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LING 432

Blackfoot demonstratives: compositionality and the lack thereof

What is interesting about demonstratives in Blackfoot?

“The number of individual forms of demonstratives is enormous... almost all predictable forms are attested. Such as have not been recorded must certainly be of rare potential appearance, but the completely random pattern of the unattested forms rules out the likelihood that there are real gaps in the morphological pattern.”
(Taylor 1969, p213)

1. Obligatory deictic root
The deictic root serves as the demonstrative head; it is the only necessary part of the demonstrative.

2. Strict morphemic template
Morphem belong to specific categories that occupy different slots in a demonstrative 'template'. The order of these slots is fixed.

3. Necessary inflection
More of a syntactic than a formation restraint: demonstratives must mirror all inflection of their referent noun. This is most visible with the plural suffixes; the singular -wa-/-yi suffixes are often elided. Some singular demonstratives appear to have only restrictive -o. This may be because inflection was elided, or because the demonstrative serves as a locative with no nominal referent.

4. Template gap restrictions
Positional markers always occur after inflectional markers or -o.

5. Remote root + Restricted = bad
The remote root om- designates that a referent is far away from both speaker and addressee, while the restricted vowel -o that the referent is near the speaker. The combination contradicts itself.

What are there any restrictions or patterns in the ways demonstratives may be formed?

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What exceptions are there to compositionality?

Lexical
Some demonstratives have been lexicalized to mean something more specific than the combined meanings of their parts.

-a\-hka
The invisible marker sometimes appears in places where straightforward invisibility is not a possible interpretation:

That’s the man who broke my window!

The invisibility marker -hka appears on the demonstrative both when the man is present and when he is not. In the case of true invisibility, -hka sometimes appears in places where

Future research
• Continue gathering corpus data to discover more possible forms
• Test the hypothesized formation restrictions—this will create a more accurate picture from the 900 logical possibilities
• Investigate the phenomenon of nominal concord with positionals
• Look further into the meaning and usage of -hka

References: