Arok Elessar Wolvengrey

Semantic and Pragmatic Functions in Plains Cree Syntax

This dissertation explores the morphosyntax of the Plains dialect of Cree - an Algonquian First Nations language of Canada - and the ways in which Semantic, Pragmatic and Syntactic Functions are (or are not) instantiated. The language-specific forms of two main morphosyntactic components of language, word order and case-marking, are discussed in this functional approach. This is of particular interest to syntactic theory, given the common characterization of Cree, and Algonquian languages in general, as having "free" word order and lacking case-marking altogether. In contrast to this "traditional" view, both case-marking (or "role-indexing") and word order are shown to serve very important functions in Cree syntax, even if not occurring in the forms more familiar from Indo-European languages.

Part I focusses on the verbal cross-reference system of Algonquian languages and particularly the Direct-Inverse system of alignment. A functional account explains the Inverse system in terms of the interaction between semantic and pragmatic hierarchies which completely obviates the need for a third level of syntactic functions. Cross-linguistically, word order is usually couched in terms of subject and object placement, but without recourse to such notions, the actual determinants of Plains Cree word order are considerably more complex. Part II provides a variety of semantic, syntactic and pragmatic constraints on Cree word order while building a number of basic word order templates. The Pragmatic Functions of Topic, Focus and Contrast prove particularly important in understanding clausal and extra-clausal word order placement in Plains Cree.

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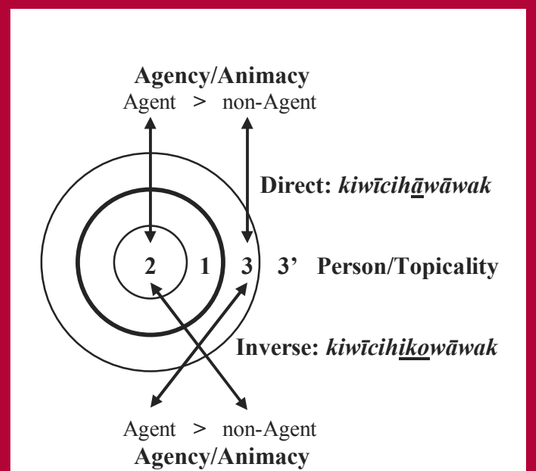

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