A study of the semantics of Ojibwe cross-clausal agreement

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Ojibwe (Algonquian) exhibits optional cross-clausal agreement (CCA), where a verb may agree with an argument of its sentential complement (in addition to its local subject). In (1-a), the main verb shows agreement with its local first person subject only. In (1-b), the main verb shows agreement with its local first person subject and with the third person object of its complement clause. These examples are identical in all other respects.

(1) a. ni-gikendan gii-bashkizw-aad (no CCA)
1-know.VTI(IND) PAST-shoot.VTA-2>3(CONJ)
'I know that you shot him.' (Lochbihler and Mathieu To appear:23)

b. ni-gikenim-aa gii-bashkizw-aa-d (CCA)
1-know.VTA-DIR.3(IND) PAST-shoot.VTA-2>3(CONJ)
'I know that you shot him.' (Lochbihler and Mathieu To appear:23)

CCA arises if an argument of the lower clause moves to the left periphery of the embedded clause, thereby entering the local domain of the matrix v, which bears the agreement probe relevant for CCA (e.g., Bruening 2001; Lochbihler and Mathieu To appear). This is represented in (2). This movement does not apply in non-CCA constructions.

(2) $[_{\text{CP}} \ldots [_{v\text{P}}\ v_{[u\varphi]} \ldots [_{\text{CP}}\ pro \ldots [_{v\text{P}} \ldots\ pro\ ]\ ]\ ]\ ]$

Some have claimed that the presence of CCA indicates topicality of the argument which participates in CCA (e.g., Branigan and MacKenzie 2002). Bruening (2006) and Fry and Mathieu (To appear) (henceforth FM) show that this cannot be correct because many elements which are difficult to topicalize, such as *wh*-phrases and quantified expressions, may also participate in CCA. FM (see also Bruening 2006) hypothesize instead that the semantic contribution of CCA is similar to that of ECM constructions in English. Consider (3).

(3) a. I see that John is an idiot. (*that*-clause)

b. I see John to be an idiot. (ECM)

These examples contrast in multiple respects: whereas (3-a) is compatible with an indirect source of evidence for the embedded proposition (e.g., hearsay or inference) and is epistemically neutral, (3-b) is compatible with a direct source of evidence (e.g, perception) and reports a *de re* belief (Moulton 2009). FM make the comparison with Ojibwe CCA on the following basis. Example (1-a) may be uttered in a context where the speaker has (i) heard from a friend that the addressee has shot someone or (ii) inferred from some state of affairs that the addressee has shot someone. Example (1-b) may be uttered in a context where the speaker has witnessed the addressee shoot someone. This distinction is reminiscent of that relevant for ECM semantics.

Here, we discuss the limitations of FM's work and how their hypothesis can be tested. First, in terms of methodology, the authors present to participants scenarios such as those just described and ask them whether sentences such as those in (1) are compatible with those scenarios. The problem is that by having someone report the scenarios, the participants may interpret all of the contexts as hearsay (Lesage et al. 2015). Second, as FM observe, scenarios such as those described above do not tease apart whether CCA semantics concerns evidentiality or attitude ascription. Following FM, we present minimally different contexts which differ in either propositional attitude or source of evidence. Finally, we discuss how the syntactic account summarized in (2) is compatible with recent semantic analyses of clausal embedding according to which the attitude is not contributed by the embedding verb but by the left periphery of the clause (Moulton 2009; Kratzer 2013; Bogal-Allbritten 2016).