

Relative clauses in Northern Iroquoian languages

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Overview: Relative clauses (RC) in the Northern Iroquoian language family (Iroquoian; US & Canada) are understudied. Most previous studies are descriptive. There is little prior research on the syntactic structure of Northern Iroquoian RCs. Northern Iroquoian languages have both **head-internal RCs** (HIRC) and **free relatives** (FR), but no head-external RCs.

This presentation introduces some basic facts and generalizations of Northern Iroquoian RCs.

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Northern Iroquoian languages

- A branch of the Iroquoian language family with 5 remaining languages:
 - Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, Kanien'kéha .
 - Historically spoken in today's New York State; currently varying between endangered and critically endangered.
- Highly polysynthetic with rich verb morphology and agreement, allowing pro-drop and flexible word order, e.g.:

(1) Cayuga (Foster 1982: 61)

ε-g-adad-ogw[?]ed-ɔ:ni-ε-[?].

FUT-1SG.A-REF-person-make-BEN-PNC

'I will make some people for myself'

- Every Northern Iroquoian language has:
 - a determiner NE that can mark specificity and more;
 - a complementizer marking various clausal subordinations (including time, place, manner, reason, complement, ... and some RCs).
 - Within each language, a RC can have either of them.

	Cayuga	Seneca	Onondaga	Kanien'kéha	Oneida
D NE	<i>ne[?]</i>	<i>ne[?]</i>	<i>ne[?]</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>ne</i>
Comp	<i>tsɛh/shɛh</i>	<i>heh/he</i>	<i>tsha[?]</i>	<i>tsi</i>	<i>tsi[?]</i>

1.2 Relative clauses & left periphery

- Barrie et al. (2014) on Cayuga *wh*-questions:
 - Cayuga has canonical *wh*-movement.
 - Articulated left periphery: ForceP>TopicP>FocusP, which allows for topic and focus positions.
 - *wh*-phrase targets Spec,FocusP.
- (2) Cayuga (Barrie et al. 2014 (8))
- sanq:ha[?] dɛ[?]ho[?]dɛ[?] a[?]ehni:nq[?]?
 you.mother what she.bought
 ‘Your mother, what did she buy?’
- Baker (1996) on Kanien’kéha FRs:
 - A single CP layer.
 - Spec,CP is the landing site for a relative operator undergoing *wh*-movement.
 - Descriptively, Woodbury’s (2018) Onondaga grammar identifies:
 - Head-internal RCs: preceded by D NE.
 - Free relatives: preceded by Comp.

Questions:

- How homogeneous are the RCs across Northern Iroquoian languages?
- If they are homogeneous enough, what is the syntactic structure?

Corpus

- Mithun & Woodbury (1980) *Northern Iroquoian texts*, Cayuga stories in Hatcher’s (2022) dissertation, Onondaga stories in Woodbury’s (2018) grammar

2. Observations: head-internal relative clauses

- HIRCs are preceded by the D NE
- The semantic head can have various forms: overt nominal, incorporated noun stem, and PRO identified through verb agreement.
- HIRC with an overt nominal as head:

(3) Cayuga (Mithun & Woodbury 1980: 150 (6))

ne[?] a:-g-ade-hniŋ-[?] ostōdra[?]
 NE OPT-1SG.A-SRF-sell-PNC hay
 ‘some hay that I will sell’

- HIRC with an incorporated noun stem as head:

(4) Onondaga (Mithun & Woodbury 1980: 137 (11))

ne[?] s-**hn**-Ra-t-ha[?]
 NE 2SG.A-**grease**-apply-INST-HAB
 ‘the grease you use to apply to it’

- HIRC with PRO as head:

(5) Seneca (Mithun & Woodbury 1980: 102 (50))

neh go-nōde-o-’
 NE 3SG.FI.P-hominy-cook-STV
 ‘the one who was cooking hominy’

3. Observations: free relatives

- FRs are preceded by Comp plus one of two options:

1) *wh*-operator + verb → the *wh* construction

– *wh*: ‘who’, ‘where’, ‘how’, ‘when’, ‘how many?...’ (≠ interrogative *wh*)

2) Partitive(PRT)-verb → the partitive construction

– Partitive: highest prefix in the verbal complex, used for clause typing (subordination) & more

- *wh* constructions:

(6) Onondaga (Woodbury 2018: 364 (59))

tsha[?] **nŋ** d-yago-yo[?]-de-[?]
 COMP where CIS-3SG.FI.A-work-STV
 ‘where she works’

(7) Onondaga (Woodbury 2018: 363 (58))

tsha[?] **gayę** shŋgwa-nasgw-awi-h
 COMP who 3SG.M>1PL-pet-give-STV

‘the one who gave us the pet’

- Partitive constructions:

(8) Cayuga (Mithun & Woodbury 1980: 154 (13))

tseḡ ni-ga-hsegwa-o[?]dę-h
 COMP PRT-N.A-fork-be.kind.of-STV
 ‘what kind of fork it is’

(9) Onondaga (Woodbury 2018: 365 (66))

tseḡ ni-g-ya[?]-o[?]dę-h
 COMP PRT-1SG.A-body-be.kind.of-STV
 ‘what kind of body I have’

4. More facts and generalizations

- RCs across Northern Iroquoian languages are highly homogeneous.
 - They have the same types: free relative and head-internal RC, but no head-external RC;
 - They have the same constructions within each type;
 - They share an inventory of Comp, *wh*-operators, and D.
- No RC contains focus or topic.
- Free relatives:
 - The partitive and *wh*-operator never co-occur.
 - FRs (of either construction) are almost never taken by the D NE.

Head-internal RCs:

- HIRC don’t have Comp, *wh*-operator, or partitive.
- The word order inside HIRCs is not as flexible as in canonical matrix sentences:

(10) Cayuga (Hatcher 2022)

gaę ni:s hq: ha[?]se:ge[?] ha[?]se:go[?] ne:gyeḡ [ne[?] otsqda[?]
 where you place you.saw.it.there you.got.it.there this NE fish
 sha:wih] ?
 you.carry
 ‘Where did you get the fish that you are carrying?’

(11) Cayuga

* gaɛ ni:s hɔ: haʔse:geʔ haʔse:goʔ ne:gyɛh [neʔ
 where you place you.saw.it.there you.got.it.there this NE
 sha:wih oʔsɔdaʔ]?

you.carry fish

Intended: ‘Where did you get the fish that you are carrying?’

5. References

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