

Verbs of (sound) emission in Algonquian: A comparison of subjects in Blackfoot and Cree

Sara Johansson

Department of Linguistics, MUN

Introduction:

Verbs of emission

- * Verbs of sound, light, substance & smell emission
- * A unified semantic class of verbs of “non-voluntary emission of stimuli that impinge on the sense” (Perlmutter 1978:163)

Introduction:

Verbs of emission

Sound	Light	Substance	Smell
babble bang ding explode fizzle growl hiss jingle knell peal ...	flash flicker gleam glimmer glisten scintillate shimmer shine sparkle twinkle ...	belch bleed drip drool gush leak ooze puff radiate seep ...	reek smell stink ...

Introduction:

Verbs of emission

- * Verbs of emission behave the same in grammar cross-linguistically
(Levin & Rappaport Hovav (LRH) 1995)
- * **Arguments** of an emission verb cannot be chosen at random

Introduction: Verbs of emission

(1) a. **The phone** rang

b. ***John** rang

(2) a. The light flashed

b. The stagehand flashed
the light

(3) a. The lightning flashed

b. *The cloud seeding flashed
the lightning

(LRH 1995:117, ex. 92, 93)

Introduction: Verbs of emission

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(LRH 1995:117, ex. 92, 93)

Introduction:

Verbs of emission

- * Why is it okay to say *the phone rang*, but not **John rang*?
- * LRH 1995: **internal cause**
Folli & Harley 2008: **teleological capacity**
- * Entities (subjects) must have the **inherent capacity** necessary to generate the event

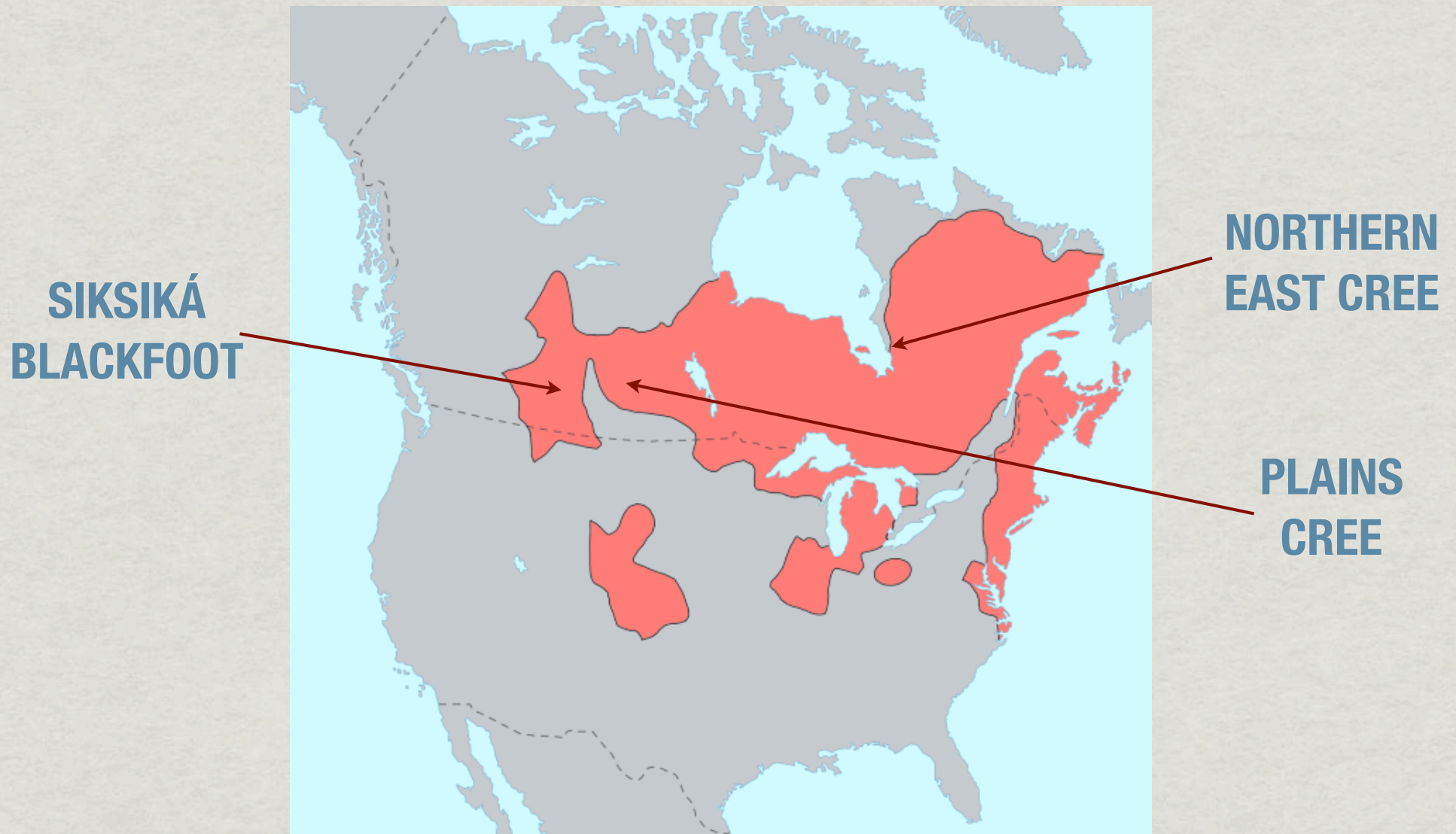
Introduction: Verbs of emission

- * Why is it okay to say *the phone rang*, but not **John rang*?
 - * LRH 1995: **internal cause**
Folli & Harley 2008: **teleological capacity**
 - * Entities (subjects) must have the **inherent capacity** necessary to generate the event
- * Does this hold of every language?
Test cases: Blackfoot and Northern East Cree

Outline

- ✱ **Goal:** Discover characteristics of subjects of emission verbs in Blackfoot and Cree (Algonquian)
- ✱ Overview of Algonquian grammar
- ✱ Data
- ✱ Observations - what is a possible subject?
- ✱ Pedagogical considerations

Algonquian languages



Algonquian languages

- * Nouns are classified into two **grammatical genders**, and verbs care about this (agree) (Bloomfield 1946)
 - * **Animate** nouns:
All real-world animate entities (e.g. people),
Some real-world inanimate entities (e.g. rock, kettle, drum)
 - * **Inanimate** nouns:
Real-world inanimate entities only (e.g. flower)

Algonquian languages

- ✱ **Sentience**

The ability to perceive/reason (Speas & Tenny 2003)

- ✱ All sentient beings are real-world animates, therefore also **grammatically animate** (Hanson 2003, Bliss 2005)

The Data

- * The sentence “Mary jingled” can describe which of these pictures?



The Data



Blackfoot	x	x	✓
NE Cree	x	✓	✓

Observations

- * Siksiká Blackfoot: Subjects **must** have the **inherent** internal capacity to generate the event (Johansson & Ritter IN PRESS)
- * Northern East Cree: Subjects **may temporarily acquire** the capacity to generate the event



Observations

- * How do you say “The flower feels happy” in Blackfoot and Cree?
(Johansson 2008)
- * Flower is an **inanimate noun**
- * Feeling happy is a property of **sentient beings**
- * Sentient beings are denoted by **animate nouns**



Observations

	Subject remains inanimate	Subject becomes animate
Blackfoot	✓	✗
P Cree	✗	✓



Observations

- * Siksiká Blackfoot: Subjects **must retain** their grammatical animacy
Sentient + inanimate
- * Plains Cree: Subjects **may temporarily change** their grammatical animacy
Sentient + animate



Generalization

- * Blackfoot subjects are imbued with attributes that **do not change**
- * Cree subjects can **temporarily change** their attributes
- * Inherent capacity to jingle, grammatical animacy

Pedagogical Considerations

- * Subjects in Blackfoot and Cree are different in **very subtle** ways
- * Both languages are endangered
 - * As numbers of fluent speakers decline, the availability of this kind of knowledge decreases

Pedagogical Considerations

- * Adult learners need to be **taught** this distinction
- * Not obvious from conversational Blackfoot and Cree
- * Best embedded in the context of a **story** (full of magical worlds)



Pedagogical Considerations

- * Fieldwork methods in linguistics that **incorporate story creation** can provide dual outcomes
 - * Language data for the linguist
 - * Language materials development for the community
 - * One solution: MuDBE (Burton 2008)

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