

A PASSIVE TO INVERSE REANALYSIS IN CREE

BY

LISA MICHELLE McLEAN

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

**Department of Linguistics
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

© May, 2001

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

One of the most interesting constructions in Cree is the inverse. The inverse comprises only half of the paradigm of the active transitive forms in the language and is interesting because it is typologically unusual. Inverse systems have only been reported in a few of the world's languages, and moreover, in the languages in which they occur they have been problematic for analysis, sometimes being analyzed as this unique voice opposition, and sometimes as a passive. The inverse in Cree has been problematic in this way, especially as it is morphologically like a passive, but syntactically like an inverse.

In this thesis, I argue that the inverse originated as a passive construction. Specifically, I claim that a passive construction that existed at a much earlier stage in the history of the language was reanalyzed as an active transitive clause – the inverse.

I use evidence from Cree and Proto-Algonquian, as well as evidence from Wiyot and Yurok, sister languages of Proto-Algonquian, to support this analysis. In addition, I provide typological evidence in support of this analysis.

The reanalysis account is shown to explain why the inverse is morphologically like a passive, but syntactically like a inverse, in this way incorporating the insights of other theorists who have previously addressed the analysis of this construction. In addition, the reanalysis account for the inverse in Cree is shown to have implications for the study of language more generally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis originated as a paper for a reading course that I had with Dr. Lorna MacDonald in 1995; Dr. MacDonald suggested the general approach taken in it.

I also wish to acknowledge my thesis advisor, Dr. David Pentland, and the members of my committee, Dr. Joan Bybee and Dr. Terry Janzen. The paper benefited from the editorial comments of Dr. Pentland. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Bybee for reading the thesis on short notice and taking the time to provide detailed feedback with insightful comments.

I wish to thank the Department of Linguistics at the University of Manitoba (UofM) for its generous support in the form of numerous teaching and research assistantships, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies, also at the UofM, for its support in the form of a University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship (1994-1995). I was also privileged to receive a fellowship for tuition from the Linguistic Society of America to attend the 1995 Linguistics Institute, held that year in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There I had the opportunity to take courses with such internationally recognized linguists such as Dr. Bybee and Dr. Mark Baker.

I am grateful to my parents, William Walley and Judith McLean, both for financing my undergraduate education (making the pursuit of a graduate degree financially feasible), and for making learning a priority in their own lives.

Completing this program, however, was more of a personal accomplishment than an academic achievement. In this regard, I wish to acknowledge the following.

- I wish to recognize both the Office of Student Advocacy, especially Ms Nancy Callaghan, and the Student Counselling and Career Centre, especially Dr. Tracy Morgan. Without the assistance and support of Nancy and Tracy, this degree would most assuredly have gone unfinished.
- I want to express my thanks to Dr. Ranjana Bird, formerly the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (Academics), for her efforts on my behalf.

- Thank you to Tracey Bayko and Murray Braithwaite for their friendship throughout the length of the program, and especially during the past two years.
- Thanks to Jennifer Turner, my son's babysitter, I had no doubt that my son, Liam, was being well cared for when I was working and his "Grammy" couldn't look after him.
- Finally, I wish to thank my mother, Judith, for trusting that this was a paper worth finishing and a degree worth having. (I would also like to remind her that she said she would read it once it was bound!) It's a kindness I can't even hope to repay, but as a small gesture, I wish to dedicate this work to her.

To my mother, Judith

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

A	agent
ABS	absolute
ACC	accusative
ACT	active
AGT	passive agent
AI	animate intransitive
ASP	aspect
ASSOC	associative
conj	conjunct order
DAT	dative
DEF	definite
DIR	direct
ERG	ergative
excl	exclusive
IMP	imperative
IMPFV	imperfective
incl	inclusive
IND	indicative
INV	inverse
NEG	negative
NOM	nominative
NP	noun phrase
OBJ	object (direct object)
OBL	oblique
P	patient
PA	Proto-Algonquian
PASS	passive
pl	plural
POSS	possessive
pre-PA	pre-Proto-Algonquian
pro	pronominal
prog	progressive
Prog	progressive auxiliary
RD	referential distance
sg	singular
STAT	stative
SUB	subject
TOP	topic
TP	topic persistence
uns	unspecified tense-aspect-mood
Y	vowel
VP	verb phrase
1	first person
2	second person

3 third person
inan or 0 third person inanimate
indf third person indefinite
3obv or 3' third person obviative
3prox or 3 third person proximate
- "act on," e.g., 3-2 third person acting on second person
> "outranks," e.g., 1>3 first person outranks second person
* "reconstructed form" or "ungrammatical construction" (depending on the context)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

One of the most interesting grammatical constructions in Cree is the inverse. Cree, like all of the other languages in the Algonquian family, has a system of “direction,” also known as a “direct/inverse system.” Direction is a category of transitive verbs such that each verb form is either direct or inverse. Direct forms are used when the agent outranks the patient with respect to a hierarchy of person. In Cree, this hierarchy is $2 > 1 > 3$. Conversely, inverse forms are used when the agent is outranked by the patient with respect to this hierarchy (Wolfart 1973).¹

Consider, for example, the Cree forms in (1).²

- (1) a. *ni(t)-asam-â-w > nitasamâw*
1 feed direct 3
'I feed him (1-3)'
- b. *ni(t)-asam-ekw-w > nitasamik*
1 feed inverse 3
'he feeds me (3-1)'
- (Wolfart 1973, 24)

The forms in (1) are from the mixed set, i.e., one argument is first or second person and the other argument is third person.³ In (1a), the direct form, marked with /â/, is used because the first person agent outranks the third person

¹ Wolfart (1973, 26) uses the terms “actor” and “goal” as is the convention in Algonquian linguistics. However, I will use the terms “agent” and “patient” throughout this paper as I incorporate data from languages in other families as well.

² Interlinear glosses are only provided if they are available in the original source unless otherwise indicated. I have standardized the presentation of examples in the following way: the example itself is given in italics, the morpheme-by-morpheme gloss (where available) is given in the second line, and the English translation is given in the third line. The use of abbreviations has been standardized as in the table on page xiii-xiv. Finally, I have standardized the orthography used to indicate vowel length in Cree and Proto-Algonquian. For Cree, I use the diacritic ^ over the vowel and for Proto-Algonquian, I use a colon after the vowel.

³ In Cree, verbs are inflected in three sets, these being the mixed set, the third person set and the non-third person set, depending on the person of the agent and patient arguments (Wolfart 1973).

patient. In (1b), the inverse form, marked with /ekw/, is used because the third person agent is outranked by the first person patient (Wolfart 1973).⁴

Bloomfield (1946) reconstructs this type of opposition for the proto-language, Proto-Algonquian, as in the example in (2). The form in (2a) is marked with /a:/, as in the Cree form in (1a), and the form in (2b) is marked with /ekw/, as in the Cree form in (1b).

- (2) a. *newa:pama:wa
 'I look at him'
 b. *newa:pamekwa
 'he looks at me'
 (Bloomfield 1946, 98)

The inverse is restricted in its distribution, comprising only half of the paradigm of transitive verbs. For example, consider the agreement morphology of forms which have a first or second person argument and a third person argument, i.e., forms in the "mixed set," in tables 1-1 and 1-2.⁵ All forms in which the agent outranks the patient are direct as in table 1-1, while all forms in which the agent is outranked by the patient are inverse as in table 1-2.

		patient	
		3	3p
agent	1	ni- - âw	ni- - âwak
	2	ki- - âw	ki- - âwak
	1p	ni- - ânân	ni- - ânânak
	21	ki- - ânaw	ki- - ânawak
	2p	ki- - âwâw	ki- - âwâwak

Table 1-1 Agreement morphology of direct forms in the mixed set (independent order) (Wolfart 1973, 41)

⁴ As Wolfart (1991, 186) indicates, the morpheme /ekw/ may be realized as -iko-, -ikw- or -ik- and after a stem which ends in -aw- as -âko-, -âkw- or -âk-. The sequence /ekw/ + third person -w- surfaces as -ik-.

⁵ The paradigm for forms in the mixed set also includes third person "obviative" forms. These are not included here as they are not taken up until 3.1.

		agent	
		3	3p
patient	1	ni- -ik	ni- -âwak
	2	ki- -ik	ki- -âwak
	1p	ni- -ikonân	ni- -ikonânak
	21	ki- -ikonaw	ki- -ikonawak
	2p	ki- -ikowâw	ki- -ikowâwak

Table 1-2 Agreement morphology of inverse forms in the mixed set (independent order) (Wolfart 1973, 41)

Inverse forms are interesting because they are typologically unusual. Besides the languages of the Algonquian family (e.g., Cree), inverse systems have been reported in only a few of the world's languages. These languages include: languages in the Chukotko-Kamchatkan family, e.g., Chukchee (Comrie 1980); Kutenai, a language isolate (Dryer 1994); Northwest Sahaptin, a dialect of Sahaptin (Rude 1994); and languages in the Apachean family, e.g., Navaho (Jelinek 1990).

Moreover, in the languages in which they do occur, the analysis of these systems has been controversial. Where they do occur, they are sometimes analyzed as this unique voice opposition, i.e., an inverse system, and by others as having an active/passive opposition. For example, Klaiman (1991, 176) suggests that "the most extensively documented Apachean inverse system is that of Navaho" and that "authors generally agree on the description of Navaho voice, though not on its analysis." The inverse in Navaho has been likened to a passive.

Similarly, Klaiman (1991, 186) states that "Although Algonquian languages are currently the best-studied languages of the inverse type, they, like other inverse systems, are subject to conflicting analyses." Inverse systems in the languages of the Algonquian family have also been analyzed as active/passive oppositions (for example, see Voegelin (1946) for Delaware and Jolley (1982) for Cree; see also Wolfart's (1973, 26) survey of analyses for the category of direction in the Algonquian languages).

The analysis of the inverse in Cree is complicated by two aspects of the morphology in the synchronic grammar of the language. In each of these aspects, the inverse is morphologically like a passive. First, the Cree inverse marker /*ekw*/ forms part of three complex derivational suffixes, each of which adds a passive-like meaning to the stem to which it is added (Wolfart 1973, 1991).

Second, inverse forms in the third person set, i.e., forms which have two third person arguments, are morphologically marked only for the thematic patient. Wolfart (1991) claims that these forms may be likened to passives because they are marked only for the patient NP.

In this thesis, I address the analysis of the inverse construction in Cree, and I claim that the inverse construction in this language originated as a passive. That is, at a much earlier time in the history of the language, a productive passive construction marked by /*ekw*/ existed, and (i) this construction was reanalyzed as an inverse construction, and (ii) /*ekw*/ was reanalyzed as an inverse marker.

1.1. Background on Cree

Cree is a member of the Algonquian family, a family of languages whose members include Fox, Menomoni, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Blackfoot, Arapaho and others.⁶ It is spoken across a vast geographical region, mostly in Canada, which extends from western Alberta in the west to the border of Ontario and Quebec in the east, where it forms a dialect continuum with Montagnais-Naskapi (Wolfart 1973, 7).

There are five dialects of Cree. Wolfart (1973) offers a comprehensive grammar of one of these, Plains Cree. The Cree examples given in this paper are from the Plains dialect, having been drawn from the work of Wolfart (1973, 1991) and also from Dahlstrom (1991).

⁶ See Teeter (1973) for a detailed history of the study of the Algonquian languages.

Cree and the other Algonquian languages descend from the proto-language, Proto-Algonquian. According to Pentland (1979, 15), "It is generally agreed that the initial break-up of Proto-Algonquian produced about two dozen distinct languages" of which Cree-Montagnais was one. Pentland estimates that this break-up took place around 1000 B.C. See Pentland (1979) for a detailed classification of the languages in this family.

Bloomfield (1946) reconstructs the grammar of Proto-Algonquian using Fox, Cree, Menomini and Ojibwa. Although Bloomfield's reconstructions are based on only four of the Algonquian languages, he states that "these reconstructions will, in the main, fit all the languages and can accordingly be viewed as Proto-Algonquian" (Bloomfield 1946, 85).

Proto-Algonquian, together with two languages of California, Wiyot and Yurok, form a larger genetic grouping known as Algic.⁷

Wiyot, a language of California, was spoken by approximately 1000 people at the middle of the nineteenth century. However, at the time that Reichard came to do fieldwork for her 1925 grammar of the language, there were few fluent speakers and she found that "the language is fast becoming extinct" (Reichard 1925, 5). The last speaker died in 1962 (Teeter 1964, 1).

Yurok is a language spoken in an area in California just north of where Wiyot is spoken. As with Wiyot, the number of Yurok speakers has been on the decline since the mid nineteenth century and few fluent speakers remained when Robins did the fieldwork for his grammar which was published in 1958.

The relationship between Algonquian and Wiyot and Yurok was originally proposed by Sapir (1913). At the time, the nature of this relationship, and indeed the very existence of such a relationship, was the subject of

⁷ Teeter (1965) suggests the name "Algic" for this family, apparently a term first used by Schoolcraft to refer to the Algonquian languages.

considerable controversy.⁸ According to Haas (1958), the publication of grammars of Wiyot (1925) and Yurok (1958) and especially the publication of Bloomfield's (1946) "sketch" of Proto-Algonquian enabled theorists to substantiate the relationship of Wiyot and Yurok to Proto-Algonquian. Teeter (1965, 225) suggests that Proto-Algonquian, Wiyot and Yurok should be viewed as "parallel branches" of the Algic family tree.

1.2. The prototypical passive and inverse constructions

In this section, I characterize the passive and inverse constructions in terms of prototypical characteristics. As the terms "transitive," "intransitive," "thematic roles," and "grammatical relations" are crucial in distinguishing the prototypical passive and prototypical inverse constructions, I begin by briefly discussing these terms as they will be used here.

First, transitivity is a verbal phenomenon, such that verbs are either "transitive" or "intransitive." Transitive verbs, e.g., *hit*, select two nominal arguments while intransitive verbs e.g., *jump*, select a single nominal argument (Palmer 1994, 8).

Arguments are NPs which are obligatory. Thus, since a transitive verb has two arguments, a sentence which has a transitive verb and a single nominal argument will be ungrammatical, as in (3). On the other hand, the transitive verb in (4) occurs in a sentence with three NPs. In this sentence, however, there are only two obligatory NPs, or arguments; the third NP is optional (Palmer 1994).

(3) *Martin hit.

(4) Mary hit the ball (with her hand).

⁸ Truman Michelson was particularly opposed to the postulation of this relationship. See Haas (1958) for a discussion of what she refers to as the "Algonkian-Ritwan controversy," "Ritwan" being the term used to refer to the grouping of Wiyot and Yurok.

Second, the term “thematic roles” will be used to refer to the particular roles that NPs in sentences can take. The most central of these are “agent” and “patient,” the agent being the “one who performs the action designated by the verb” and the patient being the “one who is affected by the action designated by the verb.” Other thematic roles include: beneficiary, locative and instrumental (Palmer 1994).⁹

Finally, the term “grammatical relations” refers to the notions of “subject,” “object,” “indirect object” and “oblique object.” In an active transitive construction, the agent NP is the subject and the patient NP is the object.¹⁰ The indirect object is associated with the beneficiary thematic role, and the locative and instrumental, when used, occur as oblique objects (Palmer 1994).¹¹

A prototypical construction is one which has the characteristics or features that are central to that construction. The use of prototypes is intended to accommodate the “non-discrete” nature of grammar: “linguistic structures are not isolated, but rather tend to show partial resemblances among themselves” (Shibatani 1985, 821). These “partial resemblances”, or overlap, between grammatical constructions may be either structural, functional or both.

1.2.1. *The prototypical passive*

1.2.1.1. Syntax

The English sentences in (5) illustrate the change in the association between structural positions and thematic roles, i.e., agent and patient, that typifies the prototypical active/passive alternation. That is, “in the prototypical active form an agent is in the subject role, and in the prototypical passive form a patient functions as a subject” (Shibatani 1988, 3).

⁹ Palmer (1994) uses the term “grammatical roles” as I am using “thematic roles.”

¹⁰ This is the association between grammatical relations and thematic roles in an accusative language. See Palmer (1994) for a discussion of the grammatical relations and thematic roles in an ergative language.

¹¹ I use the term “oblique object” following Shibatani (1985, p. 832), Sasse (1984, 245), and others. Palmer (1994) simply uses the term “oblique”.

- (5) a. The dog bit the child.
b. The child was bitten by the dog.

The sentence in (5a) is active. The transitive verb *bite* takes two nominal arguments: (i) *the dog* is the thematic agent and the grammatical subject, and (ii) *the child* is the patient and the object of the sentence.

The sentence in (5b) is passive. The verb has only one argument, the patient NP *the child*, and it is the grammatical subject. The agent NP *the dog* occurs as an oblique object marked by the preposition *by*.

The sentences in (5) also illustrate a second characteristic of the prototypical passive construction. That is, passives of transitive verbs are intransitive constructions.¹² The agent in the passive, if expressed, occurs as an oblique object, as in (5b) where it is marked as an oblique object with the preposition *by*. The agent may not be expressed at all, as in (6) (Shibatani 1985).¹³

- (6) The child was bitten.

The structure of the passive is typically described in reference to the corresponding active construction. For example, the patient in the passive is regarded as having been “promoted” in terms of the hierarchy of grammatical relations in (7). The patient in the active is the grammatical object, and in the passive, it is the grammatical subject (Palmer 1994).

- (7) subject > direct object > indirect object > oblique object
(Shibatani 1985, 832)

¹² As Shibatani (1985) points out, it is not fully accurate to characterize all passives as intransitive constructions, the appropriate generalization being that all passives are reduced in valency in comparison to the corresponding active construction. Therefore, passives derived from transitives are intransitive constructions, but passives derived from ditransitive verbs, i.e., verbs with three arguments, are transitive.

¹³ In some languages the passive is obligatorily agentless. Wolfart (1991, 175) lists Classical Arabic, Latvian and Pashto as examples of languages of this type.