CHAPTER SEVEN

SYNTAX

Wyandot morphology is highly structured and tightly organized. That is, there are several slots for morphemes to fall into, and these slots cannot be re-ordered. Wyandot syntax is, however, much looser and has less readily apparent structure. Word order is not fixed, and even what constitutes a single utterance is unclear.

7.1 Barbeau's Structures

Within Barbeau's texts there is little overt indication of structure. There are no convenient indicators of utterance boundaries, such as punctuation, particular physical layouts, intonation contours, or numbering of items. Lines of text are physical rather than linguistic in nature. That is, a line does not indicate an utterance unit of some sort, but only the amount of text that could be written across a page.

On the other hand, three potential levels of organization are discernible. At the top level is the entire text itself, always distinct from other texts. A text can run anywhere from only a single page (e.g., #10: *The White Otter*) to 25 pages in length (e.g., #27: *The Steer and the Ill-Treated Stepson*). At the bottom level is the word. Although often clear, as mentioned in chapter 4: *Prepronominal Prefixes*, there are frequent instances of separate words written together, or of single words written as two or more.

The intermediary level is the least certain. There are occasional indentations at the beginnings of lines that give the appearance of paragraphing. Their purpose is not explained.

Sometimes such an indent occurs where one would expect a paragraph break in English, but the correlations are inconsistent. A Wyandot indent might or might not occur where an English break would be, and an English break might or might not occur where a Wyandot indent appears. A block of text separated by indents might be only a single word, or cover multiple pages. Additionally, on rare occasions a large amount of white space appears within a line, giving the visual impression of a break.

Thus, there are no readily usable indications of what a Wyandot speaker might think of as an utterance. This is further complicated by the fact that, due to Wyandot's polysynthetic nature, even a single word can contain all the elements necessary for a complete utterance:

(427) hǎsǫ̀·ⁿgáʻs
hasǫ̀:dyáhs
ha-s-ǫdi-ahs
MASC,sg,AGT-bowl-make-HAB
'he makes bowls'
TN:28:240:43

Here the word contains the predicate as well as both arguments, not to mention aspectual marking. Decisions as to what constitutes a syntactic unit, whether utterance, clause, or something else, must be either left unresolved or based on English free translations.

7.2 Word Order

There is no fixed word order in Wyandot. The orders of nominal units[106] in apposition to agent and patient prefixes on verbs in relation to those verbs are variable, although there is a strong tendency for a nominal unit to follow the verb rather than precede.

To show that the word order is not fixed, both intransitive and transitive verbs, each with both agent and patient pronominal prefixes, will be shown with nominal units in apposition to those prefixes on both sides of the verb.

First to be shown is an intransitive verb, *-e-* 'go / come', bearing an agent pronominal prefix, preceded by the noun the agent prefix refers to:

(428) ...ᵘa·rí·skwaˀ tămę̀ⁿdéˀ...
na:rí:skwa? tawę̀dé?
t-a-węd-e-?
CISLOC-FACT-NON.MASC,pl,AGT-go-PUNC
'wolves they come'

A pack of wolves came [rushing toward him]
TN:12:113:02-03

Next shown is an intransitive verb, *-i?trǫ-* 'live', also with an agent pronominal prefix, but where the appositional nominal unit comes after the verb:

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[106]The term *nominal unit* is used for what would more commonly be called a noun phrase. This has been done to avoid implying any particular theoretical orientation about the nature of Wyandot syntactic constituency, beyond the idea that both morphological nouns as well as morphological verbs can apparently function as syntactic nouns.

(429) ...hanę·é˒ hĩyɛ́˒ᵉtrǫ˒ dɛ̄ka˒ yá·sti˒...
hanę:é? heyę́?trǫ? deka? yá:sti?
he-y[ę]-i?trǫ-?
TRANS-FEM.ZOIC,sg,AGT-live-STAT
'where she sits (stays) this monster'

'where the monster lived'
TN:16:129:43-46

In 430 a nominal unit precedes an intransitive verb, *-ǫredi-* 'starve', bearing a patient pronominal prefix:

(430) ...dàtǫ̀mą̀˒tɛ̨ⁿdi˒ hũnǫ́·ʿrɛ̨ⁿdi˒...
dàtǫwà?tędí? hunǫ́:redi?
hun-ǫredi-?
MASC,pl,PAT-starve-STAT
'the Potawatomies they are starving'

The Potawatomies were starving
TN:33:276:48-50

The following example demonstrates a nominal unit in apposition to a patient prefix following the verb with that prefix:

(431) ...hɛ̄sùtĩñó˒ dɛ̄
hesùtinyǫ́? de
he-s-(h)uti-Yǫ-?
TRANS-REP-MASC,non.sg,PAT-arrive-STAT
'back they go that

tutĩwi?	hà·ko̧ʕ...
tutiwí?	hà:kyo̧h
t-(h)uti-w-i?	h-at-Yo̧-h
CISLOC-MASC,non.sg,PAT-take-STAT	MASC,sg,AGT-SEMI-arrive-STAT
they with him	had come'

'his [envious] companions reached home...'
TN:13:121:02-04

Variable word order is also apparent with transitive verbs. In 432 the transitive verb *-o̧di-* 'make' appears with an agent pronominal prefix. The appositional noun appears before the verb.

(432) ...dẽ há?ᵃto̧?
de há?to̧?
ha-?to̧-?
MASC,sg,AGT-old-STAT
'the he is old

hătę̧nǫ̆ⁿgá?ᵃno̧ʕs...
hatę̧no̧dyá?no̧hs
h-atę̧-?n-o̧di-a-?no̧-hs
MASC,sg,AGT-SEMI-arrow-make-JOIN-DISTR-HAB
he (for) self arrows makes many'

'he was making arrows'
TN:26:198:09-12

The following example shows the appositional noun following the agent-marked transitive verb:

(433) ...ăhătrìwăñę̀·místa·nǫ̓
ahatrìwanyę̀:wísta:nǫ?
a-h-at-rihw-a-nyęwi-st-a-nǫ-?
FACT-MASC,sg,AGT-SEMI-law-JOIN-know.how-CAUS-JOIN-DISTR-PUNC
'he him entreated

ⁿda nărískwaʾ...
da narískwa?
the wolf'

'the Wolf entreated him'
TN:12:114:12-14

A transitive verb with a patient pronominal prefix can appear with the appositive nominal preceding, as in 434. Note that the few examples of this ordering that have been found all involve vocative uses.

(434) ...yesĕnę́ʾą̨ʿ	kasę̆ⁿdíʾⁱsǫʿ...
yesenę́?ah	kasędí?sǫh
ye-senę?-ah	ka-s-ęd-i?-sǫ-h
1,sg,AGT-domestic-NOUN	CISLOC-2,sg,PAT-SEMI-excrement-drop-IMP
'I the domestic have	here thou drop excrements'

"O my domestic, defecate here!"
TN:27:222:37-39

In the final word order possibility a transitive verb with a patient pronominal prefix precedes the nominal unit appositive to that pronominal prefix:

(435) ...tŭhàhŭñǫ́ⁿdɛʿt
tuhàhunyǫ́deht
tu-h-a-hu-nyǫde-ht
REM-TRANS-FACT-MASC,sg,PAT-take-CAUS.PUNC
'there she him took

dɛ   hũmę̃ʔʰtsę̃ʔtíʔa...
de   hǫwèʔtsę̨ʔtíʔa
      h-ǫwe-ʔtsęhti-ʔa
      MASC,sg,AGT-person-young.STAT-DIM
the   boy'

'she took the lad along with her'
TN:19:136:06-09

Normally only one nominal unit appears per utterance. However, on rare occasions both arguments appear with overt nominals. In 436 overt nominals appear for both the 'cat' and the 'rabbit':

(436) ...tăkú·c   hũweⁿdăǫ́hą̆ʔke̱ʔ   ta·ñǫ́ñę̆hą...
      takú:š   huwedaǫ́haʔkyeʔ   ta:nyǫ́nyęha
                hu-Yeda-ǫh-akye-ʔ
                MASC,sg,PAT-catch-STAT-PROG-STAT
      'a cat   it caught   a rabbit'

A rabbit was caught by a cat
TN:17:131:20-22

Although nominal apposition to pronominal prefixes on verbs seems to have little effect on word order, information structure may play a role. Chafe (1985) states that newsworthiness is an important factor in Seneca word order, with more newsworthy items ordered before less newsworthy items. Example 437 is from a creation text, and contains two nominal units in apposition to a transitive pronominal prefix. Previous to this the good Elder Brother had created humans. The evil Younger Brother in imitation decides to also make people. However, all he can make are monkeys:

(437) ...yũrǫsę́·ⁿdiᶜ ãhayǫ̀mą́)ᵃtǫ̃ⁿgà)ᵃ
yurǫsę́:dih ahayǫ̀wá?tǫdyà?
a-hayǫ-Ya?t-ǫdi-a?
FACT-MASC,sg:MASC,non.sg-body-make-PUNC
'monkeys he them bodies made

dẽhúᶜkę̃ñè)...
dehúhkę̃nyè?
de-hu-hkę̃nye?
SUBST-MASC,sg,PAT-younger.STAT
the he is younger'

And the monkeys he brought forth
TN:01:062:25-27

In this stretch of text, it is the result of the Younger Brother's creation, rather than the act of creation itself, that is more important.

7.3 "Clause" Combining

Considering the difficulties in ascertaining what an utterance might consist of, it is even more unclear how parts of an utterance interact. For instance, methods for combining clauses, however clauses are to be defined, are not readily apparent. In English, clauses can be conjoined with *and*, whereas in Wyandot units can be simply strung together. In the following example the Wyandot text has the words 'let our bodies stop' and 'let us go hunting' juxtaposed. In the free translation, however, there are two coordinate clauses joined by 'and':

(438) ...hę̀hą̃ǫ́)
hę̀haǫ́?
h[ę]-ihaǫ-?
MASC,sg,AGT-say-PUNC
'he said

dẽ
de
the

hõ̀mãyuwá·nɛᶜ
hǫ̀wayuwá:nęh
hǫwa-yuwanę-h
MASC,pl:MASC,sg-large-STAT
he person big (leader)

õñǫmą̃ą̃ʔtãtę̃ʕ	ãñǫmãnę̃·rǫ̃ʕtiʔ...
anyǫ̀waáʔtatę̀h	anyǫ̀wanę́:rǫtiʔ
a-Yǫwa-Yaʔt-a-tę-h	a-Yǫwa-nęrǫti-ʔ
FACT-1,pl,PAT-body-JOIN-stop-IMP	FACT-1,pl,PAT-hunt-IMP
let our bodies stop	let us go hunting'

Their leader said, "Let us halt here and go hunting!"
TN:20:145:13-17

Sometimes what may be joined by 'and' in English is separated by a particle in Wyandot. In 439 clauses that are conjoined in English have structures that parallel each other in Wyandot. The translation equivalents for each English clause follow the form Temporal Particle + Verb.

(439) ...nę̃ʕ sãhãtiʔⁱgãyę̃̀hąʔ
nę́h sahatíʔdyayę̀haʔ
s-a-hati-ʔd-Yayę-haʔ
REP-FACT-MASC,pl,AGT-?-go.out-PUNC
'now off they escaped

nę̃ʕ sahǫ̃má·tĩgaʕ...
nę́h sahǫwá:tidyah
s-a-hǫwati-dya-h
REP-FACT-3,non.sg:MASC,non.sg-chase-PUNC
now off they them chased'

'Then they escaped and were pursued'
TN:40:309:48-53

In both 438 and 439 the Wyandot utterances appear to have a flat structure, looking like juxtaposed clauses. This juxtaposition can hold even when the English translation involves more complex syntactic structures. Whereas the English gloss in 440 uses a *to* + infinitive construction, the Wyandot forms again appear to be simply strung together as juxtaposed clauses.

(440) ...dí? ĭyé·he? àyǫ̂nǫ^nt

dí?	iyé:he?	àyǫnǫht
	i-y-ehe-?	a-yǫ-nǫht
	PROTH-1,sg,AGT-think-STAT	FACT-1,sg:2,sg-give.PUNC
'I	I want	I thee give

dătrá?^askwĭjú?^u n dí?...
datrá?skwižúdi?
d-atra?skw-ižu-d-i?
SUBST-dream-good-BEN-STAT
the good fortune'

'I wish to bring you good luck'
TN:14:123:41-44

Despite varied translations into English, Wyandot syntactic structure appears relatively flat, involving mostly juxtaposition. However, due to the difficulties in ascertaining structural boundaries, Wyandot syntax remains an open area for further research.