Partial (Non-)Configurationality in Blackfoot

Introduction Algonquian languages are often described as non-configurational, yet there is variation in the underlying source(s) of non-configurationality. Some languages are argued to pattern as Pronominal Argument (PA) languages, in which argument expressions (AEs) are adjoined to the clause and bind pronominal arguments (Reinholtz & Russell 1995, Reinholtz 1999 for Swampy Cree; Brittain 2001 for Western Naskapi; Junker 1994, 2004 for East Cree). However, the PA analysis is rejected for other languages (Bruening 2001, LeSourd 2006 for Passamaquoddy; Christianson 2002 for Odawa; Hamilton 2012 for Mi’kmaq).

Main Claims Blackfoot is a partial PA language, exhibiting a split conditioned by obviation (a reference-tracking system for 3rd persons). In particular, proximate AEs are generated as clause-external adjuncts, but obviative AEs are generated in argument positions inside the clause.

Clitics and Agreement Proximate AEs exhibit canonically adjunct-like behaviour, consistent with a PA analysis. For example, they can be freely moved or omitted (1). Obviative AEs, on the other hand, must be resumed by an enclitic –áyi if moved to a preverbal position or omitted (2).

(1) a. A’pawaawahkaawa  anna Piohkiaaki. A’a-waawakahwa-wa  ann-wa  ipi-ohkomi-aakii around-IMPF-walk.AI-PROX   DEM-PROX   far-sound-woman “Far Sounding Woman is walking around.”
   b. (Anna Piohkiaaki) a’pawaawahkaawa. “{Far Sounding Woman/ she} is walking around.”

(2) a. Áókatakiyini  anni ónssts. a-okatakai-yini  ann-yi  w-insst-yi IMPF-bead.AI-OBV   DEM-OBV   3-sister-OBV “His sister does beadwork.”
   b. (Anni ónssts) áókatakiyin*áyi. “{His sister /she} does beadwork.”

Under the PA analysis, agreement affixes either occupy argument positions (Jelinek 1984) or absorb case (Baker 1991, 1996). Either way, the prediction is that agreement affixes and clitics should not co-occur. This is borne out for proximate but not obviative arguments.

C-Command If proximate but not obviative AEs are clause-external (3), then we predict that proximate AEs should asymmetrically c-command obviative ones, regardless of grammatical function. This is borne out: whether an obviative AE is construed as an object (4) or subject (5), it can be bound by a (null) proximate AE. (Conversely, proximate AEs cannot be bound.)

(3) [CP DP PROX [CP … DP OBY … ]]

(4) Ikáóhkanaváákomiiinviaa  oksists. ik-a-ohkanawa-wakomii-mm-yii-yi-aawa  w-iksist-yi INTNS-IMPF-all-love-TA-3:4-3PL-3PL.PRN  3-mother-OBV “Everybody love his/her mother.”

(5) Otáóhkanaváákomiiinviaa  oksists. ot-an-ohkanawa-wakomii-mm-ok-yi-aawa  w-iksist-yi 3-IMPF-all-love-TA-INV-3PL-3PL.PRN  3-mother-OBV “His/her mother love everybody.”

Implications Blackfoot exhibits a split system, in which proximate but not obviative AEs are adjuncts that bind pronominal arguments. That such a split exists provides evidence against the view of non-configurationality as a macro-parameter (Chomsky 1981, Hale 1983, Baker 1996) and supports a finer-grained approach to the typology of (non-)configurationality.
References