# Passive vs. Indefinite Actor Construction in Plains Cree

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## 1. Introduction

Many languages exhibit verb forms that resemble in meaning passive clauses in English without the actor specified, but for which there exist two prima facie possible analyses: as passive clauses (thus involving some difference in grammatical relations from active clauses) or as indefinite actor clauses. Dahlstrom (1991: 60) observes that what she analyses as passive verb forms in Plains Cree, and analogous constructions in other Algonquian languages, have sometimes been analysed as indefinite actor constructions. Thus, for example, the suffix -*ikawi* in (1) might be analysed as a passive suffix or as an indefinite actor suffix.

(1)　　ni-sa·kih-ikawi-n
　　　　1-love-PASSIVE/INDEF.ACTOR-SG
　　　　I am loved. *or* Someone loves me.

The two possible analyses are the following:

(2)　Passive Analysis

　　　The suffix -*ikawi* in (1) is a voice suffix indicating that the verb is passive, and hence the first person prefix denotes an intransitive grammatical subject, though semantically it is a goal.

(3)　Indefinite Actor Analysis

　　　The grammatical relations in (1) are no different from basic clauses in Cree. The suffix -*ikawi* indicates that the actor is someone or something unspecified. The first person prefix denotes a first person goal of a transitive verb.

Under a passive analysis, (1) is claimed to have a structure analogous to the English sentence *I am loved,* with the first person functioning as grammatical subject. Under an indefinite actor analysis, its structure is somewhat analogous to the English sentence *Someone loves me,* with the first person functioning as a grammatical object.

For some languages, it is easy to construct arguments distinguishing between these two analyses.[1] In Kutenai, for example, the suffix -*ił* can be argued to be a passive suffix, since the argument that corresponds semantically to objects of transitive clauses is the one that is otherwise associated with subjects rather than objects. For example, the preverbal clitic *hu* in the apparently passive construction in (4) is generally associated with first person subjects, as in (5), while there is a distinct morpheme, a suffix -*ap* which is associated with first person objects, as in (6).

(4)　hu　wu·kat-ił-ni
　　　1　see-PASSIVE-INDIC
　　　'I was seen.'

(5)　hu̱　wu·kat-i　　titqaƚ
　　　1　　see-INDIC　man
　　　'I saw the man [prox].'

(6)　wu·kat-ap-ni　　titqaƚ
　　　see-1SG-INDIC　man
　　　'The man saw me.'

If (4) were an indefinite subject construction, we would expect the object suffix -ap rather than the subject proclitic hu̱.

　　　A similar argument is not so clearly available for Cree sentences like (1), however, since the prefix ni- occurs both in clauses with a first person actor or subject, as in (7), and clauses with a first person goal or object, as in (8).

(7)　ni-se·kih-a·-w
　　　1-frighten-DIRECT-3
　　　'I frighten him.'　(Dahlstrom 1991: 21)

(8)　ni-se·kih-ik
　　　1-frighten-INVERSE
　　　'He frightens me.'

On the passive analysis, (1) is analogous to (7), with the prefix ni- indicating a first person grammatical subject, except that in (1) this first person argument is semantically the goal while in (7) it is semantically the actor. On the indefinite actor analysis, (1) is analogous to (8), with the first person argument both semantically and grammatically the goal (or object), the difference being that in (8) the subject is a specific third person while in (1) the subject is a nonspecific third person.

　　　Both analyses of sentences like (1) have been assumed in the literature on Plains Cree (Wolfart 1991: 175 - 177). Dahlstrom (1991: 51-52) argues that such sentences are passive, while Wolfart (1973) and Jolley (1982) treat such sentences as indefinite actor sentences. Dahlstrom (p. 60) mentions that both analyses have a previous history in the description of other Algonquian languages (cf. Hockett's preface to Bloomfield 1958; Goddard 1979: 114 - 121).

　　　In this paper, I argue that the evidence that Dahlstrom gives for analysing such forms as passive is not convincing and that in some respects the indefinite actor analysis can be argued to be the better analysis. I will refer to the clauses in question as "so-called passive" clauses. I will also discuss the implications of my conclusions for Dahlstrom's arguments that grammatical relations in inverse clauses in Cree are the same as grammatical relations in direct clauses.


2. Dahlstrom's Argument for a Passive Analysis

　　　Dahlstrom offers only one argument for her claim that so-called passive sentences like (1) are passive. Her argument is based on a rule of Copying-to-Object, illustrated in (9).

(9)　Mary　kiske·yim-e·w　　George-a　　e·=a·kosi-yit
　　　　　know(TA) 3-OBV　　George-OBV　　be sick OBV/CONJ
　　　'Mary knows that George is sick.' (Dahlstrom 1991: 71)

This construction involves a matrix verb inflecting for an argument of a subordinate verb. In (9), the matrix verb *kiske·yime·w* '3 knows 3-obv' exhibits obviative goal inflection for the third person animate actor of the subordinate verb. Dahlstrom argues that while it is the actor rather than the goal of a subordinate clause that the matrix verb inflects for when the subordinate verb is either direct or inverse, it is the goal that the matrix verb inflects for when the subordinate verb is the type of verb involved in (1). The examples in (10) illustrate that in direct subordinate clauses containing both an actor and a goal, only the actor can serve as goal of the matrix verb.

(10) a.  ni-kiske·yim-a·w          George   e·=sa·kih-a·t                    okosisa
         know(TA) 1-3 [DIRECT]              love 3-OBV/CONJ [DIRECT]      his son OBV
         I know that George loves his sons. (Dahlstrom 1991: 73)

     b.  *ni-kiske·yim-ima·wa       George   e·=sa·kih-a·t                    okosisa
         know(TA) 1-OBV [DIRECT]             love 3-OBV/CONJ [DIRECT]   his son OBV
         I know that George loves his sons. (Dahlstrom 1991: 73)

In (10a), the suffix *-a·w* '1-3' on the matrix verb involves proximate third person agreement with *George*, the actor of the subordinate verb. The example in (10b) is ungrammatical because the matrix verb bears the suffix *-ima·wa* '1-OBV', which would mean that the verb is agreeing with *okosisa* 'his son OBV', the goal of the subordinate clause. This indicates that when the subordinate clause in direct, only the actor can serve as goal of the matrix verb.

Similarly, if the subordinate clause is an inverse clause, it is still only the actor that can serve as the goal of the matrix clause, as illustrated in (11).

(11) a.  ni-kiske·yim-ima·wa        George   e·=sa·kih-ikot                  okosisa
         know(TA) 1-OBV [DIRECT]             love OBV-3/CONJ [INVERSE]   his son OBV
         I know that his sons love George. (Dahlstrom 1991: 73)

     b.  *ni-kiske·yim-a·w          George   e·=sa·kih-ikot                  okosisa
         know(TA) 1-3 [DIRECT]              love OBV-3/CONJ [INVERSE]   his son OBV
         I know that George loves his sons. (Dahlstrom 1991: 73)

The two examples in (11) differ in whether the matrix verb bears '1-OBV' inflection or '1-3' inflection. The ungrammaticality of (11b) shows that only '1-OBV' inflection is possible, indicating that the matrix verb is exhibiting goal agreement with the obviative, *okosisa* 'his son OBV', in the subordinate clause. Since the subordinate clause is inverse, this obviative is functioning as actor in the subordinate clause. We thus see that regardless of whether the subordinate clause is direct or inverse, it is only the actor that the matrix verb can bear goal inflection for.

The example in (12) illustrates a case in which the subordinate clause involves a so-called passive verb form.

(12)  ni-kiske·yim-a·wak           e·=ki·-se·kih-ihcik
      know(TA) 1-3PL [DIRECT]         scare-X/3PL/CONJ
      I know they were scared. (Dahlstrom 1991: 74)

The matrix verb in (12) is exhibiting goal inflection for the goal of the subordinate clause, on contrast to (10b) and (11b) where this is not possible.

The set of subordinate arguments involved in the construction is thus summarized in (13).

(13)    Direct                          Actor
        Inverse                         Actor
        "So-called Passive "            Goal

Analysing the so-called passive Construction as a Passive allows the rule to be described as in (14), assuming that the actor is the subject in both direct and inverse clauses.

(14)    Copying-to-Object Construction under Passive Analysis

        The matrix verb exhibits object (goal) inflection for the subject of the subordinate verb.

Under the Indefinite Actor analysis, the rule apparently cannot be described as succinctly, but requires some sort of disjunct description, as in (15).

(15)    Copying-to-Object Construction under Indefinite Actor Analysis

        The matrix verb exhibits object (goal) inflection for the actor of a subordinate verb, unless the subordinate verb is an Indefinite Actor verb, in which case the matrix verb exhibits object (goal) inflection for the goal of the subordinate verb.

This constitutes Dahlstrom's argument that the goal in so-called passive clauses are grammatical subjects, and hence that these clauses are passive clauses rather than indefinite actor clauses.


3. Morphological Arguments for an Indefinite Actor Analysis

One possible argument for analysing so-called passive clauses as transitive clauses with an indefinite actor is one that comes out of the actual morphology of the verbs in the construction. First, there are a variety of forms that both Wolfart and Dahlstrom agree should be analysed as indefinite actor forms, with AI and TI verbs, as illustrated by both verbs in (16).

(16) kīpah    māna pic-ināniwiw,   kīksēpā  ē-wīh-pic-ihk.      (Wolfart 1973: 62)
                    (INDEF ACTOR)             (INDEF ACTOR, CONJUNCT)
            One always moves camp early, when one moves camp in the morning.

Wolfart (p. 62) describes the independent forms as secondarily derived II verbs, with a suffix -nāniniw, and the conjunct forms as regular indefinite actor forms. Under the Indefinite Actor analysis, clauses like (1) involve analogous forms for TA verbs. Under the Passive analysis, TA verbs lack indefinite actor forms, though one might say that what is a passive construction under this analysis fills this functional niche and thus explains the absence of indefinite actor forms.

The complex nature of the morphology excludes the possibility of any straightforward argument for or against relating intransitive Indefinite Actor forms to so-called passive forms. There are two ways in which that the so-called passive forms are different from intransitive Indefinite Actor forms. First, while so-called passive forms are common in the independent order, intransitive indefinite actor forms are not, and involve secondarily derived II verbs. This is one respect in which so-called passive forms are

clearly different from intransitive indefinite actor forms. Second, so-called passive forms with nonthird person goals involve a suffix *-ikawi* which does not occur with intransitive indefinite actor forms. Hence under the Indefinite Actor analysis, this suffix would have to be analysed specifically as a *transitive* indefinite actor suffix.

However, a couple of other morphological facts are harder to explain under the Passive analysis. Dahlstrom herself notes that so-called passive verbs with third person goals "look like active verbs" (p. 51). The examples in independent order that she cites, with her glosses, are given in (17) to (19).

(17)  sa·kih-a·-w
      love-(DIRECT?)-3
      'He is loved.'    (Dahlstrom 1991: 51)

(18)  sa·kih-a·-w-ak
      love-(DIRECT?)-3-3P
      'They are loved'

(19)  sa·kih-im-a·-w-a
      love-OBV-(DIRECT?)-3-OBV
      'He [obv] is loved.'

As Dahlstrom notes (cf. also Wolfart 1991: 175), the theme sign *-a·-* is associated in other verb forms with a third person object, as in (20).

(20)  ni-se·kih-a·-w
      1-frighten-DIRECT-3
      I frighten him.   (Dahlstrom 1991: 21)

This is explained under the Indefinite Actor analysis, since according to that analysis, these clauses involve third person objects. Thus, just as the Indefinite Actor analysis appears to require a nonunified account of the syntactic rule of Copying-to-Object, the Passive analysis appears to require a nonunified account of the morpheme *-a·-*.

Dahlstrom cites the corresponding conjunct forms in (21) (p. 52).

(21) a. e·=sa·kih-iht          b. e·=sa·kih-ihc-ik          c. e·=sa·kih-im-iht
        love-3,PASSIVE?            love-3,PASSIVE?-3PL            love-OBV-3,PASSIVE?
        'He is loved [conjunct]'  'They are loved [conj]'       'He [obv] is loved [conj]'

These forms provide less basis for distinguishing the two hypotheses. The suffix *-iht* / *-ihc* could be analysed either as indicating a passive verb with a third person subject, or as a direct verb with an indefinite actor suffix and a third person object. However, the obviative suffix *-im* in (21c) is otherwise associated specifically with obviative objects.[2] Consider, for example, the chart for conjunct suffixes from Wolfart (1973: 42) given in (22).

(22)
|       | -3      | -3'        |
|-------|---------|------------|
| indf- | -iht    | -imiht     |
| 1-    | -ak     | -imak      |
| 2-    | -at     | -imat      |
| 1p-   | -āyāhk  | -imāyāhk   |
| 21-   | -āyahk  | (-imāyahk) |
| 2p-   | -āyēk   | (-imāyēk)  |

The Indefinite Actor analysis accounts directly for the fact that the forms of the suffixes in the second column are transparently formed by the addition of *-im* to the forms in the first column. Under the passive analysis, the suffix *-imiht* in (22) is indicating a passive conjunct verb with an obviative subject, despite the fact that *-im* is otherwise associated only with obviative objects. Once again, the Indefinite Actor analysis accounts for the distribution of *-im,* while the Passive analysis requires an ad hoc account of its association with an obviative subject. In short, the morphological evidence, while far from decisive, does support the Indefinite Actor analysis in so far as it provides evidence one way or the other.

4.      Morphology vs. Syntax

Dahlstrom (1991) is quite honest in conceding that the morphological forms are harder to account for under a passive analysis. Her view, however, is that the syntactic evidence provided by the Copying-to-Object rule is decisive, and that the morphological patterns, when in conflict with syntactic evidence, are irrelevant. Her position reflects widely held assumptions about the relationship between syntax and morphology and about the syntactic status of grammatical relations. She states (p. 89): "The passive verbs show even more clearly the hazards of relying solely on morphology as an indicator of syntactic relations. Although the third person passive forms superficially resemble active, transitive verbs, syntactically they appear to indeed be passive."

There are a number of issues involved here, and it is not easy to disentangle them. First, since Dahlstrom assumes that the question of whether the construction is a passive is a syntactic question and not a morphological one, there is a sense in which a conflict between syntactic evidence and morphological evidence must be decided in favour of the syntactic evidence. An alternative view is that the question is a morphosyntactic question and that both sorts of evidence are relevant. However, regardless of what assumption we make here, I assume that both syntactic facts and morphological facts need to be accounted for. Thus, even if they are irrelevant to the question of whether the construction is a passive construction, they still must be relevant to something in the morphology. It is not clear whether Dahlstrom intends to imply that the morphological patterns are purely accidental, or diachronically significant but synchronically irrelevant, or whether they are somehow to be accounted for within the morphology. I assume that the patterns are not accidental. The patterns could be residue from some earlier diachronic stage, but not part of the synchronic grammar, but this implies that they are irrelevant to the speaker's knowledge of the language. While this is logically possible, the patterns are sufficiently transparent that I would think that the burden of proof rests on someone who claims that they are not part of the synchronic grammar. And if they are to be accounted for within the morphology, Dahlstrom does not explain how this might be done.

Note that if one were to assign primacy to the morphology rather than the syntax, one might pose a question analogous to Dahlstrom's: "The indefinite actor verbs show even more clearly the hazards of relying solely on syntax as an indicator of grammatical relations. Although the Copying-to-Object construction suggests that these verbs are passive, morphologically they appear to indeed be indefinite actor forms." The question is whether this position is any less reasonable than Dahlstrom's. Under the view that both morphology and syntax are relevant to grammatical relations, no primacy is assigned to syntactic facts, and both types of facts need to be accounted for. Under this view, what we need is an account that captures *both* sorts of facts, and I will offer such an account below.

5. The Nature of Grammatical Relations

Quite apart from questions surrounding the relevance of morphological patterns to grammatical relations, there are two views in the field as to what grammatical relations are. On one view, a widely assumed view, grammatical relations are universal notions that exist independently of particular languages, as part of linguistic theory, and which manifest themselves in particular languages. Under this view, one can examine a language and ask questions of the form "What are subjects like in this language?". On an alternative view, grammatical relations are fundamentally language-specific notions, different classes of nominal arguments of clauses that are distinguished by the morphological or syntactic rules of a language, and whose motivation is purely language-internal. Under this latter view, the labels we choose are ultimately irrelevant, and the choice of a label such as "subject" for a grammatical relation in a language is motivated if the grammatical relation bears a resemblance to grammatical relations in other languages. At best, the choice of label is motivated by expositional clarity or an interest in drawing attention to similarities between the language in question and other languages.

While this latter view seems to be the minority view when it comes to grammatical relations, the corresponding view is far more common when we turn to word classes. On one view, word classes are universal categories which are realized in different ways in different languages. On the alternative view, word classes are classes of words in a particular language which the language treats in the same way as far as morphological or syntactic rules are concerned. On this latter view, we may choose to employ familiar terms like "noun" and "verb" for word classes in the language, but only because the classes in question so strongly resemble classes in other languages that have been referred to with these labels. But what defines the word classes in the language is the language-specific patterns. Note that on the former view, one might say that adjectives, defined in terms of a certain sort of meanings, are a universal word class that is realized in different languages in different ways. On this view, one might say that Cree has adjectives, but that the language happens to lack rules that distinguish these adjectives from verbs. This contrasts with the view that there is a class of words in Cree that are commonly called verbs, but that actually include meanings which in many other languages corresponds to two separate word classes, often called verbs and adjectives. I think that it is fair to say that the dominant view of word classes is that they are defined in language-specific terms for each language, even though there may be striking resemblances among the word classes across different languages. For reasons that are irrelevant here, but which probably can be understood in terms of the history of the field, this has not been the dominant view about grammatical relations. Rather the dominant view has been that grammatical relations are somehow universal notions that can be found in particular languages.

What are the grammatical relations in Cree that can be motivated directly on language-particular grounds? Two distinctions that are clearly central to the language are the distinction between proximate and obviative (and perhaps further obviative: cf. Wolfart 1978) and the distinction between actor and goal. The latter distinction is important both at the level of verbal morphology and in interacting with proximate and obviative at the syntactic level. Whether we call the two relations "actor" and "goal" or "subject" and "object" or even "heffalumps" and "woozils" is terminological, as long as we recognize the distinction. My choice of the more traditional terminology of actor and goal here is motivated only to avoid confusion with universal notions of subject.

Now let us consider again the two sorts of patterns relevant to the two analyses of so-called passive clauses. The morphological patterns are ones that make sense in terms of the notions of actor and goal: the generalizations are expressible in terms of these notions. The syntactic pattern that Dahlstrom observes, however, is not directly describable in terms

of either actor and goal or proximate and obviative. Hence it involves some further grammatical relation. Dahlstrom's solution, a common sort of solution, is to say that this further grammatical relation is that of subject, since a common property of subjects in other languages is that while they may typically be associated with agent-like semantic roles, languages often have constructions in which the agent-like participant is not specified and the patient-like participant is treated grammatically in a way that is otherwise associated with agent-like participants. The so-called passive construction is thus clearly parallel to what have been called passive constructions in other languages, and hence Dahlstrom's calling the Cree construction a passive and the goal in such clauses a subject makes considerable sense.

On the other hand, the construction in question differs from passive clauses in other languages in at least two respects. First, in other languages, the patient-like constituent in passive clauses in other languages typically does not exhibit grammatical properties - either syntactic or morphological - associated with patient-like constituents in nonpassive clauses. In other languages, this is attributed to the fact that the patient-like constituent is not the grammatical object, but the grammatical subject. But we have seen that in the so-called passive construction in Cree, the patient-like constituent in so-called passive clauses *does* exhibit properties like that of patient-like constituents in other clauses. In this respect, the so-called passive construction in Cree is not like typical passive constructions in other languages.[3]

Second, in many other languages, the patient-like constituent in passive clauses exhibits a host of morphological and syntactic properties that define what are called subjects in the language. But Dahlstrom is only able to identify a single construction, the Copying-to-Object construction, in which the patient-like constituent in so-called passive clauses behaves like the agent-like constituent in nonpassive clauses. In this sense, the grammatical relation that Dahlstrom labels "subject", in so far as it is distinct from actor, plays a very minor role in Cree, and to that extent is unlike what have been called subjects in other languages.

It is worth stepping back and considering the role that Dahlstrom's discussion of the so-called passive construction plays in her overall discussion. Her discussion of the so-called passive construction plays a crucial role in arguing that the *inverse* construction in Cree is not a passive construction, and that the goal in an inverse clause is not the subject. The fact that the goal in an inverse clause behaves like the goal in a direct clause and not like the goal in a so-called passive clause provides her strongest argument that inverse clauses are not passive clauses. The intuition behind Dahlstrom's argument is that while inverse clauses in Cree may look a bit like passive clauses in some respects, there are a variety of other respects in which they are unlike passive clauses in other languages. Her argument in terms of Copying-to-Object and so-called passive clauses is part of an attempt to provide empirical evidence to support this intuition. But a question arises if the argument involves assuming that the so-called passive construction is a passive construction, when it too is unlike passive clauses in other languages in some respects, and in which the assumed notion of subject is unlike subjects in other languages in playing a minor role in the language (in so far as it is distinct from actor). In other words, it seems fair to say that both the inverse construction and the so-called passive construction in Cree resemble passive constructions in certain respects but not others. And while it may be the case that the so-called passive construction bears a stronger resemblance to typical passive constructions than the inverse construction does, we might ask whether, if part of the reason for not wanting to call the inverse construction a passive is that it obscures differences from passive constructions in other languages, perhaps the same consideration ought to apply to so-called passive clauses as well.

6.      An Alternative Analysis

In this section I want to demonstrate that there is an alternative analysis of the data that accounts both for the syntactic facts that Dahlstrom cites in favour of a passive analysis and the morphological facts that suggest that it is not a passive. The discussion in section 2 above suggested that the Indefinite Actor analysis cannot provide a unified account for the fact the Copying-to-Object construction involves the arguments listed in (13), repeated here.

(13)    Direct                  Actor
        Inverse                 Actor
        "So-called Passive "    Goal

However, there is a way to provide a unified account under the Indefinite Actor analysis, if we appeal to the notion of "highest element on a hierarchy". Namely, the elements listed in (13) can be characterized as the highest specified element on the hierarchy in (23).

(23)    Actor > Goal

In direct and inverse clauses, in which the actor is specific either because it is specified by a noun in the sentence or because it is clear in the context, the highest specified element on the hierarchy in (23) is the actor. But in so-called passive clauses, in which there is no specified actor, the highest specified element is the goal. It is thus possible to account for the pattern in (13) while at the same time treating so-called passive clauses as a type of active clause and thus accounting at the same time for the morphological properties that so-called passive clauses share with active clauses. What I will do in the rest of this section is to provide additional consideration lending increased plausibility to this option. These cases illustrate the usefulness of the notion of highest element on a hierarchy in describing other languages, the usefulness of such a notion in describing other phenomena in Cree, and certain properties of the Copying-to-Object construction that make it a natural candidate for such a notion.

7. Examples of the notion of "highest-ranked" element in other languages

7.1. Kutenai

I have previously discussed (in Dryer 1992) a system in Kutenai that bears such striking resemblance to the Algonquian system that the Algonquian terminology of proximate and obviative and of direct and inverse is applicable to Kutenai in a natural way. One principle governing this construction is that stated in (24).

(24)  In direct clauses, the proximate nominal is the highest third person nominal on the hierarchy:

                subject > primary object > other

Thus in clause containing only third person elements, like (25), the proximate nominal *titqaƚ* 'man' is interpreted as the subject.

(25)　wu·kat-i　　paƚkiy-s　　　titqaƚ
　　　see-INDIC　　woman-OBV　　man
　　　'The man [prox] saw the woman [obv].'

In a clause like (26), however, there is a first person subject proclitic *hu,* so the highest third person nominal on the hierarchy in (24) is the object *kiƚqaƚƚi* 'elk' rather than the oblique nominal *ʔa·kwukƚiʔit* 'mountain'.

(26)　　　hu　　　qa·kiƚ　　ʔiƚwa-ni　　　kiƚqaƚƚi　　　ʔa·kwukƚiʔit-s
　　　　　1,SUBJ　there　　shoot-INDIC　elk　　　　　mountain-OBV
　　　　　'I shot (and killed) an elk [prox] on the mountain [obv].'

The example in (27) illustrates a case where both the subject and the primary object (the recipient in a ditransitive clause) are nonthird person, so in this case (and only in this case), the proximate nominal is one that is neither subject nor primary object, but secondary object, the patient/theme in a ditransitive clause.

(27)　ʔat　　　hin　　qa-amat-ik¢-ap-kiƚ-ni　　　　qapsin
　　　IMPERF　2　　　NEG-give-BEN-1-2PL-INDIC　thing
　　　'You people never give me anything [prox].'　(Tape NS 7, Story 2, Line 10)

Some principle either similar to (24) or identical to (24) would appear to be operative in Algonquian languages like Cree as well, thus indicating the apparent relevance of the notion of "highest element on hierarchy" to Cree. In fact, the hierarchy that is relevant here is arguably exactly the same hierarchy as the one relevant to the analysis I have proposed for the Copying-to-Object construction under an Indefinite Actor analysis of the so-called passive construction, namely that given in (28).

(28)　　actor > goal > other

If so, this illustrates that the notion of "highest available element on the hierarchy actor > goal > other" is one that is independently required for describing Cree anyway.


7.2. Choctaw

　　　A second example illustrating the usefulness of a notion of highest-ranked element on a hierarchy is provided by Choctaw. The data here come from Davies (1986), though the analysis I will assume here is not the same as Davies'. The pronominal affix system in Choctaw is a split intransitive ("active") system in which the arguments of some intransitive verbs are treated like the "subjects" of transitive verbs, while the arguments of other intransitive verbs are treated like the "objects" of transitive verbs. For example, the examples in (29) illustrate a verbal suffix *-li* marking a transitive "subject" in (29a) and an intransitive "subject" in (29b).

(29)　a.　　hattak　ikha:na-<u>li</u>
　　　　　　man　　know-1SG
　　　　　　I know the man.

    b.  hilha-<u>li</u>-tok
        dance-1SG-PAST
        I danced.

The examples in (30) illustrate a verbal prefix *sa-* marking a transitive "object" in (30a) and an intransitive "subject" in (30b) and (30c).

(30)  a.  ofi-yat     <u>sa</u>-kopoli-tok
          dog-NOM  1SG-bit-PAST
          The dog bit me.

      b.  <u>sa</u>-ttola-tok
          1SG-fall-PAST
          I fell.

      c.  <u>sa</u>-cha:ha
          1SG-tall
          I am tall.

Without examining the situation in detail, we can say that the intransitive "subjects" which are associated with *-li* are more agent-like and those associated with *sa-* are more patient-like. Using terminology that Durie (1987) applies to the split intransitive language Acehnese (and which Van Valin 1993 applies crosslinguistically), we can say that *-li* in Choctaw marks first person *actors*, while *sa-* marks first person *undergoers*. This is summarized in (31).

(31)    -<u>li</u>: transitive subjects and "agent-like" intransitive subjects (actors)
       <u>sa</u>-: transitive objects and "patient-like" intransitive subjects (undergoers)

     Now Davies shows that not all phenomena in Choctaw are based on the actor-undergoer distinction. Third person nouns in Choctaw take case markers, and the system with these case markers is somewhat similar to nominative-accusative case systems in other languages. Namely, while the undergoer in a transitive clause is not marked for case, there is a *nominative* case suffix *-at* that marks what correspond to subjects in other languages, namely actors in transitive clauses and both actors and undergoers in intransitive clauses. The example in (30a) above illustrates an occurrence of this suffix on the actor of a transitive clause. The examples in (32) illustrate its use on both types of arguments in intransitive clauses.

(32)  a.  katos-<u>at</u>  ĩpa-tok
          cat-NOM  eat-PAST
          The cat ate.

      b.  alla-<u>t</u>      cha:ha
          child-NOM  tall
          The child is tall.

The example in (32a) illustrates its use on an actor in an intransitive clause, while (32b) illustrates its use on an undergoer in an intransitive clause. The nominative suffix can thus be described in terms of more familiar notions of subject and object, as in (33).

(33)    nominative suffix: subjects, i.e. transitive "subjects", intransitive "subjects" (both actors and undergoers)
       NO nominative suffix: (transitive) objects

The question is how we are to describe the pronominal affix system on verbs and the case system on nouns in Choctaw in such a way that the relationship between the two is captured while still capturing the differences. Davies accounts for the pattern in terms of multiple levels of grammatical relations, whereby intransitive undergoers are objects at an initial level which advance to subject (by unaccusative advancement) at the final level. The pronominal affixes can be described in terms of grammatical relations at the *initial* level while the case system can be described in terms of grammatical relations at the *final* level. This analysis is summarized in (34).

(34)  Multi-level account:
           Assumed grammatical relations: subject, object
           Analysis:
              (a)  "patient-like" intransitive subjects are underlying objects but surface subjects
              (b)  pronominal inflection on verbs reflects underlying grammatical relations
              (c)  nominative suffix occurs on surface subjects

There are a number of reasons why many linguists might want to find an alternative to this analysis. First is its use of different syntactic levels. Second, even for an analysis that employs different syntactic levels, it is abstract: for one thing, the advancement of the intransitive undergoer from initial object to final subject is obligatory so that the initial level is not independently motivated; and for another thing, one of the rules (the rule involving pronominal affixes) is stated in terms of this initial level. Third, the analysis is Eurocentric to the extent that it treats subject and object as basic and treats the actor-undergoer distinction, which at first sight might seem more fundamental in the language, as a derived notion.

There are thus at least some reasons to look for an alternative account, and it turns out that there is a quite simple account that involves a single syntactic level and that involves reference in terms of a notion "highest-ranked element on hierarchy". Namely, if we take the internally-motivated grammatical relations of actor and undergoer at face value, we can simply say that the pronominal affixes directly reflect these grammatical relations. In order to characterize the nominative case suffix, all we need to say is that it marks the highest element on the hierarchy in (35).

(35)    actor > undergoer

In transitive clauses, the highest element on this hierarchy is the actor. In intransitive clauses with an actor, the actor is also the highest element on this hierarchy. And in intransitive clauses with just an undergoer, the undergoer is the highest element on this hierarchy. In other words, if we take actor and undergoer as the basic notions in Choctaw, then we can characterize the distribution of the nominative case very straightforwardly in terms of the highest element on this hierarchy. This analysis is summarized in (36).

(36)  Hierarchical account:
           Assumed grammatical relations, language-internally motivated: actor, undergoer
           Analysis:
               (a)  pronominal inflection on verbs directly reflects the language-internally motivated grammatical relations of actor and undergoer
              (b)  nominative suffix occurs on the highest element on the hierarchy
                    actor > undergoer

The appeal to a notion of highest element on hierarchy thus allows for an analysis of the Choctaw facts that does not require the sort of abstractness found in Davies' analysis.


## 7.3. Pima

Another example of the usefulness of the notion "highest element on hierarchy" is provided by a quantifier floating or association rule in Pima, discussed by Munro (1984). Pima is like many other languages (including at least some Algonquian languages) in employing a construction where quantifiers that in English typically occur as modifiers within noun phrases instead occur separate from the noun phrase in preverbal position, as in (37).

(38)  Hegam   'u'vi    'o    <u>vees</u>  s=ha-hoohit   hegam   ceceoj
      those   women   3AUX   all    them-like      those   men
      'Those women like all those boys'
      (*not* 'All those women like those boys')      (Munro 1984: 278)

This construction is analogous to the English construction illustrated in (39).

(39)  The men have all eaten hamburgers.

Languages with such constructions require interpretation rules of some sort that associate the quantifier word semantically with some noun phrase in the sentence. In English the rule is that the quantifier word is always associated with the subject. Hence (39) unambiguously means (40a) rather than (40b).

(40)  a.   All the men have eaten hamburgers.
      b.   The men have eaten all the hamburgers.

In many other languages, the rules of quantifier association are different, and Pima is one such language. In (38) above, for example, the quantifier must be associated with the *object* and cannot be associated with the subject. It is not the case that in clauses with a subject and object that the quantifier is always associated with the object. In (41), for example, the quantifier is associated with the subject rather than the object.

(41)  Hegam   ceceoj   'o    <u>vees</u>   ñeid   heg    Alice
      those   men    3AUX   all    see    ART    Alice
      All the men saw Alice. (p. 273)

The reason that the quantifier here is associated with the subject rather than the object is that the object is singular and the quantifier *vees* can only be associated with plural noun phrases. In such cases, the quantifier is associated with the subject rather than the object.

In general, the principle governing the association of quantifiers with noun phrases is governed by the principle in (42).

(42)  Associate the quantifier with the highest available element on the following hierarchy (Munro 1984: 278):

      DO > IO > S

Thus, a quantifier is associated with a subject only if there is no available direct object or indirect object with which it could be associated, where something is available it can be interpreted as plural. The example in (43) illustrates a clause with both a direct object and an indirect object, with the quantifier being associated with the direct object, according to the hierarchy in (42).

(43) M-ant      <u>vees</u> ha-gegos  hegam  mimitol  hegam  nahnagio.
     I-1SG.AUX   all    them-feed  those  cats     those  rats
     'I fed all those mice to those cats'
     (*not* 'I fed those mice to all those cats')         (p. 277)

The example in (44) illustrates a case where the quantifier is associated with the indirect object.

(44) Hegam   'u'vi    'at    <u>vees</u> ha-maa     heg  s='i'ov  cemaḍ  hegam  ceceoj
     those   women   3AUX   all    them-give  ART  sweet   bread  those  men
     'Those ladies gave the cake to all those boys'
     (*not* 'All those ladies gave the cake to those boys')     (p. 278)

The quantifier cannot be associated with the subject in (44) because indirect objects are higher on the hierarchy and an interpretation associating it with the indirect object makes sense. The quantifier cannot be associated with the direct object in this example because the direct object is singular and this quantifier can only be associated with plural elements. This phenomenon is one that would be very difficult to describe without reference to a notion of highest element on a hierarchy.


7.4. English

The last example I will discuss is in English. It is a somewhat marginal cases, and reflects judgments of only some speakers, but in some ways may be more parallel to the Cree case.

Speakers of English differ in their judgments as to how (45) can be interpreted.

(45) John gave Bill a photograph of himself.

Some speakers judge the sentence ambiguous as to whether the photograph was a photograph of John or a photograph of Bill (though many speakers express a "preference" for the former of these). However, other speakers judge (45) unambiguous, insisting that *himself* must refer to John.

However, those speakers who say that *himself* in (45) cannot refer to Bill do agree that it could refer to Bill when the subject is of a person and number that prevent it from being a possible antecedent for the reflexive, as in (46).

(46) I gave Bill a photograph of himself.

For such speakers, the principle governing the interpretation of the reflexive pronoun is something like (47).

(47) For some speakers, the antecedent is the highest permissible element on the hierarchy:
           subject > object > other

Again, the facts seem easiest to describe in terms of the notion "highest element on a hierarchy".

We see then, that there are instances in various languages in which a rule can be easily expressed, if not most easily expressed, by reference to a notion of the form "the highest element on the following hierarchy", where the hierarchy is some hierarchy of grammatical relations, typically with the more agentlike element occupying highest position on the hierarchy. The analysis proposed here for so-called passive clauses in Plains Cree is thus of a form that is well-motivated in other languages.

8. Conclusion

There are a couple of further considerations that lend additional plausibility to the analysis proposed here. First, I suspect, though I have not seen the evidence to demonstrate that it is true, that the generalization described for Kutenai in section 7.1 above regarding the assignment of proximates may also hold for Cree, except that the absence of obviative marking on inanimate nouns in Cree would obscure this. However, I suspect that if we were to examine modifiers of inanimate elements, we would find that the same generalization holds in Cree, that an inanimate element that is neither actor nor goal will trigger obviative marking on a modifier only if at least one of the actor and goal is third person. In the absence of evidence to support this argument, it is clearly only a possible argument  If true, however, it would illustrate another rule in Cree making reference to the same hierarchy as in the analysis proposed here.

Secondly, the particular rule in question, the rule governing the Copying-to-Object construction in Cree, shares a property with at least some of the cases in which a rule can be formulated by reference to a hierarchy. Namely, if the Copying-to-Object rule were not restricted to the highest element on the hierarchy, if for example it could apply to any actor or goal, then examples like (11) repeated here would be ambiguous.

(11) a.  ni-kiske·yim-ima·wa       George  e:=sa·kih-ikot                okosisa
         know(TA) 1-OBV [DIRECT]           love OBV-3/CONJ [INVERSE]   his son OBV
         I know that his sons love George. (Dahlstrom 1991: 73)

If that were the case, such examples would be analogous to the reflexive example from English given in (45) above. It seems plausible that such hierarchical effects are especially natural in choosing one reading as preferred out of a set of otherwise equally possible readings.

And finally, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that except for the Pima example, all of the appeals to highest element on a hierarchy discussed not only employ this notion, but the specific hierarchies are in each case essentially the same hierarchy, with actor first and goal/undergoer second. Furthermore, the notion of a hierarchy with agent-like elements first and less agent-like elements lower down has a long history in linguistics. Such a hierarchy was proposed by Fillmore (1968) in his proposals regarding subject selection for Case Grammar, and variations of this hierarchy are reflected in various other approaches (cf. Givón 1984: 139, Van Valin 1993: 64). To this extent, the proposed analysis of so-called passive clauses in Cree in terms of a notion of highest element on this hierarchy is one with a long history. Nor is the nature of the appeal completely different. Under the proposal I am making, what Dahlstrom analyses in terms of subject, I am proposing analysing in terms of a notion of highest element on the hierarchy 'actor > goal/undergoer'. Since proposals like those of Fillmore involve defining subject in terms

of highest element on a hierarchy like this, it might even seem that the proposed analysis and that of Dahlstrom are notational variants.

But while there is little question that the two analyses are similar, the important difference lies in the fact that the analysis proposed here employs what are otherwise notions independently motivated within Cree, namely actor and goal (or subject and object if one prefers), without appealing to a notion of subject distinct from actor that otherwise has little motivation in the language. In other words, it is only the Copying-to-Object construction which provides any motivation for a notion of subject in Cree distinct from the notion of actor. If it were not for the existence of a well-motivated notion of subject in other languages like English in which there are passive clauses in which the subject is nonactor, it seems unlikely that the idea of analysing the so-called passive construction in Cree as a passive would have even occurred to anyone. An analysis in terms of indefinite actor seems much more natural from a Cree-internal perspective.

If analysing the so-called passive in Cree as a passive construction is influenced by the fact that it bears at least a superficial resemblance to passive constructions in other languages, there is considerable irony in Dahlstrom's analysis, since it forms the basis for her strongest argument that the inverse construction in Cree is not a passive construction. It is precisely because the so-called passive construction and the inverse construction behave differently with respect to the Copying-to-Object construction that Dahlstrom is able to give a concrete argument against analysing the inverse as a passive. If the so-called passive construction is best analysed as something other than a passive, then this argument disappears and whatever the intuitions of many Algonquianists, it is less clear that there is a strong linguistic argument *against* analysing the Algonquian inverse as some sort of passive.

There is a strong version and a weak version of what I am claiming in this paper. The strong version is that the so-called passive construction in Cree is better analysed as an indefinite actor construction. I do not want to pretend that I have given strong arguments for this strong conclusion. The weak version is that the arguments for analysing the so-called passive construction as a passive construction rather than as an indefinite actor construction are quite unconvincing, and that the situation is at best indeterminate. And if it is indeterminate, then Dahlstrom's primary argument against treating the Cree inverse as some sort of passive dissolves, and thus the question of whether the inverse should be treated as some sort of passive becomes itself indeterminate.[4] This is in some ways the primary implication of this paper, since the question of whether to analyse the Algonquian inverse as some sort of passive is a more central issue, both for Algonquianists and for non-Algonquianists: Dahlstrom (1991) is specifically cited by non-Algonquianists (e.g., Givón 1994: 16) for her having allegedly demonstrated that the Cree inverse is *not* a passive.

If the arguments in this paper imply that Dahlstrom's primary argument against analysing the Cree inverse as a kind of passive collapses, it is not that I intend that as the basis of a defence of some sort of passive analysis. Rather, I believe that the issue of whether to analyse the inverse as some sort of passive is ultimately an irresolvable, nonsubstantive, and terminological issue, and arguing against Dahlstrom's argument that it is not a passive contributes towards demonstrating the inherent irresolvability of that question.

Footnotes

[1] Another example where it is less clear whether to analyse a construction as a passive or an indefinite actor construction is Tlingit. Boas (1917) discusses the two alternatives for Tlingit.

[2] Ives Goddard (personal communication) has brought to my attention that there are forms in Ellis' Cree data in which *-im* is apparently associated with obviative subjects. For dialects in which this is true, the argument I am giving here would not be applicable.

[3] Actually, Keenan (1975) discusses examples of passive-like constructions in some languages in which the patient-like constituent exhibits some grammatical properties associated with subjects and other grammatical properties associated with objects. Dahlstrom could argue that the so-called passive construction in Cree is a passive construction of this sort.

[4] By the expression "some sort of passive", I intend to include the idea of analysing the Algonquian inverse as some sort of subject-object reversal, as proposed by Rhodes (1976) and Perlmutter and Rhodes (1988) for Ojibwa. The crucial issue is whether the goal in an inverse clause should be treated as subject.

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