Some issues concerning Algonquian WH questions*

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This paper surveys a number of long-standing issues revolving around Ojibwe WH questions. The general question of whether the WH word is within or outside the CP (similar to relative clause antecedent) in Algonquian is discussed. In addition, the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis is briefly touched upon. A split DP approach, where the agreement serves as D, and NPs are in A-bar position seems to be the most promising approach. A brief comparison is made of verbal morphology associated with WH questions and relative clauses in some varieties of Anishnaabemowin (Ojibwe) and Nishnaabemwin. The main conclusion is that more research is needed, both on individual Algonquian languages and across them.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to bring together the threads of some issues which concern Algonquian WH questions. There are two issues which I will first discuss independently of each other, and subsequently discuss how they are related.

ISSUE 1. Are Algonquian WH questions words in a different syntactic position (i.e. outside the clause) from those in English? A related question asks if there is variation in this property across Algonquian languages.

ISSUE 2. Does some version of the Split DP hypothesis hold in Algonquian, whereby components of DPs are either generated in different positions, or move to different positions? If so, does this property underlie what is commonly referred to as the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis, following Wiltschko (2002), who argues for one version of this approach for Mohawk?

This paper contains a number of proposals which are not fully developed but which I still feel are worth consideration at this time. Section 2 gives a brief overview of the question as to whether or not WH questions in Algonquian have the structure of

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relative clauses or clefts, arguing that the answer is still not clear and raising the possibility that the answer could vary within the Algonquian language family. Section 3 synthesizes a number of approaches to a Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (Speas 1990; Baker 2001; Wiltchko 2002) and suggests a split DP approach for Algonquian, based on Vilks (2000), where the N is in A-bar position and the D in argument position. Finally in section 4, I delve into a long-standing interest of mine, which concerns the nature and distribution of verb morphology found on questions and relative clauses in Ojibwe.

2. The Position of WH Elements in Questions

It is a well-known property of Ojibwe WH questions that WH questions must appear on the far left of the clause and the verb associated with them must appear in a subordinate or non-main clause form, as in the Nishnaabemwin example in (1), where the verb is in the conjunct.¹

(1) Wenesh gaa-bkobiised (Nishnaabemwin)
    who IC-fall(conj3sprox)
    ‘Who fell into the water?’ Valentine (2001: 980)

A number of authors have argued that the WH element in Algonquian is in a position external to that in which WH elements in English questions are found. Specifically, proposals have been made that WH elements are external to the regular CP projection (Truitner and Dunnigan 1972 for Southwestern Chippewa; Johns 1982 for Rainy River Ojibwe; Reinholtz and Russell 1995 and Blain 1997 for Plains Cree). Cleft-like WH questions have been claimed for Egyptian Arabic, Bahasa Indonesian and Palauan (see Cheng 1997).

Johns (1982) argues that the WH word is outside of the CP based on morphological parallels with relative clauses (Truitner and Dunnigan 1972). WH questions in Rainy River Ojibwe, like relatives clauses, have conjunct morphology found affixed on the right of the verb. On the right of the verb, one finds either kaa- (a relative pronoun) or initial change (IC), a form of ablaut affecting the verb stem. Both relative pronouns and initial change are lacking in non-WH environments, so question constructions appear to have double WH marking, the independent question word itself and the kaa-/IC. Johns argues that the WH questions words are in the same position as the antecedent of the relative clause, i.e. external to the CP, thus accounting for the extra WH marking, kaa-/IC, i.e. one WH internal to the CP, and the other WH in antecedent position.

Reinholtz and Russell (1995) come to a similar conclusion from a different perspective, based on their analysis of Cree as a pronominal argument language and quantifiers, as shown in (2).

(2) [DP awêna]i [CP OPi-kâ-proj-kî-sipwêhtet]
    ‘Who (is it) that left?’

¹ Abbreviations used in the paper are conj= conjunct; prox= proximate; IC= initial change; part= participle; TA= transitive animate; TI= transitive inanimate; obv= obviative; pl= plural.
The view that the WH word is external to the CP, and not in the conventional spec CP position has not been adopted by all linguists working on Algonquian languages. A number of other linguists analyse WH questions as being located within CP. Brittain (2001) argues this for Western Naskapi, and Bruening (2001) does so for Passamaquoddy.\(^2\)

### 2.1 Relevant evidence for WH position

The presence of initial change in WH questions can be considered an argument for an external WH if it can be shown that IC duplicates the WH marking.\(^3\) Johns (1982) argues that IC is a WH marker in Rainy River Ojibwe. Brittain observes that IC can also be found in non-WH environments (Brittain 2001: 173). However, it seems that in these instances, focus must be involved. Focus and WH movement are similar, as Blain (1997) observes, and can be considered related phenomena (see Kahnemuyipour 2001 and references cited therein).

Another test for the position of the WH question words is whether or not multiple WH questions are allowed. Blain (1997), who argues for a cleft analysis for constructions containing WH words in Plains Cree, points out that multiple WH questions would be impossible under such an analysis, since there is only one argument position on the left of the cleft structure. She presents evidence from Plains Cree that multiple WH questions are indeed ungrammatical. Similarly Nishnaabemwin does not appear to allow multiple WH, as shown in (3b), which is the closest sentence I could get to the target 'Who bought what?', and is not a multiple WH question.

\[(3)\]  
(a. *awîna ê-itwê-t kîkwây  
who conj-say so-3 what  
‘Who said what?’  
\[\text{[Nêhiyawêwin]}\]  
Blain (1987: 90)  

(b. wenesh gaa-bidood gegoo  
who rel.pron-buy3 anything/something  
‘Who bought something?’  
\[\text{[Nishnaabemwin]}\]  

In contrast Brittain (2001), who argues that WH question words are in spec CP, finds multiple WH sentences are acceptable in Western Naskapi.

Both Blain (1997) and Brittain (2001) show that Strong and Weak Crossover facts do not appear in either Plains Cree or Western Naskapi. Brittain, however, argues that this property does not diagnose the presence of WH movement in the languages because properties of the obviation and direct/inverse systems override crossover effects.\(^4\)

In summary, the evidence is suggestive but not conclusive regarding the external position of WH questions in Algonquian languages. In addition, there is language

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\(^2\) Bruening (2004) explicitly argues against the possibility that WH questions in Passamaquoddy are relative clauses in a seven page appendix. Addressing this work is beyond the scope of this article and remains for the future.

\(^3\) One might imagine the WH in questions to be some sort of complementizer agreement but at the cost of losing the parallel with relatives clauses which are superficially identical in all respects.

\(^4\) In fact Brittain argues that crossover effects emerge under restricted conditions.
variation, and it may be that some Algonquian languages, e.g. Ojibwe and Cree have WH questions outside CP, while others, e.g. Western Naskapi, do not.

3. A Split DP Hypothesis

The Pronominal Argument Hypothesis is based on the work of Jelinek (1984) and Baker (1996). The Pronominal Argument Hypothesis states that in some languages the NPs are not the argument but instead the arguments are either the agreement forms themselves (Jelinek 1984), or little pro’s which are linked to the agreement (Baker 1996). More specifically, under this hypothesis, the NPs outside the verb are adjuncts to the clause with word order of no consequence. One of the problems with the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis is that it entails that languages with this property are significantly distinct from other languages. A related problem is NPs clinging in an unordered set to the CP structure lacks familiar parallels. Baker (1996) likens it to clitic left dislocation in languages like Italian.

Russell and Reinholtz (1996), Vilks (2000) and Wiltschko (2002) all make an interesting claim. What if both the pronominal/agreement elements and the NPs are in standard hierarchical positions? In other words, they propose some version of the split DP hypothesis whereby the NP and the D are generated in different positions.\(^5\)

Consider the familiar DP structure given in (4). This structure is found in languages we are familiar with: English, French, etc.

\[(4) \quad \text{DP} \]
\[\quad \text{D} \quad \text{NP} \]
\[\quad \text{N} \]

Wiltschko (2003), based on unpublished work by Dominique Sportiche, claims that in Mohawk the pronouns or D’s are in AGRP and the NP’s are generated in theta position, as in (5).

\[(5) \quad \ldots \quad \text{DP=AGrP} \quad \text{Wiltschko (2002) Mohawk} \]
\[\quad \text{D'=AGR} \]
\[\quad \text{D=AGR} \quad \ldots \quad \text{VP} \]
\[\quad \text{V} \quad \text{NP} \]

Wiltschko argues that one of the benefits of this approach to the properties of Mohawk is that parameterization between languages is not seen in terms of one macroparameter (of Pronominal Argument type languages), but instead in terms of microparameters, thus allowing for accounts which are similar but not identical to Mohawk (or French). By

\(^5\) Vilks (2000: 107) outlines this idea, while it is the central claim of Wiltschko (2002). The idea is also implicit in Russell and Reinholtz (1996), who argue that pronouns are in theta position and that that NPs and related elements are part of an articulated hierarchical structure, and not merely adjuncts.
equating D and AGR, Wiltschko accounts for the fact that Mohawk NPs are bare. She further accounts for the fact that quantifiers and WH determiners can be discontinuous from the NP by assuming that they appear in Spec DP position, and therefore will be more closely associated with the agreement/verb than the overt nominal. Optionality of nominals results from the rich features of D in Mohawk. There are numerous other properties found in Mohawk which fall out from Wiltschko’s assumption that D=AGR in this language. One issue not discussed in Wiltschko, however, is the variety of positions in which the overt NP can be found. She states that she assumes that the NP moves only covertly to its D, but does not address the various linear positions in which it does appear.

Vilks (2000) argues that in Algonquian the pronouns on the verb are generated in theta position (i.e. no little null pro’s) within the verb complex (see Reinholtz and Russell 1995; 1996), and that the optional NP’s we observe are generated in a variety of syntactic discourse positions, e.g. Focus (see Dahlstrom 1991, 1995).

Assuming then that the agreement on the verb is D and the NPs, when present, are outside the verb (CP), this proposal is also a version of the Split DP Hypothesis. The determiner/pronoun elements are verb internal and the NP elements to which they are linked are predicate-like elements (Longobardi 1994) in syntactic, but non-theta, positions. The discourse nature of Algonquian word order has been extensively researched and discussed in Dahlstrom (1987, 1991, 1995), who argues that NPs to the left of the verb are Topic and Focus.

The split DP proposal for Algonquian is reminiscent of the Jelinek/Speas account outlined in Baker (2001) for Warlpiri, where he describes Warlpiri as having discontinuous NPs, with the agreement being a clitic pronoun and the NP portion being a secondary predicate (Speas 1990), i.e. the NP being in a legitimate structural position. The difference here is that a variety of structural positions apart from theta positions is posited.

3.1 Advantages of Split DP approach in Algonquian

One of the benefits to the split DP proposal for Algonquian clause structure is that the abrupt distinction between configurational and non-configurational languages is eliminated. Algonquian IS configurational in the sense that structural hierarchy is relevant all the way up the tree from the verb internal complex up. Where it differs from English, etc. is that it satisfies theta positions with D elements only (in fact is the opposite claimed for Mohawk by Wiltschko where only NP appears in theta position), and that NP kind or type elements are found in other syntactic (A-bar) positions to which the D is linked (the linking between the agreement and the NP must take place in any analysis). Pronouns will not be outside the verb/clause (except for emphasis). The same results for Mohawk follow: optionality of NP’s and the fact that nominals do not require determiners, unlike English, French, etc. The seemingly free word order of the nominals derives from the varying discourse properties of the external NP positions, which can be subtle and often result in the same English translation.

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Ritter and Rosen (2005) argue that all agreement in Algonquian is A-bar agreement, i.e. there is no A-syntax because of deficient/missing T.

NPs to the right of the verb are not as clear. They could be simple predicates.
As the Split DP approach affords a continuum of properties of this sort, it predicts that related Algonquian languages may vary slightly. Branigan and Mackenzie (2002) discuss the fact that in Innu-aimun, demonstratives have become more prevalent in that language. We might view them as starting to assume the properties of determiners, and in fact this is proposed in Cyr (1993). Branigan and Mackenzie suggest that Innu-aimun "demonstratives" are not demonstratives, but instead pronouns adjoined to the clause. We can easily imagine a scenario whereby these external pronouns begin to perform the function of the verb-internal D’s, and Split DP properties start to erode.\(^8\)

There are numerous questions remaining to be answered. Among them is the question of how to prevent NP’s from merging in argument position in Algonquian. Perhaps the answer lies in the full referentiality of Algonquian D pronouns, unlike English determiners, which cannot act like pronouns. Further research into a typology of nominals in “non-configurational” languages is needed.

### 3.2 Split DP’s and WH Questions

Does an answer to Issue 2 where agreement = D in Algonquian force an answer to Issue 1 whereby WH is external to the clause? It is just this kind of idea which led Reinholtz and Russell (1995) to posit a cleft-like structure for WH questions in Cree.

\[(6) \text{Anti- Locality Condition (ALC)}\]

A pronoun must be locally quantifier free. \hspace{1cm} \text{Reinholtz and Russell (1995)}

Under this view, the fact that the pronoun is in theta position entails that a WH word, which is a quantifier, must be outside the clause. The version of the Split DP Hypothesis adopted here automatically leads to an analysis where the WH word is outside the CP, since the verb = CP.

Oda (2002), in an exploration of Irish WH cleft questions as pseudo-clefts based on Paul (2001), proposes that in a WH cleft type language, the WH word is a predicate to a nominalized subject on its right. This proposal fits nicely with the general direction here, that independent elements are predicates, and that all referential material is associated within the verbal complexes. We also note that Bloomfield (1958: 141) states of Eastern Ojibwe that “interrogative particles are predicative”.

### 4. Nishnaabemwin Questions

In Rainy River Ojibwe Johns (1982) found that both questions and relative clauses utilized either IC or a relative pronoun prefix kaa- (plus conjunct morphology on the verb.)

\[(7) \text{a. Questions: IC, kaa-} \hspace{1cm} \text{b. Relative Clauses: kaa-, IC} \]

As far as could determined at the time, the IC form of the verb was indefinite in some

\(^8\) It is interesting to note that in Western Naskapi (Brittain 2001: 174-175) the presence of an independent relative pronoun awân differentiates a free relative clause from a sentential complement. Both constructions have the verbal prefix kâ-, which therefore cannot be a WH-element in this language.
sense, while the *kaa*- form was definite (roughly speaking).

Rhodes (1998) reports that in Nishnaabemwin, questions are found with IC (+conjunct); however, relative clauses have a participle form of the verb which involves IC but nominal morphology, rather than simple conjunct, on the right of the verb. This is illustrated in examples (8) and (9), from Rhodes (1998), with some modification of glosses.

(8) Wen-esh gaa-daapnang nmoookmaanens
    who IC-he picked it up-CONJ1-pen knife
    ‘Who picked up my pen knife?'

(9) Wgii-nokaaznaawaa bembahgo-jig
    they-used-them [those-who-ride-(horseback)]
    ‘Riders used them.’ IC-ride-Pl.participle
    (c.f. e-verb-conjunct *e-bmibhigwaad*)

Note that Nishnaabemwin uses either e- or IC. There is speaker preference for one or the other.

In (9) we see the subject, which is a relative clause (at least in the English gloss 'those who ride'), contains the plural participle form *-jig*. Valentine (2001) provides corroboration for Rhodes' generalization with numerous examples. Thus Rhodes’ generalization looks as follows:

(10) Questions: IC/e- + conjunct Relative Clauses: IC/e- + participle

Valentine points out, however, that we can find questions with participle morphology (instead of conjunct morphology) on the verb, as in (11) and (12). At the same time, he observes relative clauses with conjunct morphology (instead of participle morphology), as in (13) and (14) (glosses modified somewhat).

(11) wenen ge-wa-wiidgemaajin
    who-an.obv. IC-will-marryTAconj.part.3s/3ob
    ‘Who is he going to marry?’ Valentine (2001: 980)

(12) wanesh niw genwaabndangin
    what those IC-look.atTI-conj.part.3s
    ‘What things is he looking at?’ Valentine (2001: 981)

(13) gaa-bi-waabmaad niwi
    IC-come-seeTA-conj3s/3obv that/those
    ["I only spoke to him for a short while” said the other officer,] who had come to see him.
    Valentine (2001: 589)

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The participle form of the verb involves a) initial change b) third person only and c) a nominal ending which can only be unambiguously discerned in the plural form. Goddard (1987) shows that relative clauses in Fox are participles. See discussion below.
Valentine reports that variation between participle and conjunct occurs in relative clauses within individual speakers, so we can assume it is not dialectal. We might therefore revise our generalization in (10) to something like that in (15).

(15) a. Questions: IC/e- + conjunct OR IC/e- + participle
   b. Relative Clauses: IC/e- + participle OR IC/e- + conjunct

The pattern in (15) now resembles to some degree the pattern in Rainy River in (10), except that where Rainy River holds a consistent conjunct form of the verb, and shows a variation in definiteness or possibly presupposition, via alternating between initial change vs. kaa-, Nishnaabemwin has initial change (or e-) as the constant, with variation between the participle versus the conjunct form of the verb. In fact we might hypothesize that the kaa- plus conjunct (Rainy River) is equivalent to the IC/e- plus participle form of the verb (Nishnaabemwin). Both may be construed as more definite and are the unmarked forms found in relative clauses. Equally, the initial change plus conjunct form of the verb in both Rainy River and Nishnaabemwin are the unmarked form found in questions, and can associated with indefiniteness or lack of presupposition. These latter forms of the verb may appear in relative clauses as marked forms. However things turn out to be more complicated than this simple mapping.

Rhodes (p.c.) points out that the suffixes on third person singular proximate conjunct forms are identical to the singular participle suffixes (see footnote 9). This means that the examples in (13) and (14) are ambiguous in between a IC/e- plus participle versus IC/e- plus conjunct, in terms of form. Thus only the plural form in the proximate (and also the obviative – see below) shows a distinct participle form in the relatives, through suffixation of the unambiguous ending -jig.

Similar facts involving the use of the participle are also observed in Truittner and Dunnigan (1972) for Southwestern Chippewa. Nishnaabemwin and Southwestern Chippewa differ from Fox, as described by Goddard (1987), where Fox has a distinct participle form both in the singular, as well as the plural. Goddard proposes that Fox participles are based on demonstrative pronouns. It is not clear that such a claim could be substantiated for Nishnaabemwin, although Valentine (2001) does report 3pl. pronouns ending in –ig for some speakers, and Bloomfield (1958: 28) also makes a connection between the plural form of pronouns and participle forms.

4.1 Some Wikwemikong data

Elicitation of relative clauses from a speaker from Wikwemikong (Nishnaabemwin) produced initially the conjunct form.

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10 See Gillon (1999) for a discussion of presupposition in questions in Inuktitut.
11 Truittner and Dunnigan (1972) refer to these morphemes as “verbal pronoun suffixes.”
12 I am restricting the following discussion predominantly to direct argument of the verbs, e.g. subjects and objects.
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(16) ngii-noopnananaa nini gaa-debnaad esbanan
    1-past-follow- man IC-catch(conj3) racoon-obv
    ‘I followed the man who caught the racoon.’

After I suggested a participle form like gaa-debnaajin (IC-catchPart.Obv), instead of gaa-debnaad in (16), the consultant decided that the participle form is actually better than the conjunct and was to be preferred.

According to Truitner and Dunnigan (1972: 361), Southwestern Chippewa has an obviative morpheme -in(i), which shows up on the verb of the relative clause when it is transitive with two third person arguments, with the object being obviative. When the head/antecedent is proximate, the -jin is triggered by the obviation of the object.

Rhodes (1998) shows also that in Nishnaabemwin such forms are found in relative clauses with obviative heads/antecedents. Truitner and Dunnigan do not give examples with obviative heads. Valentine (2001) reports variation in the use of participles, and the –jin is sometimes not found, as in (13) and (14) above, which are ambiguous in form. In none of Valentine's examples is the –jig (proximate plural) missing. If we view the presence of -jin to be conditional on the obviation of the head in Nishnaabemwin, as Rhodes suggests, then its absence in (13) and (14) is explained, since in (13) the head is related to the subject of the relative clause, and in (14) it is related to a first person pronoun. Obviation is not expected on these elements. Variation is now eliminated. The Nishnaabemwin example in (13) shows a difference from Southwestern Chippewa, since the obviation on the object does not trigger the obviative participle form, the head being proximate.

Now the two versions of (16) seem to be a little more clear. The first Nishnaabemwin translation given is based on the fact that the head is proximate, there being a first person subject in the main clause. That the form gaa-debnaajin was also fine shows either familiarity with other varieties of Ojibwe, or even that there is some optional operation highlighting the object through matching the obviation of the entire participle to the obviation of the object.

A question form is as expected, i.e. with conjunct instead of the participle form.

(17) wenesh enimaajaad
    who IC-leave(conj3)
    ‘Who is leaving?’

Valentine (2001) cites examples of questions with participle form –jin, as in (11) above.

When the subject of the verb in a WH question clause is plural, the participle form is obligatory.\(^\text{13}\)

(18) a. wenesh gaa-debnaajig esbanan
    who IC-catch(PartPl) racoon-obv.
    ‘Who (pl.) caught the raccoon?’

\(^{13}\) Likewise if the antecedent/head of the relative clause is plural, the verb ending must be –jig, and not the conjunct plural ending -waad.
b. wenesh enimaajaajig
   who IC-leave(PartPl)
   ‘Who is leaving?’ [plural]

c. *wenesh enimaajaawaad
   who IC-leave(conj3pl)
   ‘Who is leaving?’ [plural]

d. giikendaan gewe nimshag gii-nimaajaawaad
   I-know those dogs past-leave(conj3pl)
   ‘I know that the dogs left.’

The example in (18c) is ungrammatical with the IC+ conjunct form if the question is plural (compare with the sentential complement plural conjunct in (18d)). Truitner and Dunnigan (1972) also give plural participle forms for WH questions, and do not give any examples of conjunct plural forms for WH questions.

If the WH word is an adjunct, plural subject marking is in the conjunct.

(19) wenesh pii-enimaajaawad
    what time-IC-leave(conj3pl)
    ‘When are they leaving?’

With a WH determiner, the verb will be conjunct if there is neither 3 plural subject nor obviation.

(20) Wenesh gaa-debnaagwaa esbanag  
    who ICpast-catch(1/3plconj) raccoon-pl.
    ‘Which raccoons did I catch?’

This absence of participle form in (20) likely rules out a presupposition conditioning of the use of participles (see for example Gillon 1999 on Inuktitut), since it appears to presuppose that some raccoons were indeed caught. When the question word is associated with an obviative head and there are two third persons, an obviative participle form appears.

(21) wenesh nini gaa-debnaajin nimshan
    who man ICpast-catch-(Part.obv) dog-obv.
    ‘Which dog did the man catch?’

In summary, we revise our generalization about available morphology in Nishnaabemwin questions and relative clauses, as in (22).

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14 Interestingly, Rhodes (1998) has an example of a plural changed form + conj.pl. wene-sh gaa-daapnamwaaad nmookmaanens who CHC-they picked it up-CONJ ‘Who all picked up my pen knife?’ [his (8a)]. It would be interesting to check the gaa- version of (18c) with speakers who find it *.
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(22) Nishnaabemwin

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. Questions</th>
<th>b. Relative Clauses</th>
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It seems therefore that the availability of participle morphology does not provide a clear distinction between WH questions and relatives clauses in Nishnaabemwin; however further research, especially into the notion of head, both within and between varieties of Ojibwe would be enlightening. Another interesting line of research would investigate this issue quantitively. It is very likely that is true that relative clauses use participle morphology more than WH questions.

5. Brief summary

We have seen throughout this discussion that a wider range of facts from Algonquian varieties seems to be called for. Especially suggestive is that while we find very similar properties across Algonquian varieties, the actual morphology does not seem identical. For example, we saw that relative clauses and questions show near identical morphology in varieties we have discussed, yet this morphology is not the same across varieties. Further research into this variation will shed light on morphosyntax and language change.

References

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