Locatives and Obviation in Cree

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Wolfart has observed that the Cree locative suffix /-ehk/ "is mutually exclusive with the suffixes of the number-obviation paradigm. Thus, number and obviation are not expressed in locative forms; obviation would also be excluded on semantic grounds."[2] Wolfart is mainly concerned with morphology, specifically with the nonoccurrence of obviative endings on locative nouns, but his statement implies that locatives, as a category, are systematically excluded from the dimension of obviation. Indeed, in a more recent paper on obviation in Cree, Wolfart has claimed that "the *locative* . . . stands outside the proximate-obviative dimension and never interacts with it in any way," adding that in a string such as:

(1) okimāw o-kosis-a o-tēm-iy(i)-ihk
chief$_i$/PROX his$_i$-son$_j$-OBV his$_j$-horse-
OBV. POSS-LOC
on the chief's son's horse
the noun otēmiyihk "as a locative . . . itself takes no part in obviation."[3]

Wolfart's assertion regarding locatives and obviation is certainly correct so far as the morphology of Cree is concerned—locative nouns never are overtly marked with obviative suffixes. However, with regard to the syntax of Cree, it can be shown that locative nouns do participate in the obviation process and, moreover, do so in exactly the same way as inanimate nouns, the other noun class with no morphological marking for obviation.

Wolfart has noted that inanimate nouns are "covertly" obviative—although they show no markings for obviation, a verb which depends on them must itself be obviative in form, if the conditions for obviation, that is, the presence of another third-person referent in the same sentence or contextual span, are met.[4] Thus, in:

(2) okimāw wāpahtam cīmān ē-misā-yi-k
chief/PROX sees (it) canoe/INAN PVB-be
big-OBV-3SG(CONJUNCT)
The chief sees the canoe which is big
the subordinate verb ē-misāyik is inflected for an obviative subject, even though that subject, cīmān, is not overtly marked for obviation (being inanimate). This contrasts with the situation in (3), in which the conditions for obviation are not met (there being only one third-person noun in the sentence) and the subordinate verb is inflected for a (proximate) third-person subject:

(3) ni-wāpahten cīmān ē-misā-k
1SG-see (it) canoe bebig-3SG
I see a canoe which is big.
The same distribution of obviative and proximate verb forms is found with verbs dependent on locative nouns. In a sentence

[2] H. Christoph Wolfart, *Plains Cree: A Grammatical Study*, APS-T 63, pt. 5 (1973): 31.
[3] H. C. Wolfart, "How Many Obviatives: Sense and Reference in a Cree Verb Paradigm," in *Linguistic Studies of Native Canada*, ed. E. Cook and J. Kaye (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978), pp. 258–59.

[4] Ibid.

such as (4), in which the conditions for obviation are met:

(4) cān wīkiw pakwānikamikohk ē-misā-
yi-k
John/PROX lives tent/LOC be big-OBV-
3SG
John lives in a tent which is big

the subordinate verb ē-misāyik, which depends upon the locative noun pakwāni-kamikohk, is the same form as in the inanimate covertly obviative sentence (2).[5] Furthermore, if the conditions for obviation are removed, the subordinate verb

referring to the locative must be third-person proximate and cannot be third-person obviative (cf. 3):

(5) ni-wīkin pakwānikamikohk ē-misāk/
*ē-misāyik
1SG-live tent/LOC PROX OBV
I live in a tent which is big.

Thus, the facts of (4) and (5) show clearly that locative nouns in Cree can participate in the proximate-obviative dimension, although their participation is "covert," in the manner of inanimate nouns. The claim, then, that locatives do not interact with obviation in any way is falsified by these sentences. The mutual exclusiveness of the locative and obviation endings is to be viewed, therefore, as essentially a morphological restriction, with no syntactic implications.

[5] Moreover, a proximate verb form in such a sentence, according to one consultant, does not clearly refer to the tent at all:

(*i*) ??cān wīkiw pakwānikamikohk ē-misāk
John lives in a tent which is big (Intended Reading).