Shared retentions cannot support subgrouping in Algonquian: Against Goddard (2018)

Natalie Weber, Yale University

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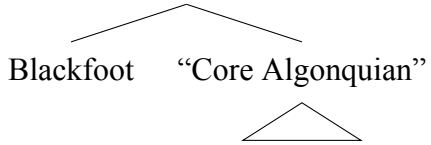
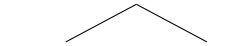
Overview This paper argues against a recent claim in Goddard (2018) argues that Blackfoot is a sister to the other Algonquian languages, as in (1). The traditional subgrouping, (2), leaves Blackfoot as a sister to the other Algonquian languages in a flat structure (Goddard 1994; Michelson 1935). Ttree (1) predicts innovations within "Core Algonquian" which exclude Blackfoot.

(1) Proto-Algonquian-Blackfoot



(2) Proto-Algonquian



I show that neither of Goddard's two arguments for Proto-Algonquian-Blackfoot (PAB) contains evidence for a shared innovation in "Core Algonquian" (CA). The remaining shared retentions point only to a shared ancestor, in favor of the tree in (2) (Atkinson & Gray 2005; Koch & Bowern 2004).

Claim #1: Roots with initial *iC Goddard claims that Blackfoot preserves PAB roots beginning with *iC while CA neutralized these to *C < *iC except for a handful of cases. I argue that the data is better accounted for if Blackfoot has C-initial roots, with prothetic [i] in some positions.

First, although Goddard (2018) reasons that most Blackfoot verbs are listed under <i>, he failed to notice that the entry headers in Frantz & Russell (2017) (FR) show the shape of the verb stem after a prefix. Synchronic patterns of root alternation show that there are some C-initial roots and some V-initial roots in Blackfoot, which neutralize after a prefix (Weber 2021, n.d.). Roots like *pon-* 'cease' begin in a consonant at the left edge of the word and an *i* after a prefix, (3), while roots like *ipotsim-* 'poison' begin with an *i* in both positions, (4). The *i* at the left edge of *pon-* 'cease' has the same properties as the usual epenthetic [i] in Blackfoot; e.g. it causes a preceding /k/ to assibilate to [ks]. The simplest analysis is that *pon-* 'cease' begins with a C, rather than an *i* as Goddard (2018) claims.

(3) a. *ponihtáát!* 'pay!' (FR91)
b. *áaksiponihtaawa* she will pay (FR91)

(4) a. *ipótsimatsísa!* 'poison him!' (FR92)
b. *áaksipótsimatsiiwa* 'she'll poison him' (FR92)

Second, archaic remnants of 'initial change', a system of morphological ablaut and mutation which targets the initial syllable of a root, confirm that the root in (3) is C-initial (Taylor 1967). In (5) the initial vowel *o* (< *oo) ablauts to *aa*. In (6) the initial vowel *i* mutates to *naa*. This confirms that *pon-* 'cease' begins with a consonant, or else the pattern of ablaut would parallel that of 'poison'.

(5) *paanixtátsisa* 'pay thou him!'
(6) ***náápotsimatsiiway*** 'he poisoned him

Third, where comparative evidence is available, C-initial roots like *pon-* 'cease' are cognate to C-initial roots in CA (< *poˑn- 'cease, stop'; Berman 2006: 267). Furthermore, when there are changes to roots over time in the historical written record of Blackfoot, the changes are always to *add* a prothetic *i* rather than delete one. All evidence shows that Blackfoot and CA retain C-initial roots from a shared ancestor, with no evidence for an innovation in Core Algonquian.

Claim #2: Post-inflectional suffixes Goddard claims that Blackfoot preserves a series of four "post-inflectional" suffixes from PAB in demonstratives and nouns, while CA innovated a remnant of this paradigm into the so-called "absentative" suffixes, which denote deceased or otherwise removed entities. I show that Goddard fails to recognize two independent innovations in different subparts of the family. The absentative paradigm is cognate to only one of the four post-inflectional suffixes in Blackfoot. It is far more likely that this suffix reconstructs to the proto-language, that Blackfoot innovated a series of post-inflectional suffixes, and that other languages retained the single suffix. These changes point to a shared ancestor, but not to a CA subgroup.

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