Word Order Variation at the Left Periphery in Innu-aimûn

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One problem – and probably the central one – in trying to understand the syntax of an Algonquian language is the free word order allowed for most types of sentences. Syntax is about how the sentence is built up bit by bit from smaller parts (most notably words) into larger ones. But when anything can show up next to anything else, it is difficult to say what gets put together first, and what is added in later.¹

The problem is not the free word order *per se*; most modern syntactic theories have mechanisms (transformations, in some form or another) which allow parts of a sentence to move around from their origin, so free word order is in principle not problematic. The problem is just to find a starting point, an ‘anchor’ which would allow us to describe what sorts of movement are necessary or permitted in the grammar of a language.

One influential trend in recent syntactic theory follows the premise that adverbial elements are inherently less mobile than the predicates (verbs) and arguments (nouns) in a sentence. Research based on this premise (see, for example, Pollock 1989 and subsequent work) has made considerable progress in identifying the positions of verbs and nouns (and the transformations involved) by using adverbials as ‘anchor’ positions. In this paper, we apply this strategy to the study of word order in Innu-aimûn. Our analysis is based on a preliminary analysis of a series of narrative texts originally recorded in 1967 and since transcribed, edited, and entered into a Shoebox database. All the data discussed comes from these texts (referred to as the Labrador Innu Text Project and cited by volume, story and line; cf. Mailhot et al. 1999a, b). Our focus will be on the particle *ek*¹, as well as what seems to be its somewhat more clearly deictic variant, *ekue*.

Necessarily, we begin with a description of the meaning and function of the *ek*¹ particle.² *ek*¹ has a range of functions, from what we can

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tell in the texts. Perhaps the most frequent use is to show temporal sequence, with the $ek^u$ clause referring to the next event in a series. Frequently, as well, the $ek^u$ clause designates an event as a natural consequence of what has come before. Sometimes, in these tales, $ek^u$ appears to be substantially lacking in ‘meaning’ and to function simply as a bleached formative which serves only to bring successive sentences smoothly into the narrative. The syntactic properties of $ek^u$ are rather less transparent.

1. a. *Eukuan tshe åtanûtsheiän.* (II-4:1)
   
   this/that.is will I.tell.a.legend
   
   ‘This is what I will tell a legend about.’

   b. *Ek^u* anite etütet nânëu, uâpameu nameshëa.
   
   So there he.goes shore, he.see.s.o. fish.obv, mishta-mîshêtînua. (II-4:2)
   
   very.there.are.many
   
   ‘He [Hare] walked along the shore there, he saw fish, there were very many of them.’

By far the most common position for $ek^u$ to appear in is at the beginning of the clause, as in (1), or as in the (2) examples:

2. a. *Ek^u* puñhîtûtuût uteshkannit. (I-5:29)
   
   so s/he.climb on.its.horns
   
   ‘Then he [Aiasheu] climbed onto its horns.’

   b. *Ek^u* nenua šhîenamuû. (I-5:62)
   
   so that he.open.it.for s.o.
   
   ‘Then he went to open the door for her.’

Often the clause-initial status of $ek^u$ is disguised by its appearance in the middle of complex sentences (or what seem to be sentences), as in the (3) examples:

3. a. *Ka-ût šhâtshishkueûâ nâteu, ek^u* shâsh
   
   seem his.head.sticks.out man, so/then already ka-nîmishta-minuâtâuâ. (II-9:5)
   
   seem-I.big-like.him
   
   ‘A man seemed to stick his head out, then right away I seemed to be really attracted to him.’

   b. *Mishkûmît tâu ne àtik^ë, ek^u* ekute niâte
   
   on.the.ice there.is that caribou, so right.there there.far

nakateshapan nenua utashâma kie ukashkua,
he.must.have.left.him that his.snowshoes and his/her.arrows,
muk' utatshâpia apū tâniti. (II-7:54)
only his/her.bow not it.obv.be.present
'The caribou was on the ice, back there he must have left his snowshoes
and his arrows, only his bow was gone.'

But ek\textsuperscript{u} typically appears only in initial position in its own embedded
clause. The syntactic role of ek\textsuperscript{u} in such cases is apparently no different
from its role in simple sentences.

In most sentences in which it appears, then, ek\textsuperscript{u} has a single, fixed
position (clause-initial) and a typical semantic function (meaning tempo­
ral sequence or natural consequence). In both respects, ek\textsuperscript{u} is similar to
English then, at least the particular then which appears in initial position
in continuing narration of a story, or in the consequent clause in a com­
plex conditional sentence. If the analogy is more than coincidental, then
ek\textsuperscript{u} should have the same syntactic function as then. That is, ek\textsuperscript{u} should be
taken to be a complementiser, as then is (Iatridou and Kroch 1992). The
structure of (3b) will then be (4):

(4) $[\text{CP} \text{Ek} \text{u} \text{[s nenua shienamuât ]}]$
    so that.obv he.open.it.for.s.o.

An alternative possibility, also reasonable, would be that ek\textsuperscript{u}
appears in the topic position, either as the head of a Topic Phrase, or as its
specifier. This alternative is problematic in two respects, however. In
some of the contexts where ek\textsuperscript{u} appears, it is likely a bleached formative,
which serves the function simply of joining a new stage in the narrative to
what has gone before. As such, it cannot be considered a true topic for the
clause. Secondly, ek\textsuperscript{u} sometimes co-occurs with clearly pre-verbal topics,
as in (5):

(5) Ek\textsuperscript{u} nenua umashkuma, nipâu ne uîn. (I-8:27)
    Then that his.bear(s), he.sleeps that he
    'Then his bear, he was asleep.'

Given the word order in (5), the position of ek\textsuperscript{u} must be distinct from
that of fronted topics, which appear to the right of the ek\textsuperscript{u} complemen­
tiser. In that case, the structure of (5) will be (6):

(6) $[\text{CP} \text{Ek} \text{u} \text{[TopicP nenua umashkuma [s nipâu ne uîn ]]}].$
then that his.bear(s) he.sleeps that he
To this point, there is nothing unexpected in the properties of ek\textsuperscript{u}. But interesting results emerge when we examine the exceptions we find to the general patterns. Occasionally, ek\textsuperscript{u} appears somewhere besides clause-initial position, as illustrated in (7). Despite first impressions, however, there are still regularities in what is a possible context for ek\textsuperscript{u}.

(7) Minuât ekue tipishkât, eshk\textsuperscript{u} pimishkâuat following and then it.is.night still they.paddle iâpit. (II-6:16)

even

‘After another nightfall, even then still they were paddling.’

The exceptions fall into two groups. In one, ek\textsuperscript{u} is preceded by the verbal complex; in the other, ek\textsuperscript{u} is preceded by an adverbial particle. The first group:

(8) a. Ek\textsuperscript{u} itikû nenua unâpema: “Tshitshipitshiâkuâkue then he.say.to.her that her.husband move.on.ice ek\textsuperscript{u}.” (II-9:12)

then

‘Then her husband said to her: “We should be travelling to winter camp now.”’

b. Tshâuepâtât ek\textsuperscript{u}. (II-4:26)

he.run.back then

‘Then he ran home.’

c. Kuuetuet ek\textsuperscript{u}, pemiuuet ek\textsuperscript{u}, mimimitshishû, he.make.fire then, he.cook then, he.eat.dup, mâtishishut ek\textsuperscript{u}. (II-4:95)

he.eats then

‘Then he made a fire, and then cooked (the fish), he ate and ate and ate, and he ate.’

If ek\textsuperscript{u} occupies a fixed syntactic position, then the verb must precede it in these sentences by virtue of a transformation which moves it to the left. The question then is what kind of transformation is at work here. One possibility is that the verb alone is moved into clause-initial position. Such an operation is attested in other languages; in Icelandic stylistic inversion, for example (Holmberg 1997). However, in some of the sentences of this type, both the verb and its preverbs may appear together in front of ek\textsuperscript{u}.
(9) a. *Ka- uí utúmaitsheuá ekue itit anite*  
seem want he.hit.things and then he.does there  
utshipishkuámít. (I-4:6)  
by.his.doorway.  
‘He seemed to want to hit something and then he did there so by his  
doorway.’

b. “*Ka-papínáshtshipisseua ekue itit, tshíuepaníu,*”  
seem.to she.pulls.apart.sticks and then she.does she.spins.around,  
*iteu itakánú.*³ (II-9:46)  
he says it.is.said  
“And then she seemed to be pulling apart the floor boughs, then she did  
it, she quickly spun around,” he said it is told of him.’

Since the preverbs often express a meaning of tense, aspect, or  
modality, it is natural to suppose that they occupy a syntactic position  
equivalent to that of English auxiliary verbs. English auxiliaries (and their  
counterparts in many non-Algonquian languages) function as the head of  
IP, in the following structure:

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(10)  
IP  
subject I'  
I  VP  
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The same I position should be the location of at least some of the pre­
verbs, as argued by Déchaine (1999) among others. But then movement  
of the verb alone will not produce the right word order in sentences like  
(9), since the preverb would remain in I, to the right of *ek*

The negative particle *apú* may be preposed along with the verbal  
complex, too.

(11) *Kátshi uínameshet, apú tshí piminuet ek*, *apú takuannit*  
after he.clean.fish, not can he.cook then, not it.obv.exist  
iskutenú. (I-4:55)  
fire

³. The phrase *iteu itakánú* ‘he says it is said’ recurs frequently in these texts (cf. also  
itát itakánú in example (18)). It appears to be a stylized form which means little more  
than a single *iteu* or *itakánú*. We assume this is the case, despite the double form.
'But, after he cleaned the fish, he could not cook them, since he had no fire.'

Again, as *apū* is clearly located outside of the VP (Brittain 2001), the right word order will not be derived if the verb alone is raised to the left of *ek*<sup>u</sup>. What is more, even if the entire verb phrase were moved to the left, the preverbs and the *apū* negator would still not appear in the right place.

A second possibility might be that the verb phrase moves to the left of *ek*<sup>u</sup> (assuming that verb phrases exist in Innu-aimûn). Again, the relevant transformation is a familiar one in other languages, including English in this case. But the fact that the preverbs and the negator also move is again not compatible with this approach, because they probably should be situated outside of the verb phrase.

In order for everything which appears to the left of *ek*<sup>u</sup> to move, the entire IP must be shifted to the left, giving a surface syntactic structure of (12) for the relevant portion of (11):

(12) \[ CP [ IP apū tshī piminuet ] ek<sup>u</sup> t ]

not can he.cook then

If the subject is explicitly represented in the clause, it is stranded to the right of *ek*<sup>u</sup> rather than moved with the verbal complex. The same is true of the object (although these texts contain only a couple of pertinent examples in which an explicit object appears).

(13) a. *Minuānū* ek<sup>u</sup> umūkumān. (II-4:53)
   it.is.good then his/her.knife
   ‘His knife was good.’

   b. *Pepāmipātāt* ek<sup>u</sup> Uāpush. (I-4:1)
   run.dup so hare
   ‘The Hare was off running around.’

   c. *Pītākuepanit* ek<sup>u</sup> ne Uāpush. (I-4:20)
   s/he.burns.porcupine then that hare
   ‘Then he [Hare] burned the quills off the porcupine.’

(14) *Pūtukāitā* ek<sup>u</sup> ushīma, pītūtēeshpimītamēu
s/he.brings.in so his-sibling-obv. s/he.throws.inside
utamishkuminua. (I-4:87)
his/her-beaver-poss-obv
‘When he [Hare] brought his little brother [Frog] home, he [Hare] threw his brother’s beaver inside his house.’
This pattern is unexpected if subjects and objects occupy argument positions within IP, since movement of IP would then carry the arguments along as well. But the polysynthetic character of the Algonquian languages has frequently been seen as evidence that subjects and objects in polysynthetic languages are actually abstract pronouns, without phonetic reflex (see Russell and Reinholtz 1995, for example). Explicit nominal arguments, in this view, are clausal satellites, which appear outside the sentence proper and are understood as sharing the semantic function of the abstract pronouns inside the clause. In Baker’s model (1996), the satellite NPs are adjoined to the outside of IP, so that the underlying source for (13b) would be as follows:

\[(15) \left[ CP \ ek^u \ [IP \ Uâpush \ [IP \ pro \ pepâmipâtât]] \right] \]

And then movement of the minimal IP to the left of \(ek^u\) leaves \(Uâpush\) in its original position, as is necessary.

Another wrinkle in the analysis of this group of exceptions arises with sentences including a direct speech quotation:

\[(16) \quad "Uâshkashâpe, \ pîshakânapi \ tûta,\" \ iteu \ ek^u \]

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{cut.cord} & \text{hide.cord} & \text{do.it,} & \text{he.says.to.her so} \\
&\text{iikuma.} & \text{his.grandmother} \\
&\text{‘Cut babiche, make a rope,’ he said to his grandmother.’}
\end{align*}
\]

Notice that in this example, \(ek^u\) is preceded by both the verb and the quotative expression. Now the quotative expression in this sentence has the grammatical function of direct object, so it might be expected to appear in a direct object position, which is to say, to the right of \(ek^u\). But quotative expressions have their own special properties which distinguish them from other ‘objects’, or even from clauses of indirect quotation (Collins and Branigan 1997). Quotative expressions often serve as root clauses, within which the remainder of a complex sentence is treated as a parenthetical clause. The relevant structure of (16) – meaning the parenthetical clause, and excluding the quotation clause – is this:

\[(17) \quad [CP \ [IP \ pro \ iteu \ pro] \ ek^u \ [IP \ t \ iikuma]] \]

he.says.to.her so his.grandmother
In fact, the inversion of ek‘ and the quotation is not dependent on the verbal complex moving to the left. Example (18) shows that the quotation may precede ek‘ anyway.

(18) “Mita ushkat nikutuatsheuátí,” ekue
firewood at.first I.light.fire and then
itát itakanú. (II-1:12)
he.says.to.him it.is.told of him
“I used firewood to light the fire first,” he said at that moment, it is
told.’

This is as we should expect, since again the quotation itself is the root clause, with the remainder of the sentence functioning as a parenthetical clause. To sum up, despite what looks like a messy set of patterns, at first glance, a single pattern can be discerned in the first group of non-clause-initial instances of ek‘. IP is optionally moved to the left of ek‘, possibly to serve as a specifier for CP (as Kayne 1995 suggests for other language families). Given the satellite character of explicit NPs in Innu-aimûn, they are unaffected by IP movement. And apparent exceptions in direct quotation sentences are not exceptional at all, on closer examination.

Turning now to the second group of exceptions, these are sentences in which an adverbial particle or noun appears to the left of ek‘:

(19) a. Minuát ekue tshitütet, minuát eshpish anite tát. (I-4:32)
again and then he.leaves again while there he.is
‘And then he [Hare] left again, while he was there.’

b. Kau ekue patapipanut […], kau ekue patapipanítat
again then crouch again then crouch
nenú ushuít. (II-7:47)
that his.tail
‘Then, afterwards, his tail came down, at that moment he put his tail
back down.’

c. Tshek ekue uápmát itakanú pishimussa,
then at.that.moment he.see.it(an) it.is.said December,
pishimua. (II-1:10)
sun
‘Then at that moment he saw it, it is said in December, the sun.’
"Tânite ek tshi pā tshi uitshimitin?"
How so you would can I marry you
iteu. (I-6:10)
she says.
"How would I be able to marry you?" she asked him.

Here the analysis is quite straightforward. Since we have already established that the grammar of Innu-aimûn permits movement of a phrase to the left of ek<sup>M</sup>, presumably to form a specifier in CP, it is natural to suppose that the sentences in (19) and (20) are also formed by a similar movement. The only difference is the nature of the phrase which undergoes movement. In the examples in (19), a single noun or particle is moved to the left; in (20), an interrogative pronoun is placed there, possibly having been raised from its usual interrogative position slightly further to the right.

To conclude, by careful examination of the contexts in which a single, quite simple word appears, we believe we have uncovered one of the mechanisms which are responsible for the extreme freedom of word order allowed by Innu-aimûn grammar. If ek<sup>M</sup> occupies only a single position in the grammatical structure of the clause, then leftward movement of IPs and some particles is a necessary component of the grammar.

**REFERENCES**


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