A'-agreement in Ojibwe: consequences for feature inheritance and the categorical status of tense

The aim of this paper is two-fold: i) to show that A'-agreement in Ojibwe is instantiated on T via feature inheritance: assuming that δ-features (i.e. discourse/clause type features, of which wh-features are one instance) are proper formal features comparable to tense, Case, and φ-features (they are part of the numeration N of linguistic expressions, cf. Abbo 2008), we argue that δ-features are introduced by C but passed down to T; ii) to show that Tense is a functional head in Ojibwe. Wiltschko & Ritter (2007) have recently argued that Tense in Blackfoot is not a functional head but is instead adverbial, and that Inf in that language is realized through Person. Although they are careful not to make a generalization across the Algonquian family from the Blackfoot data they introduce, it is tempting to generalize their findings to Ojibwe, since that language has, like Blackfoot, a person/inverse system and Tense surfacing as a preverb. We show that indeed the generalization cannot be made across Algonquian languages, citing evidence from the agreement facts in Ojibwe. It turns out that Blackfoot is different from Ojibwe not only in relation to the categorical status of tense, but also in relation to A'-agreement (which is no longer productive) and realization of Person features.

Wh-agreement has been documented for several languages, e.g. French (Rizzi 1990) and Irish (McCloskey 1979) where wh-agreement is triggered on C, and Chamorro where wh-agreement appears on the verb (Chung 1994, 1998, also in Hausa, Tuller 1986; Kikuyu, Clements 1984; Palaun, Georgopoulos 1991). Using evidence from Ojibwe, we show that beyond the categories C and ν, wh-agreement can target the category Tense. While initial change phenomena in Algonquian languages have been known for a long time, it has never been described as wh-/A' agreement. Our work builds on Lees (1979), Pagotto (1980), Johns (1981), Campana (1996), Brittain (1997) but gives a minimalist analysis that does not include movement of the verb to C. Putative evidence for the verb movement hypothesis comes from Rainy River Ojibwe (a Western dialect), since in that dialect a complementizer –ka and initial change are in complimentary distribution. But the dialect under review (a variant of Eastern Ojibwe) is very different in that no complementizer appears in environments conducive to initial change. On our view, the verb raises to T and stops there. The verb could not have possibly raised to C since wh-agreement in Ojibwe surfaces in environments where in other languages no movement from T to C is attested (see Richards 2004), relative clauses and focus constructions in French and English (cf. (7) and (8)).

In Ojibwe, verbs are marked for tense by a prefix. In the declarative the prefixes are ∅- ‘present’, gii- ‘past’, wii- ‘volitional future’, and ga- ‘future’. The tense marking changes if a wh-element has moved through or into the clause, causing ‘initial vowel change’ in the tense prefix (Bloomfield 1957): e- ‘wh-present’, gaa- ‘wh-past’, waa- ‘wh-volitional future’, and ge- ‘wh-future’. We focus on the gii-/gaa- ‘past’ alternation. (2) is the answer to the question in (1c): it is a declarative sentence in the independent order (IO) and it uses the gii- form. (1c), on the other hand, involves –gaa. Wh-agreement is also obligatory in relative clauses (3) and that agreement is cyclic (4). When no tense prefix is present, it is the first vowel in the verb that undergoes change (6). We show that discourse agreement is also attested in focus constructions (Rogers 1978, Campana 1996, Brittain 2001), since agreement on T is exhibited with it as well, as shown in (5).

The correlation between the wh-agreement on T and the presence of CP entails that the agreement features surfacing on T depend on C, i.e. that they are inherited from C. We argue that In the IO, the EPP feature of T is satisfied by a proclitic which encodes participant agreement while in the conjunct order (CO) A'-elements satisfy the EPP. In this case, the proclitic is always absent (the relevant features surface as suffixes). Spec-TP is thus an A'-position in the CO. Wh phrases and null operators pass through Spec-TP before they land in Spec-CP. In Ojibwe, C either introduces δ-features or φ-features, but never both at the same time. In the IO, C introduces φ-features, while in the CO C introduces δ-features. In the CO, the φ-features normally related to the proclitic are introduced by ν, which explains why the subject features surface as a suffix rather than as a prefix (see Boeckx 2001 and Alexiadou 2003 for the idea that ν can assign Nominative). Finally, we argue that CO sentences with no initial change involve Topics. Unlike wh and focus, topic does not trigger discourse agreement (this appears to be universal). One question that arises at the end of the paper is why the δ-features have to percolate down instead of staying in C with the verb moving to C (T now looks like a simple proxy head with no semantic content). The answer to this question can be found in a recent discussion on phase-heads (Richard 2007): T is necessary because the features correlated with C have to be spelled out along the complement of the C phase head since once uninterpretable features have been valued they have to be spelled-out.
(1) a. wenesh, John gaa-waam-dung t_i, (Mrs. Proulx)
   who John wh.pst-see
   ‘Who did John see?’

   b. wogenesh, t_i gaa-shishimik nen kwezhigaans-an?
   Who wh.pst-steal those cookie-pl
   ‘Who stole the cookies?’

   c. wenesh, gaa-gimoodit (ow) John t_i (Ella Waukey)
   what wh.pst-steal (that) John
   ‘What did John steal?’

(2) kwezhegaas-un gii-gimoode (Ella Waukey)
cookie-pl pst-steal
‘He stole the cookies.’

(3) n-gii-kenm-aa Manis gaa-kweshkwaazh-un nin-on (Mrs. Pheasant)
1-pst-know-dir Mary wh.pst-meet man
‘I know the man Mary met.

(4) a. aniish, gaa-kedat John Mary gaa-giishned-ot t_i, (Ella Waukey)
   what wh.pst-say John Mary wh.pst-buy-?
   ‘What did John say Mary bought?’

   b. aniish, Bill gaa-eneendang John gaa-kedat Mary gaa-giishned-ot t_i
   what Bill wh.pst-think John wh.pst-say Mary wh.pst-buy-?
   ‘What does Bill think John said Mary bought?’

(5) Mii dash maa gaa-nji-goojiid
and then there PAST-dive.VAI.Conj.3s
   gii-nakzhiwed    widi   yaanid.
PAST.swim.VAI.Conj.3s  over.there   be.VAI.Conj3obv
‘Then he dived from there and swam over to where they were.’ (Valentine 2001:945)

(6) Wenen, t_i bEmosset?
who   walk-3
‘Who is walking?’

(7) a. the day [when he delivered them from the enemy]

   b. *the day [when did he deliver them from the enemy] (Richards 2004)

   c. Le jour où il les a vus.

   d. *Le jour où les a-t-il vus.

(8) a. it is the man who(m) I saw yesterday.

   b. *it is the man who(m) saw I yesterday.

   c. c’est l’homme que j’ai vu hier.

   d. *c’est l’homme ai-je vu hier.

(9) CP    independent              CP  conjunct
     order         order
C      TP   C       TP
T'        T'  
  ϕ-features     δ-features