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Pragmatic Roles in Cherokee Grammar  
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In this paper I provide evidence that an adequate analysis of a language's syntax and morphology may require consideration of the discourse-pragmatic status of noun phrase referents. Specifically, I discuss two pragmatically based rules in the grammar of Cherokee, an Iroquoian language spoken by about 10,000 people in Oklahoma and North Carolina.<1> One of the rules is required to account for certain cases of transitive verb agreement and the other is required to account for word order. These rules are shown to interact in constructions which have not been fully described in the Cherokee literature.

Subject and object focus agreement prefixes

Cherokee verbs take pronominal prefixes which index the person, number, and animacy of their subjects and objects. For example, in (1a), the underlined prefix kv:y- indicates that the verb 'hit' has a first person singular subject and a second person singular object, and in (1b), the underlined prefix skw- indicates that the verb has a second person singular subject and a first person singular object.<2>

- (1) a. Kv:yv:niha.  
'I am hitting you.'  
b. Skwv:hniha.  
'You are hitting me.'

With so much information marked on the verb, it is very common not to have many--or any--full noun phrases in Cherokee clauses.

There are two sets of pronominal prefixes which may appear on verbs with third person subjects and third person objects: a set which has been called the "subject focus" set, and a set which has been called the "object focus" set (Cook 1979). There are three distinct, but clearly related, rules which determine whether a verb with a third person subject and a third person object will take a subject focus prefix or an object focus prefix.

The first rule involves an animacy hierarchy, similar to those which have been proposed for other languages by many linguists (for some discussion see Comrie 1981). The relevant part of the Cherokee animacy hierarchy is given in (2).

- (2) human > non-human animate > inanimate

When the subject outranks the object on the hierarchy, then the verb takes a subject focus prefix, as in (3a), where the subject is human ('John') and the object is non-human animate ('the dog').<3> When the object outranks the subject on the hierarchy, then the verb takes an object focus prefix, as in (3b),

where the subject is non-human animate ('the horse') and the object is human ('John'). When the subject and object are both third person inanimate the verb must take subject focus, as in (3c).

- (3) a. Ca:n ki:hl a:hyvthe.  
 John dog 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=kicks  
 'John is kicking the dog.'
- b. So:kwili Ca:n u:hyvthe.  
 horse John 3sg./3sg.OBJ=kicks  
 'The horse is kicking John.'
- c. Kalo:stí kv:nsta ka:skilo.  
 door 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=bump table  
 'The door hit the table.'

If the choice between subject and object focus is not determined by the animacy hierarchy (that is, if both the subject and object are third person human or if they are both non-human animate), then the choice of focus may be determined by the syntax of the clause. When an object is relativized or questioned, as in (4a), the verb shows subject focus, and when a subject is relativized or questioned, as in (4b), the verb shows object focus.

- (4) a. Ka:kw kv:hniha Ca:ni?  
 who 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=hits John  
 'Who is John hitting?'
- b. Ka:kw u:wa:hniha Ca:ni?  
 who 3sg./3sg.OBJ=hits John  
 'Who is hitting John?'

When focus is determined by the animacy hierarchy, the pronominal prefix appearing on the verb of a WH question is in general not determined by the syntactic role of the questioned constituent. Thus, although the object is questioned in (5a), the verb appears with an object focus prefix because the subject is non-human animate and the object is human. Although the subject is questioned in (5b), the verb appears with a subject focus prefix because the subject is human and the object is non-human animate.

- (5) a. Ka:kw u:khe:he:ka yo:n?  
 who 3sg./3sg.OBJ=chases bear  
 'Who is the bear chasing?'
- b. Ka:kw a:khe:he:ka yo:n?  
 who 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=chases bear  
 'Who is chasing the bear?' <4>

If the choice between subject and object focus is not determined by the animacy hierarchy or by the syntax of the clause, then it is determined by discourse pragmatic factors.



- d. standard of comparison and comparative adjective;  
 Me:l u:ko:ti uwo:tú:hi si:hmv Li:t ke:sv:ʔi.  
 Mary more pretty than Lydia is  
 'Mary is prettier than Lydia.'
- e. predicate and copula: uwo:tú:hi ke:sv:ʔi  
 pretty was  
 'She was pretty.'

On the basis of fixed word orders, and on the basis of gapping facts, various claims can be--and have been--made about underlying word order in Cherokee. (Cherokee gaps to the right: SOV + SO, OVS + SO, and SVO + SO are all possible gapped constructions: for further discussion see Pulte (1972).) Notice, for example, that most of the fixed orders presented above are consistent with operator-operand (i.e., OV) order, although the comparative facts and the gapping facts suggest an operand-operator (i.e., VO) order. Many word orders in Cherokee are variable, as shown below. Some of the possible word orders are more frequent than others, and frequency has been used as a criterion for basic order; thus, additional evidence in favor of one or another underlying or basic word order for Cherokee might be forthcoming. It is not at all clear, however, that a search for basic word orders will lead to an insightful description of Cherokee grammar. <6> A more promising approach involves examining the principles which govern the many variable word orders of Cherokee.

Although some word orders in Cherokee are fixed, most are remarkably free, at least in elicitation. In any given context, however, word order is considerably less free. Some orders occur far more frequently than others, and speakers often will not accept or are hesitant to accept one order in place of another. The variable orders illustrated in (9) include the order of adjective and noun (9a), adverb and verb (9b), verb and subject (9c), and verb and object (9d).

- (9) a. Adj N Skwi:sto:sv' cutale:hmv't uwo:tú ti:hnavo  
 many different pretty clothes  
 tu:ni:na.  
 they=have=them  
 'They have a lot of different kinds of pretty clothes.'
- N Adj U:le:nv:he nikawe:skv no:kwu we:sa ú:thana.  
 he=began he=was=meowing now cat big  
 'The big cat began to cry.' (Cowen n.d.)
- b. Adv V Hlekwwitá u:cv:siye:ha.  
 a=little=while he=walked=around  
 'He walked around a little while.'
- V Adv Ustí ake:hyú:ca ta:ne:lo:ni:to:he to:yi.  
 small girl she=was=playing outside  
 'A small girl was out playing.' (Cowen n.d.)

- c. V S A:se:hn tlv:sko ahli:li:sv u:ni:luhcv skwi:st yv:wi  
 but about=ten time they=arrived many people  
 'About ten o'clock, the people began to come.'
- S V Ahlcató:hvski ta:ya:ʔi.  
 preacher he=was=coming  
 'The preacher was coming.'
- d. O V No:kw sa:kw hwiski u:tlista wu:ki:sv.  
 then one whisky container he=went=and=got  
 'He went and got one of his bottles of whisky.'
- V O nokw wiciné:la ku:k  
 then I=gave=back bottle  
 'and when I handed back the bottle,'

Other variable orders, not shown here, include the order of genitives (and possessive adjectives) and nouns, adjectives and adverbs, relative clauses and nouns, and verbs and infinitive complements.

Recent work on so-called free word order languages has revealed pragmatically based principles which are helpful in describing Cherokee.

Payne (1984) in examining the placement of verbal arguments and postpositional phrases in Papago, a Uto-Aztecan language, developed a three-part rule to account for the order of constituents relative to the verb. Her rule is quoted here as (10).

(10) Payne (1984):

1. Indefinite information precedes the verb when the hearer is instructed to open a new active discourse file for it, making it available for further deployment.
2. Pragmatically marked information (including all information question words) precedes the verb.
3. Information for which the hearer is not instructed to open a new active discourse file follows the verb. This includes items for which active cognitive files are already available (e.g. definites and uniques), and entities for which files are not to be established, including non-referential mentions.

In a language like Papago, the pragmatic principles outlined above will often result in new information preceding old information: more specifically, indefinite material precedes the verb and non-indefinite material follows the verb. Significantly, it is pragmatic and not syntactic relations which determine word order in Papago.

Payne considers the order of constituents within the clause, not the order of words within constituents. Mithun (to appear) describes languages (including Cayuga, an Iroquoian language distantly related to Cherokee) for which a similar pragmatic principle accounts not only for the order of constituents, but

also for word order within constituents. In languages like Cayuga, according to Mithun, when word order is not fixed, it is determined by a principle involving "newsworthiness": the most newsworthy information comes first, and elements of a clause, or of a lower level constituent, appear in order of decreasing newsworthiness.

Mithun's principle is different from Payne's, for Mithun's relies on newsworthiness rather than indefiniteness and is designed to account for word order on a lower level than Payne's. Nevertheless, in many instances the two rules give the same results: new information will generally precede old information, because it will generally be indefinite (Payne) or because it will generally be more newsworthy than old information (Mithun). Noun phrases representing changes of topic (even if the referents are given or definite), question words and other "pragmatically marked" material will come at the beginning of the sentence, because they are pragmatically marked (Payne) or because, by virtue of their special pragmatic status, they are newsworthy (Mithun).<7>

All of the examples in (9), above, are drawn from texts. Some discussion of the contexts in which the examples are found will show how the newsworthy-first principle operates in Cherokee.

In the first example in (9a), the adjectives 'different' and 'pretty' precede the noun they modify, and in the second example the adjective 'big' follows the noun it modifies. The Adj N example is part of a passage describing the main street of a tourist town, and the speaker is emphasizing the appearance of the street, with its many different shops selling a variety of brightly colored goods. It is not the clothes themselves that are of interest here; rather, it is the festive appearance of the clothes for sale out on the street, which is created by the variety. The N Adj example is taken from a story in which a girl going out to play finds a large cat (a mountain lion) in the tree she wanted to climb. When she first discovers the cat, the cat is referred to with the NP ú:thana we:sa, with the adjective before the noun; and there follows a clause describing the big teeth that the big cat has (all referred to by NP's with Adj N order). In the clause given here, the girl is approaching the tree, and the cat begins to cry. The size of the cat is not especially newsworthy at this point in the narrative, having been established just previously.<8>

Both of the examples in (9d) are taken from the same passage, in which a father and his son pass a bottle of whisky back and forth, with the father insisting that the son take a drink, and the son refusing. When the bottle of whisky, which figures so prominently in this story, is first introduced into the text, it appears before the verb (the OV example). Certainly the fact that a bottle of whisky is fetched is newsworthy, but it is not so newsworthy as the fact that what is fetched is a bottle, and particularly a bottle of whisky. Notice the phrasing hwiski u:lista, with the (more newsworthy) partitive before the noun.

U:tlista hwiski is also grammatical, as the story teller noted, but he prefers hwiski u:tlista. The order u:tlista hwiski would indicate that the bottle was more newsworthy than the whisky, but what is significant here is that the bottle is full of whisky, since there follows a passage in which the son, who has resisted tasting it because it is intoxicating, is eventually forced to drink. The possibility that the whisky has made him drunk is crucial to the remainder of the story, in which he has a very strange, perhaps alcohol-induced, dream. The VO example in (9d) refers to the passing of the bottle between father and son. What is significant in this example is that the son (the speaker) is handing the bottle back: the action of passing the bottle is newsworthy, but the fact that what is being passed is the bottle, which has been given information for several clauses, is not newsworthy.

#### Focus and word order in 'actives' and 'passives'

I have yet to consider sentences with two NP arguments: in context, transitive clauses with full NP subjects and objects are rare. In elicited sentences, when the verb prefix disambiguates subject from object, either because of animacy (11a) or because of number (11b), then any order of S, V, and O is permissible, although speakers prefer not to place verbs first in such clauses.

- (11) a. Ca:n ki:hl a:hyvthe.  
 John dog 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=kicks  
 'John is kicking the dog.'  
 b. Ca:ni ani:chú:ca te:kv:hniha.  
 John boys 3sg./3pl.SUBJ=hits  
 'John is hitting the boys.'

There is some controversy as to whether the subject must precede the object when the verb does not disambiguate subject from object. King (1975) and Cook (1979) claim that in such cases the subject must precede the object; examples from Pulte and Feeling (1975) claim otherwise. The two pragmatic principles discussed above, one accounting for subject and object focus prefixes and the other accounting for word order, provide an explanation of this controversy and an account of a related problem: a so-called passive construction in Cherokee.

The examples in (12) illustrate the problems with these transitive clauses. (12a) is an example of an 'active' transitive clause, and (12b) is an example of a 'passive' transitive clause (i.e., an object focus construction with two NP's in which object focus is not required by the animacy hierarchy or by the syntax). There are two translations given for each Cherokee sentence. In each case, the first translations, which are the translations predicted by the discussions of word order presented by King (1975) and Cook (1979), are by far the more commonly elicited--even among Oklahoma speakers, although King and Cook were both describing North Carolina Cherokee.

- (12) a. Ake:hya a:kohwthiha askaya.  
 woman 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=sees man  
 'A woman sees a man.' (King 1975, Cook 1979)  
 'A man sees a woman.' (Pulte and Feeling 1975)
- b. Askaya u:kohwthiha ake:hya.  
 man 3sg./3sg.OBJ=sees woman  
 'A man is being seen by a woman.' (King, Cook)  
 'A woman is being seen by a man.' (Pulte and Feeling)

Example (12b) shows that a Cherokee verb with an object focus prefix and two NP arguments is translated into English with a passive verb (if the focus is assigned by discourse pragmatic rules rather than by the animacy hierarchy or by syntax: compare (12b) with (3b) and (4b)). Likewise, a verb with a subject focus prefix and two NP arguments is translated into English with an active verb. I suggest that the object focus verbs are translated by English passives because the object focus prefix is used when the object, or patient, is given, and the English passive is often used in just those circumstances.

Sentences with transitive verbs and two full NP arguments are extremely rare in Cherokee (I found only seven among several hundred clauses). The unnaturalness of these clauses, coupled with the fact that Cherokee word order is pragmatically based, makes any judgment of word order and grammaticality taken out of context highly suspect, and it is precisely that sort of judgment which provides the English translations for the examples in (12).

The King and Cook translations, taken out of context, reflect English word order principles rather than Cherokee principles. In English, subjects precede verbs, and the subject of an active verb is the agent and the subject of a passive verb is the patient; but in Cherokee, word order is determined by newsworthiness, and the most newsworthy elements come earliest in the sentence. Given NP's (i.e., the subjects of subject focus verbs and the objects of object focus verbs) are in general unlikely to be newsworthy, and this is reflected in the Pulte and Feeling translations. These NP's can be newsworthy, however, if they are new as topics, for example. In context, if a verbal argument which is given appears as a full NP at all, it is likely to be because that NP is newsworthy; otherwise it would have been omitted.

If this analysis is correct, then any naturally occurring transitive clauses with both subject and object NP's ought to show SVO or SOV order (recall that speakers prefer not to place verbs first in these clauses) if the verbs have subject focus prefixes and the subjects are given, and ought to show OVS or OSV order if the verbs have object focus prefixes. This should hold regardless of whether the prefix on the verb disambiguates subject from object (unless the construction involves topicalization or dislocation: see Cook (1979)). The analysis makes no prediction

about word order in subject focus sentences with no given NP (see (7) for an example of such a sentence).

In fact, sentences with two NP's in which object focus is required by discourse factors rather than by syntax or animacy, are extremely rare in texts—a reflection, no doubt, of the fact that it is rare to have a given object in a sentence which meets the various requirements for object focus; and there are no such examples in the texts I examined for this study. There are, however, examples of subject focus sentences with two NP's, although there are not many. The only word orders exemplified by these sentences are SOV and SVO: this is just what is predicted for clauses with given subjects, but some of the clauses contain subjects which are not given. In every case, whether or not the subject is given, it can be shown that the subject is more newsworthy than the object, since in every example the subject represents a major participant in the text or passage and the object represents a minor participant or else the subject is given but is new as topic. Thus, the lack of sentences in the corpus with OS orders is not problematic, but it remains to be seen whether subject focus clauses without given subjects and with OS order ever occur in texts, and, if they do, under what circumstances they occur.

The newsworthiness principle claims that SVO order appears when the verb represents information which is more newsworthy than the object and that SOV order appears when the object is more newsworthy than the verb; the examples in (13), when considered in context, bear out that claim.

(13) a. SVO: Askaya awe:nu:ca kano:ski:ske:ʔe ake:hya.  
man young=man 3sg./3sg.SUBJ=went=to=steal woman  
'A young man once went to abduct a girl.'  
(Speck 1926)

b. SOV: Nv:khi:yani anino:lito cu:nata:li:ʔi  
four=of=them hunters their=wives  
tu:nhthinv:seʔi.  
3pl./3pl.SUBJ=took=along  
'(Once) four hunters took their wives (hunting)  
with them.' (King 1975)

(13a) is the first sentence of a short story or joke in which a young man goes off one night to steal a wife, and ends up instead with an old man who is sleeping in her usual place. The joke is less about the girl than about what happens when the man is off on his expedition. (13b) introduces new participants, the hunters and their wives, into a narrative. The fact that these men are taking people along with them is not so important as the fact that it is the women who are going along, because the misadventures which befall the women (described in the next few clauses) precipitate the main action of the story, in which the men are shown to be main characters. The clause in (13b) is

serving to introduce participants into the story rather than to describe any action that the participants undertake.

I have tried to show how the discourse-pragmatic status of an NP referent, specifically its status as newsworthy or as given, can be relevant to morphological and syntactic rules. In the Cherokee transitive clauses described above, the interaction of these morphological and syntactic rules is best understood in terms of the pragmatic roles of the NP's in the clauses.

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#### Notes

<1>In my field work I have primarily studied Oklahoma Cherokee, but the facts discussed here hold true for both the Oklahoma and the North Carolina dialects.

<2>Cherokee examples are presented in an orthography similar to the phonemic orthographies of King (1975) and Cook (1979), but I am using <c> in place of their <ts>. The <v> represents a nasalized central vowel. Pitch is not marked in the examples, except that atonic accent (see Cook 1979) is marked with an acute accent.

<3>The abbreviation SUBJ in the glosses indicates a subject focus prefix; the abbreviation OBJ indicates an object focus prefix.

<4>Not all speakers are consistent in applying the animacy hierarchy. For example, some speakers occasionally allow verbs with non-human animate subjects and human objects to take either subject or object focus prefixes. Further, WH questions with non-human animate subjects and human objects in which the object is questioned (e.g., 'Who is the bear chasing?') sometimes show subject focus prefixes, rather than the object focus prefixes which the animacy hierarchy would require.

<5>Example (6a) can also mean 'John's hitting it.' (Subject focus is required when the subject outranks the object.)

<6>Cherokee appears to present some problems for word order universals such as those proposed by Hawkins (1983). Given that Cherokee is postpositional and shows Numeral Noun and Demonstrative Noun orders, it should show Genitive Noun order as well (pp.79-81). Although Noun Genitive order is possible, Genitive Noun order is more common; since Hawkins considers frequency a criterion for basic order, and since he is concerned with relationships among basic orders, there are no problems so far. But by the same token, since Adverb Adjective order is more common than Adjective Adverb order, then Adverb Adjective order is

to be taken as basic. A problem arises, because a postpositional language with Adverb Adjective order should show the standard of comparison before the adjective (p. 88), but Cherokee has the adjective before the standard of comparison.

<7>There are certain elements of a sentence which are not affected by the newsworthy-first principle: Mithun explains that "elements that establish a significant orientation for the first time, whether it be the point of view of the topic, the time, the location, or the reliability of the statement, occur early, just as they do in Czech", a language which otherwise shows word order which is almost the reverse of the newsworthy-first pattern Mithun describes.

<8>It is far more common to find the order Adjective Noun than Noun Adjective, probably because if an adjective is to be used at all it will carry newsworthy information; otherwise, an unmodified noun will do.

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