppletive forms and interacts with agreement processes
- This behaviour provides novel evidence in favour of the fundamentally syntactic conception of roots

→ **ROOTS ARE SYNTACTIC ENTITIES**

Context

Hiaki (Uto-Aztecan) alternations:

(1) *aapo/vempo uka koowi-ta mea-k*
 3.SG/PL the.SG pig-ACC.SG kill.SG-PRF
 ‘He/they killed the pig.’

(2) *aapo/vempo ume kowi-m sua-k*
 3.SG/PL the.PL pig-ACC.PL kill.PL-PRF
 ‘He/they killed the pigs.’

Harley’s (2014) argument:

- Number features of the object trigger verbal suppletion
- Hiaki does not have object agreement
- Suppletive triggers must be based on a head-complement relation

Borer’s (2014) counterargument to the Hiaki data:

- Pluractionality explains the alternations
- We need independent evidence of number-sensitivity outside of the root alternations
- Otherwise, number-conditioned verb suppletion is not actually suppletion
- Not representative of a root-complement constituent

→ But roots ARE grammatically active in Nishnaabemwin

→ **NISHNAABEMWIN ROOTS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY SYNTACTIC OBJECTS**

Algonquian Verbal Structure

PREFIX	INITIAL	FINAL	THEME	SIGN	INNER	SUFFIX	OUTER	SUFFIX
DC	√ ⁰	v ⁰	Voice ⁰		Infl ⁰		DC	
ni-	waab	-am	-aa		-naan		-ag	

‘We see them_{anim.}’

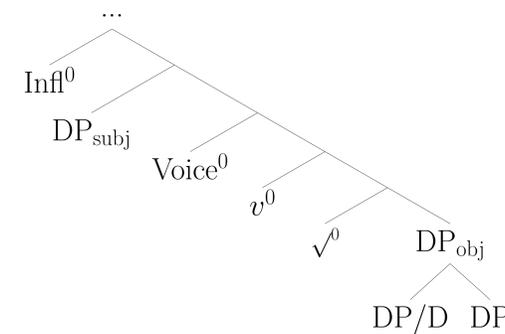
(Oxford 2014)

Agree in ϕ -features:

- Theme sign *-aa* → object agreement
- Inner suffix *-naan* → subject agreement

Doubled clitics, preconditioned by Agree:

- Outer suffix *-ag* → object
- Prefix *ni-* → subject

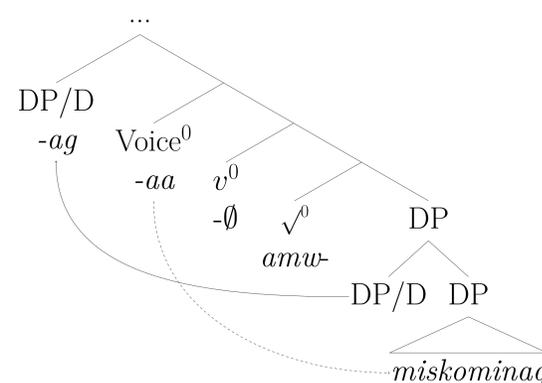


Animacy & Allomorphy

- Nishnaabemwin roots are sensitive to the animacy features of objects (e.g. *amw-* ~ *miijin-* ‘eat’)
- The object’s animacy feature also triggers allomorphy in the plural markers *-ag* ~ *-an*

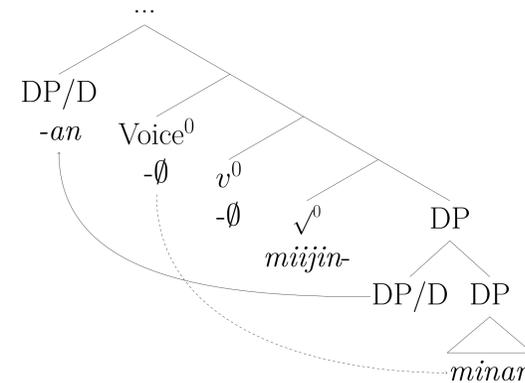
Animate Object (Example)

(3) *miskomin-ag ni-amw-∅-aa-ag*
 raspberry.ANIM-ANIM.PL 1-eat.TA-DIR-ANIM.PL
 ‘I’m eating raspberries.’



Inanimate Object (Example)

(4) *miin-an ni-miijin-∅-∅-an*
 blueberry.INAN-INAN.PL 1-eat-TI-TI3-INAN.PL
 ‘I’m eating blueberries.’



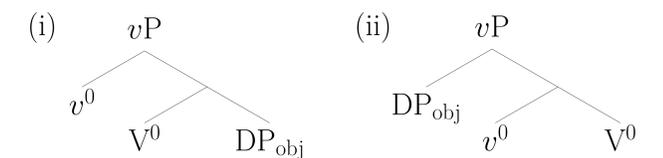
Conclusion

- Co-variance between the plural markers *-ag/-an* and the (in)animacy of the object provides independent evidence that Nishnaabemwin verbs are sensitive to the animacy features of their complements outside of the *amw-* ~ *miijin-* root alternation

→ **ROOTS ARE SYNTACTIC ENTITIES**

Implications

This analysis adjudicates between two proposals concerning verb + object structures:



(e.g. Lochbihler 2012) (e.g. Hirose 2003, *a.o.*)

Theories of the locality of suppletion require the object to be in a maximally local relationship to the root

- Strict sisterhood (Bobaljik 2012)
- Sisterhood + pruning of intervening phonologically null terminal nodes (Embick 2010)

→ The *amw-* ~ *miijin-* suppletive pair shows that the object cannot be in Spec,vP

Select References

- Borer 2014. Wherefore roots? *Theoretical Linguistics*.
 Harley 2014. On the identity of roots. *Theoretical Linguistics*.
 Kramer 2014. Clitic doubling or object agreement: The view from Amharic. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*.
 Oxford 2014. Multiple instances of agreement in the clausal spine: Evidence from Algonquian. *Proceedings of WCCFL* 31.