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

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Light</th>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Smell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>babble</td>
<td>flash</td>
<td>belch</td>
<td>reek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bang</td>
<td>flicker</td>
<td>bleed</td>
<td>smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ding</td>
<td>gleam</td>
<td>drip</td>
<td>stink</td>
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<td>explode</td>
<td>glimmer</td>
<td>drool</td>
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<td>fizzle</td>
<td>glisten</td>
<td>gush</td>
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<td>growl</td>
<td>scintillate</td>
<td>leak</td>
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<tr>
<td>hiss</td>
<td>shimmer</td>
<td>ooze</td>
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<tr>
<td>jingle</td>
<td>shine</td>
<td>puff</td>
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<td>knell</td>
<td>sparkle</td>
<td>radiate</td>
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<tr>
<td>peal</td>
<td>twinkle</td>
<td>seep</td>
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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

(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

- 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**
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- 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

SIKSIKÁ
BLACKFOOT

NORTHERN
EAST CREE

PLAINS
CREE
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blackfoot</th>
<th>NE Cree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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</table>
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Subject remains inanimate</th>
<th>Subject becomes animate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blackfoot</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Cree</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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)
References


Hanson, Rebecca. 2003. Why Can’t We All Just Agree? Animacy and the Person Case Constraint. MA Thesis, University of Calgary.


Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Cree language consultants Alice Duff and Elsie Duff for the NE Cree data that appears here. Thanks also to the Cree School Board in Chisasibi for their continued support of the larger project within which this research is situated (the Chisasibi Child Language Acquisition Study, CCLAS: www.mun.ca/cclas). Particular thanks to Daisy Herodier for facilitating the 2011 fieldwork.

Funding for this research comes from the J.R. Smallwood Foundation #207769 (Johansson) and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) #410-2008-0378 (Brittain, Dyck, Mackenzie & Rose).