

A Comparison of the Obviation Systems of Kutenai and Algonquian

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the term 'obviation' has been applied to phenomena in a variety of languages on the basis of perceived similarity to the phenomenon in Algonquian languages to which, I assume, the term was originally applied. An example of a descriptive use of the term occurs in Dayley (1989: 136), who applies the terms 'obviative' and 'proximate' to two categories of demonstratives in Tümpisa Shoshone, the obviative category being used to introduce new information or to reference given participants which are nontopics, the proximate category for topics. But unlike the obviative and proximate categories of Algonquian languages, the Shoshone categories for which Dayley uses the terms are categories only of a class of words he calls 'demonstratives', and are not inflectional categories of nouns or verbs. Similarly, Simpson and Bresnan (1983) use the term 'obviation' to refer to a system in Warlpiri in which certain nonfinite verbs occur in forms that indicate that their subjects are nonsubjects in the matrix clause. These phenomena in non-Algonquian languages to which the term 'obviation' has been applied may bear some remote resemblance to the Algonquian phenomenon, but I suspect that most Algonquianists examining them would conclude that the resemblance is at best a remote one.

The purpose of this paper is to describe an obviation system in Kutenai, a language isolate of southeastern British Columbia and adjacent areas of Idaho and Montana, and to compare it to the obviation system of Algonquian languages. The Kutenai system, unlike the other kinds of phenomena which have been referred to as obviation systems, bears a strong similarity to the obviation system of Algonquian languages in both its discourse and its syntactic properties.¹ The term 'obviative' was, in fact, applied by Boas (1927: 93) and by Garvin (1948: 172, 1958:1) to the Kutenai phenomenon I will discuss, although Garvin (1958:1) claims that Boas' application of the term to the Kutenai phenomenon is by 'false analogy' with the Algonquian obviative. While I will briefly discuss the difference that leads Garvin to this conclusion, this difference should not obscure the overall similarity. The similarity between the Kutenai and Algonquian obviation systems is specifically noted by Boas (1920: 373), though he otherwise never discusses the similarity, as far as I am aware. I will discuss a variety of differences between the Kutenai system and the Algonquian system, though these differences are primarily at the morphological level. I

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¹ See section 12 below for some discussion of proposals relating Kutenai genetically to other languages.

should also say that my references to Algonquian are somewhat misleading, in that my comparison will be primarily with Ojibwa, and to a lesser extent, Cree. Some of the similarities I note with these languages – as well as some of the differences – may not be shared with all other Algonquian languages.

2. Proximate and Obviative

In Algonquian languages, one participant within each clause has the privileged status traditionally referred to as ‘proximate’, while other participants are obviative. Thus in the Ojibwa sentence in (1), the notional object is marked with a suffix indicating its obviative status while the notional subject is unmarked, indicative of its proximate status.²

(1) Ojibwa

aw nini wgi:-wa:bma:n niw kwe:wan
 that man 3,PAST-see (TA,3-3') that,OBV woman,OBV
 ‘The man [prox] saw the woman [obv].’ (Rhodes 1976: 202)

Transitive verbs with third person arguments occur in one of two forms. If the notional subject is proximate, as in (1), a form known as the direct form is used. If, on the other hand, the notional object is proximate (and the notional subject thus obviative) a form known as the inverse form is used, as in (2).

(2) aw kwe: wgi:-wa:bmigo:n niw ninw-an
 that woman 3,PAST-see (TA,3'-3) that,OBV man-OBV
 ‘The man [obv] saw the woman [prox].’ (Rhodes 1976: 202)

The choice as to which participant is proximate is determined by discourse factors. As Bloomfield (1962: 38) says, referring to Menomini, though presumably this is applicable to other Algonquian languages, “the proximate third person represents the topic of discourse, the person nearest to the speaker’s point of view, or the person earlier spoken of and already known.”

Kutenai exhibits a contrast similar to the Algonquian contrast of proximate versus obviative. Within each Kutenai clause – and perhaps within each sentence, though at this point I am not aware of clear criteria for identifying sentences in Kutenai – one third person participant has the privileged status that one can call ‘proximate’ while all other participants

² For the examples from Algonquian languages cited in this paper, I generally employ the orthography and glossing system of my sources. As a result, the glossing and orthography across languages and across sources varies somewhat. I take the liberty of providing my own morpheme divisions and glosses in a few places. Because Rhodes’ analysis of the verbs in (1) and (2) differs from traditional analyses in ways that are irrelevant for present purposes, I use glosses that reflect more traditional analyses. The notation 3-3’ in the gloss for (1) reflects the traditional analysis, employing a notation that is used by Wolfart (1973) and Nichols (1988) and in the examples from these sources that I cite later in this paper. In this notation, 3 indicates an animate third person, 0 indicates an inanimate third person, p (as in 0p) indicates plural, and a prime, as in 3’, indicates an obviative. The absence of a prime indicates a proximate. 3-3’ indicates a third person proximate acting on a third person obviative while 3’-3 (as in 2) indicates a third person obviative acting on a third person proximate.

are ‘obviative’. The proximate noun is, as in Algonquian languages, morphologically unmarked, while obviative nouns are marked with the suffix *-(i)s*. In (3), for example, the notional object *pa#kiy* ‘woman’ bears this suffix *-s*, indicating its obviative status, while the notional subject *titqat* ‘man’ is unmarked, indicating its proximate status.³

- (3) wu·kat-i pa#kiy-s titqat
 see-INDIC woman-OBV man
 ‘The man saw the woman.’ (A)

In a transitive clause without inverse marking on the verb, as in (3), the notional subject will be proximate and the notional object will be obviative. Such clauses can be referred to as direct clauses by analogy to Algonquian. If we add the suffix *-aps* to the verb, as in (4), the meaning is reversed, the proximate participant now being interpreted as the notional object, the obviative participant as the notional subject.

- (4) wu·kat-aps-i pa#kiy-s titqat
 see-INVERSE-INDIC woman-OBV man
 ‘The woman saw the man.’ (A)

Since the function of verbs bearing this suffix is analogous to inverse verbs in Algonquian, this suffix can be described as an ‘inverse’ suffix.⁴ As discussed below, the characterizations cited above regarding the nature of the proximate-obviative contrast apply equally well to Kutenai: the kinds of discourse situations in which inverse clauses are used

³ The majority of the examples of Kutenai sentences cited come from texts. Kutenai examples marked ‘E’ are ones that are elicited examples provided in response to an English sentence prompt; those marked ‘J’ are ones judged acceptable when asked for a judgment; and those marked ‘A’ are constructed by myself by analogy to very similar examples. I assume that examples from texts are most reliable as sources of data and those merely judged acceptable or constructed by analogy are least reliable. The following abbreviations are employed in glosses in the Kutenai examples in this paper.

ANIM	animate	PL	plural
ASP	aspect	POSS	possessive
FUT	future	POSS'D	possessed
HABIT	habitual	PRED	predicate
IMPERF	imperfect	PTCL	particle
INDEF	indefinite subject	REFL	reflexive
INDIC	indicative	REVERS	reversative
IND.OBJ	indirect object	SG	singular
IRREAL	irrealis	SUBJ	subject
NEG	negative	SUBOR	subordinate
NOM	nominalization	TRANS	transitive
OBJ	object	3	third person
OBV	obviative	1/2	first or second person

⁴ Morgan (1991:431-436) analyses the inverse suffix *-aps* as a sequence of two suffixes, *-ap*, which he refers to as ‘the higher ranking object suffix’, essentially equivalent to an inverse marker, followed by *-s*, the obviative subject marker. The question of the correct analysis of *-aps* does not seem crucial to the discussion in this paper. See Dryer (1991:197, footnote 16) for some discussion of Morgan’s analysis.

in Kutenai are similar to the kinds of discourse situations in which inverse clauses are used in Ojibwa.

3. Animacy

One important difference between Kutenai and Algonquian is that Kutenai lacks a grammatical animacy distinction. Nouns in Algonquian languages fall into one of two classes, animate and inanimate, correlating with but not identical to the semantic classes, since some semantically inanimate nouns are grammatically animate. The two types of nouns exhibit different inflectional paradigms, and verbal paradigms vary with the animacy of the absolutive (subject if intransitive, object if transitive). Algonquian verb forms are traditionally described as falling into one of four classes, animate intransitive (AI), inanimate intransitive (II), transitive animate (TA), and transitive inanimate (TI), where the contrast between the first two of these, AI and II, depends on the animacy of the subject and the contrast between the last two of these, TA and TI, depends on the animacy of the notional object. Crucial to the present discussion is the fact that, apart from certain dialects (cf. Wolfart 1973: 16 regarding Cree dialects and Grafstein 1984: 247 regarding the Algonquin dialect of Ojibwa), inanimate nouns in Cree and Ojibwa do not inflect for obviation. Thus in a Plains Cree sentence like (5), neither argument of the verb is morphologically obviative, the notional subject because it is proximate, and the notional object because it is inanimate.

- (5) kītahtawē miskam mistik, ...
 presently find (TI 3) stick (0)
 ‘Presently he [prox] found a stick [inanimate].’ (Wolfart 1973: 23)

Wolfart (1973: 16) shows, however, that although inanimate nouns may not themselves inflect for obviation, they may still be ‘covertly’ obviative in that they may trigger obviative agreement on an agreeing verb form, as in (6).

- (6) ..., kītahtawē kā-miskahk maskisinah otinam, ē-wā-wāpahtahk;
 soon find (TI 3) moccasin (0p) take (TI 3) examine (TI 3)
 ēh-miywāsiniyikih
 pretty (II 0’p)

‘..., soon he found some moccasins. He picked them up and examined them; they were very pretty.’ (Wolfart 1973: 16)

The inanimate noun *maskisinah* ‘moccasins’ in (6) is not marked as being obviative, but triggers obviative third person plural subject marking on the verb *ēh-miywāsiniyikih* ‘pretty’. Grafstein (1984: 252) observes similar facts for Ojibwa, as in (7), where *o-ji:ma:n* ‘his canoe’ is not marked as obviative but triggers the obviative form of the verb *wi:nadiniw* ‘dirty’.

- (7) wi:nad-ini-w ininiw o-ji:ma:n
 dirty,II-OBV-3 man 3-canoe
 ‘The man’s canoe is dirty.’ (Grafstein 1984: 252)

Kutenai, in contrast, does not have any grammatical animacy distinction, and obviative marking occurs on inanimate nouns in the same way as on animate nouns, as illustrated in (8) and (9).⁵

- (8) qawxax-i niʔ-s kwił-t̄a-nam-is.
 go.to-INDIC the-OBV big-house-INDEF,POSS-OBV
 ‘He [prox] headed towards the biggest teepee [obv].’ (Tape NS7, Story 1, Line 7)
- (9) n-aʔt-i ʔakɕamał-s ...
 PRED-have-INDIC knife-OBV
 ‘He [prox] had a knife [obv].’ (Tape 20, Story 2, Line 36)

It even occurs on adverbial elements, such as the initial adverbial *taxa* ‘then’, as in (10), or *qu* ‘there’, as in (11).

- (10) taxa-s n-ʔik-ni skinkuɕ niʔ-s ʔakułak-s
 then-OBV PRED-eat-INDIC coyote the-OBV meat-OBV
 ‘Then [obv] Coyote [prox] ate the meat [obv].’ (Tape 126A, line 61’)
- (11) ... ʔat k-ɕinam qu-s kamanqukuł-s
 IMPERF SUBOR-go there-OBV Sandpoint-OBV
 ‘... and they [prox] would go there [obv] to Sandpoint (Idaho) [obv].’
 (Tape NS28, Text 5, Line 7)

If we interpret the Cree situation in which the inanimate nouns lack obviative morphology but trigger obviative marking on modifying verbs as one in which nouns are syntactically obviative but not morphologically obviative only because the language lacks a morphological contrast on inanimate nouns, then Cree and Kutenai can be described as similar in their syntactic systems, differing only in their morphological systems.

The role of animacy in Kutenai deserves further comment. Although Kutenai lacks a grammatical category of animate versus inanimate, semantic animacy plays a role distinct from discourse factors in determining the choice of proximate versus obviative. Thus, given two arguments, one animate and the other inanimate, the inanimate argument is always obviative. Furthermore, if two arguments are both animate, but one is human and the other nonhuman animate, the nonhuman argument must be obviative, regardless of the discourse context. Thus even outside of any discourse context, a sentence like (12) is judged as sounding odd.

⁵ Apart from one example from Boas (1918), the text examples come from a body of texts collected by Lawrence Morgan and transcribed and translated by Elizabeth Gravelle. These texts are identified by tape number and story number within the tape, with line number in the transcribed version. These stories, with informal title, are as follows, listed by speaker. Catherine Gravelle (Tobacco Plains): Tape 20, story 2 (Chickadee, Frog, and Wolf). Rosalie McCoy (monolingual, Tobacco Plains): Tape 21, story 1 (Fool Hen, Hawk, and Weasel). Moses Joseph (Lower Kutenai): Tape 126, side A (Coyote and Fox); side B (Frog and Turtle); Tape 127, last story (The captive daughter). Anne Pierre (monolingual, Tobacco Plains): Tape NS7, story 1 (about Coyote and Qufapɕik); story 3 (true story about people traveling through Kutenai Pass). Alice White (Columbia Lake): Tape NS28, part 2 (about Kukla, the priest); part 5 (about going to Sandpoint in the fall); part 6 (about when parents die).

- (12) ??xaʔɬin n-ʔiʔx-ni paʔkiy-s
 dog PRED-bite-INDIC woman-OBV
 ‘A dog [prox] bit a woman [obv].’ (J)

To express the meaning of (12), the human participant must be proximate and the nonhuman participant obviative, so an inverse clause must be used, as in (13).

- (13) paʔkiy n-ʔiʔx-naps-i xaʔɬin-s
 woman PRED-bite-INVERSE-INDIC dog-OBV
 ‘A dog [obv] bit a woman [prox].’ (E)

4. Possessives and Obviation

One of the distinctive properties of the obviation system in Algonquian languages is its role in possessive constructions, in which a noun possessed by a third person is necessarily obviative, as in the Ojibwa example in (14).

- (14) Nisiwan dash odayensiwaan igiw Anishinaabeg.
 VAI,IND,3’ NAD,3p-3’ 3p NA,3p
 they are three [obv] and their [prox] little dogs [obv] those Indians [prox]
 ‘There were three of the Indian’s [prox] little dogs [obv].’
 (Nichols 1988: 165; Birch Island Text VIII: Yet Another Expedition, sentence 12)

The situation is similar in Kutenai, although here again differences in the morphological systems obscure the similarity. At first sight, one might think that nouns possessed by third persons in Kutenai are not obviative, since they in general lack obviative marking, as in (15) and (16), in which the possessed nouns bear only the third person possessive suffix *-ʔis*.⁶

- (15) qa-ʔ ʔakmuxu-s waʔunak-ʔis niʔ watak
 PTCL fall.out-OBV,SUBJ tongue-3,POSS the frog
 ‘The Frog’s [prox] tongue [obv] would come out.’ (Tape 126, Side B, line 125)
- (16) pamik k-sanʔukatiʔ-*s* xaʔi-ʔis qu paʔkiy
 PTCL SUBOR-ugly-OBV,SUBJ son-3,POSS that woman
 ‘That woman’s [prox] son [obv] is so ugly.’ (Tape NS7, Story 1, Line 17)

Although nouns possessed by third persons in Kutenai normally do not bear obviative marking, as with the possessed noun *waʔunak-ʔis* ‘his tongue’ in (15) and *xaʔi-ʔis* ‘her son’ in (16), they can be shown to be syntactically obviative, or ‘covertly obviative’, in a way analogous to Wolfart’s discussion of inanimate nouns in Plains Cree. Namely, verbs in Kutenai with obviative subjects always bear a suffix *-(i)s* (identical to the suffix used on nouns to indicate their obviative status). When a noun possessed by a third person functions as subject of a verb, the verb obligatorily inflects for an obviative subject, as in

⁶ The form *waʔunak-ʔis* ‘his tongue’ is given in (12) in morphophonemic form: it is actually pronounced as *waʔunaʔis*, with the sequence of *k* and a glottal stop realized by glottalic *k̚*. I follow this practice throughout this paper for various forms which involve a single glottalic consonant which is underlyingly a nonglottalic consonant preceding a morpheme boundary and a glottal stop following the morpheme boundary.

both (15) and (16). Thus, although these possessed nouns may not bear obviative inflection themselves, they do trigger obviative subject marking on verbs.

While nouns possessed by third persons are generally not marked obviative, as in (15) and (16), there are situations where they *are* marked obviative, as in (17) and (18).⁷

- (17) k-ʔituqʰaṅtiʰik ʔakuqʰaṅt-ʔis-is watak-s
 SUBOR-dress.up clothing-3,POSS-OBV frog-OBV
 ‘He [prox] dressed up in Frog’s [obv] clothing [obv].’
 (Tape 126, Side B, Line 205)
- (18) paʰ n-aqap-s-i ʔakniʰnamu-ʔis-is niʔ-s ma-ʔis
 PTCL PRED-exist-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC relative-3,POSS-OBV the-OBV mother-3,POSS
 ‘The one who was her mother had a sister.’
 (Literally: Her [prox] mother’s [obv] sister [obv] existed.)
 (Tape 127, Last part, Line 64)

The possessed nouns in (17) and (18) bear both the third person possessive suffix *-ʔis* and the obviative suffix *-is*. What distinguishes these two examples from those in (15) and (16) (where the possessed noun is not marked obviative) is that the *possessors* are obviative in (17) and (18), while they were proximate in (15) and (16). The presence versus absence of obviative marking on a possessed noun in Kutenai depends on the obviative status of the *possessor*, rather than the obviative status of the possessed noun itself, which is necessarily obviative syntactically. In (17), the possessor *watak* ‘frog’ is obviative because it is distinct from the proximate subject of the clause. (18) involves two levels of possession. The proximate participant in (18) is expressed only by the possessive suffix *-ʔis* on *ma* ‘mother’. Because *ma* ‘mother’ is possessed by a proximate, it does not bear the obviative suffix, like the possessed nouns in (15) and (16). In contrast, the possessed noun *ʔakniʰnamu* ‘relative’ bears both the third person possessive suffix *-ʔis* and the obviative suffix *-is*. The obviative suffix occurs here because its possessor *niʔs maʔis* ‘her mother’ is syntactically obviative.

The contrast between (15) and (16) on the one hand, and (17) and (18) on the other, is similar in some respects to a number of contrasts found in Algonquian languages. Grafstein (1984: 254) observes the contrast in the Algonquin dialect of Ojibwa between (19) and (20).

- (19) John o-wa:banda:n o-ʃi:ma:n [e:-zakide:-ini-g]
 3-see,II 3-canoe pres-burn,II-obv-3
 ‘John_j sees his_j canoe burning.’
- (20) John o-wa:banda:n o-ʃi:ma:n-ini [e:-zakide:-ini-g]
 3-see,II 3-canoe-obv pres-burn,II-obv-3
 ‘John_j sees his_j canoe burning.’

⁷ The verb given as *-aqap* ‘exist’ in (18) is underlyingly *haqap*, the *h* being deleted after *n*. For all verb forms cited with the so-called predicate prefix *n-* in which the initial segment of the verb stem is given as a vowel, the verb stem underlying begins with an *h* which is deleted after the *n-*. For verb stems beginning with ʔ, the forms are cited morphophonemically as *n-ʔ...* although they are realized by *ṇ*. This predicate prefix is only realized before verb stems beginning with ʔ or *h*.

(19) and (20) differ in form in that the obviative suffix *-ini* occurs on the possessed noun in (20) but not in (19). These two sentences differ in interpretation in that (19) is interpreted such that the possessor is coreferential to the subject *John*, while (20) is interpreted such that the possessor is distinct from the subject *John*. But this is precisely the same as the contrast in the Kutenai sentences in (15) to (18): in both the Kutenai case and the Algonquin Ojibwa case, the possessed noun bears obviative marking if and only if the possessor is obviative. In addition, the verbs in both (19) and (20) inflect for an obviative subject. Hence we can describe both cases by saying that the possessed noun inflects for the obviative or proximate status of the possessor rather than the status of the possessed noun itself, although the possessed noun can be shown to be syntactically obviative in both Kutenai and Ojibwa, in that it triggers obviative subject marking on an agreeing verb, regardless of whether the noun is marked obviative.

Kutenai and Ojibwa differ, however, in that the pattern just described holds for all nouns in Kutenai, but only for inanimate nouns in Ojibwa. Animate nouns in Ojibwa are inflected for obviation, whether the possessor is proximate or obviative, though the inflectional marking is different for some dialects, as in (21) and (22), which are apparently from Western Ojibwa.

- (21) John o-gike:nima:-an Mary o-misēh-an
 3-know,TA-OBV 3-sister-OBV
 ‘John knows Mary’s sister.’ (Grafstein 1984: 258)
- (22) John o-gike:nima:-an Mary-an o-misēh-ini
 3-know,TA-OBV Mary-OBV 3-sister-FURTHER.OBV
 ‘John knows Mary’s sister.’ (Grafstein 1984: 258)

The use of the so-called further obviative in (22) corresponds to those instances in Kutenai where obviative marking occurs on a possessed noun, namely when the possessor is itself obviative.⁸

5. Other Instances of Obviative Subjects

Apart from its use in clauses in which the subject is a noun possessed by a third person, obviative subject marking on verbs arises in a variety of other contexts in which obviative subjects occur. For example, the use of the obviative subject suffix on the subordinate verb in (23) indicates that the subject of the subordinate clause is distinct from the proximate subject of the main clause.⁹

⁸ The example in (21) points to another possible difference between Ojibwa and Kutenai: although *Mary* is in the same clause as *John* in (21), both are proximate. Obviation of possessors in Ojibwa is optional in clauses containing a distinct proximate participant. While obviation normally occurs in such contexts in Kutenai, I am not sure whether it is obligatory. This requires further investigation.

⁹ The material in the square brackets in *[ta]xas* in (23) was absent in the faster speech employed by the speaker, but would have been included in more careful speech. I use this notation elsewhere below.

- (23) n-ʔupx-ni [ta]xa-s k-sʔ_ʔisiʔʔ hu·kup-s
 PRED-know-INDIC then-OBV SUBOR-ASP-very cooked-OBV,SUBJ
 ‘He_i [prox] knew that they_j [obv] were pretty burned.’ (Tape 71, Story 1, Line 72)

If a subordinate verb is not marked as having an obviative subject, as in (24), the clause is interpreted as having the same subject as the proximate argument in the main clause.

- (24) Taxa-s qaʔwiw-ni k-ϕxaʔ ʔik_ϕ
 then-OBV think-INDIC SUBOR-FUT eat-and
 ‘He_i [prox] thought he_j [prox] was going to eat it and’
 (Tape 127, Last Story, line 97)

The contrast between (23) and (24) is analogous to the contrast in the Ojibwa examples in (25) and (26), where the obviative versus nonobviative subject forms of the subordinate verb also function in a way reminiscent of switch reference systems, as indicating whether the subject of the main clause and the subject of the subordinate clause are the same.

- (25) ininiw o-gike:nda:n e:-aye:kozi-ʔ
 man 3-know,TI PRES-tired-AI,3
 ‘The man_i [prox] knows that he_j [prox] is tired.’ (Grafstein 1984: 202)
- (26) ininiw o-gike:nda:n e:-aye:kozi-iniʔin
 man 3-know,TI PRES-tired-AI,OBV
 ‘The man_i [prox] knows that he_j [obv] is tired.’ (Grafstein 1984: 202)

Verbs in Kutenai bearing the obviative subject suffix also arise in discourse contexts in which a given clause contains no reference to the participant that is proximate in the surrounding discourse, as in the text example in (27): *ʔawu* ‘elk’ in the second line is obviative, the proximate subject of the the first line remaining the proximate participant through into the subsequent text.

- (27) qa·nax-i_ϕ ʔakinmituk-s
 go.along-INDIC-and river-OBV
 ‘He [prox] went along and there was a river [obv].’
- qu-s ʔiyini-s qaqap-s-i ʔawu-s
 there-OBV across-OBV be-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC cow.elk-OBV
 ‘Across there was a herd of cow elk [obv].’ (Tape 20, Story 2, Lines 7-8)

The proximate participant in the first clause in (27) is not referred to in the second clause but remains the proximate participant through into the subsequent discourse. The subject in the second clause in (27) is obviative, indicating its secondary status relative to the surrounding discourse. Again, this is analogous to one of the uses of obviative subject forms in Cree, as in (28).

- (28) mo·hkiciwanipe·k itah e·h·aya·yik, ci·k e·kotah mostoswah aya·yiwa
 spring loc be,inan.obv near there buffalo.obv be.obv
 ‘near a spring of water were some buffalos [obv]’
 (Dahlstrom 1986: 158, lines 60-61)

The Cree example in (28) is analogous to the Kutenai example in (27) in that the discourse participant that is proximate in the preceding and following discourse is not mentioned in the clauses in (28).

6. Double Obviative Clauses

In general, the contrast between the direct construction and the inverse construction can be characterized, both for Kutenai and for Algonquian languages, in terms of whether the notional subject is proximate (in which case the direct construction is used) or the notional object is proximate (in which case the inverse construction is used). Such an account does not fully describe the alternation either in Kutenai or in Algonquian, however, because of the existence of transitive clauses in which both arguments are obviative. (29) is an example of a direct clause in Kutenai in which both arguments are obviative.

- (29) n-ʔitmasiʔt-s-i ʔakuʔak-s
 PRED-dry-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC meat-OBV
 ‘She [obv] was drying meat [obv].’ (Tape 20, Side 2, Line 109)

Dahlstrom (1986: 54) cites an analogous verb form for Cree, given in (30).

- (30) wa.pam-e.-yi-w-a
 see-direct-obv-3-obv
 ‘He [obv] sees him [obv].’

The sentence in (31) from a text in Nichols (1988: 130) is an example from Ojibwa.

- (31) Megwaa dash esibanan iniw endazhi-miginaaninijin.
 NA,3’ 3’ VTA,CON,3’-3’
 at.the.moment and raccoon that who is barked at by them there
 ‘And that racoon was the one who was at the moment being barked at there.’
 (Nichols 1988: 130; Birch Island Text I: Sentence 28)

(32) is an elicited Kutenai example of an inverse clause in which both arguments are obviative.

- (32) ma-ʔis misáʔ wu.kat-aps-is-ni maʔi-s
 mother-3,POSS Mike see-INVERSE-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC Mary-OBV
 ‘Mary [obv] saw Mike’s [prox] mother [obv].’ (E)

(33) is a Kutenai example of a double obviative inverse clause from one of the texts in Boas (1918: 36), using Boas’ original phonetic notation.

- (33) qa-e-ʔx_a-naps-i’s-ne k.ʔa’wʔa-s
 NEG-bite-INVERSE-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC grizzly.bear-OBV
 ‘Grizzly Bear [obv] had not bitten her [obv].’ (Boas 1918: 36; Text 23, Line 5)

(34) is a Cree example of this type of double obviative inverse verb form from Dahlstrom (1986: 54).

- (34) wa.pam-iko-yi-w-a
 see-inverse-obv-3-obv
 ‘He [obv] sees him [obv].’

And (35) is an example of a double obviative inverse clause from Ojibwa, cited by Rhodes (1990: 112) from Bloomfield (1958: 158).

- (35) wiiikiwenhen wgii-dkamgoon niw gnebgoon
 'The snake_i [obv] bit his_i friend_j [obv].'

Transitive clauses in which both arguments are obviative are not frequent in Kutenai texts. In a body of Kutenai texts containing 361 transitive clauses, the relative frequency of the different clause types is as given in Table 1.

Table 1
 Frequency of Clause Types

	Number	Percentage
Direct clause containing proximate	274	76%
Inverse clause containing proximate	66	18%
Direct clause, both arguments obviative	20	6%
Inverse clause, both arguments obviative	<u>1</u>	<u><1%</u>
TOTAL	361	100%

Table 1 shows that only 21 of these 361 clauses contain two obviative arguments and only 1 of these is an inverse clause.

Table 2 summarizes the relationship between the relevant verbal categories in Kutenai and what I believe to be the corresponding categories in Ojibwa.¹⁰

Table 2
 Correspondence of Kutenai Verb Forms to Ojibwa Verb Forms

Kutenai Type	Morphology	Ojibwa Types
direct (1 obv)	none	3-3', 3-0
inverse (1 obv)	-(n)aps	3'-3, 0-3
direct (2 obv)	-(i)s	3'-3' (direct), 3'-0
inverse (2 obv)	-(n)aps-is	3'-3' (inverse)

Table 3 gives data comparable to the text counts in Table 1 for the frequency of different transitive verb forms with third person arguments for a selection of Ojibwa texts in Nichols (1988).

Table 3
 Frequency of Ojibwa Clause Types

	Total	Percentage
3-0	39	26%
3-3'	84	56%
3'-3	22	15%
0-3	2	1%
3'-3' (direct)	1	1%
3'-0	<u>2</u>	<u>1%</u>
Total	150	100%

¹⁰ The notation 3'-3' is apparently ambiguous between a double obviative direct form and a double obviative inverse form.

Table 3 shows that double obviative clauses, in which both arguments are obviative, are less common in these Ojibwa texts than they are in the Kutenai texts examined. The Ojibwa texts examined contain only one occurrence of a double obviative clause out of 150 transitive clauses with third person arguments (or less than 1%), while the Kutenai texts contain 21 double obviative clauses (or almost 6%) out of a total of 361 transitive clauses with third person arguments. One reason for this difference is that because Kutenai has obviative marking on inanimate participants, clauses which correspond to 3'-0 in Algonquian languages will be double obviative clauses in Kutenai. A Kutenai sentence corresponding to the Ojibwa 3'-0 example in (36) would have used a double obviative verb for the final verb.

- (36) ... gii-nsaawaad niw miinwaa gii-mkamaawaad iw
 VTA,CON,3p-3' 3' VTA,CON,3p-3' 0
 they killed them those and also they took away from them that
 bemwidoonpan.
 VTI2,CON,PRT,3'-0
 what they had been carrying

'... they [prox] killed them [obv] and they [prox] took away what they [obv] were carrying' (Nichols 1988: 78; Parry Island Text I, Sentence 11)

This difference between Kutenai and Ojibwa reflects a general fact, that in most situations in which an inanimate noun occurs in Ojibwa, it would have been marked obviative in the corresponding Kutenai sentence, and presumably would also be obviative in those dialects of Ojibwa in which inanimates are marked for obviation. This suggests that inanimate NPs are in some sense functionally obviative in Ojibwa even if they are not marked as such. The fact that they trigger obviative agreement on agreeing forms, as noted above, provides further support for this.

Now if we treat inanimate arguments in Ojibwa as a kind of obviative, in order to make the Ojibwa data more comparable to the Kutenai data in Table 1 (thereby treating 3-0 as a kind of direct clause, 0-3 as a kind of inverse clause, and 3'-0 as a kind of double obviative direct clause), we can convert the Ojibwa data in Table 3 to the form given in Table 4.

Table 4
 Frequency of Ojibwa Clause Types, Collapsing Inanimates With Obviatives

	TOTAL	Percentage
Direct clause containing proximate (3-3', 3-0)	123	82%
Inverse clause containing proximate (3'-3, 0-3)	24	16%
Direct clause, both arguments obviative (3'-3', 3'-0)	3	2%
TOTAL	150	100%

This gives frequencies somewhat analogous to the frequencies of the comparable Kutenai clause types in Table 1, except that the frequency of double obviative clauses is still lower in Ojibwa. Although this difference may just be due to accidental differences between the particular sets of texts examined (rather than a reflecting a systematic difference between the two languages), it may also reflect the fact, discussed in the next section, that multiple proximates are possible in Ojibwa in contexts in which they are not possible in Kutenai.

7. Multiple Proximates

One grammatical difference between the obviation system of Kutenai and that of Algonquian languages lies in the phenomenon of multiple proximate sentences in Algonquian languages, discussed extensively by Dahlstrom (1986: 137-143) for Cree and attested in the Ojibwa texts in Nichols (1988). Whether Kutenai also allows multiple proximate sentences is not clear to me, since at this point I am not aware of any criterion for clearly identifying sentence boundaries in Kutenai. Kutenai does have two verb forms, one that is generally used in main clauses and one that is generally used in subordinate clauses, but the supposedly subordinate verb form is often used in clauses that do not seem to be subordinate, and at this point the factors governing the choice between these two verb forms is not clear to me. Nevertheless, there are two types of subordinate clauses which are unambiguously subordinate, both because they require the subordinate verb form and because they are clearly embedded in another clause. These are complement clauses (serving as complement of another verb) and relative clauses. And it is apparently not possible to have multiple proximates within a domain that includes a complement clause or a relative clause and the main clause in which these subordinate clauses are embedded. (23) above illustrates obligatory obviation into a complement clause. (37) illustrates obligatory obviation into a relative clause: since *titqał* ‘man’ is distinct from the subject of the main clause, it is obligatorily obviative.

- (37) k-wu.kat niʔ-s y-aqaqap-s-ki titqał-s
 SUBOR-see the-OBV NOM-be.like-OBV,SUBJ-NOM man-OBV
 ‘He [prox] saw what [obv] the men [obv] were like.’ (Tape NS28, Story 2, Line 13)

It would not be possible to have a proximate in the relative clause distinct from the proximate in the main clause. Ojibwa, in contrast, apparently permits multiple proximates at least within the domain of a main clause and a complement clause, as in (38): the people who the referent of the subject of the main clause is visiting are obviative in the main clause and in the clause of which *e-mbwaachaajin* ‘whom she visits’, but proximate in the clause of which *ji-wii-yaamwaagwehn* ‘if they might have’ is verb.

- (38) ... wgii-kwejmaan e-mbwaachaajin ji-wii-yaamwaagwehn moozhwaagan.
 VTA,IND VTA,CON,3-3’ VT14,CON,DUB,3p-0 NI,0
 she asked them whom she visits if they might have scissors
 ‘... she asked the people she was visiting if they had haircutters.’
 (Nichols 1988: 54; Chippewa-Ottawa Text VII: Moozhwaagan (Scissors), Sentence 1)

The possibility of multiple proximates in Ojibwa in contexts in which it would not be possible in Kutenai is one factor contributing to the lower frequency of double obviative clauses in Ojibwa, and the Ojibwa texts in Nichols (1988) contain other examples analogous to that in (38) where a comparable sentence in Kutenai would not have contained multiple proximates and would have used a double obviative clause where Ojibwa does not.

8. Clauses with First or Second Person Arguments

One important difference between Kutenai and Algonquian languages is that the contrast between direct and inverse is restricted in Kutenai to clauses in which both arguments are third person. Where Algonquian languages employ direct verb forms when a first or second person is acting on a third person and inverse verb forms when a third person is acting on a first or second person, Kutenai employs a system similar to typologically more common systems in which there is a set of first and second person

subject proclitics and suffixes and a separate set of first and second person object suffixes, rather than a system with direct and inverse. (39) and (40) illustrate the first and second person subject proclitics, while (41) illustrates the first person subject proclitic in combination with a first person plural suffix.

- (39) hu \emptyset xa-ni
 1,SUBJ talk-INDIC
 ‘I talked.’ (E)
- (40) hin \emptyset xa-ni
 2,SUBJ talk-INDIC
 ‘You (sg.) talked.’ (E)
- (41) hu \emptyset xa-naʔaʔ-ni
 1,SUBJ talk-1PL-INDIC
 ‘We talked.’ (E)

(42) to (44) illustrate first and second person object suffixes.

- (42) wu.kat-ap-ni
 see-1SG,OBJ-INDIC
 ‘He/she/it/they saw me.’ (E)
- (43) wu.kat-is-ni
 see-2,OBJ-INDIC
 ‘He/she/it/they saw you (sg.).’ (E)
- (44) wu.kat-awas-ni
 see-1PL,OBJ-INDIC
 ‘He/she/it/they saw us.’ (E)

Because obviation is only relevant in cases of contrasting third persons, this difference between Kutenai and Algonquian in the treatment of first and second person arguments does not affect the fact that the obviation systems are similar. However, it does mean that the Kutenai inverse is used in only one of the situations in which the Algonquian inverse is used, namely those situations in which both arguments are third person.

The fact that only third persons partake in the obviation system of Kutenai is also reflected in the possessive construction. While, as shown above, nouns possessed by third persons are syntactically obviative in Kutenai, nouns possessed by first or second persons are not, as illustrated in (45).

- (45) niʔ-s piʔak-s k-sawsaqa ka titi ...
 the-OBV long.ago-OBV SUBOR-live 1,POSS grandmother
 ‘Long ago when my grandmother was still alive, ...’ (Tape NS28, Story 6, Line 1)

If *ka titi* ‘my grandmother’ were syntactically obviative, it would trigger obviative subject marking on the verb *ksawsaqa* ‘live’. The fact that it does not shows that *ka titi* ‘my grandmother’ is proximate, thereby showing that first and second person possessors, unlike third person possessors, do not cause the possessed noun to be obviative.

9. First and Second Person Obviation

Although the examples in the preceding section seem to show that first and second persons do not participate in the obviation system and do not compete with third persons for proximate status, there is one construction in Kutenai that led Garvin (1948: 172, 178; 1958: 5) to conclude otherwise. In fact, it is this construction that led Garvin to conclude that the Kutenai system is not an obviation system in the Algonquian sense. My discussion here of this construction will be rather brief, since I am not sure at this point what its proper analysis is, and further research is required.

Garvin analyses verb forms like that in (46), which involves a suffix *miʔ*, as indicating a first person or second person obviative.

- (46) hu wu·kat-miʔ-ni xaʔɕin-ʔis
 1,SUBJ see-MIL-INDIC dog-3,POSS
 ‘I saw his [prox] dog [obv].’ (A)

Taken literally, the notion of a first person obviative would suggest that first persons compete with third persons for proximate status. But the examples in the preceding section show that this is not so. Clauses with a first person subject acting on a proximate third person object do not bear the obviative subject suffix and do not generally bear the suffix *-miʔ*. Clauses with a third person subject acting on a first person object do not generally inflect for obviative participants, and do so only when the third person subject is apparently obviative due to the presence of a distinct proximate third person participant in the surrounding discourse. And nouns possessed by first persons are not syntactically obviative, in contrast to nouns possessed by third persons, as discussed in the preceding sections.

It is worth contrasting the example in (46), in which the *miʔ* is obligatory on the verb, with (47), in which *miʔ* is obligatorily absent.

- (47) hu wu·kat-i xaʔɕin
 1,SUBJ see-INDIC dog
 ‘I saw the/a dog [prox].’ (E)

The crucial difference between (46) and (47) is that the *object* is obviative in (46) while it is proximate in (47). This suggests that *miʔ*, rather than indicating a first person obviative, actually indicates a first person subject acting on a third person obviative object. This would account, not only for the contrast between (46) and (47), but also for the fact that first and second persons do not otherwise seem to participate in the obviation system of Kutenai.

The suffix *-miʔ* also occurs on nouns in Kutenai, as in (48).

- (48) asʔ ʔup-iʔ-ni titu-nis-miʔ
 PTCL die-TRANS-INDIC father-2,POSS-1/2,POSS:OBV,POSS'D
 ‘He [prox] just killed your father [obv].’ (Tape NS7, Story 3, Line 117)

The apparent function of *-miʔ* in (48) is fairly clear: it indicates a first or second person possessor and an obviative possessed noun. However, the possessed noun is not obviative because it is possessed; rather it is obviative because there is a distinct third person proximate participant in the same clause, namely the subject of the clause. Again, we find no reason to posit first or second person obviatives.

There is, however, a range of cases where the proper analysis of *-miʔ* is less clear, such as (49).

- (49) qakiʔ-ni k-u ʔumaɕ-miʔ
 say-INDIC SUBOR-1,SUBJ laugh-MIL
 'He said that I laughed.' (E)

The use of *-miʔ* in (49) conforms to the following generalization: when the subject of a complement clause with an intransitive verb is first or second person, and the subject of the main clause is third person, the complement verb is apparently invariably marked with *-miʔ*. These cases are not covered by the generalizations covering (46) to (48), which describe *-miʔ* in terms of a first or second person and a distinct third person obviative participant. Since the verb in (49) is intransitive, the *-miʔ* cannot be indicating an obviative object. Analysing examples like (49) in terms of some notion of first or second person obviative is more plausible, since the analog of (49) with a third person subject of the subordinate clause distinct from the subject of the main clause involves the obviative subject suffix on the verb, as in (50).

- (50) qakiʔ-ni maʔ k-ʔumaɕ-s
 say-INDIC Mary SUBOR-laugh-OBV,SUBJ
 'Mary said that he laughed.' (E)

Because of examples like (49), and a number of other types of examples, the proper analysis of the suffix *-miʔ* awaits further research. Even if examples like (49) eventually lead us to posit some notion of first and second person obviation, the range of environments in which this occurs is clearly distinct from that of third person obviation, as the examples in (46) and (47) as well as those in section 8 make clear. And while this would entail one significant difference between the obviation system of Kutenai and that of Algonquian languages, this difference should not obscure the fact that if we restrict attention to third person, the obviation system of Kutenai is strikingly similar to that of Algonquian languages, both at the syntactic level and at the discourse level.

10. Obviation at the Discourse Level

While the above discussion demonstrates considerable similarity between the grammatical systems surrounding obviation in Kutenai and in Algonquian languages, perhaps the most critical question is whether the two systems function similarly at the discourse level, since I assume that in both Kutenai and Algonquian, obviation is ultimately a discourse phenomenon, albeit a fairly grammaticized one. Demonstrating the functional similarity of the two obviation systems at the discourse level is not as easy as demonstrating the grammatical similarities, and I will approach this problem in two ways. First, I will discuss a number of factors governing proximate versus obviative choices in Kutenai at the discourse level, backed up by text counts, and then demonstrate similar patterns in some of the Ojibwa texts in Nichols (1988) and the Cree text in Dahlstrom (1986: 153-185). Second, in an appendix to this paper, I go through a portion of a Kutenai text, illustrating these principles in action. I believe that those familiar with how obviation works at the discourse level in Algonquian languages will recognize the similarity from this Kutenai text.

Grafstein (1984: 35) makes the interesting claim that in Ojibwa, obviatives can occur in discourse only if they are obviative for syntactic reasons or if they have antecedents in the text which are obviative for syntactic reasons. This is clearly not true for Kutenai, as illustrated by the text segment in (51).

- (51) ?at qu?qanax-i na?kyu
 IMPERF go.somewhere-INDIC fox
 'Fox [prox] would go somewhere
- sanit#a?-s-i nupi?ka-s_?t
 house.be.there-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC Nupi?ka-OBV-and
 Nupi?ka [obv] would have a house there and
- ?at qunax-i
 IMPERF visit-INDIC
 He [prox] [i.e. Fox] would visit.' (Tape 126, Side A, Lines 4-5)

The subject of the second clause in (51), *nupi?ka-s* 'Nupi?ka-obv' is obviative although that character has never been mentioned before in the text. Example (27), repeated here as (52), is similar: *?awu-s* 'cow.elk-obv' is obviative in the second sentence but the elk have not been mentioned previously in the text.

- (52) qa-nax-i_?t ?akinmituk-s
 go.along-INDIC-and river-OBV
 'He [prox] went along and there was a river [obv].
- qu-s ?inyi-s qaqap-s-i ?awu-s
 there-OBV across-OBV be-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC cow.elk-OBV
 Across there was a herd of cow elk [obv].' (Tape 20, Story 2, Lines 7-8)

It is not clear, however, that this is a general difference between Kutenai and Algonquian languages. For one thing, despite Grafstein's claim, there do appear to be occasional instances in which an obviative occurs in Ojibwa texts that is not itself obviative and that does not have an antecedent in the text. The subject of the sentence in (53) is obviative, but there is no syntactic reason for it to be obviative and it has no antecedent in the preceding text.

- (53) Mii-sh gii-debwewdamnid niw wesiinyan.
 VAI2,CON,3' 3' NA,3'
 and he could be heard yelling that animal
 'And an animal [obv] could be heard yelling.'
 (Nichols 1988: 92; Parry Island Text V: Shaking Tent Episode, Sentence 13)

Second, while instances of this type of obviative are not common in the Ojibwa texts in Nichols (1988), they are more common in the Cree text in Dahlstrom (1986: 153-185), such as the example given above in (28). Hence even if there are dialects of Ojibwa in which Grafstein's claim holds, it does not appear to be true of Algonquian languages in general.

The traditional descriptions of the proximate versus obviative contrast in Algonquian languages carry over equally well to Kutenai, but these descriptions are inevitably vague and do not allow one to predict for any participant in any discourse context whether it will be proximate or obviative. As in Algonquian languages, the length of a proximate sequence in Kutenai – a sequence of consecutive clauses sharing the same proximate participant – can be a single clause or be very long. A complete characterization of the obviation system of Kutenai or that of Algonquian languages would require that we specify the discourse principles that determine, on the basis of the discourse context and/or the cognitive state of the speaker, which participant should be proximate at any point in a

discourse. Each time a clause is produced, the speaker must decide whether to continue the previous proximate sequence or begin a new one, and a complete characterization of an obviation system requires that we correctly characterize the basis on which this decision is made. While it is likely that the determining factors are ones that are only indirectly reflected in the observable properties of texts, characterizing the discourse properties of an obviation system in terms of observable properties of texts is at least an important first step. It is also useful if we wish to determine how similar the discourse factors governing the obviation system of Kutenai are to those governing the obviation system of Algonquian languages. The question is what determines when a proximate shift occurs (to use the expression Goddard 1990: 318 uses in reference to Fox).

The critical question then can be stated as follows: how can we predict for a given clause whether or not a proximate shift will occur? The vast majority of clauses in Kutenai texts conform to the principles in (54) and (55).

- (54) a. If the participant that is proximate in the immediately preceding discourse occurs in the given clause, a proximate shift rarely occurs.
 b. If the participant that is proximate in the preceding discourse does not occur in the given clause and the clause does not contain any participant as high on the animacy hierarchy (inanimate < nonhuman animate < animate) as the proximate participant in the preceding discourse, a proximate shift rarely occurs.
 c. If the proximate in the preceding discourse was human and the verb of the given clause bears the ‘indefinite subject’ suffix, a proximate shift will not occur.
 d. If the clause is embedded in the preceding clause, either as a complement clause or as a relative clause (or if the preceding clause is embedded in the given clause), a proximate shift never occurs.
- (55) If none of the four conditions in (54) is satisfied, a proximate shift can occur and more often than not does occur.

The ‘indefinite subject’ verb form mentioned in (54c) involves a suffix *-am* that is illustrated in (56).

- (56) k-qaki k-~~ɬ~~-~~ɕ~~inax-am-is_ϕ ...
 SUBOR-say SUBOR-IRREAL-go-INDEF,SUBJ-OBV,SUBJ-and
 ‘He [prox] said that someone [obv] should go and ...’ (Tape 126, Story B, Line 24)

This verb form is commonly used in contexts where English would use a subject *someone* and only occurs with intransitive verbs (a separate passive construction is used in analogous contexts with transitive verbs). Clauses with verbs of this form never take a separate nominal subject. These indefinite subjects do not normally cause a proximate shift to occur, presumably because of the low importance associated with their referents.

Table 5 gives text count data bearing on the generalizations in (54) and (55). In order to ensure that a variety of texts and speakers are represented, the data in Table 5 is based on the first 20 clauses from 10 texts (skipping the first clause in each text, since a proximate shift cannot occur in the first clause).

Table 5
Number of Proximate Shifts by Text Environment for Kutenai

	Total Number	Number of Proximate Shifts	Percentage
Previous proximate continues in current clause	122	6	4.9%
Previous proximate not in current clause and			
-current clause contains only less animate participants	23	2	8.7%
-current clause contains indefinite subject verb	11	0	0%
-otherwise, but one clause embedded in other	5	0	0%
Otherwise	<u>39</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>71.8%</u>
Total	200	34	17%

Of the 161 clauses in this sample satisfying one of the four conditions in (54) only 8 involve a proximate shift. Of the 39 clauses satisfying none of these four conditions, 28 (or over 70%) involve a proximate shift. While there are a relatively large number of exceptions to (55), namely 11 cases in 39 clauses in which a proximate shift does not occur despite the fact that none of the four conditions in (54) hold, it should be noted that 8 of these 11 cases occur in just one of the ten texts examined. In this one text, in only 2 out of 10 situations in which none of the conditions in (54) holds does a proximate shift occur. In this text, which is a Coyote story, Coyote remains proximate even in clauses referring only to other animate participants. The other 9 texts conform much more strongly to the principle in (55): in 26 out of 28 situations where none of the four conditions in (54) hold, a proximate shift occurs. Why the one text not conforming to (55) is different from the other texts in this sample is not clear. A larger sample of texts would have to be examined to determine whether it really is atypical. One possibility is that there are two 'styles', as Goddard (1990: 331) suggests for Fox, one in which a single participant remains proximate over a large stretch of text, with other participants obviative, the other in which there are a much higher number of proximate shifts as the action shifts from one participant to another. Even if this is the case, the question remains whether this choice of 'style' is predictable from other properties of the text, such as a single clear central character.

It should be emphasized that although the principles in (54) and (55) describe the distribution of proximate shifts on the basis of textual characteristics, I do not intend to imply that the choice of proximate shifts is directly determined by characteristics of the preceding text. Rather, it is far more likely that these proximate shifts are determined by fairly abstract properties in the speaker's cognitive representation underlying the text and the distribution of such things as attention and point of view by the speaker, and that the textual characteristics outlined in (54) and (55) are simply very symptomatic of these underlying determining factors. These principles (or descriptive generalizations) are useful for present purposes because they make it possible to compare the discourse factors underlying the Kutenai obviation system with that found in Algonquian languages.

Table 6 gives data for Ojibwa texts analogous to that given in Table 5 for Kutenai. This data is based on the first 20 clauses (skipping the first one) in 10 texts from Nichols (1988).

Table 6
Number of Proximate Shifts by Text Environment for Ojibwa

	# Proximate		
	Total	Shifts	Percentage
Previous proximate continues in current clause	137	6	4.4%
Previous proximate not in current clause and			
Current clause contains only less animate participants	32	3	9.4%
Otherwise, but one clause embedded in other	2	0	0%
Otherwise	<u>29</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>100%</u>
Total	200	38	19%

The Ojibwa data in Table 6 is remarkably similar to the Kutenai data in Table 5, illustrating that proximate shifts occur in similar environments in the two languages. In the sample texts from both languages, a proximate shift occurs in 4% to 5% of the situations in which the previous proximate continues in the current clause. In both languages, a proximate shift occurs in about 9% of those situations in which the previous proximate is not mentioned in the current clause and the current clause contains only less animate participants. In both languages, a proximate shift does not occur in embedded clauses in which the proximate of the main clause is not mentioned. The largest difference is that while the Kutenai texts contained some instances of proximate shifts failing to occur when none of the specified conditions occurred (in 11 out of 39 cases), there are no exceptions in the Ojibwa texts. In other words, the principle in (55) actually describes the Ojibwa texts examined *better* than it does the Kutenai texts.

Table 7 provides similar data for Cree. Unlike the Kutenai and Ojibwa data, the data for Cree is based on a single text, one that occurs in Dahlstrom (1986), and is based on the first 100 clauses of that text.

Table 7
Number of Proximate Shifts by Text Environment for Cree

	# Proximate		
	Total	Shifts	Percentage
Previous proximate continues in current clause	64	2	3.1%
Previous proximate not in current clause and			
Current clause contains only less animate participants	10	0	0%
Otherwise, but one clause embedded in other	7	0	0%
Otherwise	<u>19</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>52.6%</u>
Total	100	12	12%

The Cree data is again similar to that for Kutenai, although with Cree there are a greater number of exceptions to the principle in (55): a proximate shift occurs in 9 of the 19 cases in which none of the conditions in (54) hold.

It is not clear to what extent the differences in this data between the Cree text and the Ojibwa texts represent real differences between the principles governing obviation in these two languages rather than accidental differences between the particular texts examined. As mentioned above, one of the Kutenai texts is rather different from the others in this respect.¹¹ The crucial point for present purposes is that, at least on the basis of the

¹¹ It is worth noting that although none of the texts in the sample of Ojibwa texts that are the basis for Table 6 provide any exception to the principle in (55), I am aware of at least

texts examined, Kutenai exhibits a pattern intermediate between that of Cree or Ojibwa, clear evidence, I assume, that the discourse factors underlying the Kutenai obviation system are similar to those in Algonquian languages. While the text count data cited in Tables 5 to 7 provides an objective basis for this conclusion, I suspect that a particularly persuasive argument for this conclusion for many Algonquianists would be an example of a Kutenai text illustrating obviation at the discourse level and for that reason an excerpt from a text, with some accompanying discussion, is given in an appendix.

11. Summary of Similarities

(57) summarizes properties shared by the obviation systems of Kutenai and Algonquian languages.

- (57) a. There is an inflectional category of nouns, where one value, obviative, is formally marked, the other value, proximate formally unmarked.
- b. There is an inflectional category of verbs, distinguished by whether the subject of the verb is proximate or obviative, the formally marked form of the verb being the one used when the subject is obviative.
- c. Only one participant per clause can be proximate, though syntactically obviative participants may not be marked obviative morphologically, their obviative status being demonstrable on the basis of triggering obviative verb forms in agreement.
- d. A given clause may lack a proximate participant.
- e. Nouns possessed by third persons are obligatorily obviative.
- f. There are two forms of transitive verbs with two third person arguments, a direct form and an inverse form. With direct forms, the proximate participant (if there is one) is interpreted as the notional subject. With inverse forms, the proximate participant (if there is one) is interpreted as the notional object.
- g. It is possible, though not frequent, for both arguments of a transitive verb to be obviative. In such a case, there is still the possibility of a contrast between direct and inverse, though the distinction can no longer be characterized in terms of the contrast of proximate and obviative, and the double obviative inverse is quite infrequent in texts.
- h. The inflectional category of proximate participant is associated with some discourse notion like ‘primary’ or ‘most topical’ participant at a given point in the discourse.
- i. A given participant may maintain status as the proximate participant over an extended segment of text, although it is also the case that shifts in the identity of the proximate participant may occur quite frequently.
- j. Proximate participants tend to remain proximate as long as they continue to be mentioned, but if they are not mentioned in a given sentence, a different participant generally takes over proximate status.

one apparent exception elsewhere in the texts in Nichols (1988), namely the example cited in (i), which I assume involves some sort of clause boundary between the second and third words.

- (i) Aaniish ni-baabaagaakwa'iged mindimooyensan zaagewenijin.
 VAI,CON,3 NA,3' VAI,CON,3'
 well he [prox] raps at the door little old lady [obv] who appears
 Well, he raps at the door and a little old lady appears.
 (Nichols 1988: 276; Wenabozho Text II:

Wenabozho and the Berries in the Bowl (Normalized version))

(58) summarizes some of the differences between the obviation systems. I ignore differences in the actual form of morphemes and the morphological structure of forms coding the relevant features, focusing on differences with syntactic significance.

- (58) a. Kutenai lacks a grammatical distinction between animates and inanimates.
 b. All nouns in Kutenai, regardless of animacy, inflect for the contrast of obviative versus proximate.
 c. Kutenai nouns possessed by third persons do not inflect as obviative unless the possessor is obviative, though such nouns trigger obviative subject agreement on agreeing verb forms, regardless of whether the possessor is proximate or obviative.
 d. The contrast of direct and inverse in Kutenai applies only to clauses containing two third person participants.
 e. Multiple proximates within a sentence are very limited in Kutenai if at all possible.
 f. Kutenai exhibits a phenomenon that may require a notion of first or second person obviative, though the proper analysis is unclear.

12. Obviation in Other Languages

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the term ‘obviation’ has been applied to phenomena in a number of non-Algonquian languages other than Kutenai, but in none of these other cases is there the type of similarity I have documented for Kutenai. In the cases of Tümpisa Shoshone and Warlpiri mentioned at the beginning of this paper, for example, there is not a systematic contrast between proximate and obviative, with a single participant bearing proximate status at each point in the discourse. Nor are these categories of nominal or verbal inflection the way they are in Algonquian and in Kutenai. And there is no inverse construction used when the notional subject is obviative. The term ‘inverse’ is also a term that has been applied to constructions in a number of languages (e.g. Cherokee, by Scancarelli 1986: 81; Nootka, by Whistler 1985: 228; Inuktitut, by Hewson 1991: 870; Nocte, a Tibeto-Burman language, by Delancey 1981: 641-2). In some cases (such as Inuktitut and Nocte), the similarity to the inverse construction in Algonquian is the role of a person hierarchy, the inverse form of a verb being used when the notional object is higher on a person hierarchy than the notional subject. In other cases (such as Cherokee and Nootka), there is an alternation between two forms used for transitive verbs with third person arguments, the term ‘inverse’ being applied to the form that is used when the notional object is more ‘topical’. To what extent the discourse conditions under which the construction called an ‘inverse’ is used resemble those in which the inverse is used in Algonquian languages (and in Kutenai) is generally not clear. I suspect that while the discourse conditions for such constructions may resemble to some extent the discourse conditions under which the Algonquian inverse is used, that resemblance may be no more than the resemblance between the English passive and the Algonquian inverse, and probably not as strong as the resemblance between the Kutenai inverse and the Algonquian inverse, as described above. But perhaps most crucially, in most cases in which the term ‘inverse’ has been applied to constructions in other languages, those languages lack an inflectional category of obviation on nouns, a system whereby nouns possess one of two values that are analogous to proximate and obviative in Algonquian and Kutenai.

Wiyot, for example, as described by Reichard (1925: 75), exhibits an alternation which bears at least a superficial similarity to the alternation between direct and inverse in Algonquian, illustrated by (59) and (60).

(59) Louis dicga'miL Mary. ‘Louis loves Mary’

(60) Louis dica'yoγiL Mary. 'Mary loves Louis'

The relative order of the two nouns in (59) and (60) is reportedly fixed, and the form of the verb, along with the order of the two nouns, indicates which noun is subject and which is object. Both forms bear a third person subject suffix *-iL*, and Reichard characterizes the morphological difference between the two verb forms as a difference between two different object suffixes, the usual suffix being *-am* (or *-aw*), as in (59), the less common suffix being *-o·γ* (or *-o.g*), as in (60). However, since the meaning is reversed, depending on which so-called object suffix is used, at least one of them must be more than an object suffix, and the difference in function is certainly reminiscent of a direct-inverse contrast. Unfortunately, this alternation is not discussed in Teeter (1964), and examination of a number of Reichard's texts failed to uncover any instance of verb forms analogous to that in (60), even in discourse contexts in which one would expect to find an inverse in Algonquian. But most crucially, none of the forms in (59) and (60) exhibits evidence of an inflectional category of obviation, either on nouns or on verbs, so even if Wiyot had a grammatical inverse construction, it apparently lacked a grammatical obviation system. But the resemblance between Kutenai and Algonquian lies not just in that both have an inverse construction, but more specifically in the existence of an inflectional category of obviation with clear syntactic significance.

Boas (1920: 373) specifically notes the parallelism between Kutenai and Algonquian in their use of a "second third person", noting that "we find hardly anywhere else a similar development of this tendency". But he also obscures the similarity by later drawing (1929: 4) comparisons to Eskimo and Sahaptin as well. What is often called "fourth" person in reference to Eskimo is simply a type of reflexive form, indicating possession by the subject in the case of nouns, identity of subordinate subject to main clause subject in the case of verbs (cf. Fortescue 1984: 143-155, Harper 1974: 16-17). It thus does not occur as an inflectional category of nouns except to indicate properties of the possessor, unlike the proximate:obviative contrast of Kutenai and Algonquian, and does not generally occur as a category of verbs that are not subordinate. It is possible (at least in West Greenlandic, cf. Fortescue 1984: 153-154) for a main clause verb to be inflected for "fourth person" subject, with the interpretation that the subject of that verb is the topic of the preceding discourse, but the use of a verb form inflected for third person subject (rather than fourth person) does not appear to indicate that the subject is *distinct* from the topic in the preceding discourse. While I have seen no hard data on the frequency of this construction, it appears to be far less frequent than the use of proximate subject verb forms in Kutenai and Algonquian which indicate (in the absence of a noun subject) that the subject of a clause is the proximate participant in the preceding discourse. In addition, while an obviative form of a subordinate verb form can indicate lack of coreference with the main clause subject in Kutenai and Algonquian, this is true only if the main clause is inflected for a proximate subject. Thus the subject of the subordinate verb is interpreted as being the same as the subject of the main verb if the two verbs are both inflected for proximate subject or both inflected for obviative subject; they interpreted as distinct if the two verb forms differ in obviation status. In other words, in Kutenai and Algonquian, identity of the two subjects is not directly coded by the subordinate verb, but can only be inferred from a comparison of the main verb and the subordinate verb. But the so-called "fourth person" verb forms in Eskimo directly code coreference, and thus the contrast between the two verb forms is a kind switch reference system. With respect to Sahaptin, I have not had the opportunity to check primary sources, but it is clear from Boas' remarks that he is referring to the use of ergative case marking in Sahaptin in clauses with two third person participants. While there is perhaps a parallel with Kutenai and Algonquian in that both systems involve distinguishing two third person participants, I assume there is otherwise little parallel, the similarity likely being due to the fact that both systems contribute to reference tracking.

The terms ‘inverse’ and ‘obviative’, and ‘proximate’ are applied by Hewson (1991: 870) to Inuktitut, although his application of these terms is not identical to what Boas (1929: 4) applies the term “fourth person” to, in his discussion of Eskimo in general. But the Inuktitut case, even accepting Hewson’s analysis, differs from Kutenai and Algonquian in a number of clear respects. First, there is no contrast between direct and inverse for transitive clauses with two third person participants. Second, what he describes in terms of an obviative:proximate contrast does not involve a category of nominal morphology (except for possessed nouns). And third, what he characterizes as obviative in the verb morphology is apparently restricted to the object of verbs with third person subjects. In short, the contrast between the categories Hewson applies the terms ‘proximate’ and ‘obviative’ to is not sensitive to discourse context.

Another non-Algonquian language to which the terms ‘inverse’ and ‘obviation’ have both been applied is Navajo, but close examination makes clear how different the Navajo phenomena so named are from the Algonquian phenomena, and helps to drive home just how similar the Kutenai obviation system is to Algonquian. The terms ‘direct’ and ‘inverse’ are applied by Thompson (1989: 137) (*inter alia*) to the well known Navajo alternation between *yi-* and *bi-* forms of verbs, and the discourse conditions in which these two forms are used seems to resemble the Algonquian inverse at least to the extent that the English passive does. Thompson also applies the term ‘proximate’ to one status that arguments of clauses in Navajo can possess, though he does not use the term ‘obviative’ for arguments lacking this status. Proximate status in Navajo is certainly similar to the Algonquian proximate to the extent that proximate status serves to “distinguish between two third persons, often serving to represent the main character in a narrative ...” (Young and Morgan 1980: 187, quoted by Thompson 1989: 141).

However, despite this similarity to Algonquian, there are very significant differences. For one thing, while proximate status in Navajo is a status associated with participants in a clause, it is not a grammatical category of nominal morphology but only of verbal morphology: the contrast of proximate to nonproximate is a contrast realized only by different pronominal prefixes on verbs. Thus while these prefixes may agree with nouns in a clause, the inflection of nouns does not vary with their status as proximate or nonproximate, in contrast to both Algonquian and Kutenai. Furthermore, while proximate versus nonproximate is also a category of verbal inflection in Algonquian and Kutenai, in these languages it is the obviative which is formally marked, and the proximate unmarked, both on nouns and on verbs. But in Navajo, it is the so-called proximate which is formally marked: on Thompson’s analysis, the verbal prefix *ji-* indicates a proximate subject, while the absence of *ji-* indicates a nonproximate subject. Similarly, while a prefix *ho-* indicates a proximate object, a zero in the same slot indicates a nonproximate object. Young and Morgan employ the term “fourth person” for the category Thompson uses the term “proximate” for; this term has been applied in the *opposite* sense to Algonquian languages, namely to obviatives (e.g. Frantz 1966: 50). In Algonquian languages, and in Kutenai, it is generally the case that the notional subject and notional object compete for proximate status in the sense that generally either one or the other is proximate. And while it is possible for both to be obviative, as discussed above in section 6, this arises (at least in Kutenai) only in specific discourse contexts in which both participants are distinct from a third participant which is proximate in the surrounding discourse. But it is never possible for both to be proximate simultaneously.¹² In Navajo, however, it is possible for both

¹² It is, of course, possible for both arguments to lack obviative morphology, but only because inanimate nouns in Algonquian and possessed nouns in Kutenai do not inflect for

subject and object to be proximate, showing that the subject and object do not compete for proximate status in the way they do in Algonquian and Kutenai. And while clauses in which both arguments are obviative are possible in Algonquian and Kutenai, such clauses are infrequent; but the most frequent clauses in a Navajo text count described by Thompson (1989: 150) are precisely clauses in which *neither* argument is proximate. Thus, while there may be some relation between proximate participants and main characters in narrative in Navajo, it is clearly not the same relation found in Kutenai and Algonquian. Finally, the relationship between the categories which Thompson employs the terms 'direct' and 'inverse' for is different from the relationship between the categories bearing those names in Algonquian and Kutenai. In the Algonquian and Kutenai case, the inverse necessarily involves an obviative notional subject and usually involves a proximate notional object. As Thompson applies these terms to Navajo, however, neither of these associations hold. He specifically distinguishes clauses in which the object is proximate from those which he describes as inverse, so that on his use of the terms, the object is *never* proximate in an inverse clause. And according to his counts, in 90% of the clauses he labels as inverse, the *subject* is proximate, something which is impossible in Kutenai and Algonquian. Hence in a large number of respects, there are significant differences between inverse and proximate in Navajo, as Thompson uses these terms, and the Algonquian phenomena with which these terms are traditionally associated. But these are equally differences between Navajo and Kutenai, and with respect to each of these differences, Kutenai patterns like Algonquian. This makes clearer the extent to which the Kutenai obviation system resembles that of Algonquian languages.

The preceding discussion should not be taken as criticism of the choice of terminology by those who have applied terms like 'inverse' and 'proximate' to phenomena in other languages. If we were to invent new terms for phenomena in every language encountered, our description of languages would obscure similarities, and while Algonquianists may take the traditional terminology used in describing Algonquian languages for granted, they may not realize the extent to which that terminology renders Algonquian languages more opaque to non-Algonquianists than would be the case if more conventional terminology were used. But broad use of terminology can also obscure differences and not only increases the possibility of people being unaware of these significant differences but can also make it more difficult for people to see just how similar to Algonquian obviation the *Kutenai* obviation system is. A number of people have reacted to my claim that the Kutenai possesses an obviation system very like that found in Algonquian languages by responding that many American Indian languages possess inverse constructions, or obviation systems, or fourth persons. But no other American Indian language, to my knowledge, does in fact possess an obviation system that is nearly as Algonquian-like as the Kutenai system I have described in this paper. In fact, I am not aware of any other American Indian language that possesses a system any more similar to the Algonquian one than the Navajo one I have described briefly above.

12. Explaining the Similarity

The similarity I have documented here between the obviation systems of Kutenai and Algonquian seems too striking to be accidental; no other non-Algonquian language has been described as having a system that resembles the Algonquian system in the way the Kutenai one does. Ives Goddard (p.c.) has pointed out to me that we really do not know enough about reference tracking systems in enough languages to be sure that there really

their obviative status. As discussed in section 4, however, tests show that such nouns are covertly or syntactically obviative.

are no languages elsewhere with systems similar to the one found in Algonquian languages. While his point is well-taken, it should be stressed again that one of the crucial properties shared by the systems of Algonquian and Kutenai is the existence of a *morphological* system of obviation, which among other things and in conjunction with the verb form, serves to distinguish subject and object. Since that is the kind of phenomenon that people have long seen as important to mention in describing a language (unlike reference tracking systems), and since different methods of distinguishing subject and object have been an object of interest for typologists and other linguists for a number of years, it seems likely that if any of the languages which have been described to this extent did possess a system remotely like the Algonquian one, this would probably have attracted someone's attention and been mentioned in the typological literature. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine hypothetical systems resembling the Algonquian one, but not to the extent that the Kutenai system does (such as a system in which possessed nouns are not necessarily obviative). But even cases like that have not, apparently, been attested. Furthermore, while it must be conceded that it is possible that there might be a language with a system very like the Algonquian one that is spoken somewhere else in the world and that has been described, but not come to the attention of anyone familiar with the Algonquian system, it seems especially unlikely that any other language of *North America* has a system remotely like the Algonquian one, since the existence of such a system would probably have come to the attention of Algonquianists by now. At the very least, then, we can say that no language within North America other than Kutenai appears to have a system remotely like the Algonquian one. I am therefore inclined to conclude that the explanation is most likely not coincidental, but historical. There are, of course, two possible historical explanations, common genetic origin and influence due to contact. It must be emphasized that whatever speculations one may offer in answer to the question of which of these explanations is correct, the answer is necessarily, at least given current knowledge, far more speculative than the conclusion that it is probably one or the other (or both). The main purpose of this paper has been to document the similarity, rather than to speculate as to its explanation. Having said that, let me offer a number of observations that are relevant to the question.

Various people, most notably Sapir (1929), Haas (1965), and Greenberg (1987), have proposed that Kutenai is genetically related to Algonquian. The proposals of Sapir and Greenberg are that Kutenai and Algic (Algonquian plus Yurok and Wiyot) form two of three branches of a group Almosan, the third branch consisting of Salish, Wakashan, and Chimakuan. While Haas used a question, 'Is Kutenai Related to Algonquian?', as the title of her paper, she concludes (p. 88) that the "evidence adduced is too substantial to be explained away as entirely the result of borrowing or accident", apparently an affirmative answer to her question. But it is not clear to me that Haas' evidence is any greater than what one might expect to be due to chance. Similar remarks apply to the resemblances noted by Greenberg. Morgan (1992) assesses the possibility of a relationship between Kutenai and Algonquian, primarily examining the potential cognate sets listed by Haas, eliminating a number of them on the basis of the apparent morphological structure of the Kutenai forms cited. He claims that there are at most 24 potential cognate sets and concludes that the list is about what one would expect due to chance. While further examination of the question deserves attention, there seems little doubt that any genetic relationship would be at most a remote one. Boas (1920: 373) specifically claims that the similarity between the obviation systems in Kutenai and Algonquian is "due to a contact phenomenon, because we find hardly anywhere else a similar development ...".

The possibility of a relationship of Kutenai to Salish is also raised by Haas (1965), though with more hesitation than she demonstrates regarding a relationship of Kutenai to Algonquian. More recently, Morgan (1980, 1991, 1992) has argued for a relationship of Kutenai to Salish. He discusses (1992) 144 potential cognate sets and claims (1991: 494)

that of 99 Kutenai grammatical morphemes, some 42 are potentially cognate with Salish morphemes. If we interpret Morgan's data as suggesting that Kutenai is at least more closely related to Salish than it is to Algonquian, then, if the similar obviation systems were due to common genetic origin, that would mean that the obviation system is descendent from some language ancestral to at least Salish, Kutenai, and Algic but which was lost in Salish (plus whatever other languages might belong to this group). And even if we ignore the question of Salish, I assume it to be uncontroversial that Algonquian is more closely related to Yurok and Wiyot than it is to Kutenai, so this common system would apparently have been lost in Yurok and Wiyot as well, since, as far as I am aware, neither Yurok nor Wiyot exhibits evidence of an obviation system.¹³ Thus, while the similarity could reflect a common retention, the specific hypotheses that have been put forward regarding the relationship of Kutenai to other languages would entail the loss of such a system from a variety of languages.

There are, in addition, a number of considerations that lend credibility to the hypothesis that the similarity is due to contact. One of these is an observation sometimes directed at possible lexical cognates: the systems seem *too* similar to be a common retention from what would be at best a remote genetic relationship. A second observation is that, while the Kutenai system resembles the Algonquian one at the syntactic and discourse levels, there is little similarity at the morphological level. Certainly the actual morphemes do not seem to resemble each other (cf. Kutenai *-s* 'obviative', *-aps* 'inverse'). A third observation is that, since obviation is primarily a discourse phenomenon, it seems to be the kind of system that would be particularly easily borrowed: it seems easy to imagine how bilingual speakers speaking one language with an obviation system and one without might eventually adopt something analogous to obviation into the language originally lacking an obviation system. Fourth, while obviation may be more deeply ingrained into the morphology of Algonquian languages, Kutenai morphology is considerably more agglutinative, and the obviative suffix occurs last on nouns and second-last on verbs (followed only by the indicative suffix) and does not interact with other morphology. Fifth, it is worth noting that among the resemblances noted by Morgan (1992) between grammatical morphemes of Kutenai and those of Salish is the use of *-s* in morphemes associated with third person.¹⁴ In Kutenai, it shows up in the third person possessive suffix *-ʔis*, and since obviation is specifically associated with third person (ignoring the Kutenai phenomenon discussed in section 9), the obviative *-s* could be seen as a further instance of third person *-s*. If one tries to imagine a language acquiring an obviation system due to contact, it is natural that morphemes that originally had some other meaning would be reanalysed as indicators of obviation and while I will not offer any more specific scenario, morphemes that were already associated with third person would perhaps be among the prime candidates for such reanalysis. Finally, there are a couple of nonlinguistic factors suggesting that contact may have occurred or is at least not improbable. First, Kutenai has been adjacent to Blackfoot in recent times. Second, in the Kutenai texts I have examined, the Blackfeet are mentioned more often than all other non-Kutenai groups combined. Third, the Kutenai territory originally extended eastward out onto the plains, into territory that has more recently been occupied by speakers of Blackfoot (Morgan 1991: 3). And fourth, Denny (1990) argues for the Columbia Plateau, which is relatively close to the modern location of Kutenai, as the original location of the Algonquians. This suggests that there may have been ample opportunity for contact between Kutenai and Algonquian languages over a lengthy period of time. While I think

¹³ See the discussion of Wiyot in section 11 above.

¹⁴ Greenberg (1987: 286) also observes the use of *s* in third person morphemes in Bella Bella (Wakashan), Quileute (Chimakuan), and Yurok. The significance of this is not clear.

that it would be a mistake to assign much significance to any of the observations in this paragraph, I do think they should be pointed out for the record.

Even if the most likely explanation for the similarity is contact, a number of scenarios are possible. While the possibility that the influence went from Algonquian to Kutenai (or some ancestor of Kutenai) seems most likely, the possibility of influence the other way is at least possible. If it is less likely, that is because the period of time in which the influence could have occurred would have to have been shorter, since the influence would have to have been on Proto-Algonquian (or some ancestor of Proto-Algonquian), whereas the influence from Algonquian on Kutenai could have been at any time up to the recent past. Furthermore, there are other logical possibilities. There might have been some language that was neither an Algonquian language nor an ancestor of Kutenai which served as a conduit for the influence, developing an obviation system due to contact with Algonquian and later passing it on to Kutenai (or even a development in the opposite direction). Or such a third language might have been the original language with an obviation system, passing it on to both Kutenai and Proto-Algonquian. Such a language might have been related to Algonquian, or to Kutenai, or it might have belonged to some other genetic group, either one still extant or one with no surviving members. Nor should one assume that the explanation must involve a *choice* between a genetic explanation and one due to contact, since Kutenai and Algonquian might be remotely related and the similarity might be a common retention that has survived only because continued contact has reinforced the similarity. If one is going to speculate, one must admit the wide range of possibilities that cannot be eliminated.

My primary conclusion is a descriptive one: Kutenai possesses an obviation system that bears striking resemblance to the obviation system of Algonquian languages, both at the syntactic level and at the discourse level. This resemblance is sufficiently striking that, given the apparent absence of any documented case of any other language possessing a system even remotely like the Algonquian one, the resemblance seems unlikely to be accidental. While any further comment is necessarily highly speculative, a number of considerations suggest that contact is the more likely explanation for the similarity.

Appendix: Discussion of a Kutenai text Segment, Illustrating Obviation at the Text Level

The following consists of two segments from a Kutenai text entitled “Chickadee, Frog, and Wolf” (Tape 20, Story 2). The numbering reflects a numbering convention employed by Mrs. Elizabeth Gravelle, who transcribed and translated these texts, that convention involving approximately one number per clause. The morphological divisions, as well as the morpheme-by-morpheme glosses, are my own. The free translations provided are essentially those of Mrs. Gravelle, though I have added parenthetical comments in square brackets, primarily indications of which participants are proximate [prox] and which obviate [obv]. The symbol || at the beginning of a line indicates a proximate shift, following a similar notation in Goddard (1990). We join the text in progress (at line 40), at which point Chickadee has been the proximate character.

40-44. qaki?-ni “ ... ”
 say-INDIC
 ‘He [prox] [i.e. Chickadee] said “ ... ”’

Note that (45) conforms to the principle that if the previous proximate (here Chickadee) continues into the current clause, it will normally remain proximate. Since Chickadee is proximate, Wolf must be obviate. Since proximate Chickadee is the notional object here, and obviate Wolf the notional subject, an inverse clause is used.

45. n-uḥpaḥ-naps-i ka·kin-s_ϕ
 PRED-hear-INVERSE-INDIC wolf-OBV-and
 ‘Wolf [obv] heard him [prox] and’

(46) involves a proximate shift. This conforms to the fact that the previous proximate, Chickadee, is not mentioned in the current clause. Note that although (46) involves a verb of going, Wolf is actually moving toward Chickadee, so the proximate shift is not due to Chickadee’s not being part of the current scene. Chickadee is not mentioned again, however, until (51).

46. || ǰinax-i ka·kin_ϕ
 || go-INDIC wolf-and
 || ‘Wolf [prox] went over and’

47. k-ḥaxam_ϕ
 SUBOR-arrive-and
 ‘when he [prox] got there’

- 48-49. taxa-s n-ʔumiϕiʔt-i niʔ-s kiḥq̄aḥi[ʔ]-s_ϕ
 then-OBV PRED-butcher-INDIC the-OBV elk-OBV-and
 ‘Then he [prox] butchered the elk [obv]’

50. k-uḥ ʔumiϕiʔt
 SUBOR-finish butcher
 ‘when he [prox] finished butchering’

51. taxa-s qak-iḥ-ni miḥq̄aqaqas-s
 then-OBV say-TRANS-INDIC chickadee-OBV
 ‘He [prox] then told Chickadee [obv]’

The notation [(obv)] in (52) and elsewhere indicates a noun that is obviative syntactically though not morphologically. Note that the presence of the obviative subject suffix on the verb in (52) makes it clear that the subject is Chickadee and not Wolf. Conversely, the *absence* of obviative marking on the possessed noun *ʔaḥq̄aḥtʔis* ‘his children’ makes it clear that it is Wolf’s children, not Chickadee’s.

52. k-ḥ ǰinyaxa-s ʔaḥ-q̄aḥt-ʔis
 subor-IRREAL go.get-OBV,SUBJ PL-child-3,POSS
 ‘That he [obv] should go and get his [prox, i.e. Wolf’s] children [(obv)].’

(53) involves a proximate shift from Wolf back to Chickadee. Note that (53) coincides with the first instance of a clause that does not refer to Wolf: every clause in the previous proximate sequence, (46) to (52), involves reference to Wolf. This proximate shift does involve a change of scene with Chickadee leaving the place where Wolf is. Note also that (53) also employs marked word order: nouns generally follow the verb in Kutenai. The fronting of the noun referring to Chickadee is presumably related to the proximate shift to Chickadee.

53. || taxa-s miḥq̄aqaqas ǰinax-i_ϕ
 || then-OBV chickadee go-INDIC-and
 || ‘Then Chickadee [prox] went and’

54. ?at n-?aqɕxu?-ni ʔaŋ-[?]is
 HABIT PRED-pound.holes-INDIC moccasins-3,POSS
 ‘He [prox] would pound holes in his [prox] moccasins [(obv)].’
55. ?at ʔa ɕinax-i
 HABIT REVERS go-INDIC
 ‘He [prox] would return.’
56. ?at qak-iʔ-ni ka-kin-s
 HABIT say-TRANS-INDIC wolf-OBV
 ‘He [prox] would tell Wolf [obv].’
57. k-?umiɕ-ik-i ʔaŋ-[?]is
 SUBOR-break-REFL-INDIC moccasins-3,POSS
 ‘that he [prox] wore out his [prox] moccasins [(obv)].’
58. k-qa-taʔ ʔaxam
 SUBOR-NEG-can arrive
 ‘that he [prox] couldn’t make it there.’

(59-60) involves an inverse, since the previous proximate, Chickadee, is notional indirect object, and the notional subject, Wolf, is obviative. As in Algonquian languages, the notional indirect object functions as primary object in clauses with two objects.

- 59-60. ʔaʔakʔak-s ?at qa-nmiʔ hamat-ikɕ-aps-i ʔaŋ-s
 different-OBV HABIT quickly give-IND.OBJ-INVERSE-INDIC moccasin-OBV
 ‘He [obv] would quickly hand him [prox] different moccasins [obv].’
61. ?at ʔa ɕinax-i
 HABIT REVERS go-INDIC
 ‘He [prox] would take off again.’
62. n-?aqsaqʔaʔiʔ ?umiɕxu ni?-s ʔaŋ-[?]is
 PRED-several.times put.holes.in the-OBV moccasins-3,POSS
 ‘He [prox] would put holes in his [prox] moccasins [(obv)].’

The proximate shift in (63-64) again coincides with the first clause that does not mention the previous proximate. Again, the new proximate noun, *ka-kin* ‘Wolf’ is fronted before the verb.

- 63-64. || taxa-s ka-kin n-?in-i ɕinax-i
 || then-OBV wolf PRED-be-INDIC go-INDIC
 || ‘Then Wolf [prox] went himself.’
65. ɕinyax-ni ?aʔ-aqʔt-ʔis
 go.get-INDIC PLUR-child-3,POSS
 ‘He [prox] went to get his [prox] children [(obv)].’

A section of the text (consisting of about 25 clauses) is left out here, only for reasons of space. In the text left out, there is a proximate shift to another character away from Wolf. When we rejoin the text in (90), there is a proximate shift back to Wolf. Note that this proximate shift does not involve fronting of the proximate noun.

...

90. || taxa-s ʔa ʔaxax-i ka·kin_ϕ
 || then-OBV REVERS arrive-INDIC wolf-and
 || ‘When Wolf [prox] got back’

(91) involves a clause that does not refer to the previous proximate, but the only participant, the blood, is less animate than the previous proximate so there is no proximate shift and the subject of (91) is obviative. This continues until (94), the next clause that mentions the proximate character Wolf.

91. sanmuxunak-s-i ni?-s waŋmu-s
 there.in.pile-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC the-OBV blood-OBV
 ‘the blood [obv] was there in a pile.’

92. n-ʔin-s-i ʔaʔu#upkup-s
 PRED-be-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC rotten.wood-OBV
 ‘It [obv] was rotten wood [obv].’

93. n-anuhus-s-i
 PRED-red-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC
 ‘It [obv] was red.’

Note that although there has been no reference to the proximate character Wolf in the preceding three clauses, (94) is understood to refer to Wolf without the use of a noun since the use of obviatives in the preceding text indicates continuation of Wolf as the proximate character and the use of a verb without the obviative subject suffix in (94) means that the previous proximate is subject.

94. k-ʔaxam-maʔ ʔaʔ-aqaʔ-ʔis_ϕ
 SUBOR-arrive-COMIT children-3,POSS-and
 ‘When he [prox] arrived there with his [prox] children [(obv)]’

95. [ta]xa-s qu-s qawxax-i
 then-OBV there-OBV go.there-INDIC
 ‘He [prox] then went over there [obv]’

96. taxa-s wi#ka#ma-ni
 then-OBV open.mouth.wide-INDIC
 ‘Then he [prox] opened his mouth wide’

97. taxa-s qaʔwiy-ni k-ϕxaʔ ʔik_ϕ
 then-OBV think-INDIC SUBOR-FUT eat-and
 ‘He [prox] thought he [prox] was going to eat it [obv].’

(98) and (98’) are analogous to (91) to (93) above: they do not refer to the proximate character but do not involve a proximate shift since they refer only to a less animate object. The subject of (98) is clear for pragmatic reasons, but, given the absence of a subject noun (*ʔaku#aks* ‘meat’ is the complement of the copula verb), it must be something distinct from the proximate character in the preceding text.

98. qa-ʔin-s-i ʔaku#ak-s
 NEG-be-OBV,SUBJ meat-OBV
 ‘It [obv] was not meat [obv].’

- 98'. n-ʔin-s-i ʔaʔuʔupkup-s
 PRED-be-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC rotten.wood-OBV
 'It [obv] was rotten wood [obv].'
- 99-100. taxa-s qawxax-i_ϕ niʔ-s wuʔu-s
 then-OBV go-INDIC-and the-OBV water-OBV
 'Then he [prox] went there to the water [obv].'
101. taxa-s n-ʔikuʔ-ni_ϕ
 then-OBV PRED-drink-INDIC-and
 'and then he [prox] took a drink.'
102. na-s qanaʔ ʔupx-ni qu-s yunu-s
 this-OBV up.there see-INDIC there-OBV on.top-OBV
 'He [prox] saw [from the reflection] way up there [obv].'

(104) to (109) represents a somewhat unusual sequence of clauses in which there is reference to two other animate characters, Chickadee and Frog, without a proximate shift. All of the participants in these clauses are obviative and the verbs of these clauses all inflect for an obviative subject. The explanation for this is apparently that we are seeing the action in this section of text 'through the eyes' of the proximate character Wolf. The preceding clause in (103) involves a verb of seeing, as does the next clause to refer to Wolf, in (110). It is worth noting how Mrs. Gravelle captures this in her English translations by the use of the progressive in the English forms, which has a similar effect.

104. paʔ qu-s ʔa-tʔ qakawicʔinukuna-s-i miʔqaqas-s
 indeed there-OBV ASP smile-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC chickadee-OBV
 'Chickadee [obv] was smiling down.'
- 105-106. qu-s naʔta-s qakanaqnak-s-i
 there-OBV above-OBV sit.this.way-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC
 'He [obv] was there sitting this way way up there [obv].'

Note that the subject of (107) is fronted, not because there is a proximate shift (there is none here) but because there is a shift from one obviative character, Chickadee, to another, Frog.

107. watak-s ʔa-tiqanmitak-s-i
 frog-OBV be.busy.do.something-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC
 'Frog [obv] was busy doing something.'

(108) and (109) are both double obviative direct clauses, in which both subject and object are obviative.

108. skikiʔ ʔitkin-s-i ʔakwaskuʔis-is
 PROG make-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC dried.meat-OBV
 'She [obv] was putting meat [obv] up to dry.'
109. n-ʔitmasiʔt-s-i ʔakuʔak-s
 PRED-dry-OBV,SUBJ-INDIC meat-OBV
 'She [obv] was drying meat [obv].'

(110) is the first clause since (103) to refer to the proximate character Wolf. The absence of obviative subject marking on the verb in (110) makes it clear that Wolf is to be

interpreted as subject, despite the absence of any noun phrase mentioning Wolf and despite the number of clauses that have elapsed since the previous reference to Wolf.

110. [ta]xa-s qanaki#wiɕkik-ni_ɕ
 then-OBV look.up.there-INDIC-and
 ‘Then he [prox] looked up there and’
111. qaki?-ni k-ɬhis-iɬ ?akuɬak-s
 say-INDIC SUBOR-IRREAL-give.food-PASSIVE meat-OBV
 ‘he [prox] asked that he [prox] be given some meat [obv].’

The text continues on from here, but I believe the excerpt I have discussed should give the flavour of when proximate shifts occur in Kutenai.

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