Some aspects of stem formation in Oji-Cree

The Algonquian verb stem is traditionally described as consisting of a template of three elements, identified by their position relative to each other: initial, medial and final (following the description by Bloomfield (1946, 1958, 1962) uniformly adopted by subsequent scholarship). However, in recent years it's being recognized more and more widely that that templatic approach does not adequately describe either the relation between stem components or the range of possible stem types. This talk is part of a larger project to characterize the relation between stem components beyond the traditional templatic approach, based on large amounts of original data. Focusing on Oji-Cree, an under-described dialect of Ojibwe, an Algonquian language spoken in Canada, I will discuss two constructions that have not received adequate attention in the literature: bi-partite stems (1) and stems that involve an incorporation of a possessed noun (2).

For both constructions, the question will be asked of the obligatory presence of overt lexical material at the left edge of the verb stem, a requirement that has been known in Algonquian literature as a left-edge requirement (Goddard 1988, Dahlstrom 2000)

(1)  a. pimi-√pah-too along-run-INTR ‘S/he is running (along).’
     b. mino-√shimo-ø well- dance- INTR ‘S/he dances well.’

(2)  a. tahki-sit-e cold-foot-AI ‘S/he has cold feet.’ / ‘Her/his feet are cold.’
     b. nit-oshki-taapaan-e 1-new-car-AI ‘I have a new car.’

Providing large amounts of original data, I show that there is no such thing as a unified left-edge requirement as there is no uniform template for all verb stems. I analyze the structural and semantic relations between stem components in stems of types (1) and (2), showing that the structures are vastly different. In both cases, the left-edge element contributes to the semantic composition of the stem, however, it does so in completely different ways. Specifically, in bi-partite stems in (1), the verb stem corresponds to an event, and the left-edge element participates in event composition (cf. Slavin 2012). The stems in (2), on the other hand, involve an incorporation of a small clause, with the left-edge element acting as a predicate (cf. Slavin, to appear).

The data and analyses presented here confirm that the structure of the stem in Algonquian languages cannot be reduced to a predefined template, and as in most polysynthetic languages, the stem here is a complex and dynamic entity whose structure can only be understood through a careful analysis of large amounts of data.

References