

The Covert Syntax of Wh-questions in Plains Cree

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The Covert Syntax of Wh-questions in Plains Cree¹

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This paper examines the proposal that there are two strategies used for relativization in Cree: i) restrictive modification via operator movement; and ii) coreference across coordinate clauses.² I argue for this proposal on the basis of the structure of wh-questions in Cree. In the analysis I develop, wh-words are not operators but are licensed by predication in a nominal small clause, NP NP, in which the initial NP constitutes the predicate as shown in (1):³

- (1)
- | | | |
|--|-----------|--|
| | SC | |
| | / \ | |
| | NP NP | |
| | pred subj | |

In this structure, the subject NP may serve as a relative clause head in an operator construction involving another clause; OR the subject may simply be construed with an argument in a following conjoined clause. I am assuming the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (PAH) (cf. Baker 1994, Jelinek 1984) whereby verbal AGR identifies and licences *pro* in argument positions with overt lexical NPs in adjoined position.

Wh-questions in Plains Cree show contrasts in two respects: i) the choice of complementizer; and ii) the [+/- AGREEMENT] features of the wh-word. These contrasts are illustrated in the following examples. Example (2.a) shows ka:- complementizer which involves an empty operator (i.e., ka:- is obligatory in relative clauses and focus constructions):

- (2.a) awi:nihi ka:-wa:pam-a:-t
 who (obv) REL-see s.o.-dir-3 (3 prox > 3' obv)
 Who is it that she saw? (literally)

Example (b) has e:- which is the general complementizer and does not involve an operator (both complementizers are referred to in the Algonquian literature as conjunct markers):

- b) awi:nihi e:-wa:pam-a:-t
 who (obv) Conj-see s.o.-dir-3 (3 > 3')
 Who did she see?

The second contrast involves proximate/obviative agreement of the wh-word -- awi:na 'who' (proximate/unmarked) or awi:nihi 'who' (obviative).⁴ Note that the examples in (2) both involve an obviative wh-word. Example (3) involves two

overt NPs. The obviative marker for NPs is -(w)a suffix which occurs here on the object NP:

- (3) Mary e:-wa:pam-a:-t John-a
 Mary (prox) conj-see s.o.-dir-3 John-obv
 Mary (prox) saw John (obv).

The following NP pairs also illustrate the proximate/obviative contrast: Mary vs Mary-wa; mo:s vs mo:s-wa 'moose'; and na:pe:w vs na:pe:w-a 'man'. The pronominal forms in (4) belong to a different paradigm and contrast, for example, awi:na vs awi:nihi 'who' (prox/obv) and ana vs anihi 'that (one)' (prox/obv). Consider the examples:

- (4. a) awi:nihi Mary e:-wa:pam-a:-t [+AGR]
 who (obv) Mary conj-see s.o.-dir-3
 who did Mary see?

The obviative wh-word in (a) is [+AGR] and agrees with its obviative (object) referent as indicated in the verbal agreement. In (b), the wh-word is unmarked/proximate with the same obviative referent in the verbal morphology:

- b) awi:na ana Mary ka:-wa:pam-a:-t [-AGR]
 who that (one) Mary REL-see s.o.-dir-3
 Who is it that Mary saw?

In example (b), the [-AGR] wh-word is accompanied by the deictic ana 'that (one)' (also in the unmarked proximate form -- a matter which will be addressed below). This deictic can occur only with a [-AGR] wh-word as indicated in Table 1 which illustrates the possible combinations of [+/- AGR] with respect to the two complementizers:

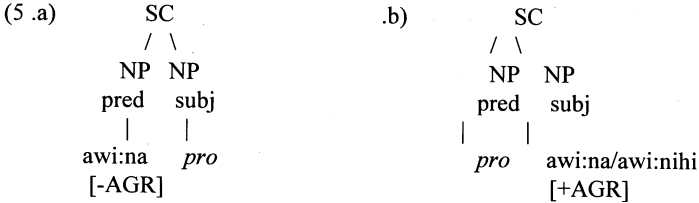
Table 1:

	[+AGR]	[-AGR] <u>-deictic</u>	[-AGR] <u>+deictic</u>
e:-	yes	yes	no
ka:-	yes	ok	yes

The [+AGR] wh-word can occur with either complementizer. The [-AGR] form with deictic is grammatical only with ka:- while its counterpart without the deictic is typically given with e:- complementizer. However, when asked, consultants also accept the ka:- complementizer in these examples (hence "ok"). It should be noted here that **deictic phrases** will be designated as **DP[>]** (not DP) in contrast to other NPs. Cree does not have def./indef. articles and all NPs are equally

"definite". To avoid confusion, these will all be designated simply as NP. (Note in (6) that deictic constituents are more referential than definite NPs.)

The nominal small clause analysis provides a unified account of all these phenomena (see the diagrams in (5)). Note that these structures are equational small clauses in Cree (see discussion in Section 1).



When the wh-word is in initial (predicate) position as in (5.a), the wh-word will always be [-AGR], i.e., it occurs in the (unmarked) proximate form even if its intended referent in the wh-question is obviative. When the wh-word is in the subject NP position as in (b), then the wh-word will be [+AGR] -- i.e., it will agree with the proximate/obviative status of its intended referent.

1. NP - NP CLAUSES IN CREE:

A nominal small clause contains two NPs, one of which may be less referential than the other (cf. Heggie 1988, Moro 1990, Williams 1994). A sentence with two NPs which are equally referential is referred to as **Equational**, i.e., The morning star is the evening star. In an equational structure, either NP may be in predicate position without affecting the structure. On the other hand, if the two NPs are not equally referential, then the less referential NP is in predicate position, i.e., John is the chief. (In English, the predicate involves the second NP.) This is referred to as a **Predicational** clause (cf. the hierarchy in (6)):

(6) Hierarchy of reference: (adapted for a predicate-initial language. cf. Heggie 1988)

indefinites <---- definite NPs <---- names <---- deictic

[predicate] <----- [subject]

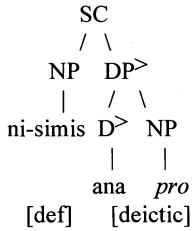
In this hierarchy, the most referential (subject-like) constituent is deictic while the least referential indefinite NP is more predicate-like.

In Cree, a predicative small clause is shown in (7.a) and illustrated in the tree structure in (b):

(7.a) ni-simis ana
 1 - younger sibling that (one)
 That is my younger sibling.

C.182.a

b)



In my analysis, the deictic constituent in subject position in (b) is the determiner of a DP[>] with an empty *pro* as NP. When the two NPs in (7.a) are reversed, the result is a DP[>] and the small clause reading is unavailable:⁵

c) ana ni-simisVb.....

that 1-younger sibling

That younger sibling of mineVb.....

D.182.b

** 'My younger sibling is that one.'

In the following example, the underlined clause is a predicative small clause structure which is followed by the DP[>] 'that dog' in apposition.

(8) niya ana, ana atim

mine that (one), that dog

That's my dog.

J.16

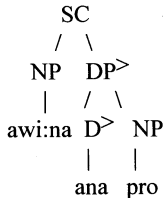
In the predicative small clause, niya 'me/mine' is in predicate position while the deictic ana 'that' is part of a DP[>] structure with *pro*. Examples in (9) show an interrogative example in which the wh-word is in predicate position and the deictic is, once again, part of a DP[>] structure in subject position of the SC:

(9.a) awi:na ana

who that (one)

Who is he? Who is that (one)? cf D.234

b)



The structure in (b) represents a **predicational** structure, i.e., the subject is more referential than the predicate.

In other words, the determiner does not show agreement if the DP[>] contains an NP which is an entire relative clause (with head *pro*); but if the NP is a lexical noun, the determiner will agree with the proximate/obviative status of that NP.

In this section, I have discussed the two types of nominal small clauses which will be used in the analysis which follows: i) the predicative structure with DP[>]; and ii) the equational structure as in (5).

2. ANALYSIS:

In this section, I will provide an analysis for the four types of wh-questions shown:

- 2.1 [+AGR] wh-word with ka:- complementizer.
- 2.2 [-AGR] wh-word with ka:- complementizer
- 2.3 [+AGR] wh-word with e:- complementizer.
- 2.4 [-AGR] wh-word with e:- complementizer.

In the examples involving ka:- complementizer, the second NP in the small clause is relativized as the head of the following clause. With e:- (which does not involve an empty operator), the two clauses are conjoined and the restrictive modification is achieved via coreference.

2.1 [+AGR] WH-WORD WITH ka:- COMPLEMENTIZER:

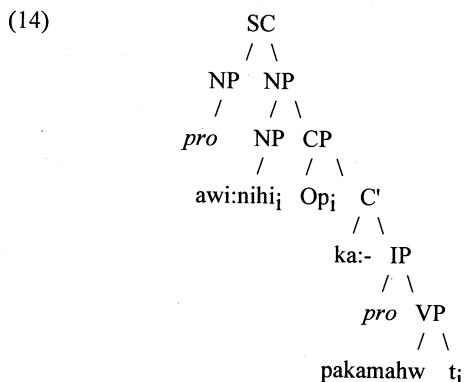
The schema in (13.a) represents the examples below. The first NP of the small clause is *pro* which occurs in predicate position. The second NP is the [+AGR] wh-word which is the head of the relative clause in subject position of the predicative structure.

- (13.a) NP is [NP NP Op_i ka: *pro*Vb'd..... t_i]
 pro is [NP who Op_i ka: *pro*Vb'd..... t_i]
 [+AGR]

- b) awi:nihi ka:-pakamahw-a:-t
 who (obv) REL-hit s.o.-dir-3 (3 > 3')
 who (obv) did he hit? cf.B.360.b

- c) awi:nihi Mary ka:-pi:kiskwat-a:-t
 who (obv) Mary REL-speak to-dir-3 (3 > 3')
 Who is Mary talking to? cf. B.294

In each case, the wh-word is obviative in agreement with the obviative object of the relative clause. The following structure represents (13.b):



The operator in Spec CP links the variable and the wh-antecedent functioning as head of the relative clause.

2.1 [-AGR] WH-WORD WITH ka:- COMPLEMENTIZER:

These examples provide overt evidence for: i) the existence of the nominal SC; and ii) for the location of the [-AGR] wh-word in the predicate position.

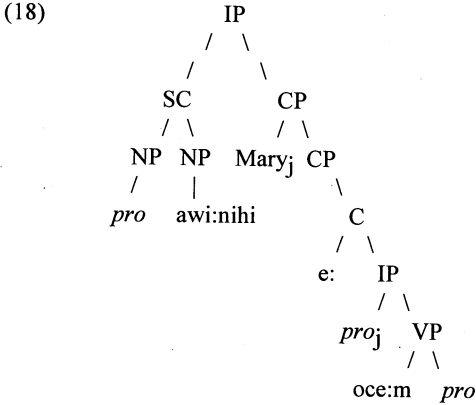
- (15.a) NP is ana [NP NP Op_i ka: proVb'd..... t_i]
 who is that [NP pro_i Op_i ka: proVb'd..... t_i]
 [-AGR]

Here ana 'that' is the deictic of the DP[>] containing the relative clause with empty head *pro*. As shown in (12.a), the deictic does not agree with the obviative object it refers to in the following clause. The wh-word in the following examples is the predicate; therefore, the wh-word in each case is [-AGR]:

- b) awi:na ana
 who that (one)
 Who is he? Who is that one? cf. D.234
- c) awi:na ana John ka:-wi:kim-a:-t
 who that (one) John REL-marry-dir-3 (3 > 3')
 Who is it that John is going to marry? cf.D.263
- d) awi:na ana kahkiyaw aniki ka:-wa:pam-a:-t-ik
 who that (one) all those REL-see s.o.-dir-3-pl
 Who is it that they all saw? D.251.b

The structure in (16) represents (15.c) above with ka:-:

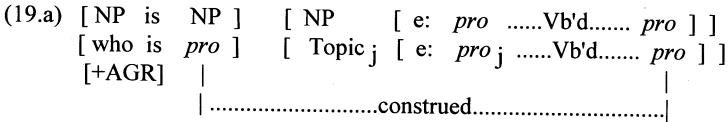
Example (c) is illustrated in (18):



Even though there are two *pro* elements in the second clause, there is no ambiguity. The proximate Mary is coindexed with the *pro* in subject position (given the 'direct' morphology on the verb). The remaining *pro* constituent must then be coreferential with the *pro* in the preceding clause as shown. Note that this is true also in the English equivalent, i.e., Who is he -- she kissed him. The second clause is a restriction on the first and the two masculine pronouns are construed as coreferential. In other words, the interpretation of (17.c) is the equivalent semantically to restrictive modification, i.e., 'Who is *pro* that she kissed?' This constitutes S-structure evidence for the claim that some relativization strategies involve coordination.

2.4 [-AGR] WH-WORD WITH e:- COMPLEMENTIZER:

This type has a restricted distribution inasmuch as the second clause must have a topic-type structure:

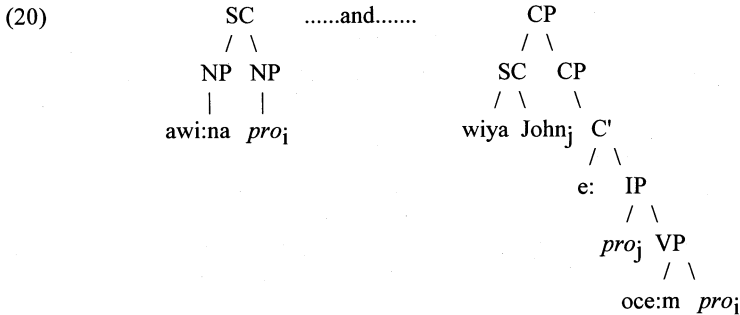


Literally: 'Who is **he** (and) X herself, she Vb'd **him**.'

- b) awi:na wiya John e:-oce:m-a:-t
 who EMPH John conj-kiss-dir-3 (3 > 3')
 Who did John himself kiss? cf. D.32

- c) awi:na kiya ki-ite:yiht-e:-n John e:-pakamahw-a:-t
 who YOU 2-think -th-2sg John conj-hit-dir-3
 Who do YOU think John hit? cf.D.71

In these examples, the [-AGR] wh-word is in predicate position with *pro* as the subject NP. The following clause contains an intervening SC structure wiya John 'John himself'.⁷ In Blain (1996), I show that wiya associates only with topic. In (c), the emphatic pronoun kiya constitutes new topic (Dahlstrom 1995).



The topic SC is adjoined to the CP structure while the wh-phrase is represented in a separate SC clause. This structure is more like two separate sentences rather than a single IP containing both.

It should be noted that all of these arguments can be generalized to proximate examples in which the [+AGR] wh-word has the same phonetic form as the [-AGR] wh-word. The analysis then depends on the other clues in the sentence, i.e., the choice of complementizer, and the existence of deictic constituents (i.e., awi:na ana) and topicalized structures.

3. CONCLUSION:

We have seen that wh-words can be [+/- AGR] with an obviative referent. If the wh-word is [+AGR], then it is in argument position, i.e., in subject position in the NP NP small clause. On the other hand, if the wh-word is [-AGR], then it is in predicate position.

The complementizer can be [+/- Operator]. If [+Op] as with ka:-, then a relative clause construction results. If it is [-Op] with e:-, the wh-clause is conjoined to the rest of the sentence. Both, I argue, involve restrictive modification and relativization -- whether structural or by interpretation and construal.

This supports the proposal that there are two types of relativization strategies needed for Cree: i) on the one hand, restrictive modification achieved via null operator movement; and ii) on the other, restrictive modification achieved by means of anaphora across coordinated sentences (as proposed by Ross (1967) and Williams (1988)).

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² Cf. Ross (1967) in which D-Structure coordination is the source for relatives and Williams (1988) analysis with coordination occurring at LF.

³ Cree is a predicate-initial language (cf. Dahlstrom (1995) for Fox; Blain (in progress) for Cree).

⁴ The function of the proximate/obviative contrast is to distinguish a single (unmarked proximate) 3rd-person (topic) from all other (marked obviative) 3rd-persons in a sentence or span of discourse.

⁵ The Inverse order (Ruwet 1982) is not possible in Cree small clause structures as it is in English copula constructions (i.e., The winner is Susan, with the more referential NP following the copula). In Cree, one of the NPs must be derived as a verb.

⁶ With respect to the claim that the wh-word itself is not in Spec CP, note that the NP John intervenes between the ka:- in COMP and the wh-word -- which cannot then be in operator position.

⁷ wiya 's/he' is the 3rd-person pronominal form which is typically used as an intensifier (see Blain 1996) and could be glossed 'body'. It does not occur in the same patterns as niya 'I' and kiya 'you', its 1st- and 2nd-person counterparts which occur in emphatic environments.

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