

The Importance of the Other: The relational verb form in the Cree language

Chantale Cenerini
University of Regina

The relational form is a Cree verbal inflection which is unique among all languages in the Algonquian family, and, according to those who have studied the question, apparently among all languages as a whole. The form's peculiarity is one of the reasons why it is so fascinating: it is different, unique and, as of yet, only partially researched and understood.

In this presentation, a brief exposé will be made on the Cree verb, on its orders, modes, tenses and inflections, as well on the four categories into which it is traditionally classified: the Inanimate Intransitive verb (VII), which has an inanimate subject, the Animate Intransitive verb (VAI), which has an animate subject, the Transitive Inanimate verb (VTI), which has an inanimate object, and the Transitive Animate verb (VTA), which has an animate object. Cree has no feminine-masculine gender distinction: instead, it distinguishes between animate and inanimate nouns.

Secondly, I propose to give a definition of the relational inflection, which only applies to AI and TI verbs, and which serves to signal the presence of an additional animate third person participant in the discourse. It is represented by the morpheme *w-*, followed by the TA verb ending. One cannot discuss the relational form without bringing up the question of transitivity: the inflection will acknowledge the presence of an extra participant *without* increasing the syntactic valence of the verb. The contexts that trigger the appearance of the relational form will also be discussed, as well as its limitations, and the extent of its use in the different Cree dialects. In brief, I am suggesting an overview of the relational form, and how it contributes to the complexity and the beauty of the Cree language.

This ongoing research hopes to contribute to the promotion and the valorization of this Native American language. By valorizing the language, one can hope to bring about a better appreciation for the culture, and the identity of the people to whom it gives expression.

The Importance of the Other References

- Bloomfield, Leonard. 1928. *The Plains Cree Language*. International Congress of Americanists, Proceedings 22.2:427-431. (Rome). p.429.
- Ellis, C. Douglas. 1971. *Cree Verb Paradigms*. International Journal of American Linguistics 37:76-95. p. 81-2, 87, 94.
- Ellis, C. Douglas. 2000. *Spoken Cree Level 1*. The University of Alberta Press. Edmonton, Canada. p.358-9, 485, 489, 383.
- Ellis, C. Douglas. 2004. *Spoken Cree Level 2*. The University of Alberta Press. Edmonton, Canada.
- Horden, John. 1881. *A Grammar of the Cree Language, As Spoken by the Cree Indians of North America*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. p. 28-9, 56, 175.
- Howse, James. 1844. *A Grammar of the Cree Language*. London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington. p.123-7, 167, 209, 229-30, 265-70.
- Junker, Marie-Odile. 2003. *East Cree Relational Verbs*. International Journal of American Linguistics 69.3: 307-329.
- Lacombe, Albert. 1874. *Grammaire de la langue des Cris*. Montreal. p. 12, 48-50, 76, 90, 129-30.
- Wolfart, H.C. 1973. *Plains Cree: A Grammatical Study*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s. volume 63, part 5. Philadelphia. p.60-1.

Textual sources of data

- Ahenakew, Freda. 1987. *wâskahikaniwiyiniw-âcimowina: Stories of the House People*. The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, MB.
- Ahenakew, Freda & H.C. Wolfart. 1992. *kôhkominawak otâcimowiniwâwa: Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in their Own Words*. Fifth House Publishers. Saskatoon, SK.
- Bloomfield, Leonard. 1930. *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree*. Anthropological Series, no. 11, Bulletin No. 60, AMS Press, New York.
- Bloomfield, Leonard. 1934. *Plains Cree Texts*. G.E. Stechert & CO., New York.
- Ellis, C. Douglas. 1995. *âtalôhkâna nêsta tipâcimôwina: Cree Legends and Narratives*. Publications of the Algonquian Text Society, The University of Manitoba Press.
- Masuskapoe, Cecilia. 2010. *piko kîkway ê-nakacihtât: kêkêk otâcimowina ê-nêhiyawastêki*. Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics: Memoir 21. Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Minde, Emma. 1997. *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik: Their Example Showed Me the Way*. The University of Alberta Press. Edmonton, Canada.
- Wolfart, H.C. & Freda Ahenakew. 2000. *âh-âyîtaw isi ê-kî-kiskêyihthahkik maskihkiy: They Knew Both Sides of Medicine Cree Tales of Curing and Cursing Told by Alice Ahenakew*. The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, MB.
- Wolfart, H.C. & Freda Ahenakew. 1998. *ana kê-pimwêwêhahk okakêskikhêmwina: The Counselling Speeches of Jim kê-nîpitêhtêw*. The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, MB.