

Incorporation and Classification in Ojibwe Syntax: Key Distinctions and Potential Explanations

Ojibwe exhibits a robust capacity for both verbal classifiers and noun incorporation. Where these processes have been covered in the generative syntax literature, noun incorporation dominates the discussion—Ojibwe has been used as an example in theoretical debates on noun head/phrase movement in incorporation (see Barrie & Mathieu 2016, following Baker 2009, for example). Classifiers offer another look into the Ojibwe verbal complex and could further complicate this debate. This analysis suggests that verbal classifiers originate within the *vP* complex while incorporated nouns originate within the *VP* and undergo raising. Additionally, different explanations are explored as to what motivates this movement, including the possibility that incorporating finals act as probes. The syntactic evidence affirms a diachronic transition from incorporation to classification (Mithun 1986). This diachronic transition potentially explains the pre-medial -aa- as well as certain post-medials, though the origin of post-medials is less clear. Medials that otherwise seem to be in the middle of the cline from incorporation to classification (Biedny et al. 2021, O'Meara 1990), such as environmental and body part medials, unsurprisingly resist clear syntactic explanation and offer room for further research.

References

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