Revisiting the é-Preverb in Potawatomi

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Questions
• What are the functions of the é preverb in Potawatomi?
• What are its semantics?

Background

Algonquian Verbal Morphology

• Since Bloomfield (1946), it has been commonly assumed that Algonquian verbs are grouped into verbal "orders".
• Potawatomi is divided into three orders, each showing different inflectional morphology
  1. Independent
  2. Imperfective
  3. Conjunct
• Independent agrees for 3-features through the use of prefixes and suffixes (1). Imperfective (2) and Conjunct inflections (3) are only realized with suffixes
• Generally, the independent occurs in main clauses and the conjunct in subordinate clauses

Preverbs

• Potawatomi is divided into three orders, each showing different inflectional morphology

Preverbs and Initial Change

• Non-Narrative Discourse Uses of é-
  • The é-preverb occurs in everyday speech
  • Used to indicate subordination or embedding
  • I do not restrict the é-morpheme to storytelling

When did we (incl) see him?
I saw Mary buy that car
He didn’t know when we were talking about him

• More analysis to come

Selected References


Additional Findings from Welcher and Others

• Changed conjuncts are found in contexts of presupposition
• Plain conjuncts occur in hypothetical and irrealis situations

Plain Conjuncts

1. Independent
2. Imperfective
3. Conjunct

Preverbs

• Preverb elements with fixed positions; no more than one preverb surfaces in a single position

Initial Change

• A phonological process that affects the first vowel of a word, the result helps to distinguish

Plain and Changed Conjuncts

Table 1: Initial Change in Potawatomi

cf. (Costa 1996; Lockwood 2017)

Future Work and Remaining Questions

• Building a formal analysis of the é-morpheme = would what a compositional meaning look like for this?
• Would any analysis be accurate across Algonquian languages? Can an analysis be extended
• How will the description of the Algonquian aorist, which is a cognate of Potawatomi é, weigh on this analysis?

More Open Realms of Inquiry

• é and modal da- occupy the same first position preverb slot; they cannot co-occur:

(17) V à-VA
(18) V à-VA

• Might looking at the relationship between é and the modal da- give us a more fleshed out analysis?
• What is the relationship between Initial Change and é? If é is example of IC, and not Plain Conjunct, then could an analysis unite the é-conjunct with the changed conjunct?
• Is the difference in function between Plain and Changed conjuncts easier to delineate if é is IC?

Summary

• Hockett and Welcher’s descriptions and analyses of é are inaccurate
• I take particular issue with the proposal that é is a factive or factive-like marker
• More analysis to come