

## **Grammaticalization and Polysynthesis: Iroquoian**

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Like many other languages in North America, those in the Iroquoian family are highly head-marking and polysynthetic. Nominal morphology is generally quite simple, but verbal morphology is elaborate, serving many functions expressed syntactically in other languages. Because there is documentation of a good set of Iroquoian languages, it is possible to reconstruct the basic grammatical structure of the common parent and certain stages of subsequent development. Most of the verb morphology was already in place in Proto-Iroquoian, spoken thousands of years ago, a structure which has remained remarkably stable over time. The situation raises interesting questions about processes of grammaticalization in languages which already show extensive, tightly grammaticalized structures.

For the most part, Iroquoian communities have long been sufficiently large that there was not the regular, longstanding, extensive exogamy and resulting multilingualism characteristic of some other parts of the continent. There have, however, been several types of contact. The family consists of two main branches: Southern Iroquoian, represented only by Cherokee; and Northern Iroquoian, comprising all of the other languages. Within Northern Iroquoian, the first group to separate became the Tuscarora. The next became the Wendat and Wyandot. The remaining group became known as the Five Nations, comprising Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk. (There is documentation of some additional languages, but little beyond vocabulary.) The Cherokee were first encountered by Europeans in the Southeast, a notorious linguistic area; we know there was some contact there with speakers of unrelated languages, but they do not appear to have left a strong structural mark. The Tuscarora were also living in the Southeast, but early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century they migrated northward to join their relatives in New York State. This migration resulted in contact with speakers of related languages with very similar morphological structure; it resulted in some replica grammaticalization as well as lexical borrowing. In the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Wendat, living in what is now Ontario, were decimated and took refuge in the various Five Nations communities; the resulting contact with even closer relatives affected primarily allomorphy and some vocabulary. Finally, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, bilingualism in English or French began to spread in all communities, where it has begun to have some syntactic effects.

Many of the same kinds of processes commonly associated with grammaticalization elsewhere in the world can be seen in Iroquoian. Some new affixes were added to the various languages at the outer edges of words. Jespersen negative cycles can be seen in each of the languages, whereby negative constructions, grammaticalized early, have been reinforced and replaced in slightly different ways in the various languages. There are the usual kinds of semantic extensions, such as space > time, with directional markers, already grammaticalized as affixes, taking on tense functions. The morphological structures were also enriched in other ways, however. All verbs contain pronominal prefixes identifying their core arguments, for example. In Proto-Iroquoian, there were prefixes for first, second, and third persons, a situation which has remained unchanged in Southern Iroquoian (Cherokee). In Northern Iroquoian, we can see the progressive enrichment of the third person categories, first with the addition of a

masculine gender, then the extension of a generic category to some female persons, and, in some languages, to all, resulting in a dedicated feminine category. In Proto-Iroquoian, dual number was distinguished only in first and second persons, again as in modern Cherokee. In the Northern languages, the distinction has been extended into third persons, but by exploiting different sources. Finally, modern contact with European languages affected the languages primarily in the area of complex syntactic constructions. Overt markers of syntactic relations previously less differentiated or expressed primarily prosodically are rapidly becoming grammaticalized. The same kinds of pathways observed for many European languages can be seen here as well, such as the development of complementizers from demonstratives and from content question words.