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Morphosyntax in Algonquian and ASL: Insights from Comparison

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1. Introduction

• Understanding morphosyntax in Algonquian languages and American Sign Language (ASL) has long been hindered by quite limiting comparisons to English.

• Fruitful comparisons have been made between ASL and at least one Athabaskan language, Navajo (MacDonald 1982, Kegl 2013, Fernald 2016). MacDonald's work, following that of Keith Allan (1977, cp. also Cogill-Koez 2000), focuses on the system of verbal classifiers in ASL as compared with Navajo. Here we draw data from Penobscot and Passamaquoddy-Maliseet (with reference to other Algonquian languages), that also show a rich set of morphosyntactic typological parallels with ASL.

• Algonquian and ASL morphosyntaxes are obscured when English/French (etc.) remains their primary point of comparison. Our preliminary observations suggest that collaboration between Algonquian and ASL researchers offers rich potential for deepening our understandings of these linguistic systems.

(1) JOHN KNOW MARY 'John knows Mary.'
(plain verb, no agreement)

vs. _____eg[j]
_____ht[i]

j-o-h-n[i]	[TO-ON LOC[i, forehead]	CL:B (flat surface)]]	m-a-r-y[j]
John -at loc-[i]	onto-forehead-loc[i]	many-lines(of thought)	Mary-at-loc[j]
John-[i]	*[i] dative subject*	*theme*	*Secondary Object*

• Glossing the verb here as just "KNOW"...vs. as:

- Dative Subject head-marked in the verb as locative argument of KNOW

- Secondary Object with no morphological agreement on verb: *(hello, most Central Algonquian)*
  = true of all Theme arguments of the ASL verb...
  ...even though syntactic agreement with subject---head tilt (ht)---and with notional object---eye gaze (eg)---consistently occurs.

(2) kəpečíptoləŋ sàhte 'I bring thee a blueberry' (S:60)

kə-pečiptaw-əl-ən sahte
2-bring-2OBJ-N blueberry
= I-bring-you-it

• Glossing the verb stem *pečiptaw-* here as just "BRING"...vs. as three subcomponents:

pet-i-pt-aw-
to.here-LINKER-grab/carry-Applicative-

• Algonquianists do (know how to) do this, but it's still often glossed over/neglected indefinitely....

2. Radical head-marking of argument structure

• Both ASL and Algonquian languages in general are radically head-marking (Nichols 1986). From a broad typological perspective, this is not remarkable.

But in the historical and current context of Algonquian and ASL teaching, learning, and even some kinds of linguistic work, *awareness* of head-marking, and in particular, of what its typical consequences are for overall/pervasive grammatical-structural patterns, is still not widespread outside of very specialized theoretical research.

• *Raise your hand if you've never heard of head-marking, or are only vaguely familiar with it....*

• Put roughly, when the roles of nouns in the event are marked on the *nouns* themselves---by word order, by adposition, by case: as in most European languages---that is *dependent*-marking.

When those roles and relations are not marked on the nouns, but on the *verb* instead (as in most Algonquian languages), that is *head*-marking.

• Radical head-marking is where the verb matches or reflects practically *everything* else in the sentence: not just the subject, but often direct and indirect object, and even oblique phrases like location, manner, amount, etc.

Basically, a radically head-marked verb shows many or even all of its relations.

• So directly underlining the radically head-marking properties of ASL and Algonquian languages, particularly for a more general(ist) audience---including language teachers and trainers (and learners)---offers a powerful and foundational shift away from simply viewing these languages in constant baffling contrast to English and/or French.

3. Near-uniform morphological visibility of transitivity and its subtypes: Primary- vs. Secondary-object verbal marking of Agent-Goal-Theme argument structure

• Algonquian languages wear (much of) their argument structure on their morphological sleeves: hence TA, TI, derived TAOs, etc., and even AIOs. Contrast English/French verbs like *sell/vendre*, that can change argument structure---in-/di-/mono-transitive---without morphological change.

• With few exceptions (e.g. Wampanoag), most Algonquian languages mark a ditransitive *Goal* and *Theme* through a *Primary* vs. *Secondary Object* system---consistently and centrally marking the **Goal** (English indir. obj.) and only secondarily (and not always!) marking the *Theme* (English dir. obj.):

(3)	nàmil**α***n*	nə-mil.**α**-*n*	*ditransitive:* **Goal**+*Theme*
	'I give **NA** *it*; I give *it* **to NA**.'	1-give.**Dir**-*N*	

• Secondary Objects (of TAOs, of AIOs, etc.) in Pb, PsmMl, etc., are marked in the Independent with the *N-element*.

• ASL also wears much of its argument structure on its sleeve, but in a different way.

ASL verbs always systematically reflect the **Theme**: via an object classifier (*CL*) or handling classifier (*HCL*) (in causatives) that is coextensive with the movement or location marking of the verb. *(Even entire sentential verbs can be nominalized and inserted into this theme slot.)*

LOC[value] *MOTION/LOCATION* [LOC[value] MOTION/LOCATION[THEME]]

THEME

• The relation between the motion/location and the theme is one of dominance and not precedence. So, the two are transparently separable, but are completely co-terminus/temporally parallel.

• Subject and Primary Object are marked via a process of spatial indexing: where the NP is associated with a particular point in space (via a verb of motion) and then the verb agrees with that point in space.

(4) j-o-h-n TO+AT LOC[x] [TO+AT LOC[x][THEME]]

CL:1 (index/point)

or via a verb of location that incorporates the NP into the Theme slot of a location verb:

(5) Ø+AT LOC[x] [Ø+AT LOC[x] [THEME]]

j-o-h-n

• In ASL, nouns are not case-marked: they are only indexed into space. *But via that indexing process, their thematic relation to the verb is indicated morphologically.*

• The Source NP agrees [x] with the initial location [x] of the verb.

• Goal [y] agrees with the endpoint [y] of the verb.

• Theme is reflected in the Theme slot and is co-terminus with the location or movement of the verb.

• Their status as subject or object is indicated by agreement with head tilt (that marks Role Prominence; subject) or eye gaze (that marks the notional object).

• Unlike Algonquian languages, the verb EAT has the same form as a transitive or intransitive.

Its transitivity is indicated by the presence of an independent NP (the Secondary Object) in the sentence that has no spatial agreement with the verb.

In addition, in the transitive there is the possibility of a more specific handling classifier in Theme position. Instead of general 'handling an object', it can be:

- handle a spherical object (apple, peach, etc.)
- handle a rectangular object with narrow depth (a slice of bread, a cookie, etc.)
- handle a flat object from beneath (a slice of pizza, a piece of cake, etc.)

• *We are not going to walk you through these examples, but have included them on the handout (next slide)s.*

(6)

_____eg[i] *(object)*

_____ht[i] *(subj/role prominence)*

(IX1p) mouth[i]#HCL:lotus-TO-AT[i]

I at the mouth[i] handle-general-to-at[i] 'I eat.'

(7)

_____eg[i] *(object)*

_____ht[i] *(subj/role prominence)*

(IX1p) mouth[i]#[TO-AT[i][HCL:lotus]] BREADø

I at the mouth[i] handle-general-to-at[i] 'I eat bread.'

(8)

_____eg[i]

_____ht[i]

(IX1p) mouth[i]#[TO-AT[i][HCL:spherical object]] APPLEø

I at the mouth[i] handle-spherical obj-to-at[i] apple 'I eat an apple.'

• The ASL verbal complex does the same: primary marking for **Goal**, secondary (zero) for *Theme*:

(9) j-o-h-n[i] [LOC[i] WARD-FROM+TO-WARD][j][[i]AT-FROM+**TO–AT[j]** HCL:lotus]]

john-at[i] person marking [i] to person marking [j] while moving from[i] **to[j]** with handling general

m-a-r-y**[j]** *BOOKø*

mary-**at–[j]** *book*

'John gives Mary a book".'

• Completely zero marking for Secondary Object is of course common to most Central Algonquian languages....

• ASL and Algonquian languages (exc. Wampanoag, etc.) systematically lack the *to-Dative* option: they have only [*I give-her-it*], and no [*I give it to her*]. ([*to her*] = dep-marking, not head-marking)

• This shared feature, of strictly Primary-Secondary Object marking of Goal-Theme relations, reflects the radical head-marking typology of both systems.

While not rare in the world's languages, the absence of a *to-Dative* can be surprising to learners and teachers alike: ASL-Algonquian comparison helps normalize and de-exoticize this phenomenon for English/French-based workers in either language system.

4. Extensive verbal marking of non-core arguments (vs. reduced/minimal use of adpositions)

• ASL and Algonquian radical head-marking also means that both show extensive verbal marking of non-core arguments, i.e. reflecting much more than just subjects and objects.

• In Algonquian languages, English-like freestanding adposition-like particles (10), or their collocation with a locative-marked nominal (11) are not rare (cf. and adapt. from LeSourd 2014:211):

(10) Punàn walŏtíyik [*neqìw*].
put.them dishes [*underneath*]
'Put the dishes down below.' (*PsmMl:* Francis and Leavitt 2008:326)

(11) Pomŏqotéhe áhkiq [*neqìw* ŏqítŏnu*k*].
it.goes.along.underwater seal [*underneath* canoe-*LOC*]
'The seal swims along under the canoe.' (*PsmMl:* Francis and Leavitt 2008:440)

• Constructions with an adposition free from the verbal complex are near-impossible in ASL.
• Instead, the spatial-locative argument must be marked as a *clitic* on the verbal complex:

(12) _____top _____top
TREE, [AT-LOC[i]CL:B+extension]]#[AT-FROM-LOC[I, up][SASS:CL:C(cylinder)]]
Tree tall-flat-surface-at[i] cylinder-extends-from-loc[i]

[AT-LOC[i][CL:1→]]#[TO-ON-LOC[i][CL:V↓]]
long-thin-object-*at-loc[i]* person-by-legs-to-on-loc[i]
'A person stands on *the branch of a tree*.'

• Algonquian languages can do this, too, via *verbal Sec Obj* marking of the locational argument, equivalent to the ASL clitic:

(13) nətehsíkαpawi*n* iyo — nə-tehs(i)-kαpawi-*n* iyo
'I am standing on this [NI]' — 1-atop-stand-*N* this_NI

Píyel wíki*n* yèt utèn. — Piyel (w)-wiki-*n* yèt utèn
'Peter lives in that town.' — Peter 3-live.at-*N* yonder_NI town
(*PsmMl:* P. LeSourd, p.c. 2014)

• The above Alg construction requires a feature shared with ASL: root/stem components of these very same Path (spatial-configuration)-specifying elements (UNDER, ON/ATOP, INSIDE, etc.) being superficially "incorporated" into verbs (i.e. rather, with verbal elements affixed to them)---esp. those of motion/position and causation thereof:

(14) Skinuhsis elomi-*neq*hok soqasuwakon*ok*.
boy away-*under*-swim bridge-*LOC*
'The boy swam away *under* the bridge.' (PMP)

Elomi-*neq*iyat not wasis soqasuwakon*ok*.
Away-*under*-move that child bridge-*LOC*
'That child is going *under* the bridge.' (PMP)

(15) "*tehs*ihasi npəskʷan*ək*..." *atop*-quick.move my.back-*LOC*
"Get *on* my back...."

ni [wə]wisα-*tehs*ahkαn iye wasəsse*k*. then 3-quickly-*atop*-throw-N yonder nest-*LOC*
'He hurriedly tossed him *up into* the nest.'

• In Algonquian languages, these morphologically bound strategies leave relatively restricted roles for actual adpositions.

The exact distribution of the "free particle + locative" (i.e. adpositional phrase (LeSourd 2014)) construction has not yet been demonstrated.

But it seems, from initial observations at least, to be used more either when the adpositional spatial configuration is either salient/focusworthy, or (at least in terms of discourse representation) not particularly smoothly integrated into verbal action---i.e. possibly comparable to discourse-fragmented English "Going...um...in" vs. smoothly integrated "Going in / Entering".

In contrast, the construction where Path and the remainder of the verb are joined together (with Path as either an Initial with a bound verbal Final, or as a Preverb with prosodically semi-integrated freestanding verbal stem) seems to be more when the Path is an integral but less independently salient component of the overall event structure.

(Needless to say, testing/demonstrating this initial impression conclusively will be a project unto itself.)

• ASL Path elements are near-exclusively bound like this, into the verbal complex:

(16) TABLE[i] (IX1p) CL:B[i]#[*ON* LOC[CL:Vlegs]][i]
Table I flat-surface#person-by-legs *on*
'I am standing *on* the table.'

_____top
POSS1p BACK [[AT-LOC[i][CL:B]#[*TO+ON*-LOC[i][CL:bentV]]
my back flat-surface-at-loc[i]# person-by-legs-*to-on* loc [i]
'Get on my back.'

• The only exceptions are rare cases where the Path itself is discourse-highlighted/contrasted:

(17) NOT [AT-LOC[a][CL:C]]#[Ø+IN[HCL:gen]], [AT-LOC[a][CL:B]]#[Ø+ON[CL:B]]
neg classifier clitic verb handling classifier classifier clitic verb objectCL
theme *theme* *theme* *theme*
rimmed obj. handle general flat surface flat surface
NOT [IN] [ON]

'Not in, on!'

• And from these Path+verb patterns, both languages have grammaticized somewhat more abstract/functional Path elements to head-mark/verbally reflect core locational arguments.

• Hence Algonquian verb-complex integration of TO/AT/FROM components:

(18)	nət-*ə̀li*-hla	ni	amil-əpék-i	'I went out on the open water.'
	1-*ToX*-move-(P)	there	out.water-water-ADV	(*Pb: PD*)
	nə-*tal*-álohke		asehtά-yi	'I work at the rear.'
	1s-*AtX*-work-(P)		behind/back-ADV	(*Pb: PD*)
	nə̀ya=č	iyo	n-*očí*-mαči-n	'I shall leave this place.'
	1s=FUT	here	1s-FromX-leave-N	(*Pb: PD*)

• And the same systematic integration of TO, AT, and FROM into ASL verbal complex as well:

(19) TO

_____eg[i] ___(smooth pursuit-to-[i] 'Someone walks to the store.'

[Ø+AT-LOC[i][STORE]] *[TO+AT-LOC[i]*[CL:V↓]]

verb *theme* *verb* *theme*

store-at-location[i] *to-at-location[i]*-person-by-legs

(20) AT

Ø+AT-LOC[i][CL:bentV]] 'Someone is sitting there (at location [i]).'

verb *theme*

at-location[i] person-by-legs-bent

(21) FROM

[Ø+AT-LOC[i][JAIL]] [Ø+AT-LOC[i][CL:5→]]#[*IN+FROM-LOC[i]* [CL:1↑]]

verb *theme* *verb* *theme* *verb* *theme*

at jail at penetrable obj. out long thin obj.;person

jail-is-at-location [i] penetrable obj. at loc[i] *person-out-from-loc.[i]*

'Someone escapes from jail.'

• A striking feature of radical head-marking is that while Algonquian languages use a certain degree of dependent-marking in the form of adpositions, and esp. of (on-the-noun) locative affixes themselves, nearly all---Wampanoag again being a major exception---show effectively no use of adpositional particles (with or without locative suffixing) to mark core argument relations like the to-Dative of English "I give a book *to* you".

• ASL is the same. The only dep-marking for core-argument-structure-like elements are benefactives---this being in strong contrast to the Algonquian head-marked Applicative strategy.

5. Verbal object-classifiers and head-marking

Algonquian languages and ASL both show rich use of verbal object-classifiers (VOCs):

(22) ni akʷa, owa kči-skok (w)-[očkaw-**tak**-ihlα]-n...
then=QUOT this_NA great-snake 3-[hither-**CORD**-move]-N
'and then the serpent writhed forward...'

cp. nə=tte k-[očkaw-ihlα]-n. *(= i.e., with no verbal object-classifier)*
then=INTNS 2-[hither-move]-N
'you are to come here at once.'

(23) [TO+AT[forward]**[CL:3]**] 'a **vehicle** moves forward'
verb *theme*

[TO+AT[forward]**[CL:1↑]**] 'a **person** moves forward'

[TO+AT[forward]**[CL:bentV]**] 'a **small animal** moves forward'

• Unlike Athabaskan (Cogill-Koez 2000), in ASL and Algonquian languages, the Motion and the Figure-denoting VOC elements are phonologically bound to each other---but analyzable as a distinct morphological elements.

Hence the optionality of use of *-(ah)tak-* 'CORD' in (22), and the ASL alternations in (23)---repeated as (24)---where the classifiers are phonologically bound to the Motion/Location element of the verb, but can swap in and out for each other, as distinct morphemes.

(24) [TO+AT[forward]**[CL:3]**] 'a **vehicle** moves forward'
verb *theme*

[TO+AT[forward]**[CL:1↑]**] 'a **person** moves forward'

[TO+AT[forward]**[CL:bentV]**] 'a **small animal** moves forward'

• In ASL, the {Path+VOC+Motion] elements are bound in temporal *parallel* (simultaneous); in Algonquian, in temporal *series/linear sequence*.

• Children acquiring ASL, however, are attested producing these components in bound *linear sequence*: i.e. their emergent ASL follows the Algonquian pattern:

(25) *Adult form (embedded)*

[TO+AT-LOC[i] [CL:V↓[legs alternating]] 'Person walks to location[i].'

movement verb *theme*

person by legs walking

(26) *Child form (sequenced)*

[Ø+AT LOCi [CL:V↓[legs alternating]] [TO+AT-LOC[i]] [CL:1]]

locative verb *theme* *motion verb* *theme*

person by legs walking path

'Person moves legs back and forth at location [a] and a movement happens from location [a] to location [b].' *(cf. Supalla 1982)*

• Path and Motion are near-unomittable in both systems. The VOC, in contrast, is readily omittable in Algonquian (as in (X[b]) above), and is reduceable to a default classifier in ASL.

• This structural analysability of the parallel-bound components of the ASL system becomes much more evident when we examine it in tandem with the linear-bound but otherwise directly comparable components of Algonquian systems.

• And old observations of child-acquisitional linear-bound variants of ASL now become much more significant when we see that they evidently exactly parallel Algonquian semantics-to-morphology chunking.

6. Inverse-and-impersonal voice-morphology, tied to argument-prominence marking

• It is well-established that only one Algonquian **Proximate** is permitted per transitive clause (Goddard 1990:318, inter alia):

(27)	**…nà-nemαn**	kàmαč	wə-kəsítəhαmα-l	*kà-tos- al*
	1-son	very	3-feels.intensely.for.her-OBV	*2-daughter-OBV*
	…my son cares very much for *your daughter*.			

…where **nànemαn** 'my son' is **Proximate**,

…and the other transitive-configured argument, *kàtosal* 'your daughter) therefore *must* be non-Proximate, i.e. *Obviative*---and so marked with *-al*.

• ASL similarly only allows one **Role Prominent** element per transitive clause (28). Two RPs are (*also*) phonologically precluded; closest workaround is a biclausal, "double verb construction" (29):

(28) *3RP→3RP *(ungrammatical; indeed, phonologically unproduceable)*

*[ATLOC[i] [j-o-h-n]] [ATLOC[i] [RP]] [ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]] [ATLOC[j] [RP]] ...

John at loc[i] role prominence[i] Bill at loc[j] role prominence[j]

[AT-LOC[i] [CL:1↑]]# LOC[i] AT+FROM-TO+ON-LOC[j] [CL:S]]

lto(person) at loc[j] rso(fist)-goes from-loc[i]-to-loc[j]

*'John (RP) hit Bill(RP).'

(29) *Double verb construction = splitting two RPs across two separate clauses for pseudo-[3RP→3RP]*

[Ø+ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]] [Ø+ATLOC[j] [RP]] [AT-LOC[ø]] [CL:1↑]]# LOC[i] AT+FROM-TO+WARD-LOC[ø] [CL:S]]^...

j-o-h-n at location [i] role prominence[i] lto(person)-at-loc[ø] rso(fist) moves toward[ø]

[ATLOC[j] [RP]] [AT-LOC[j] [CL:1↑]]# LOC[i] AT+FROM-TO+ON-LOC[j] [CL:S]]

role prominence[j] lto(person) at loc [j] rso (fist) from loc[i]to on loc[j]

'John (RP) hits at someone ^ John (nonRP) hits Bill (RP).'

= *effective workaround conveying 'John (RP) hit Bill(RP).'*

• While Proximate has long been recognized as the default form in Algonquian, Role Prominent has often been misidentified as the marked case.

• From comparison to Algonquian Proximates, we now recognize that Role Prominent is in fact the default form in ASL, as it is a near-obligatory part of unergative intransitive and transitive clauses alike.

• The Role Prominence distinction is not available in a 1→3 or 3→1 configuration: 1 is always RP, and the structures look more like 1→3, 1←3. *As per the Algonquian Inverse!*

(30) *(RP_)1→3*

(IX1p) [Ø+ATLOC[1p] [RP]] [AT-LOC[j] [CL:1↑]]#LOC[i] AT+FROM-TO+ON-LOC[j] [CL:S]]

pro-1p *verb* *role prom.* *verb* *theme* *verb* *theme*

I role prominence[i] person at loc.[i] rso (fist) from loc [1p] to-on-location[j]

[Ø+ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]]

Bill at location [j]

'I hit Bill' *(RP_ on first person)*

(31) *(RP_)1←3*

[Ø+ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]] [ATLOC[1p] [RP]] [AT-LOC[1p] [CL:1↑]]#LOC[i] AT+FROM-TO+ON-LOC[1p] [CL:S]]

Bill at location[j] role prominence[j] lto (person) at 1p rso(fist)-moves-from-loc [j] to-on-loc[1p]

'Bill hit me.' *(RP_ on first person)* *REF:RP[j???]*

(32) *(RP_)1→3*

(IX1p) [Ø+ATLOC[1p] [RP]] [AT-LOC[j] [CL:1↑]]**#LOC[i] AT+FROM–TO+ON–LOC[j] [CL:S]]**

pro-1p *verb* *role prom.* *verb* *theme* *verb* *theme*

I role prominence[i] person at loc.[i] rso (fist) from loc [1p] to-on-location[j]

[Ø+ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]]

Bill at location [j]

'I hit Bill' *(RP_ on first person)*

(33) *(RP_)1←3*

[Ø+ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]] [ATLOC[1p] [RP]] [AT-LOC[1p] [CL:1↑]]**#LOC[i] AT+FROM–TO+ON–LOC[1p] [CL:S]]**

Bill at location[j] role prominence[j] lto (person) at 1p rso(fist)-moves-from-loc [j] to-on-loc[1p]

'Bill hit me.' *(RP_ on first person)*

(34) nàtihl**ɑ** nə-ihl.**ɑ**-(W) *Direct: 1→3*

'I tell NA' 1-tell.**Dir**-W

(35) nàtihl**əkʷ** nə-ihl.**əkw**-(W) *Inverse: 1←3*

'NA tells me' 1-tell.**Inv**-W

• In both systems, the discourse contrast of Prox/RP is only meaningfully available *between 3rd persons*...where both ASL and Algonquian languages show transitive-verb morphology---namely, Direct vs. Inverse---alternating to reflect which argument role is discourse-/perspectively primary (Prox/RP), and which is secondary/dependent (Obv/non-RP):

(36)	wətihl**α**l	wə-ihl.**α**-(W)-al	*Direct: Prox→Obv*
	'Prox told Obv' (SDasα)	3-tell.**Dir**-W-Obv	
	wətihl**əkw**l	wə-ihl.**əkw**-(W)-al	*Inverse: Prox←Obv*
	'Obv told Prox' (SDasα)	3-tell.**Inv**-W-Obv	

(37) wətihl**ɑ**l — wə-ihl.**ɑ**-(W)-al — *Direct: Prox→Obv*
'Prox told Obv' (SDasɑ) — 3-tell.**Dir**-W-Obv

wətihl**əkw**l — wə-ihl.**əkw**-(W)-al — *Inverse: Prox←Obv*
'Obv told Prox' (SDasɑ) — 3-tell.**Inv**-W-Obv

(38) *3RP→3nonRP*
[ATLOC[i] [j-o-h-n]] [ATLOC[i] [RP]] [AT-LOC[j]
John-at-loc[i] role prominence[i] lto(person)-at-loc[j]

[CL:1↑]]# **LOC[i] AT+FROM-TO+ON-LOC[j]** [CL:S]] [ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]]
rso(fist)-goes from-loc[i]-to-loc[j] Bill at loc[j]
'John (RP) hit Bill (nonRP).' = **DIRECT**

(39) *3RP←3nonRP*
[ATLOC[i] [j-o-h-n]] [ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]] [ATLOC[j] [RP]]
John-at-loc[i] Bill-at-loc[i] role prominence[j]

[AT-LOC[j] [CL:1↑]]# **LOC[i] AT+FROM−TO+ON−LOC[j] [CL:S]]**
lto(person)-at-loc[i] rso(fist)-goes from-loc[i]-to-loc[j]
'John hits Bill (RP).' = **INVERSE**

• Note: (39) contrasts w/an Indefinite (Impersonal, "Passive") Agent form, w/no licit overt Agent:

(40) *Indef/Impers→3RP*

[ATLOC[j] [b-i-l-l]] ATLOC[j][RP]] [AT-LOC[j] [CL:1↑]]# *(Ø overt source)*-TO+ON-LOC[j] [CL:S]]

Bill-at-loc[j] role prominence[j] lto(person)-at-loc[j] rso(fist)-contacts-loc[j]

'Bill (RP) is hit.' *(impersonal passive; Source deleted; no agent possible)*

• Algonquian systems show the same restricted, no-Agent-permitted forms (often also w/"stripped of the Agent component" patterns, and/or elements partly resembling the UNDERGO-like Inverse):

(41) tákamα takam.α-(W)

'he was struck' (awehsohsak:12) hit.Dir-W

cp. nətákamα nə-takam.α-(W)

'I hit NA, strike NA' (PD:447) 1-hit.Dir-W

nətákaməke nə-takam.əke-(P)

'I am hit' (S:70:10) 1-hit.ImpersAgt-P

• The ASL Role Prominence system tracks the Algonquian Proximate in:

- being limited to one RP/Prox per transitive configuration

- being the *default* 3rd-person form (as against nonRP/Obv = the explicitly marked of the two)

- not contrasting between 1st and 3rd, only *3rd vs. 3rd* (*2nd is a complex issue in general in ASL*)

- connecting to an apparent (Direct-)Inverse contrast; and to an explicitly marked Obviative.
(*...which in turn contrasts w/"pure Impersonal Agent", w/no possible oblique Agent*)

7. Conclusion

• Until we break out of the English/French labels---by breaking into the internal structure of the verbs in these kinds of languages---we do not have the ability to see when we're talking about the same (or relevantly similar) things.

• There are at least twenty things that we now see across Algonquian and ASL that we would not have seen if we were---as non-specialists, or even beginning researchers---just looking at superficial glosses. Obvious parallels, subtle differences, and partial overlaps would be obscured and left unexplored in both systems: we would simply not have the metalinguistic tools to share with each other what we see.

• These, then, are just three insights (out of many) that we would not have arrived at without the cross-fertilization of working between two otherwise unrelated polysynthetic languages:

(a) Strong head-marking not only of core arguments, but also even Path-Motion elements (UNDER, ATOP), TO/AT/FROM; alongside nouns bare of practically any dependent-marking except Locative.

(b) verbal object-classifiers are (unlike in Athabaskan) morphologically transparent ("swap-out-able") and distinct from the Motion/Location element, while the two are still phonologically bound to each other: just linearly in Algonquian, and simultaneously/coterminously in ASL.

(c) ASL Role Prominence shows a host of systematic parallels to Algonquian Proximate/Obviative, with a closely connected Inverse contrast.

8. Remaining questions...

• While Algonquian requires a "choice of Proximate" in every 3-on-3 transitive configuration, ASL does have a "neutral" construction...but it's rather rare compared to the "choice of RP", which seems to be the default. And the "neutral" construction---might it be biclausal? Since in Algonquian, once one splits to another clause, one can always shift what was earlier Obviative now to its own Proximate status in that new clause.

• Are there any effects around head-tilt and RP-stance re nominal possession constructions (prediction: RP can possess non-RP, but not the reverse)?

A striking feature of the Proximate vs. Obviative contrast is that the two major Goal-Theme constructions---nominal Possessor-Possessee, and ditransitive verbal Goal-Theme---both strictly require that the Theme (=Possessee, ditrans Theme) never be Proximate with respect to the Goal (= Possessor, ditrans Goal). Does this hold for the RP-nonRP contrast, too?

• Additional important parallels (esp. re "verb-centricity")

- nominal lexicons built heavily from (often nonce-) nominalized verbal stems

- affixal semantically rich lexemes (???)

- more re how the verbal shape-classifier system with bound but distinctly analyzable classifier roots interacts with handling, motion/stance, as a "parsed out" version of Athabaskan (where classifier roots are monomorphemicized with handling/motion/stance predicates)

- esp. how other verb-bound nominal roots can flexibly read as Location or as Instrumental (Quinn 2009)---possibly all spatial metaphor?---in Algonquian and ASL alike:

nətehs**ǽləyak**hα 'I place **snow** on top of NA.'
tehs**ahkʷé**kαpawo 'NA stands on top **on a limb** or **something wooden**.'

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