The Verbal Morphosyntax of Aspect-Tense-Modality in Dialects of Cree

This paper will survey the verbal morphosyntax of aspect, tense and modality (henceforth ATM) in dialects of the polysynthetic Algonquian language Cree within an FDG framework (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008). Primary data will be both synchronic and diachronic in nature, providing a glimpse not only of the Cree ATM system, but also suggesting routes of grammaticalization for certain elements within this system in terms of Hengeveld’s (2010, 2011) work on the pathways of grammaticalization.

To a greater or lesser extent across Cree dialects, ATM is coded by either preverbal elements, verbal suffixes or (usually) both. Among the suffixes that must be investigated are the dubitative /-tokēl/, and the so-called “preterit” forms /-h/, /-htay/ and /-pan/ (cf. James 1991:281, Wolfart 1973:44). These latter are generally equated with past tense (cf. James 1982, Bloomfield 1928), but with some aspectual characteristics, and they contrast with a preverbal element kî- which has been analyzed as completive (Ellis 2000:135-136) or perfective aspect (Wolfart 1973:45) or (relative) past tense (Okimāsis 2004, Mühlbauer 2011). Other preverbal elements prove just as variable in form as the suffixes and just as difficult to characterize as kî-, covering the gamut of aspect, tense and modality. In particular, the apparent fluctuation between aspectual and tense categorization (as with the intensive future tense or prospective aspect wî-; cf. Okimāsis 2004 and Wolvengrey 2006) is indicative of historical and dialectal shift, but the direction of this shift must be pinpointed to affirm or disconfirm Hengeveld’s grammaticalization hypothesis.

References


