The P-constraint, obviation, and word order in Southwestern Ojibwe

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Goal The goal of this paper is: (i) extend the *P-constraint* (Zubizarreta and Pancheva, 2017) to account for direct/inverse alignments with the proximate/obviative system of Southwestern Ojibwe (SWO), and (ii) resolve a conflict between the word order predictions derived from this analysis and the observed word orders of SWO. I show that while applying the P-constraint to Voice and Infl captures direct/inverse agreement in SWO, this account *predicts that proximate arguments should generally precede obviative arguments*. I show that the opposite is true—that obviative precedes proximate—and propose that an additional probe on C is responsible for these patterns.

Agreement There are three agreement slots in SWO: Voice, Infl, and C, shown in (1). For expository purposes, I limit discussion to matrix verb (i.e. *Independent Order*) agreement. Third person in SWO shows alternations between *proximate* and *obviative*. Proximate arguments are morphologically unmarked, and are generally associated with being a *perspective center* or topic, while all other third persons are *obviative*—a designation marked on the nouns and in agreement (Bliss, 2005; Hammerly and Göbel, 2019). Proximate arguments alternate in number. In most dialects, number is syncretic in the obviative forms.

(1)   *Independent order (matrix verb) agreement with third person arguments in SWO*

	Infl	$\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$	*Voice*	**Infl**	C̲
PROX (PL) → OBV	o-	waabam	-aa	(-waa)	-an
	3-	see	-3	(-PL)	-OBV
OBV → PROX (PL)	o-	waabam	-igo	(-waa)	-an
	3-	see	-INV	(-PL)	-OBV

The suffixal nature of much of the verbal morphology in Ojibwe can be derived via a post-syntactic head amalgamation operation (Harizanov and Gribanova, 2018; Hammerly, 2019)—this also derives V1, which is discussed below. The exception is Infl, which arises as a discontinuous prefix-suffix combination (see Oxford, 2018; Harbour, 2008, for a fission-based analysis).

Voice shows what has been referred to descriptively as direct/inverse marking. The direct marker (*-aa*) indexes the object, and appears when the subject is proximate and the object obviative. The inverse marker (*-igo*) is an impoverished form, which appears when the subject is obviative and the object proximate. Infl uniformly agrees with the proximate argument—with direct alignments, this is the subject; with inverse, this is the object. At a minimum, this appears with the person prefix *o-*, but is more apparent with proximate plurals, where *-waa* appears. Finally, C uniformly agrees with the obviative argument (*-an* in the examples above).

The P-constraint The P-constraint (Zubizarreta and Pancheva, 2017) is extended in (2) to capture direct/inverse alignments with proximate and obviative (note that *P-uniqueness* and *P-primacy*, not shown below, remain unchanged). The P-constraint is an interface condition triggered by the presence of an interpretable person feature (i.e. a *p*-feature) on the head of a phase. If there is a proximate argument within the phase (2a), then it must occupy the phase edge (2b).

(2)   *The P-constraint on phases with interpretable p-features—extension to proximate/obviative*
   a.   *Domain:* The P-constraint applies to phases containing one or more [+Prox] D
   b.   *P-prominence:* There must be a [+Prox] D located at the edge of phase β that agrees with the interpretable person feature on the head of β
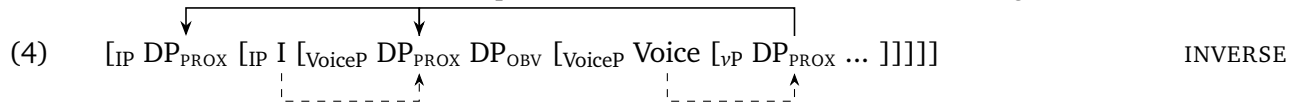
In SWO, I assume that Voice, Infl, and C are phase heads. SWO is a *Generalized P-language* in that both Voice and Infl have a *p*-feature that triggers the P-constraint. I argue that C does not have the relevant *p*-feature, and therefore is not subject to the P-constraint.

The derivation of agreement on Voice and Infl is shown in (3) for direct alignment and (4) for inverse. With direct, Voice agrees with the obviative object, transferring an obviative feature that

leads to the spell-out of this head as *-aa*, but this does *not* trigger movement to the edge. While the P-constraint does apply, the proximate subject already sits in the edge, satisfying (2b). When Infl probes, it agrees with the proximate subject, spelling out as the discontinuous marker *o-* (*-waa*). The P-constraint then requires the proximate argument to move to the edge of the phase (SpecIP).

(3)   [$_{IP}$ DP$_{PROX}$ [$_{IP}$ I [$_{VoiceP}$ DP$_{PROX}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ Voice [$_{vP}$ DP$_{OBV}$...]]]]]   DIRECT
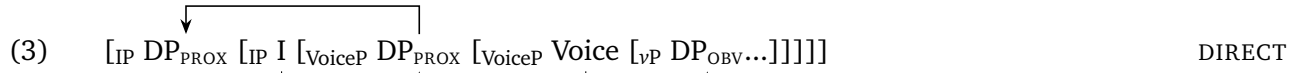
With an inverse alignment, Voice again agrees with the object. The P-constraint then requires the proximate object to move to the edge of the VoiceP as a second specifier. When Infl probes, it can see both arguments, but is relativized such that the proximate argument is agreed with, and it is again pulled to the edge of the phase to satisfy the P-constraint. Spell-out of Infl occurs as in the direct alignment, however an impoverishment rule (Oxford, 2018) that deletes the features of the lower head when two adjacent heads share the same features (as Infl and Voice do in (4)) results in the deletion of features of Voice, and the spell-out of Voice as the elsewhere form *-igo*.

(4)   [$_{IP}$ DP$_{PROX}$ [$_{IP}$ I [$_{VoiceP}$ DP$_{PROX}$ DP$_{OBV}$ [$_{VoiceP}$ Voice [$_{vP}$ DP$_{PROX}$ ...]]]]]   INVERSE

A Word Order Puzzle   The derivations in (3) and (4) predict a word order where proximate precedes obviative. Indeed, Algonquian languages such as Passamaquoddy (Bruening, 2005) show this word order. Assuming the head amalgamation operation discussed above brings the verbal complex to the left periphery, this should result in a VSO word order in direct, and a VOS word order in inverse. However, the observed word orders of SWO go against these predictions. Hammerly (2019) shows that with direct alignments, VOS (5a) is preferred, but VSO (5b) is also grammatical. With the *inverse* alignment, VSO is grammatical (5c), while VOS is ungrammatical (5d). In short, there is a *general preference for obviative to precede proximate*.

(5)   *Word order in SWO shows a tendency for obviative to precede proximate (Hammerly, 2019)*

    a. o-waabam-aa-n ikwe-wan   gwiiwizens
        3-see-DIR-OBV   woman-OBV boy
        'The boy (prox) sees the woman (obv)'   V$_{DIR}$O$_{OBV}$S$_{PROX}$

    b. o-waabamaan gwiiwizens ikwewan   V$_{DIR}$S$_{PROX}$O$_{OBV}$

    c. o-waabam-igoo-n gwiiwizens-an ikwe
        3-see-INV-OBV   boy-OBV   woman
        'The boy (obv) sees the woman (prox)'   V$_{INV}$S$_{OBV}$O$_{PROX}$

    d. *o-waabam-igoo-n ikwe gwiiwizens-an   *V$_{INV}$O$_{PROX}$S$_{OBV}$

Towards a Solution   I propose that the conflict between the word order predictions based on the application of the P-constraint to Voice and Infl and the observed word orders in SWO can be resolved by considering the probe on C. Unlike Voice and Infl, C is not relativized to prefer agreement with proximate: C uniformly agrees with obviative arguments. As a result, C is not subject to the P-constraint and does not require a proximate argument to occupy its edge. This agreement opens up the possibility that obviative arguments move to SpecCP—a position preceding the proximate argument, which is sitting in SpecIP. This operation must be relativized to ensure that movement of the obviative argument to this position is not obligatory, to capture the fact that proximate can precede obviative in the direct alignment (5b), and opens questions about the source of variation across Algonquian languages with respect to obviation, agreement, and word order.

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