Decomposing Blackfoot Proclitics
Heather Bliss & Bettina Gruber

1. The Problem In Blackfoot (Plains Algonquian: Southern Alberta), subject[1] proclitics are generally of the form *nit-* (1st person), *kit-* (2nd person), and *ot-* (3rd person). However, in certain morphosyntactic contexts the proclitics are truncated to *n-* (1st), *k-* (2nd), and *w-* (3rd). This paper addresses the question of what conditions the alternation between the long and short forms, and what the contribution of *-it-* is in the long form proclitics.

2. The Proposal The long form proclitics are composed of a person marke*r n-/k-/w-* plus a morpheme *-it-* that anchors the subject to a spatiotemporal context. The function o*f -it-* in proclitics derives from that of the locative preverb *it-*, and the distribution of the proclitic forms corresponds with the anchoring requirements of the subject in different morphosyntactic contexts. Proclitic *-it-* is analysed as a D head that attracts a person marker to its Specifier and morphosyntactically encodes the link between the subject and the context.

3. Spatiotemporal Anchoring Preverbal *it-* is required to license adverbials of space and time. In the absence of overt adverbials, *it-* is translated as 'then' or 'there' (Frantz 1991, Bliss and Louie 2010).[2]

(1) a. *Áák-*(it)-ipsst-iooyiwa omi ksikookooyiss.*   b. *Áák-(it)-ipsst-iooyi-wa*
    FUT-**LOC**-inside-eat-3S DEM tent   FUT-**LOC**-inside-eat-3S
    'S/he will eat in that tent.'   'S/he will eat (there).'

The presence of *it-* correlates with the assertion of a discourse-given, or topical, spatiotemporal context. In the (a) example, the context is provided by the overt adverbial, and in the (b) example, it has been previously established in the discourse. In both cases, *it-* functions to anchor the event denoted by the clause to this spatiotemporal context. We propose that *it-* has a parallel function in proclitics; as a preverb, *it-* anchors the clause to the spatiotemporal context and as a pronominal element, *-it-* anchors the subject to the spatiotemporal context.

4. Distribution of Proclitic Forms The short form proclitics have a more limited distribution than the long forms, appearing in the contexts of inalienable possession, perfect tense, and epistemic modality. This distribution is predicted by our analysis of the short forms as lacking a spatiotemporal anchor for the subject.

4.1. In/alienable Possession When the Blackfoot proclitics attach to nouns, the long and short forms correspond with alienable and inalienable possession, respectively.

(2) a.   **nit**-*ota'si*   b.   **n**-*insst*   c.   **n**-*o'tsisi*
      'my horse'   'my sister'   'my hand'

Ritter and Rosen (2010) argue that Blackfoot inalienable possession is syntactically less complex than alienable possession. We adopt their proposal, and suggest that variation in syntactic structure of possessors directly reflects variation in the morphological composition of the proclitics. The spatiotemporal anchoring function of *-it-* is consistent with its distribution as a nominal proclitic; alienable possession is eventive, insofar as it is established in spatiotemporal context, and as such requires the anchoring contributed by *-it-*. In contrast, inalienable possession is infallible and exists outside of any spatiotemporal context, thus not requiring anchoring by *-it-*.

4.2. Perfect Tense The perfect morpheme *ikáá-* is invariably used with the short form proclitics.

(3) a.   **n**-*ikaa-yo'kaa.*   b.   ***nit**-*ikaa-yo'kaa*
      1-PERF-sleep   **1**-PERF-sleep
      'I have slept.'   intended: 'I have slept.'

---

[1] As in other Algonquian languages, Blackfoot proclitics do not reference the thematic subject, but rather the highest-ranking argument in a 2>1>3 person hierarchy. Following Déchaine and Wiltschko (2010) we assume that proclitics occupy the grammatical subject position in the clause.

[2] Unless otherwise cited, data are from the authors' fieldwork with native speakers of Blackfoot.

Iatridou et al (2001) describe the experiential use of the perfect as an individual-level property of the subject, as it relates the event to something experienced by and permanently attributed to the subject. Following Kratzer (1996), we assume that individual-level predicates lack the argument position for spatiotemporal location. Hence, the absence of *-it-* in the proclitics reflects that the relation of the subject to the perfect predicate is an individual-level relation that does not require spatiotemporal anchoring.

4.3. Epistemic Modality The modal *aahk-* may be variably used with either long or short forms.

(4) a.　**n**-*aahk-ihpiyi.*　　　　　　　　b.　**nit**-*aahk-ihpiyi.*
　　　1-MOD-dance.　　　　　　　　　　　　**1**-MOD-dance
　　　'I might dance.'　　　　　　　　　　　'I might (/would) dance.'

Epistemic modals such as *aahk-* signal the speaker's perspective about the probability of an eventuality, compared with other possible eventualities. We predict that, when the long form proclitics are used, the anchoring function of *-it-* will restrict the range of possible eventualities to those that locate the subject at a particular point in time or space, whereas the short forms will not show any such restrictions. This prediction is borne out. Whereas (4a) receives a typical modal interpretation, (4b) receives a counterfactual interpretation, in which the possible eventualities are constrained by a conditional antecedent that situates the subject in a particular spatiotemporal context. For example, (4b) but not (4a) may be felicitously preceded by a conditional statement such as "If I weren't so tired ...".

5. Modelling Compositionality We analyse *-it-* as a D head that anchors the referent of the proclitic, providing a spatiotemporal context for the relation between the subject and the event. In the spirit of Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002), we propose that the person marker *n-/ k-/w-* merges as a phi (φ) head in both the long and short form proclitics. In the short forms, this projects a φP, and in the long forms, it combines with *-it-* to form a DP. Linearization of the long forms is the result of the person marker moving to Spec, DP.

(5) a.　[φP *n*]　　　　　　　　　　　b.　[DP n_i [D *it* [φP t_i]]]

Recognizing *-it-* as a D head accounts for its distribution; if D is universally associated with domain restriction (Gillon 2009), then the spatiotemporal anchoring associated with *-it-* can be seen as restricting the domain of subject-predicate relations. Relations that do not require spatiotemporal anchoring, such as inalienable possession, perfect tense, and epistemic modality, do not require a DP subject. Our analysis fits within the context of recent claims that pronouns and/or determiners contain an (often covert) spatiotemporal element (Gruber 2010; Leu 2008). The overt appearance of *-it-* in the Blackfoot proclitics gives credence to these claims and suggests that the internal syntax of pronominal elements can encode deictic categories beyond just the phi-features traditionally associated with personal pronouns.

References Bliss, H. & M. Louie. 2010. *Spatio-Temporal Topics and Fixed Quantifier Scope*. Paper presented at CLA. Concordia, Montreal QC. Déchaine, R.-M., & M. Wiltschko. 2002. Decomposing Pronouns. *LI* 33(3): 409-442. Déchaine, R.-M., & M. Wiltschko. 2010. *Micro-variation in Agreement, Clause-typing, and Finiteness*. Paper presented at the 42nd Algonquian Conference. MUN, St. John's NL. Gillon, C. 2009. The Semantic Core of Determiners. In Ghomeshi, J. et al (eds). *Determiners: Universals and Variation*. Philadelphia: Benjamins. Frantz, D. 1991. *Blackfoot grammar*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Gruber, B. 2010. *Why You and I are Here and Now*. Ms., Utrecht University. Iatridou, S., E. Anagnostopoulou & R. Izvorski. 2001. Observations about the Form and Meaning of the Perfect. In M. Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 189-238. Kratzer, A. 1996. Stage-Level and Individual-Level Predicates. In G.N. Carlson & F.J. Pelletier (eds). *The Generic Book*, Chicago: UChicago Press: 125-175. Leu, T. *The Internal Syntax of Determiners*. PhD dissertation: NYU. Ritter, E., & S.T. Rosen. 2010. *Possessors as External Arguments: Evidence from Blackfoot*. Paper presented at the 42nd Algonquian Conference. MUN, St. John's NL.