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## GENDER, TRANSITIVITY, AND PERSON IN ALGONKIAN AND INUKTITUT

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OF THE THREE CATEGORIES OF GENDER, TRANSITIVITY, AND PERSON, the last of these (person) appears to be a true universal of human languages. I have never yet observed a human language which did not have some kind of reference to what we, in our grammatical tradition, call first, second, and third person, nor have I ever heard any report from any other linguist of the existence of any language which lacked the category of grammatical person. That is a fact which reveals something about the nature of language itself. Normally, as in Indo-European languages, there is a hierarchy which runs from the first person, the speaker speaking about self, through the second person, the person spoken to about self, to the third person, simply the person spoken about, as presented in (1), definitions taken from Gustave Guillaume (1987) because they clearly distinguish the speech act participants (SAP) from the third person.

(1) Indo-European Person Hierarchy:

First Person (SAP)	=	Speaker speaking about self
Second Person (SAP)	=	Person spoken to about self
Third Person	=	Person spoken about

But that hierarchical *order* (1, 2, 3) is by no means a linguistic universal: those three persons, yes, but in that order, no. In Algonkian languages, for example, what we call the second person is marked grammatically as the primary element of the hierarchy, to which what we call the first person is subordinate. And the Algonkian third person, as well as showing a gender distinction of animate versus inanimate also has a person distinction of proximate versus obviative. The proximate is the primary or focus third person, and the obviative is the secondary or peripheral third person, with a grammar all of its own. What we normally call the plural forms are even more complex, with first person plural inclusive (*you and me*) and exclusive (*me and my buddy, but not you*), as well as proximate and obviative third persons, linguistic variations of the basic, universal three personal categories.

Gender and transitivity, which I am also going to talk about, are frequently involved in the grammar of person, but are not linguistic universals. They are found in Indo-European languages apparently without exception, but not necessarily elsewhere: there are no third person distinctions of gender in Inuktitut, for example, and it is quite common to hear even well-educated speakers of Algonkian languages refer to men as *she* and women as *he* when speaking English, since for them, in their languages, the grammatical contrast of masculine and feminine does not exist (although the contrast of animate versus inanimate,

apparently non-existent in Inuktitut, is of prime importance in Algonkian). As for transitivity, such facts as the lack of a passive in Hittite have led to the suspicion that Proto Indo-European may have been an active language, where the diathesis of the verb was completed not with a direct object, but with adverbial phrases using all of the oblique cases of the noun. In Modern Icelandic, which is the most conservative of the modern languages in this regard, there are well over 200 verbs where the verbal diathesis is completed by an oblique, sometimes genitive, sometimes dative, sometimes accusative, where modern English has simply a direct object. In Old English many of those same verbs governed oblique cases, just as they do in Modern Icelandic, so that we can see in the history of English the consummation of the development of the fully transitive diathesis of the verb.

First of all I want to look at the interrelationship of the grammar of possession and the grammar of transitivity which is found in so many languages of the world (Allen 1964, Seiler 1983b, Ulving 1987:40), where there is a common morphology for the pronominal elements that mark (a) nominal *possession* and (b) the verbal *subject* of intransitive verbs, as in (2). The data is from Ojibway, an Algonkian language spoken in the southern parts of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, as well as across the border in the northern U.S. The prefixed pronominal elements *ni-*, *ki-*, *o-*, are used with nouns to indicate possession, and with verbs to indicate the subject of intransitive verbs and also transitive verbs with inanimate goal (TI verbs): the verb *niwa:panta:n* means 'I see it', and *ninikk* means 'my arm'. Grammatical possession in Algonkian languages is always hierarchical, and the hierarchical relationships are made explicit in the right hand column,

(2) Ojibway Person Markers for Subject and Possessor

		'SEE IT'	'ARM'	(PERSONS)
<i>ni-</i>	1st sing.	<i>niwa:panta:n</i>	<i>ni-nikk</i>	1 > 3 <sub>INAN</sub>
<i>ki-</i>	2nd sing.	<i>kiwa:panta:n</i>	<i>ki-nikk</i>	2 > 3 <sub>INAN</sub>
<i>o-</i>	3rd sing.	<i>owa:panta:n</i>	<i>o-nikk</i>	3 <sub>AN</sub> > 3 <sub>INAN</sub>

But, whereas the word for 'arm' in Ojibway is inanimate, a further element is called into play when the possessed noun is animate, as in (3): *ninaw*, *kinaw*, *onawan* 'my, thy, his/her cheek', again with an exact parallel in the paradigms of the transitive verb: *niwa:pama:*, *kiwa:pama:*, *owa:pama:n*, '1st, 2nd, 3rd sees (something animate)', where the suffixed (a)*n* in both cases marks the obviative singular, again with a hierarchical analysis in the right-most column, where <sub>AN</sub>=animate, <sub>INAN</sub>=inanimate, <sub>PR</sub>=proximate, <sub>OBV</sub>=obviative), the obviative marker for both verbal and nominal forms being *-n/* in Ojibway.

(3) Ojibway Person Markers with Animate Goal or Animate Possessee

		'SEE S.T. ANIMATE'	'CHEEK'	(PERSONS)
<i>ni-</i>	1st sing.	<i>niwa:pama:</i>	<i>ni-naw</i>	1 > 3 <sub>AN</sub>
<i>ki-</i>	2nd sing.	<i>kiwa:pama:</i>	<i>ki-naw</i>	2 > 3 <sub>AN</sub>
<i>o-</i>	3rd sing.	<i>owa:pama:n</i>	<i>o-naw-an</i>	3 <sub>PR</sub> > 3 <sub>OBV</sub>

In these paradigms we can see elements of three Algonkian grammatical hierarchies. The possessor is seen as the determining element in the relationship of possession, and is therefore required to be of a higher grammatical rank than the possessee. In Algonkian person hierarchies first and second person rank higher than third; it can also be seen that animate ranks higher than inanimate, and that proximate ranks higher than obviative. The proximate/obviative distinction only comes into play in Ojibway when both actors are otherwise of an equal status (namely third person animate): its principal purpose appears to be the 'backgrounding' (Seiler 1983a:24) of the possessee, thereby foregrounding or focussing the determining role of the possessor.

The notion of obviative, by itself, is secondary or derived: there can be no obviative unless there is first a proximate, just as in baseball freedom to advance to second base is contingent on touching first base, which thereby becomes a determining or controlling factor of the secondary element. Proximate, in short, determines obviative: proximate establishes a new (third person) viewpoint or focus, to which all other third persons are secondary, or notionally subordinate.

The animate/inanimate hierarchy has similar values. Universally in languages, animates are appropriate for agentive active roles, such as agent of a transitive verb, in which the agent controls or determines the action, whereas inanimates are appropriate for inactive roles such as patient. If A hits B, for example, A is the controlling and determining factor, who often has free choice, whereas B has little control or choice—he is hit whether he likes it or not. It is noteworthy that animates in languages such as Spanish (phenomenon of *leísmo*), Gascon, Rumanian, and elsewhere in the world, require special prepositional or other marking to play the role of patient, Spanish *leísmo* is a mark of the iconic insuitability of an animate or active element to play the role of patient.

The person hierarchy, wherein first and second outrank third, is based on the following factors: (a) first and second persons are always animate, and almost exclusively human, since only humans are normally capable of speaking, and of listening and understanding (roles that fall to first and second person by definition), whereas third persons can be either animate or inanimate; (b) the SAP (Speech Act Participants) establish a *viewpoint* (DeLancey 1981) for the discourse which determines directionality (e.g., come/go) and focus. There is, in fact, a natural hierarchy, as noted by Guillaume (1987:100), in the very act of language: the speaker is the fully active person, creating discourse and causing it to vibrate on the airwaves, the hearer is in a mediopassive position, passive in regard to receiving the message, but active in interpreting and understanding it. The third person, by contrast, is inactive, not being required to speak or listen. In this regard the hierarchy of person may be seen to be equally as iconic as those of animacy and obviation.

These same factors are also at play in the paradigm of possession: first and second persons, for example, may possess third person elements, but third person elements cannot be possessors of elements that are first and second person: we can have *my dog, your dog*, but we cannot have *\*dog's me* or *\*dog's you*. In the paradigms of possession in Algonkian languages, therefore, we can see the person hierarchies operating in every form: SAP>3 is an irreversible relation of determination, and when there is a third person possessor, the relationship must always be interpreted as either animate>inanimate (dominance of agentivity) or proximate>obviative (dominance of viewpoint).

We turn now to Direct and Inverse Forms. It would appear that the majority of languages that have person hierarchies or grammatical directionality (i.e., direct and inverse forms) follow the natural hierarchy noted above and made explicit by Seiler (1983a:46), as in (4):

- (4) 1st > 2nd > 3rd human > 3rd animate > 3rd inanimate

An alternative is to treat the two SAPs as equal elements. The Algonkian family, in fact, without exception, presents the hierarchy in (5).

- (5) 2nd > 1st > 3rd an proximate > 3rd animate obviative > 3rd inanimate

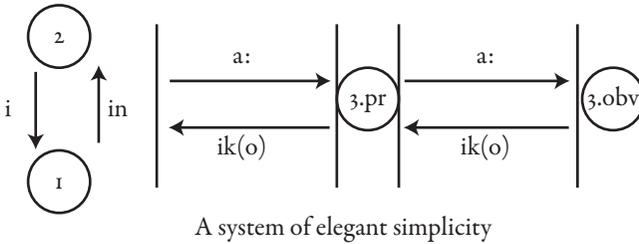
where there is the prominence given to second person over first. The possible cultural overtones of this difference may be of interest to anthropologists, and indeed Speck (1935) has discussed at length the fact that among the tribes of Northern Quebec and Labrador it is felt that one's *mista:pe:w* (literally 'great man' or 'spirit') may not be as powerful as that of one's interlocutor, to whom one must, as a consequence, always give deference.

Whatever the case, the Algonkian TA verb (transitive with animate goal) has paradigms which show three sets of direct and inverse forms, as in the TA paradigms from Ojibway in (6), where the second set represents the plural or complex persons, and the third set represents the interplay between first and second persons. In these paradigms 3 = 3rd proximate and 3' = 3rd obviative, 1p = 1st plural exclusive *s/he and I*, 12 = 1st plural inclusive *you and I*. The direct forms are on the left, the inverse forms on the right, so that *niwa:pama:* means 'I see him' whereas *niwa:pamik* means 'He sees me', and in the second row *kiwa:pama:* means 'You see him', and *kiwa:pamik* means 'He sees you'. In the third line *owa:pama:n* means 'proximate sees obviative', and *owa:pamiko:n* means 'obviative sees proximate'. In both forms the initial *o-* marks the proximate, and again in both forms the final *-n* marks the obviative.

The forms in the right hand column are equally active and transitive as the forms on the left, the only difference being that the normal hierarchies of person and viewpoint operate inversely in the forms in the right hand column.

(6) Ojibway Transitive Animate (TA) Verbal Paradigms

	DIRECT		INVERSE
1 > 3	<i>niwa:pama:</i>	1 < 3	<i>niwa:pamik</i>
2 > 3	<i>kiwa:pama:</i>	2 < 3	<i>kiwa:pamik</i>
3 > 3'	<i>owa:pama:n</i>	3 < 3'	<i>owa:pamiko:n</i>
1p > 3	<i>niwa:pama:na:n</i>	1p < 3	<i>niwa:pamikona:n</i>
12 > 3	<i>kiwa:pama:na:n</i>	12 < 3	<i>kiwa:pamikona:n</i>
2p > 3	<i>kiwa:pama:wa:</i>	2p < 3	<i>kiwa:pamikowa:</i>
3p > 3'	<i>owa:pama:wa:n</i>	3p < 3'	<i>owa:pamikowa:n</i>
2 > 1	<i>kiwa:pami</i>	2 < 1	<i>kiwa:pamin</i>



A system of elegant simplicity

Figure 1. Schematic View of Ojibway TA Markers (based on Hockett 1966).

2p>1	<i>kiwa:pamim</i>	2p<1	<i>kiwa:paminim</i>
2(p)>1p	<i>kiwa:paminimin</i>	2(p)<1p	<i>kiwa:paminiminim</i>

The last line is to be interpreted as follows: 2(p)>1p = second person (sg. or pl.) acting on first plural: *kiwa:paminimin* ‘you (sg. or pl.) see us’; 2(p)<1p = first plural acting on second (sg. or pl.): *kiwa:paminiminim* ‘we see you (sg. or pl.)’. All the inverse forms are to be interpreted according to this pattern. Note that in the inclusive form the *ki* prefix of second person is used, indicating the hierarchical ranking of second person over first, and the *ki* prefix is also found throughout the paradigm of the you-me and I-you (2>1 and 2<1) forms, where second person takes hierarchical precedence over first.

In the above paradigm the following direct and inverse markers may be presented schematically as in Figure 1. The markers in Figure 1 represent the following functions: (i) *a:* = direct action on subordinate third person; (ii) *ik(o)* = inverse action of subordinate third person on others; (iii) *i* = direct action of second person on first; *in* = inverse action of first person on second. (The above figure may profitably be compared to that in Hockett (1966), where the status of direct and inverse forms is discussed at length.)

We turn now to the question of the parallelism of transitivity and possession in Inuktitut. Since Inuktitut has dual number as well as singular and plural, the paradigms of the transitive verb, when laid out to fill all possible permutations of actor, are very complex. Such a paradigm may be seen in the three pages presenting the 63 possible forms of the indicative in Smith (1977:613): syncretism is ignored in Smith’s presentation, the appropriate form being given for every possible combination of actors. The same 63 forms are compressed onto one page in Lowe’s grammars of the dialects of the Beaufort Sea region (e.g., 1985a:117, 1985b:121, 1985c:130).

An important and recurrent pattern emerges from these Inuktitut transitive paradigms: third person proximate is regularly unmarked. This means that the argument that is italicised in (7) has no marker in the Inuktitut forms, and that this is an essential fact that for understanding what happens in the rest of the paradigm. The rest of the paradigm cannot be properly understood if this fact is not taken into account.

- (7) Inuktitut Transitive Forms
  - taku-va-ga I see *him*
  - taku-va-t You see *him*
  - taku-va-a *He* sees him

In these forms *-va* marks the verb as transitive, and *-ga* and *-t* mark first and second person transitive agents respectively; the third person patient is not marked in these forms. In other words in these two forms, *takuvaga*, *takuvat*, the goal of the transitive verb is completely unmarked. In the remaining form, however, the *-a* has to be interpreted, as we shall see, as the goal of the transitive verb; in this form it is the third person agent that is unmarked.

We have already seen that this is precisely the pattern followed in the Algonkian transitive animate paradigms where the third person proximate makes the same shift from the role of patient with SAP subjects to agent in 3 > 3 forms (pr = proximate; U = unmarked) as shown in (8):

(8) Person Relationships in Algonkian and Inuktitut Transitive Paradigms

ALGONKIAN			INUKTITUT		
1	>	3pr	1	>	3prU
2	>	3pr	2	>	3prU
3pr	>	3obv	3prU	>	3obv

In the transitive paradigms of Inuktitut, as we have seen, the stem is marked for transitivity, but only the agent is marked in inflections of the 1>3 and 2>3 forms, whereas in the 3pr>3obv forms only the patient is marked, as the following forms in (9) from Lowe (1985b:121) clearly show.

(9) Inuktitut Obviative Forms

<i>utaqqigaa</i>	‘he waits for him’	<i>illu</i>	‘house’
<i>utaqqigai</i>	‘he waits for them’		
<i>utaqqigaaat</i>	‘they wait for him’	<i>illu-t</i>	‘house-s’
<i>utaqqigait</i>	‘they wait for them’		

In this dialect *ga* is the transitive marker, *a* marks obviative singular, *i* marks obviative plural, and *t* marks proximate plural, proximate singular being unmarked. I shall call this recurrent pattern the Ushift (U = un-marked), and it will be found to apply not only to transitives, but also to possessives, and to the marking of singular and plural, since the proximate plural marker *t* (as in *illut* ‘houses’) is not used for the obviative.

The syncretism that we have already mentioned as being a feature of the transitive paradigms is revealing. For 1<sub>DUAL</sub>>3U and 2<sub>DUAL</sub>>3U forms there is levelling of number in the patient, whereas in 3U>3 forms there is levelling of number in the agent, as the following forms in (10) from Smith’s Labrador Inuttut data (1977:62) clearly show (3 = prox; 3’ = obv):

(10) Syncretism of Singular, Dual, and Plural Forms of Unmarked Third Person in Inuktitut

1d	>	3/3d/3p	<i>takuvavuk</i>	‘we two see him/them both/them all’
2d	>	3/3d/3p	<i>takuvatik</i>	‘you two see him/them both/them all’
3/3d/3p	>	3’	<i>takuvauk</i>	‘he/they both/they all see him’
3/3d/3p	>	3’d	<i>takuvaagik</i>	‘he/they both/they all see them both’
3/3d/3p	>	3’p	<i>takuvaait</i>	‘he/they both/they all see them all’

(Cf. *taku-va-tik* ‘you two see him/them/all’ and *taku-vu-tik* ‘you both see’ where *-vu-* = intransitive).

These patterns of levelling (1/2 > 3U vs. 3U > 3’, where 3U is unmarked for number) persist throughout the paradigm, but with less consistency than in the examples given, showing that third person typically behaves differently from first and second, indicating the different status of third person from first and second. The unmarked status of 3U, for example, shows very clearly in *takuvatik*, which only differs from *takuvutik* ‘you both see (intransitive)’ in the fact that *va* is the verbal marker of transitivity whereas *vu* is the marker of intransitivity. In both forms there is only one person marker: the *tik* that marks second person dual.

Uvling (1987:401) also points out that the possessive markers for third person differ significantly from those for first and second, and reports the confusion that this difference has caused among analysts of the language. His Greenlandic data, using the noun *illu(t)* ‘house(s)’, shows that whereas the suffixes mark the possessor in first and second person forms, the suffixes *̱* and *̱* mark the possessee, ‘while the third singular possessor is marked by zero’ (1987:41):

(11) Proximate and Obviative Possessive Forms in Inuktitut

1	>	3U	<i>illuga</i> (< * <i>ka</i> )	1	>	3UP	<i>illukka</i> (< * <i>illukka</i> )
2	>	3U	<i>illut</i>	2	>	3UP	<i>illutit</i>
3U	>	3’	<i>illua</i>	3U	>	3’P	<i>illui</i>
3UP	>	3’	<i>illuat</i>	3UP	>	3’P	<i>illui(t)</i>

Here again we can observe the effect of the U-shift. In the form *illua* ‘his house’, *̱* marks the noun as obviative singular. In *illui* ‘his houses’, *̱* marks the noun as obviative plural. In both cases the proximate possessor is unmarked, and need not be marked, since one can only have an obviative where there is already a proximate. In the forms *illuat* and *illuit* the final *t* marks the proximate possessor as plural, whereas in *illukka* (< \**tka*) and *illutit* it marks the proximate possessee as plural. This *t* is, in fact, the regular proximate plural marker that is found on *illut* ‘houses’ when the noun itself is proximate, not obviative. The shifting role of *-t* in this paradigm is entirely dependent on the U-shift; it regularly pluralizes the unmarked proximate, whether this latter be possessor or possessee.

In conclusion we may note that the problem of person is a true linguistic universal since, as Guillaume comments, “It is impossible to conceive of language without a certain solution to the problem of person, seeing that language requires the confrontation of an active, speaking person and a listener, active also by dint of his listening” (1987:187, trans. by author). Solutions to the problem vary, but it is not surprising to find that third person, an element transcendent or exterior to the phatic relationship of first and second, is frequently treated quite differently from these latter persons. It is also not surprising, given the necessarily always active role of first and second, to find them ranked in an iconically-based hierarchy above third person. And the use of inverse forms, which require the representation to run counter to these established hierarchies, can likewise be seen as a development

to be expected, a necessary result once such highly iconic systems of grammatical person have been established. We also find in languages of the Tibeto-Burman family (one of the rare other families that has direct and inverse forms) an example of the “split ergative type with ergative syntax in transitive sentences with a third person subject and accusative syntax with first or second person subjects” (Ebert 1987:475), a situation that emphasizes the distinctive role of speech act participants.

There is, of course, no one system of personal pronouns that is universal. What is universal, however, as Guillaume has indicated (1987:188), is the distinction between what is immanent to the linguistic system, and what transcends it: third person is always immanent to the system; first and second, however, because they are the two poles between which the act of language takes place, are established outside the system, and change with every change of speaker. They are necessarily deictic elements, in a way that third person is not. It is not surprising that in child language the child initially uses its own name (i.e., third person) for self reference; use of first and second person pronouns is a later development (Jones 1970:10).

In Inuktitut, the identity of morphological markers of possession in the noun and of agents of the transitive verb has led linguists (a) to view transitivity as a subcategory of possession (Thalbitzer 1911, Hammerich 1970, Schmitt 1976, Johns 1987), or (b) to view possession as a subcategory of transitivity (Mey 1970, Rischel 1971, Kalmár 1979). Rather than propose that one function determines another, however, it is more appropriate, in sound linguistic method, to derive them both from a common underlying source than to derive each from the other. We do not, in historical linguistics, derive daughter language A from daughter language B; we derive both A and B from a prehistoric source that needs to be reconstructed. As Seiler has pointed out (1983a) what we call possession is in fact a simple determining relationship that covers relations as different as *my book* (Seiler’s “establishing relationship”), *my mother* (Seiler’s “inherent relationship”: every speaker has a mother), *my song* (‘the song they always sing for me’), and so on. Clearly the role of controller of a transitive verb and of possessor of a noun are similarly broad determining relationships, so that it is profitable for many languages to exploit a common morphology for both functions. Ulving (1987), in his final paragraph, expresses a similar point of view, and points out that he has argued “that the fundamental function of this form [i.e., possessive] is to express a relationship of some kind.”

Finally we should note the importance of unmarked categories such as third proximate in Inuktitut. The fact that this unmarked element is the patient of the transitive verb in  $1 > 3$  and  $2 > 3$  forms, but naturally and expectedly shifts to being the agent in  $3 > 3$  forms, just as it does in Algonkian languages, lies behind many of the oddities in the transitive paradigms of Inuktitut. Once one understands the different roles played by this unmarked element, and the significance of the pattern of U-shift, much of the transitive morphology of Inuktitut becomes quite transparent.

From the foregoing, we may draw the following methodological and theoretical conclusions. The first and most important methodological conclusion is the priority of meaning. If you believe that all grammar is syntax, and all syntax is meaningless, you cannot do the kind of linguistics I have just been demonstrating. In fact, if you believe that the

morphosyntax is more important than what it marks you have put the cart before the horse. The whole purpose of language is the representation and conveying of meaning.

The second methodological conclusion is the necessity of monosemy: the insistence that the same morphological element, in entirely different functions, nevertheless represents a single underlying meaning. There may be alloemes, variant surface meanings, but all can ultimately be traced to the same underlying grammatical meaning. The Inuktitut [-*t*] that marks the proximate plural in *illut* 'houses', is the same [-*t*] that marks the subject plural in *utaaqigaat* 'they wait for him'. And perhaps even more curiously, the [-*t*] that marks houses as plural in *illutit* 'your houses', is the same [-*t*] that marks the owners of the houses in *illuat* 'their houses'. In this last form it is the obviative plural [-*a*] of *illuat* that pluralizes *house* and the following [-*t*] that pluralizes the owners of the houses. These are exemplifications of the grammar of the U-shift, which operates in identical fashion in the grammar of the transitive verb and in the grammar of personal possession.

Finally, there is the important element of system which is so often neglected. The paradigm of the transitive animate verb in Ojibwa represents a closed system of meanings, so that the direct and inverse markers can be laid out in schematic form as in (7) above. The systemic nature of languages has two advantages: (i) it makes languages easier to learn, so that they can be learnt by very small children. It is much easier to learn a set of items that has inner coherence, than a list of random and atomistic elements. And (ii) it gives languages stability through time: a closed system cannot be altered, except by destroying the whole system, which does happen, and normally results in a major typological shift. If it were not for the stability imposed by system, there would be nothing to prevent massive language change in every generation.

Systems, as can be seen in the data we have just examined, are not always easy to analyse. But since all languages face the same questions and problems of representing experience, it is always interesting to turn to a new set of data, and find that a solution that has already been perceived in one set of languages is also relevant, in some new and curious way, to the new data under examination. In the case we have examined, the marked contrasts of proximate and obviative found in Algonkian languages lead to an understanding of a similar contrast that is much less clearly marked in Inuktitut.



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