

A Survey of “Classificatory Medials” in Ojibwe: Classifiers versus Incorporation

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Biedny et. al. (forthcoming) presents a survey of classifier-like medials across the Algonquian family, concluding that variation in these medials reflects a cline of grammaticalization from incorporation to verbal classifier. This cline of grammaticalization resembles that proposed by Mithun (1986). Building off of these seminal studies, we present a detailed analysis of the formal and semantic characteristics of these medials as they occur in Ojibwe. We survey the Ojibwe People’s Dictionary, as well as several texts and Valentine’s (2001) *Nishnaabemwin Reference Grammar*, to compare the characteristics of verbs with medials to those with different medials and without medials. Some examples appear very templatic, with the addition of the medial reflecting broad semantics (1), while others seem to exhibit lexicalization, with the medial reflecting narrow semantics (2). The medials are shown in bold.

1) *biinad* ‘it is clean’ VII

a. *biin-ad*

clean-it.is.in.a.state.or.condition.VII

‘it is clean’

b. *biinaabikad*

biin-aabik-ad

clean-mineral.organic.solid.rock.or.metal.CL-it.is.in.a.state.or.condition.VII

‘it (a mineral) is clean’

2) *aaba’an* ‘undo’ VTI

a. *aab-a’an*

undo-act.on.it.using.tool.VTI

‘undo, untie, unfasten it (using something)’

b. *aabaabika’an*

aab-aabik-a’an

undo-mineral.CL-act.on.it.using.tool.VTI

‘unlock it’

In addition to clarifying the phonological conditions causing variation in certain medials identified by Biedny et. al. (forthcoming), we propose several refinements to their criteria of classifiers versus incorporation, including morphological, semantic and syntactic factors, and the so-called incorporation marker ‘e’. Namely, we offer supporting evidence for their conclusion that ‘e’ is not a valid diagnostic for incorporation, evidenced by its inclusion in medial forms that are clearly classifiers, and we strongly favor the use of semantics as the most reliable indicator of medial status, i.e. incorporated medials show narrow semantics, while classifiers show broad semantics.

References

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