Verbs within verbs in Plains Cree[*]

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1   Introduction

This paper will provide a brief introduction to complement-taking predicates in *nēhiyawēwin*, the Plains Cree language, which have heretofore received little to no research attention. Though the majority of constructions will be clearly bi-clausal, one particular construction will be highlighted since its common analysis is of a mono-clausal combination of an auxiliary-like "preverb" (IPV) plus main verb stem. A re-interpretation of this construction as a serial verb construction is facilitated by the layered structure of the clause as represented in Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) (cf. Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008).

The remainder of this paper will have the following structure: section 2 will provide a short introduction to pertinent features of the Plains Cree language and its grammar, and section 3 will provide examples of predicates which take complements organized following the various layers of the Representational Level. The relevant layers are specifically: the Propositional Content in section 3.1, the Episode in 3.2, the State-of-Affairs in 3.3, and the Situational Property in 3.4. This last subsection will offer the proposed analysis of a variety of preverbs as lexical predicates which themselves take restricted verbal complements at the layer of the situational property. Section 4 will provide conclusions and further research questions.

2   Plains Cree[1]

Plains Cree is spoken largely in southern and central Saskatchewan and central and northern Alberta, Canada, and is the northwesternmost form of what has commonly been referred to as the Cree-Montagnais-Naskapi continuum, one of many languages within the Algonquian Language Family. Plains Cree shares many linguistic features with its neighbouring dialects and indeed the Algonquian family as a whole. It is a polysynthetic language with considerable use of bound morphology and nominal incorporation. This manifests itself particularly in the complex structure of the verb which includes bound pronominal marking, a diverse set of "preverbs" which include grammatical operators and lexical modifiers, and, in the most complex forms, markers of the infamous Algonquian direct-inverse system (cf. Dahlstrom 1991, Wolfart 1973, Wolvengrey 2011). This complexity will be most apparent in section 3.4 below.

The main word classes are verbs (subsuming adjectives), nouns, pronouns, and a large morphologically undifferentiated but functionally heterogeneous class of particles, some free and some bound to nouns and/or verbs. Nouns are divided into two main noun classes or genders, animate (NA) and inanimate (NI), which despite these terms indicating a division based on the notion of "living" versus "non-living" is still primarily a grammatical division, which is exceedingly vital to Cree grammar. Patterns of gender agreement extend to marking on pronouns and verbs. Indeed, the verbal system of Cree is dictated by the two main criteria of transitivity and animacy. Intransitive verbs can consist of a sole participant which is animate (i.e., Animate Intransitive Verbs – VAI) or inanimate or impersonal (i.e., Inanimate Intransitive Verbs – VII). Transitive verbs can consist of two or more participants in which the "actor", agent or primary participant is generally animate, while the "undergoer" or (primary) object can be inanimate (i.e., Transitive Inanimate Verbs – VTI) or animate (i.e., Transitive Animate Verbs – VTA). VTI stems will be most prominent in the examples which follow, as these are the stems that most commonly take (inanimate) clausal complements. Aside from the Imperative, Cree verbs can also appear in two forms or "Orders", the Independent and the Conjunct, which in many Algonquian languages correspond roughly to main and subordinate clauses. Although this is not strictly true of Cree, and verbs in the Conjunct can serve as main clauses, the main subordination pattern will involve Conjunct verb complements, again with the topic of section 3.4 being exceptional.

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[1] This brief introduction is in part edited and modified from the more specific description in Wolvengrey (subm.), which is the result of another project spearheaded by the research agenda of Kees Hengeveld and colleagues in FDG.

3   Complement-taking predicates

Within FDG, complement-taking predicates can be classified by the highest possible layer represented within their complements. In this section, the form of Plains Cree complement clauses will be briefly introduced, establishing three main patterns. Subsections 3.1 and 3.2 will illustrate similar complementation patterns at the layers of the Propositional Content and the Episode respectively, while subsection 3.3, will exemplify complements at the layer of the State-of-Affairs. Subsection 3.4, however, will introduce a very different and much more restricted pattern of complementation when the complement is restricted to the layer of the Situational Property.

3.1   Propositional Content

Complements of propositional attitude predicates (e.g., *believe*, *think*) and predicates of knowledge (e.g., *know*, *realize*) take the form of full Propositional Contents, the highest layer of the Representational Level. In Plains Cree, such complements occur in the Conjunct form, marked with the preverb/complementizer *ē-*, as in (1) and (2), and always permit tense marking, as in (2).[2]

(1)   *ni-tāpwēht-ē-nān*   [*ana*   *ēkā*   ***ē-**pimātisi-t.*]
       1-VTI.believe-TH-1PL.EXCL.IND   that.one   NEG   **COMP**-VAI.live-3SG.CNJ
       'We believe that that one is no longer living.'   (Masuskapoe 2010:115)

(2)   *kiskēyiht-am-Ø*   [***ē-**kī-sipwēhtē-yit.*]
       VTI.know-TH-3SG.IND   **COMP**-PST-VAI.leave-3OBV.CNJ
       'S/he$_i$ knows that s/he$_j$ left.'

Further research remains to determine formal differences between such Propositional Content complements as shown here, and those of the Episode layer, exemplified immediately below.

3.2   Episode

Complements of commentative (factive) predicates (e.g., *regret*, *like*) and predicates of deduction and manifestation (e.g., *find out*, *notice*) take the form of Episodes, again permitting tense marking, but without the layer of the

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[2] Unless otherwise cited, all examples are the author's and have been checked with the gracious assistance of Dr. Jean Okimāsis, fluent Plains Cree speaker and language educator. All errors of interpretation remain the author's own. In addition to standard Leipzig glossing, abbreviations used in the examples include: CISLOC – cislocative ('come to'); CNJ – Conjunct Order; DIR – direct theme; IND – Independent Order; OBV – obviative (less topical 3rd person reference); PRSP – prospective aspect; TH – transitive theme; TRLOC – translocative ('go to').

Propositional Content. Example (3) illustrates this, but also shows an exact parallel to the Propositional Content complement in (2) above.

(3)   *mihtāt-am-Ø*   [*ē-kī-sipwēhtē-yit*.]
       VTI.regret-TH-3SG.IND   COMP-PST-VAI.leave-3OBV.CNJ
       'S/he_i regrets that s/he_j left.'

Again, further research is required to fully differentiate the forms of propositional and episodical complements. There is, however, a clear distinction between these two complement types and that restricted to the State-of-Affairs.

3.3   State-of-Affairs

Manipulative predicates (e.g., *allow*, *cause*) and predicates of immediate perception (e.g., *witness*) take complements which represent only the layer of the State-of-Affairs, and cannot therefore include absolute tense marking. Such complements in Cree cannot take the preverb *ē-*, but must instead take a different complementizer/preverb, a marker of irrealis analogous to infinitival marking. This marker can occur in a number of allomorphs including *ka-*, *ta-* (as in examples (4) and (5)), *kika-*, *kita-* and *tita-*.

(4)   *kī-pakitin-am-Ø*   [*ta-sipwēhtē-yit*.]
       PST-VTI.allow-TH-3SG.IND   COMP-VAI.leave-3OBV.CNJ
       'S/he_i allowed him/her_j to leave.'

(5)   *nitawēyiht-am-Ø*   [*ta-sipwēhtē-yit*.]
       VTI.want-TH-3SG.IND   COMP-VAI.leave-3OBV.CNJ
       'S/he_i wants him/her_j to leave.'

Here, the participants of each clause remain distinct, as in the preceding examples, something that will set all these forms apart from even smaller complement structures at the layer of the Situational Property. The example in (5) is added here particularly to provide a contrast to the structure to be exemplified in the immediately following subsection 3.4 in which a very different means of expressing "want to" is found, where the subjects of both the upper (or main) and lower (or subordinate) predicates are co-referential.

3.4   Situational Property

At the layer of the Situational Property, the subject of the complement clause must be co-referential with that of the higher clause, which will include phasal predicates (e.g., *begin*, *continue*), and positive and negative achievement predicates (e.g., *manage*, *try*, *fail*). When this is the case, Plains Cree does not

appear to use a bi-clausal structure at all. Instead, a subset of preverbs represents the equivalent of the higher clause joined to what appears to be a main verb. Such preverbs include phasals such as *māci-* 'start', *pōni-* 'stop', *kīsi-* 'finish', as well as the desiderative *nōhtē-* 'want', conative *kakwē-* 'try', and the abilitative *nihtā-* 'be good at'. These forms have previously been treated simply as part of the preverb class (cf. Okimāsis 2004: 17), or more specifically analyzed as aspectual and modal operators (cf. Bakker 2006, Wolvengrey 2012). The ostensible main verb, and the entire verbal complex, can then appear in either the Independent (6a) or Conjunct (6b) Order:

(6) a. *nōhtē-sipwēhtē-w*.
         want.to-VAI.leave-3SG.IND
         'S/he wants to leave.'

     b. *ē-nōhtē-sipwēhtē-t*
         COMP-want.to-VAI.leave-3SG.CNJ
         '(as) s/he wants to leave'

The examples in (6) can be compared with the clearly bi-clausal structure in (5) above, and this contrast suggested the treatment of such forms as preverbs with grammatical function.

      However, preverbs such as these differ from other grammatical preverbs in a number of important ways. In (7), a typical sequence of grammatical preverbs is demonstrated preceding the main verb *kiyokaw-* 'visit'. None of these preverbs can ever be pre-modified and they permit only a rigid ordering, as illustrated. In contrast, the phasals and modals discussed here can be premodified, whether by other modifiers or by operators of the Situational Property, as in (8).

(7) **kī-wī-nitawi**-*kiyokaw-ē-wak*
     PST-PRSP-TRLOC-VTA.visit-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
     'They$_i$ were going to go visit them$_j$.'

(8) a. *mōya   awiyak   nānitaw   wīhkāt*
         NEG   someone   anything   ever
         *ni-**pē-isi-kakwē**-kīkway-kitimah-ik ...*
         1-**CISLOC-thus-try.to**-something-VTA.abuse-INV-(3SG>1SG).IND
         'No-one ever came to try to abuse me in any way …'

                                                                (Masuskapoe 2010: 38)

b. *ē-kī-**nipahi-nihtā**-mitiht-ahkik*   *kīkway.*
   COMP-PST-**extremely-good.at**-VTI.track-TH.3PL.CNJ   something
   'They were very good at tracking things.' (Bear et al. 1992: 340-341)

They can also occur preceding other modifiers and operators of the Situational Property such as directionals (9a&b), durative (9c) and frequentative (9d) reduplication, and combinations thereof (9e), and can, to a certain extent, be re-ordered and stacked recursively as in (10).

(9)   a. *kī-wī-**kakwē-nitawi**-kiyokaw-ē-wak*
         PST-PRSP-**try.to-TRLOC**-VTA.visit-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
         'They$_i$ were going to try to go visit them$_j$.'

      b. *ni-**nōhtē-nitawi**-kiskinohamākosi-n*
         1-**want.to-TRLOC**-VAI.attend.school-1/2SG.IND
         'I want to go to school.'   (Masuskapoe 2010: 8)

      c. *ahci piko   mān   ē-wī-**kakwē-ma**-mīnom-akik, ...*
         nevertheless   HAB   COMP-PRSP-**try.to-DUR**-VTA.correct-1SG>3PL.CNJ
         'I still try to straighten them out by what I say …' (Minde 1997: 50-51)

      d. *kī-wī-**kakwē-kāh**-kiyokaw-ē-wak*
         PST-PRSP-**try.to-FREQ**-VTA.visit-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
         'They$_i$ were going to try visit them$_j$ repeatedly.'

      e. *kī-wī-**kakwē-pē-kāh**-kiyokaw-ē-wak*
         PST-PRSP-**try.to-CISLOC-FREQ**-VTA.visit-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
         'They$_i$ were going to try to come visit them$_j$ repeatedly.'

(10) a. *kī-**māci-nōhtē-kakwē-nihtā**-miyo-nēhiyawē-w*
         PST-start.to-want.to-try.to-be.good.at-well-VAI.SPEAK.CREE-3SG.IND
         'S/he started to try to be good at speaking Cree well.'

      b. *kī-**nōhtē-māci-kakwē-nihtā**-miyo-nēhiyawē-w*
         PST-want.to-start.to-try.to-be.good.at-well-VAI.SPEAK.CREE-3SG.IND
         'S/he wanted to start to try to be good at speaking Cree well.'

      c. *kī-**nōhtē-kakwē-māci-nihtā**-miyo-nēhiyawē-w*
         PST-want.to-try.to-start.to-be.good.at-well-VAI.SPEAK.CREE-3SG.IND
         'S/he wanted to try to start to be good at speaking Cree well.'

These differences suggest instead that the phasal and modal preverbs are better treated as lexical elements which can themselves be modified and which take Situational Properties as their complements. Examples (11) and (12) illustrate the similarities and contrasts between structures with a single main verb and a combination of lexical (pre)verb and verb. In particular, the example in (12b) can be provided with the FDG analysis in (13) in which a second Situational Property is embedded as a complement of the predicational IPV, *kakwē-*.

(11)   *kī-wī-nitawi-**kiyokaw**-ē-wak*
       PST-PRSP-TRLOC-**VTA.visit**-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
       'They$_i$ were going to go visit them$_j$.'

(12)   a.   *kī-wī-nitawi-**kakwē**-**kiyokaw**-ē-wak*
            PST-PRSP-TRLOC-**IPV.try.to**-**VTA.visit**-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
            'They$_i$ were going to go try to visit them$_j$.'

       b.   *kī-wī-**kakwē**-nitawi-**kiyokaw**-ē-wak*
            PST-PRSP- **IPV.try.to-**TRLOC-**VTA.visit**-DIR-3PL(>3OBV).IND
            'They$_i$ were going to try to go visit them$_j$.'

(13)   (p$_i$: (past ep$_i$: (e$_i$: [(prosp s$_i$: [(f$_i$: **kakwē-v** (f$_i$)) (x$_i$)$_A$
       (trloc s$_j$: [(f$_j$: **kiyokaw$_V$** (f$_j$)) (x$_i$)$_A$ (x$_j$)$_U$]) (s$_j$)) (s$_i$)]) (e$_i$)) (ep$_i$)) (p$_i$))

Such structures, however, are mono-clausal and fit the description of serial verb constructions (SVC), as summarized in Aikhenvald (2006), in virtually every way except one: these lexical "preverbs" cannot ever stand alone as main verbs. This last point may suggest that a process of grammaticalization is in progress, but it has by no means progressed to the point where these phasal and modal-like elements can be considered grammatical operators.

4   Conclusions

The current study suggests that the Plains Cree verbal complex is just that: consisting of an even greater level of complexity than heretofore described. In addition to grammatical preverbs (i.e., operators) and lexical modifiers, some "preverbs" may themselves be identified as lexical predicates which take Situational Properties as their complements. However, like serial verb constructions, such constructions are represented in the morphosyntax by mono-clausal structures.

Further, more detailed analyses of textual examples are required to determine the full extent of the modifiers and operators which can precede the phasal and modal predicational elements discussed here. This ultimately entails a complete description of the preverb string, which should also determine whether there are other "preverbs" which can similarly be identified as lexical predicates. One further wrinkle will be provided by the occasional insertion of otherwise free lexical material into the preverb string (such as the pronoun *kīkway* 'something' in example (8a) above). A preliminary and cursory glance at the available textual data suggests that such insertions can also precede and follow these lexical preverbs, and more detailed investigation is required to further clarify the structure of the full polysynthetic verbal complex.

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