

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and goals

The present study grew out of a descriptive problem in Potawatomi. The problem concerns the behavior of grammatical elements in discourse, and raises issues about the relationship between syntactic structure and discourse structure, and presents the challenge to linguistic theory of accounting for grammatical constructions whose distribution is dependent on discourse context.

The problem, as I first encountered it, did not concern an unusual aspect of Potawatomi grammar, but one that is generally considered to be mundane: the distribution of main and subordinate clause verb forms. If one considers only sentences as found in everyday discourse, the problem is not apparent. It arises only in the context of comparing such sentences to those found in traditional narrative, where the distribution is quite different. In narrative, the majority of main clause verbs are marked as syntactically subordinate, and main clause verb forms ‘proper’ are used for special purposes: the speech of characters, background information, and the representation of narrative-internal viewpoint.

The problem does not end here, however. There are other aspects of Potawatomi grammar whose ‘syntactic’ behavior does not match what one finds in narrative. One that is obvious from even a cursory glance at narrative is the use of a verbal prefix *é-* which is found on nearly every main clause verb form. In everyday discourse, however, its syntactic use is as a marker of factivity in a subordinate clause.

Another aspect of grammar with both syntactic and discourse domains of application is obviation. Obviation is a common feature in Algonquian languages that signals disjoint reference in third persons. Within phrases and clauses, obviation is obligatory: if there are two or more third persons, only one may be proximate; others will be obviative. In narrative, however, obviation can be used for stylistic purposes to foreground and background characters, and to represent point-of-view.

These aspects of Potawatomi grammar raise the theoretical problem of accounting for grammatical constructions whose distribution is dependent on discourse context. A generative syntactic analysis, modular in its approach, would likely take individual sentences from everyday discourse as data, and might then state, for example, that independents are main clause verbs, and conjuncts are subordinate clause verbs. However, this analysis would founder if it were extended to narrative discourse, where the distributions of these verbal paradigms are quite different.<sup>1</sup> The same is true for the preverb *é-*, which a syntactic analysis might describe as applying only to subordinate clause verbs. How then might one explain its proliferation to nearly every narrative main clause verb? However, the modular approach to syntax has probably been most detrimental to the study of obviation in Algonquian languages, where studies commonly

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, the primary description we have of Potawatomi (Charles Hockett's work from the Structuralist era), has the opposite problem of taking narrative discourse as its basis for syntactic description (Hockett's data primarily came from traditional narrative texts), thereby missing most of the interesting behavior of these grammatical phenomena in everyday conversational discourse.

discount its discourse use as outside the scope of syntactic study, or even the domain of linguistic inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

While the primary goal of a modular approach to syntax is to capture generalizations about well-formedness, seen in a less forgiving light, it can only account for the well-formedness of a part of the grammatical constructs speakers are capable of generating. My assumption in the present study is that we have more to gain from studying the function of grammatical phenomena in both syntax and discourse than from excluding the data from either domain, *a priori*, from our analysis. I will argue that the behavior of discourse-sensitive morphosyntax in Potawatomi is principled, and moreover makes use of mechanisms already needed to explain sentence-level structures. My goal is to show that the syntactic behavior of these grammatical phenomena in everyday discourse and their textual use in traditional narrative discourse are related to each other, and will propose a model that captures these relationships.

## **1.2 A cognitive approach**

The theoretical approach taken here is Cognitive, that is, it rests on the assumption that language is not a separate, isolable, faculty of the human mind but is intimately bound up with general cognitive processes involving perception, processing, reasoning and construal. Two theories developed within this overarching framework are central to this study: Construction Grammar and Mental Spaces. These theories, along with their notational conventions, are presented in Chapter 3. Construction Grammar, which is a unificational theory of syntax, will generally be used for syntactic analyses. I

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<sup>2</sup> For an example of this approach, see Aissen (1997).

will allude to the theory in Chapters 4 and 6 when I present the Conversational Construction and Narrative Construction, respectively, but the theory is heavily utilized in Chapter 9 for the representation of obviation. The second, Mental Spaces theory, is not strictly speaking a theory of discourse (it was developed, in part, to address problems of reference) however it has proven to be very useful in the analysis of narrative. Its advantage in the present study is it provides a means of distinguishing narrative and everyday discourse. The theory of Mental Spaces figures prominently in Chapters 3, 5, 7, and 9, and 10.

### **1.3 Data**

It is often difficult to obtain data from different discourse genres from published sources; a particular problem for those working on endangered languages who often rely on philological work to help fill in gaps where there has been grammatical attrition. For example, it is clear from Hockett's sketch of Potawatomi that narrative discourse formed the basis of his grammatical description. With regard to the uses of paradigmatic orders outside of narrative, we learn only that the independent is used "for statements and some questions in ordinary conversation" and that the conjunct is used "in certain types of dependent clauses" (Hockett, 1948a, p. 9). Given that the distributions of the paradigms are very different in these two discourse types, it is surprising that non-narrative discourse received no further attention. This omission was likely due to the fact that his data consisted primarily of narrative texts. It has been the tradition among Americanists, especially where field time is limited, to primarily elicit narratives, and within this type of discourse, the even narrower genre of mythological text.

What is more unfortunate about the lack of conversational data, is the American Structuralists were working at a time when many speech communities were still robust, and conversational data would have been easier to obtain (although, not necessarily easier to record in a notebook) . Charles Hockett conducted his research on Potawatomi about the time most speakers shifted to English, and they would raise their children as first language English speakers. Today, there are a very few elderly fluent speakers left. Most do not use Potawatomi extensively in the home, because their children and grandchildren do not speak or understand it. In many cases, speakers do not live very close together. As a result of these factors, conversational data is rather difficult to obtain, and, admittedly, I collected very little of it myself.

In the process of using Hockett's materials as a basis for elicitation and comparison, however, I noticed that the morphosyntax of the modern elicited data was quite different from that recorded in traditional narrative. Upon examination, the primary difference turned out to be with respect to narrative clauses—the reported speech of characters in narrative matched the elicited data. When I began working with speakers to create pedagogical materials, I found that the morphosyntax of their constructed conversations matched those of the elicited data. For these reasons, I would not go as far as to say that the elicited data I have used is conversational *per se*, but I believe that with respect to the linguistic parameters I am examining, it is good representation of the type of language used in everyday discourse.

The data used for this study comes from several sources. The narrative data was largely collected by Hockett in the 1940's, which I have been in the process of translating. It is currently unpublished except for the two texts included in his IJAL

series on Potawatomi (Hockett, 1948b). The examples cited here come from about ten of these narratives, the majority of which were told by Jim Spear, and a few by his wife Alice Spear (one of her narratives “Crane Boy” is provided in Appendix C). These are cited either as JS (Jim Spear) or AS (Alice Spear). For this subset, I am reasonably satisfied with the glosses and free translations. Other examples come from narratives told to me during the period of 1994 – 1996 by a conservatively fluent female speaker, cited as MD. For data on everyday discourse, I include the elicited examples in my own fieldnotes, which are cited as POEX. Those examples annotated JTNB are taken from the conversations in a pedagogical workbook developed by fluent speaker Jim Thunder with Kim Wensaut (1998).

## **1.4 Chapter organization**

The structure of the text is as follows. Chapter 2, ‘Descriptive preliminaries’ provides a background for the grammatical topics to be addressed in later chapters. Chapter 3, ‘Theoretical preliminaries’ presents the Cognitive orientation of the analysis, and Construction Grammar and Mental Spaces theory. In this Chapter, I also argue for an elaborated representation of ground in the Mental Spaces theory. This representation will become important for contrasting various types of information in traditional narrative.

Chapters 4-9 are arranged in pairs, with a descriptive chapter followed by a theoretical chapter. My intent in using this type of presentation is twofold; first, to make the descriptive information as accessible and theory-free as possible. Since the descriptive topics here have not been significantly addressed for Potawatomi, and in some cases Algonquian languages in general, I feel it important to give them due

attention. Secondly, I did not wish to encumber the line of theoretical argumentation with excessive descriptive detail. Each of these chapters is summarized in more detail below.

Chapter 4 addresses the use of two types of verbal inflections in Potawatomi, the independent and conjunct, along with a preverb *é-*, as they are used in everyday discourse. It is shown that independent verbs are used for main clauses, and conjunct verbs are generally used for subordinate clauses. The preverb *é-* is shown to be a marker of factivity in subordinate clauses. However, there are a few contexts where a conjunct can occur in a main clause, particularly when accompanying one of several particles indicating speaker evaluation. In addition, conjuncts can occur in main clauses without an accompanying particle if this evaluation is available in the context. I argue that these evaluations provide a context of subordination, which is satisfied by the use of the conjunct. This pattern of main clause independents, subordinate clause conjuncts and the preverb *é-* is introduced as the Conversational Construction (CC), which will be contrasted with the pattern of these grammatical elements in narrative.<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter 5, I present a Mental Spaces theory analysis of the elements of the Conversational Construction. I argue that in their everyday uses, independents structure Space R (the space which represents the “Reality” domain), and conjuncts always structure a space that is embedded in Space R. The preverb *é-* is a marker of factivity of

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<sup>3</sup> The linguistic entities I am referring to here as constructions are complex, in that they have analyzeable pieces which are themselves constructions. When these subconstructions combine, they contribute elements of their semantics to the larger ‘super’ construction.

an embedded space. These basic uses are contrasted with the function of these grammatical elements in narrative in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of independents, conjuncts and the preverb *é-* in traditional narrative discourse. I argue that the use of main clause conjuncts is the basic narrative pattern which reflects narrative foreground. I call this basic narrative pattern the Narrative Construction (NC). By contrast, the use of main clause independents (that is, the Conversational Construction) in narrative reflects background information, either settings, explanations, or evaluations. Other uses of the Conversational Construction reflect a narrative-internal perspective, or viewpoint, which is used for direct speech, vividness, epistemic distance, or semantic opposition. I argue that the several uses of narrative-internal viewpoint probably arose out of the use of the Conversational Construction for direct speech.

Chapter 7 presents a Mental Spaces theory analysis of the use of the Narrative and Conversational Constructions in traditional narrative discourse. I argue that the use of the Narrative Construction reflects that narrative is generally set up as an embedded network within a larger non-narrative discourse. The use of the Narrative Construction to mark foreground is metonymic for narrative discourse as a whole. When the Conversational Construction is used in narrative, it always indexes its basic use in the “Reality” domain in some way. With respect to background information, there is a contextual focus on one of the discourse participants. The various uses of the Conversational Construction for internal viewpoint reflect that viewpoint is inside of the focused narrative domain, whereas an external viewpoint (represented by the use of the Narrative Construction) reflect that viewpoint is outside of the focused narrative domain.



Chapter 8, contains a description of the use of obviation in Potawatomi. I describe both the marking of obviation on nouns and verbs, as well as the syntactic contexts for obviation. I then argue, by analyzing a traditional narrative, that the appearance of Potawatomi as a largely syntactic obviation language is due to a separate treatment of transitive and intransitive main clause verbs. Intransitive verbs reflect the syntactic pattern of obviation, whereas transitive verbs reflect the use of a hierarchical ranking of discourse participants. I show that despite this tendency towards syntactic obviation, the narrator is clearly working to maintain the main character as proximate, and makes use of discourse obviation in some very subtle and interesting ways. I argue that a possible path for a discourse obviation language to become a syntactic obviation language is grammaticalizing proximates as subjects of main clause intransitive verbs of speech, and that Potawatomi shows this change in progress.

In Chapter 9, I analyze the use of obviation in terms of Construction Grammar and Mental Spaces theory. I argue that the various uses of obviation in syntax and discourse reflect the use of a basic obviation construction that ranks multiple third persons, and assigns proximate status to the highest ranked third person. Various “instance” constructions that inherit the obviation construction provide the details of specific ranking schemes.<sup>4</sup> I also show that the use of discourse obviation, in particular proximate shifts, can be accommodated by associating particular nominal rankings to various viewpoints in the Mental Spaces theory networks. These networks are then indexed inside of particular obviation instance constructions.

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<sup>4</sup> The term instance construction is from Goldberg (1995), and will be explained in more detail in Chapter 9.

Chapter 10 concludes with a discussion of Mental Space blends in Potawatomi discourse. I argue that independents, conjuncts, the preverb *é-*, and obviation reflect a productive blend in Potawatomi that takes as its input spaces syntactic and discourse uses of constructions. In this way, possible contexts for the application of a construction in one domain can be associated with established contexts in the other. When the cross-space mappings are made, the blend can be ‘run’ and the construction applied to the new domain. I argue that the existence of these blends demonstrates that a full description of these constructions requires predication in multiple grammatical domains, syntax and discourse.

There are also three appendices: Appendix A contains a list of the grammatical codes used in morpheme glosses. Appendix B provides interlinear glosses of the textual examples used in Chapter 6 and 7. Appendix C contains the narrative “Crane Boy”, which is discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, presented with interlinear glosses and facing translation.

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