Shared retentions cannot support subgrouping in Algonquian: Against Goddard (2018)
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Overview This paper argues against a recent claim in Goddard (2018) 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). Tree (1) predicts innovations within “Core Algonquian” which exclude Blackfoot.

(1) Proto-Algonquian-Blackfoot

Blackfoot   “Core Algonquian”   Blackfoot   etc…

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 assimilate to [ks]. The simplest analysis is that pon- ‘cease’ begins with a C, rather than an i as Goddard (2018) claims.

(3) a. ponõhtáát! ‘pay!’ (FR91)   b. áaksiponíhtaawa she will pay (FR91)

(4) a. ipotsísimatsísa! ‘poison him!’ (FR92)   b. áaksipótsísimatsíiwá ‘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) paañíxtátsísa ‘pay thou him!’

(6) náádpítsísimatsíiwáy ‘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.
References


