

Infrequent morphosyntactic phenomena in Plains Cree: Bloomfield's text collections and the Ahenakew-Wolfart corpus

In this presentation, I present the frequencies of various morphological phenomena in two sets of Plains Cree texts: those collected by L. Bloomfield in the early 20th century (Bloomfield, 1930, 1934) and those collected by F. Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart in the late 20th century (Ahenakew, 2000; Bear et al., 1998; Kâ-Nîpitêhtêw, 1998; Masuskapoe, 2010; Minde, 1997; Vandall & Douquette, 1987; Whitecalf, 1993). The phenomena I present are archaic features or minor paradigms: initial change, relational morphology, *h-* and *ht-*preterits, dubitative forms, inanimate actor verbs, and further obviative verbs. In addition to presenting the relative frequencies of these phenomena in the two time periods, I also look at the frequency of alternative strategies for initial change and dubitative verbal morphology, as these strategies can be identified and readily counted in a morphosyntactically tagged corpus of Plains Cree (e.g. Arppe et al., 2020; Harrigan et al., 2017; Schmirler et al., 2018). For example, there are relatively more initial change forms in Bloomfield's texts (1.3% of verbs) than in the A-W corpus (0.3% of verbs); conversely, the *ê-*conjunct preverb is used on 28.2% of verbs in the Bloomfield texts, but on 43.3% of verbs in the A-W corpus. We observe a similar pattern for dubitative suffixes and particles, also commented on by Wolfart (1973): the Bloomfield texts include 14 verb forms with dubitative suffixes (0.05% of verbs) and 112 free particles (0.4% of particles), while the A-W corpus contains only two forms with dubitative suffixes (0.01% of verbs), 694 free particles (1.8% of particles), and four instances of a dubitative particle inserted into the preverb complex, along with additional syntactic material. These patterns and others offer a quantitative look at changes in morphological features over time.

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