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The rise of *un*emphatic negation: two standard negation constructions in Oji-Cree and their patterns of use

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Abstract

Oji-Cree (Algonquian) makes use of two negation constructions which overlap in non-future environments and differ subtly in their pragmatic contexts of use. *Ci-* negation is used for neutral, descriptive negation whereas *hsii-* negation is associated with polemic, emphatic-like uses within stronger assertions. While *hsii-* negation dates to Proto-Ojibwe, I show that *ci-* negation developed more recently from indirect irrealis expressions as a way to downplay the inherent abruptness of negation. This represents an opposite pathway from Jespersen's Cycle, which is partly motivated by the desire to *emphasize* negatives. Oji-Cree *ci-* negation instead arose as a new *un*emphatic expression, motivated by the desire to avoid social tension. Though many languages of the world feature multiple standard negation constructions, the development of these systems remain to be investigated in relation to their diachrony and social contexts. This study contributes to our knowledge of why and how such systems might arise.

Keywords: negation; Oji-Cree; Ojibwe; pragmatics

1. Introduction

This paper presents the first description of two alternate standard negation (SN) constructions in Oji-Cree which overlap in non-future contexts. Compare the affirmative statement in (1a) with the two corresponding negatives in (1b-c).

(1) a. ᐅᐸᐩᑯᐱᐧᐣ.
O-pashkopin-aan.
3-pluck.TA-3SG⟶3
'S/he's plucking it (ex. a goose).'

b. ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᐅᐸᐩᑯᐱᓴᐢᓯᐣ.
Kaawin o-pashkopin-aahsiin.
NEG 3-pluck.TA-3⟶3:**NEG**
'S/he's not plucking it.'

c. ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᑎᐸᐩᑯᐱᓴᐧ.
Kaawin ci-pashkopin-aac.
NEG **SUB.IRR-**pluck.TA-**CJ.**3SG ⟶3
'S/he's not plucking it.'

The construction in (1b) uses a negative particle *kaawin*[1] plus a verb inflected with the negative paradigm (Table 1). I will use the label *hsii- negation* for this construction, since most forms in the paradigm contain a segment *-(h)si(i)*.

Affirmative		**Negative**	
minohpikwan	'it tastes good'	minohpikwa**hsinoon**	'it doesn't taste good'
minohpikosi	's/he tastes good' (ex. fish)	minohpikosi**hsiin**	's/he doesn't taste good' (ex. fish)
ominohpitaan	's/he enjoys the taste of it'	ominohpitaan**siin**	's/he doesn't enjoy the taste of it'
ominohpinaan	's/he enjoys the taste of it (ex. fish)'	ominohpinaa**hsiin**	's/he doesn't enjoy the taste of it (ex. fish)'

Table 1: Select verbs with affirmative and negative inflection

The second SN construction in (1c) uses the same negative particle *kaawin,* plus a verb which takes the irrealis subordinating prefix *ci-* and conjunct (subordinate) inflection. Its only grammatical restriction is to non-future contexts. Otherwise, the two constructions overlap in their distribution, and occur with similar frequency in natural speech.

The term *standard negation* was first introduced by Payne (1985) and refined in Miestamo (2005) to refer to constructions which:

[1] The negative particle *kaawin* is often reduced to *kwaan*, and often occurs with the contrast-marking clitic *=(w)iin*, which for some younger speakers is in the process of becoming a fused form *kaawiniin* or *kwaaniin*.

- negate declarative verbal main clauses,
- are productively extendable to verbs across the language in question,
- and are not clearly secondary in frequency or pragmatic meaning to another negation construction.

Constructions which add significant semantic content in addition to negation are excluded from Miestamo's definition, though he allows for cases where two constructions differ more subtly.

Many languages in his typological study feature multiple standard negation (SN) constructions, and at least 40 by my count have constructions which overlap in their grammatical contexts. Miestamo (2005) discusses overlapping SN constructions which differ subtly in their semantics (Kayardild; p.88), to contrast in emphasis (Lahu; p.308; 389), or to be largely interchangeable (Korean; p.17). Some differ only by word order or the addition of a particle; others appear to be structurally unrelated. There are few dedicated studies which examine two such alternating SN constructions in a given language (though Schwenter (2005) represents an example).

Oji-Cree *hsii-* negation and *ci-* negation can both be analyzed as SN constructions which extend to any verbal negation in the language (including existential negation). Both are used to express neutral (non-emphatic) negation in declarative verbal main clauses[2] and both can be used with any verb in the language. Both occur with a similar frequency, with 43 occurrences of *hsii-* negation and 44 occurrences of *ci-* negation in the current corpus. The difference lies in their patterns of use, which contrast subtly in their relative strength of assertion.

The aims of this paper are to describe the usage of each SN construction, identify their pathways of development, and discuss possible motivating social-pragmatic factors. I will show that *ci-* negation arose more recently as an extension of an irrealis category, and functions to downplay the inherent abruptness of negative assertions. This represents a very different pathway from the well-documented Jespersen's Cycle, whereby a negative construction evolves through the addition of a new *emphatic* expression. The expansion of *ci-* negation has resulted in a layering effect over above *hsii-* negation, which continues to cover neutral as well as emphatic-like contexts.

[2] Although I will show that *hsii-* negation is associated with contexts of emphasis, this is not directly part of its semantics – it also occurs in neutral contexts and remains the sole means of expressing SN in future tense.

Since Oji-Cree is a divergent and under-described variety of Ojibwe, §2 will give a profile of the language and briefly describe the major types of standard and non-standard negation in relation to other dialects. §3 will describe the usage of each SN construction in natural speech, and section §4 will identify the diachronic pathways involved. §5 discusses the social-pragmatic factors which influenced the rise of a neutral, descriptive negation construction.

2. Background

Anihshininiimowin, or Oji-Cree, is the northernmost, most divergent variety of the Ojibwe language complex, having developed in close contact with Cree, another central Algonquian language.[3] Oji-Cree is spoken in Canada by approximately 12,000 people in the province of Ontario. The unique character of Oji-Cree is partly the result of its relative isolation from other dialects and partly the result of contact with Cree, which has influenced its lexicon, grammar and phonology.

Within Oji-Cree there exists considerable dialectal variation, which can be divided into three main sub-dialects: an Eastern dialect located within the Winisk River basin, a western dialect within the Severn River basin, and a southwestern dialect located further upriver near the Severn River headwaters (Valentine 1994; Nichols 2014). The map in Figure 1 displays these in relation to each river system.

This paper is primarily based on the variety spoken in Kingfisher Lake of the Winisk River dialect. The youngest fluent speakers in the community are in their twenties, though the level of language use among this age group varies considerably from household to household (Windsor 2021).

Significant works on Oji-Cree include a dissertation by Todd (1970) cast within transformational grammar and an ethnography of speaking by L. Valentine (1995). R. Valentine's (1994) dialectology of Ojibwe also contains much information about the distinctives of Oji-Cree.

[3] Oji-Cree was formerly known in the linguistic and anthropological literature as Severn Ojibwe (Ethnologue ISO ojs; Glottocode seve1240).

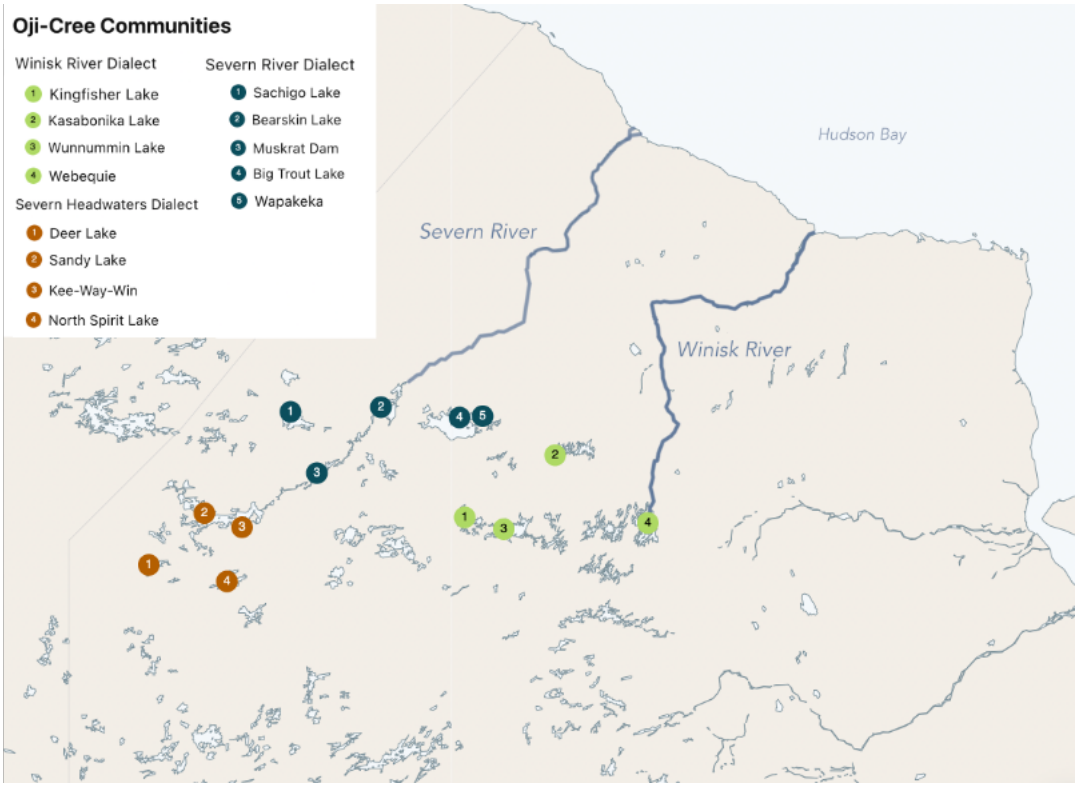

Figure 1: Oji-Cree communities in northwestern Ontario, by sub-dialect

2.1 Grammatical profile

Ojibwe is a highly synthetic language. Oji-Cree verbs directly index their core arguments and express complete propositions by themselves. The alignment of grammatical relations is hierarchical, being largely determined by the relative ranking of participants according to a predetermined hierarchy (roughly, 1/2nd person⟶3rd person). The ordering of constituents is flexible and functions primarily to convey pragmatic information. A large set of clitics serve to express varying degrees of assertion, contrast and emphasis.

Algonquian languages make a clear morphological distinction between nouns and verbs, and include many derivational resources for deriving one from the other. A set of some 200 affixal "pre-nouns" and "pre-verbs" express basic adjectival and adverbial meanings, and almost all other modification is achieved using a relative clause strategy.

Nouns fall into two inherent genders according to animacy, resulting in two separate paradigms for the marking of number, and obviation status. *Obviation* in the tradition of Algonquian linguistics refers to a grammatical system which

disambiguates two third person referents where the most topical (typically animate) referent has the value of "proximate status," and all other referents receive overt obviative marking. Person, number, and obviation values of core participants are also indexed on verbs regardless of the presence of co-referring nominals.

Since Bloomfield (1946), Algonquian verbs are traditionally described according to a tripartite template structure consisting of an *initial* slot (containing root-like elements), a *medial* slot (containing nominal or classifying elements), and a *final* slot (containing elements which specify verb class and often add further root-like semantics). The majority of verbs in Ojibwe have a bipartite (*initial-final*) stem structure (Rhodes 2011).

Verbs further fall into four structural sub-classes which specify transitivity and the animacy of the S argument (for intransitives) and O argument (for transitives). The basic categories are Inanimate Intransitive (II), Animate Intransitive (AI), Transitive Inanimate (TI), and Transitive Animate (TA). In the presentation of examples these abbreviations are appended to verb stem glosses, as they are central to the interpretation of each clause.

The verbal inflection system contains a primary division between two paradigm sets, traditionally termed *independent* (unglossed) and *conjunct* (CJ). The conjunct set of inflections is used for subordination of all kinds, as well as a smattering of specific constructions (including content questions, specific focus constructions and the *ci-* negation construction). It also has extended uses in main clauses in certain pragmatic contexts – a phenomenon discussed elsewhere under the term *insubordination* (Evans 2007).[4] Table 2 shows independent and conjunct forms for a family of four related verbs belonging to each of the four sub-classes.

Subordinate clauses carry a high functional load in Oji-Cree, and there are six primary subordinating prefixes which occur with conjunct inflection. Relevant to the current paper are the subordinator *ci-* (an irrealis covering potential, purposive, modal meanings and negative) and *ke-* (irrealis$_2$ covering future, counterfactual and modal meanings). Despite the centrality of verbs, Oji-Cree also makes frequent use of verbless clauses to express basic existence or identity of nominals.

Tense is optionally specified using verbal prefixes. Verbal suffixes further distinguish a *preterite* (PRET) tense for remote past and events which do not extend to

[4] See also Mithun (2008) who includes discussion of Algonquian languages and Drapeau & Lambert-Bretiere (2014) for specific analysis of a central Algonquian language, Innu.

present,[5] and a *dubitative* (DUB) category which expresses a reduced level of certainty. Further information on Ojibwe grammar can be found in Valentine (2001).

	Independent		Conjunct	
Inanimate Intransitive (II) verb	ᒥᓂᐱᑲᒼ *minohpikwan*	'it tastes good'	ᐊᒥᓂᐱᑲᐧᐠ *e-minohpikwahk*	'(that) it tastes good'
Animate Intransitive (AI) verb	ᒥᓂᐱᑯᓱ *minohpikosi*	's/he tastes good' (ex. fish)	ᐊᒥᓂᐱᑯᓰᒻ *e-minohpikosic*	'(that) s/he tastes good'
Transitive Inanimate (TI) verb	ᐅᒥᓂᐱᐱᓐ *ominohpitaan*	's/he enjoys the taste of it'	ᐊᒥᓂᐱᐱᓕᐠ *e-minohpitank*	'(that) s/he enjoys the taste of it'
Transitive Animate (TA) verb	ᐅᒥᓂᐱᐧᐊᓐ *ominohpwaan*	's/he enjoys the taste of him (ex. fish)'	ᐊᒥᓂᐱᐧᐊᒼ *e-minohpwaac*	'(that) s/he enjoys the taste of him (ex. fish)'

Table 2: Verb classes and primary inflectional division

2.2 Presentation and methodology

As the topic of this paper relates mainly to discourse-level phenomena, example glosses will not always decompose the internal morphology of each verb. Instead, each verb stem will be treated according to its meaning in context, and inflectional suffixes will sometimes be treated together according to their combined paradigmatic value.

Oji-Cree examples in this paper will be given first in the syllabic orthography used in Kingfisher Lake, followed by the standard "northern double vowel" writing system used in reference works such as Nichols (2014). This system corresponds more or less to IPA values, with doubled vowels indicating phonemic length, and <h> + consonant clusters corresponding to fortis consonants in other dialects of Ojibwe.

This study is primary based on examination of a growing corpus of Oji-Cree texts, currently numbering 8,115 words, composed of monologues and some conversation.

[5] Compare Plungian & van der Auwera's (2006) "discontinuous past tense" category.

Initial transcription and translation were carried out collaboratively by a small team of fluent native speakers and me using the software ELAN,[6] and subsequently imported to FLEx[7] for further analysis. All recorded material is housed by Mishamikoweesh Corp. in a community language and culture archive in Kingfisher Lake and is accessible to community members. The examples used for illustration below are drawn primarily from Mamakwa & Windsor (2021), which contains a collection of stories concerning the time period when the community of Kingfisher Lake moved to its current location in 1965.[8] Examples without a source reference were constructed in dialogue with speakers.

2.3 Overview of the negation system: standard and non-standard negation

This section will offer a brief overview of major negation constructions in Oji-Cree, since it is an under-described dialect and since the two negation constructions considered in this paper interact with non-standard negation. Oji-Cree features four major non-standard negation constructions which differ from other varieties of Ojibwe.

i. In subordinate clauses, Oji-Cree maintains a separate negator *ekaa*, borrowed from neighbouring dialects of Cree (2). It has also lost the entire set of negative inflections within the conjunct paradigm.

(2) …ᐅᑕ ᐱᐧᐨ ᐁᑊ ᐁᑭᐊᓂᒥᐦᑎᐧᐨ.
ota piko ***ekaa*** *e-kii-ani-mihtikohkaa-k.*
PRT just **NEG** SUB-PST-starting-be.many.trees.II-CJ
'…with there just starting to not be many trees [standing dead-wood] left.' [SS01.2]

ii. For negative commands, Oji-Cree has lost the prohibitive inflection of other dialects and simply pairs the standard negative particle *kaawin* with an imperative verb.

[6] By Max Planck Institute (https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan)

[7] SIL Fieldworks Language Explorer (https://software.sil.org/fieldworks)

[8] Primary story-tellers included Moses Mamakwa, Bessie Mamakwa, Simon Sakakeep, Samuel Winter, Martha Winter, and James Mamakwa. Examples below are identified by the initials of the speaker, text number, and line number.

(3) ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᒪᐃᐧᐣ.

Kaawin *mawi-n.*

NEG cry.AI-IMP

'Don't cry!' [observed]

iii. Existential negation makes use of negated indefinite pronouns *kekoon* 'thing' or *awiya* 'someone', and may be non-verbal or include a verb of existence. If a verb of existence is present it may use either *ci-* negation or *hsii-* negation.

(4) ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᖿᑯᐣ ᓂᐱ (ᑭᐊᐦᐠ / ᐊᐦᔨᓴᐧᐣ).

Kaawin ***kekoon*** *nipi* *(ci-ayaa-k / ayaa-hsinoon).*

NEG **thing** water SUB.IRR-be.there.II-CJ be.there.II-NEG

'There's no water.'

iv. Constituent negation similarly pairs *kaawin* with a nominal, and often takes the form of a cleft construction.

(5) ᑲᐃᐧᓂᐣ ᖾᔨ (ᑲᐃᓇᐠ).

Kaawin **=** ***iin*** *Jessie* *(kaa-in-ak).*

NEG **=** **but** Jessie SUB.REL-mean.TA-CJ.1SG ⟶3SG

'(It's) not Jessie (that I mean).'

Oji-Cree also makes extensive use of the prefix *onci-* to indicate negative perfect aspect (c.f. (12) below). While reported to occur infrequently in southern dialects of Ojibwe, the form is more common in regions of close contact with Cree *ohci-* 'negative past' (Valentine 1994: 545). The major negation constructions of Oji-Cree are summarized schematically in Table 3 in comparison with the better-documented dialect of Odawa Ojibwe (based on Valentine 2001: 837-56).[9] Unglossed forms are negators.

Todd (1970: 73-80) contains a section on Oji-Cree negation with no mention of the *ci-* negation construction, though Valentine (1994) provides one example (1994: 238) and comments on the apparent lack of difference in meaning (1994: 763).

[9] Odawa standardly uses the southern "double vowel" orthography which represents lenis and fortis consonants with voiced and voiceless symbols, corresponding to their pronunciation.

	Oji-Cree	Odawa Ojibwe
Standard Negation	*kaawin(iin)* + VERB-NEG *kaawin(iin)* + IRR-VERB-CJ	*gaa wii* + VERB-NEG
Subordinate Negation	*ekaa* + VERB-CJ	initial vowel change\VERB-CJ.NEG
Negative commands	*kaawin* + VERB-IMPER	*gego* + VERB-NEG.IMPER
Existential negation	'no thing' + nominal (+ VERB-NEG) (+ IRR-VERB-CJ)	'no thing' + nominal (+ VERB-NEG)
Constituent negation (cleft)	*kaawin* + nominal (+ relative clause)	*gaa* + nominal (+ relative clause)

Table 3: Summary of basic negation constructions in Oji-Cree and Odawa Ojibwe

3. The two negation constructions

The remainder of this paper concerns the two SN constructions introduced at the outset. I will show that these occur in contexts which differ subtly in the speaker's relative *strength of assertion.* This section classifies each construction by its structural characteristics (§3.1), then provides some brief background on the pragmatics of negation (§3.2) before describing their differences in usage with examples from natural texts (§3.3). Section 3.4 describes a few further tense-related restrictions on the use of *ci-* negation.

3.1 Structural classification

Hsii- negation (6b) is a *symmetric* construction in that it differs from its positive counterpart in (6a) solely by markers of negation (Miestamo 2005). It is also an example of double negation, with polarity being doubly expressed through both a particle *kaawin* as well as verb morphology.[10]

[10] Valentine (1994: 238) includes an Oji-Cree example of a negative lacking the expected verb morphology, and negation signalled only by the negator *kaawin.* I have informally observed instances of this as well though there are no examples in the corpus.

(6) a. ᐃᒋᐦᐣ.
Maacihse.
start.AI.3SG
‘S/he is starting.’
b. ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᐃᒋᐦᐣᐠᐧᐨ.
Kaawin = iin maacihse-hsiin.
NEG = but start.AI-NEG
‘S/he’s not starting.’ (may express stronger assertion)
c. ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᒋᐃᒋᐦᐣ⁻.
Kaawin = iin ci-maacihse-c.
NEG = but start.AI-CJ.3SG
‘S/he’s not starting.’ (descriptive/non-emphatic)

The verbal negative *paradigm* however, is *asymmetric* in Miestamo’s terms, since it is missing from the conjunct paradigm. A separate negation construction is instead used for subordinate contexts (c.f. §2.3). Negative verbal endings involve an element *-(h)si(i)* in an identifiable slot following the verb stem, yet the negative paradigm also involves complex morphophonemics and a few idiosyncratic changes throughout the suffix complex. Although the Algonquian verbal suffix complex is segmentable, some of the resulting segments are opaque in meaning or only occur in a few of the expected forms, meaning full paradigms always need to be listed. The ending *-hsiin* in (6b), for example, is segmentable into *-hsii* ‘negative’ and *-n* ‘(negative) non-plural,’ the latter of which only occurs in some singular forms.[11]

The *ci-* negation construction (6c) is unique to Oji-Cree. It uses the same negative particle *kaawin* plus irrealis prefix *ci-* on a conjunct-inflected verb. In Miestamo’s terms, the construction is structurally *asymmetric* in that it differs from its positive counterpart (6a) by features aside from negation markers – it also bears the markings of a subordinate irrealis clause.

Outside of negative contexts, the irrealis subordinator *ci-* expresses a range of meanings from the domain of non-reality, including potentiality and purpose. It typically occurs in subordinate clauses, but can be extended for independent use in certain pragmatic contexts such as suggesting a course of action (*ci-*

[11] For analysis of Ojibwe negative forms see Nichols (1980: 209-220); for useful templates and discussion see Valentine (2001: chapters 5-8). Valentine (1994: 554) maps the dialectal distribution of this final -n segment.

amihtamawininaan? 'Could I read it to you?'). Historically, it originated as a future marker (cf. Valentine 2001: 759), though in its current negative use it is restricted from future contexts. Negated subordinate clauses with *ci-* are distinguishable from the *ci-* SN negation by the use of subordinate negator *ekaa*.

3.1 Prerequisites: The pragmatics of negation

Givón (2001) characterizes the pragmatic nature of negation in this way: "Negative assertions are typically made on the tacit assumption that the hearer either has heard about, believes in, is likely to take for granted, or is at least familiar with the corresponding affirmative" (Givón 2001: 370-71).[12]

In (7), for example, the first clause introduces a background proposition and the second clause negates it.

(7) Background: Bill told me he won the lottery,
Neg-assertion: though later I found out he *didn't*. (Givón 2001: 371)

The background proposition can become salient in any number of ways, from an earlier mention in conversation or from the shared experience between speakers. Most of the functions of *hsii-* negation discussed below involve negative assertions which express contrast with some background proposition present in context.

In milder cases, a negative assertion simply contrasts with generic shared information.

(8) a. There once was a man who *didn't* have a head.
b. ?There once was a man who *didn't* look like a frog. (Givón 2001: 371)

Sentence (8a) is easily processed because the fact that people normally have heads is generic shared information. Sentence (8b), on the other hand, sounds questionable without some further creative background, because it cannot normally be assumed that people look like frogs. Most examples of *ci-* negation discussed below involve

[12] See Horn (2001: 3,63) for the history of this idea, which traces as far back as the 8th century Indian logician Sankara. Also compare Jespersen (1917: 4-5): "the chief use of a negative sentence [is] to contradict and to point a contrast." Criticisms of Givón's approach to negation are addressed in Miestamo (2005: 197-199).

negative assertions which negate only generic information. Between these two extremes, the background to any given negative assertion can have a greater or lesser strength of activation in a speaker's mind.

The literature on negation has identified a number of useful semantic distinctions. Building on the work of Ducrot (1972) and others, Horn (2001: 363), distinguished *descriptive negation*, which simply negates a proposition, from metalinguistic (or *polemic*) negation, which specifically objects to a speaker's previous utterance (whether on the basis of the utterance itself or related presuppositions or implicatures), and is said to express an attitude of disapproval. Gross (1977) had termed this *contrastive* negation, though the term now typically refers to expressions which very explicitly contrast a negative state of affairs with the corresponding affirmative (see for example Silvennoinen 2019). Understood this way, contrastive structures can express either metalinguistic or descriptive negation (Martins 2020). The term *denial* in this paper will refer to any non-agreeing response to an assertion, where phrased as a negative or affirmative.

The subtle contrast between *ci-* negation and *hsii-* negation loosely corresponds to that between descriptive vs. polemic negation, though the distinction is not so clear cut that it can be easily elicited. Speakers do not identify *hsii-* negation as more emphatic per se, though *ci-* negation appears limited to neutral descriptive contexts in natural speech. Either construction can be used to express contrastive negation, though I will use the term *contrast* in describing polemical negatives which may "contrast" with an anticipated inference, for example.

In many contexts a negative assertion can be construed alternately as a response to some background, or merely as a neutral description. Rather than coding an obligatory grammatical contrast, *ci-* negation and *hsii-* negation relate to differences in pragmatic *stance* – how a speaker is choosing to position themselves at a particular moment in interaction (Heritage 2012). In isolated elicitation, speakers typically offer *ci-* negation as default, since in an elicitation setting a speaker usually has no reason to be asserting the content of what they are saying. If I then suggest the alternative *hsii-* negation form, I frequently receive a response such as "yes, that's the other way of saying it." Differences in use only become apparent in the analysis of natural speech (§3.2-3) or occasionally when a good context is described (§5.1). I use the term

strength of assertion as a way of characterizing the pragmatic contrast conveyed, loosely based on Givón's use of the term.[13]

The following sections illustrate the nonfuture functions of *ci-* negation and *hsii-* negation in natural texts. It will be shown that *ci-* negation is limited to descriptive contexts, while *hsii-* negation most often occurs in polemic contexts, associated with assertiveness and an authoritative stance.

3.2 Ci- *negation: contexts of use*

The *ci-* negative construction is used for descriptive negation – the neutral (non-emphatic) negation of a proposition without contrast against any salient background. In the corpus it is used:

- to make observations about present circumstances (including directing a hearer's attention to something observable or revealing an internal state) (example (9))
- to describe narrative setting (example (10))
- to describe generic past habitual events (example (11))
- to elaborate on specific narrative events (examples (12))

One evening I was sitting with a friend, and the community radio station was airing music in the background. After a period of silence in our conversation, he voiced the observation in (9).

(9) ᑲᐃ·ᓐ ᐊᐃ·ᔭ ᑎᒪᑌᐊᐱ⁻.

Kaawin awiya *ci-mate-api-c.*

NEG INDEF.PRON SUB.IRR-INDR-sit.AI-CJ.3SG

'There's no one at the radio.' (lit. 'there's no one audibly sitting") [observed]

Our shared background was the knowledge that it was the time of evening when someone usually sits at the community radio to give an update. But this expectation was not previously salient in our conversation, and my friend was not asserting any

[13] Givón (2001) discusses four broad "propositional modalities" he terms "realis assertion," "negative assertion," "irrealis assertion" and "presupposition". In his chapter on negation, he arranges these by "strength of assertion," which he associates with contexts having a high degree of certainty.

knowledge he had that I did not. He was simply directing my attention to a fact we could both perceive.

In narrative, *ci-* negation is used for descriptions of narrative setting. In (10), the speaker is recounting an early memory from when he first arrived in Kingfisher Lake with his family. He describes the sight of the shoreline when it first came into view.

(10) We were just coming around the point here across the lake, and it was a little bit rainy. We were covered, being just kids, with some kind of canvas. There were just a few overturned canoes barely visible here along the shore.
ᑲᐃᐧᐊᓂᐣ ᒋᐸᐩᑭᐱᑭᓐ ᐃᐦᐃᒪᐣ,
Kaawiniin ci-pashkwaakipan ihimaa.
kaawin=iin *ci-pashkwaa-kipan* *ihimaa*
NEG=but SUB.IRR-be.clear.II-CJ.PRET there
‘It wasn’t cleared there.’ (Only the canoes were visible) [JM01.50]

The negated information in this case is the generic knowledge that boat landings are typically cleared of brush, reinforced by shared familiarity with the spot he was referring to (now clear). The description was not in contrast to anything particularly salient in the narrative or speech situation.

A similar use is in neutral descriptions of past generic events. The following example comes from a text in which the speaker, Moses Mamakwa, describes learning to trap from an older man who used unorthodox methods. When the man trapped for otter, he would place the traps in water that was really too deep to see through clearly.

(11) And when he trapped for otter...
ᑲᐃᐧᐊᓂᐣ ᐃᐧ ᒋᐸᑲᐧᓂᔨ. | Kaawiniin iko ci-paakwaanik.
kaawin=iin=iko *ci-paakwaan-nik*
NEG=but=EMPH SUB.IRR-be.shallow.II-CJ.SG.OBV
‘it [the water] wasn’t shallow.’ (It was maybe three feet deep) [MM01.45]

Ci- negation is also used in the elaboration of specific events in narrative. In (16), the speaker, Martha Winter, is telling a story from when she first arrived in Kingfisher Lake as a girl and her father sent her to the new trading post with her sister to buy some tea.

(12) ᐃ·ᓂᐣ ᐃᑯ ᑎᐅᐣᑎ ᑭᐦᑎ ᐅᑕᐦᐱᓂᑲᐩᔭᐣᐦᐟ.
Kaawiniin iko ci-onci-kihci-otaahpinikeyaank.
kaawin = iin = iko ci-onci-kihci-otaahpin-ike-yaank
NEG = but = EMPH SUB.IRR-NEG.PERF-DEGREE-take.TA-DETRANS-CJ.1PE
'And so we hadn't taken [bought] a lot of stuff.' (We only bought tea) [MW01.46]

On her way home, she becomes separated from her sister and is lost in the woods. She says,

(13) ᑲᐃ·ᓂᐣ ᐃᑯ ᑎᒫᐢᓯᐣᑕᒪᐣ ᐊᐣᑎ ᖃᐃᓴᐦᐟ.
Kaawiniin iko cimaaciiyentamaan aanti ke-ishaayaan.
kaawin = iin = iko ci-maacii-yentam-aan
NEG = but = EMPH SUB.IRR-begin-think.TI-CJ.1SG
aanti ke-ishaa-yaan
where SUB.IRR2-go.there.AI-CJ.1SG
'I had no idea where to go.' [MW01.64]

These lines occur at key points in the narrative, and both contain the emphatic particle *iko*. But within the storytelling situation – a room full of community members – neither line functions to deny any strong supposition shared with the audience.

3.3 Hsii- *negation: contexts of use*

Although *hsii-* negation is also frequently offered in neutral contexts, examination of natural speech shows that it frequently contrasts with information already salient in communicative context. In textual examples it is employed:

- to contrast with explicit background information from a previous clause or earlier in discourse (example (14))
- to contrast with another's implicature (15)
- to contrast to an anticipated inference (16)
- to speak from a position of knowledge or emphasize a "main point" (18)-(19).

The countering function of *hsii-* negation is best shown in examples where the negation explicitly contrasts with a previous clause.

(14) ᓂᓅᐢᑖᐢ ᓱ ᐃᐧᓂᑯ ᐁᑲᑭᑎᓀᓂᐊᐧᐣᑊ, ᑲᐢ ᑕᑌ ᐃᑯ ᓂᑖᐁᐧᑊᑖᔨᐢ.

Ninoontaan hsha wiiniko e-kakitinaaniwank, kaawin tahsh iko nitaawehtaahsiin.

ni-noontam-n hsha = wiin = iko e-kakito-naaniwank,

1-hear.TI-1SG ASS = EMPH = EMPH SUB-talk.AI-CJ.NONSPEC.ACT

kaawin = tahsh = iko nit-aawehtam-hsiin

NEG = but = EMPH 1-understand.TI-NEG

‘I hear talking, but I can’t understand it.’ [BM01.04]

Example (14) comes from the opening of the speaker’s talk, where she explains that she cannot really hear the others’ stories because she is very hard of hearing. The initial clause “I hear talking” gives rise to an expected inference ‘she understands what is being said’. The second clause negates it with *hsii-* negation.

The construction is also used to disagree with an implicature. In (15) the speaker begins her talk in the same vein as the elders before her, saying, “OK – my turn – I will tell a story of long ago. A story of long ago.” But in the next line she adjusts her stance.

(15) ᑲᐃᐧᐁᐢ ᐃᑯ ᐁᐧᐣᑲ ᓂᐢ ᓂᑎᓅᐢᑖᔨᐢ ᐅᐦᐅᒪ ᐃᓂᑯᐢ ᑲᐧᐣᐧᑕᐢᑊᐧᓂᐊᐧᐣᑊ.

Kaawiniin iko weshkac niin nitinentaahsiin ohomaa inikohk kaa-onci-ayaaniwank.

kaawin = iin = iko weshkac niin nit-inentam-hsiin

NEG = but = EMPH long.ago 1.PRON 1-think.AI-NEG

ohomaa inikohk kaa-onci-ayaa-aaniwank

here much SUB.PST-since-be.there.AI-CJ.NONSPEC.ACT

‘Though I don’t think/agree it’s been all that long, myself, since we started living here.’ (We’ve been here since about 1965) [MW01.03]

Here she disaffiliates with the angle of the other storytellers and asserts her own opinion: 1965 was not *all* that long ago, after all. A few paragraphs later, she uses *hsii-* negation in anticipation of an expected inference. She starts by telling her audience, a room-full of community members, how she has been based at Kingfisher Lake her whole life, from a time predating the relocation of the settlement. The audience could reasonably expect that she would remember the other families who

also lived here – a matter of key interest. In anticipation of this, she asserts that, in fact, she does not remember who those individuals were.

(16) This is where I was born, here in Kingfisher Lake. I've been here ever since I was a child.
ᓱᓀᑯᐨ ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᑌᐯᐧ ᓂᑲᓄᐦᑫᐦᓯᐣ ᐁᐧᑎ ᐃᐧᐣ ᐁᐧᐠᑲᐨ ᑲᑭᐊᓴᐃᐧᑯᐊᐢᑐᐣ.
shaakooc kaawin tepwe nikanoohkehsiin weti wiin weshkac kaa-kii-ayaawaakopanen.
Shaakooc *kaawin* *tepwe* *ni-kanoohke-hsiin*
nevertheless NEG really 1-remember.AI-NEG
weti *wiin* *weshkac* *kaa-kii-ayaa-waakopanen*
over.there PRON.3SG long.ago SUB.REL-PST-be.there.AI-CJ.3PL:PRET:DUB
'Nevertheless I cannot really remember those who would have stayed over there back then.'
Those who used to go to the north side. I can only remember them a little bit. [MW01.32]

The particle *shaakooc* "nevertheless" here introduces a contra-expectation. Compare the parallel example in (17) using *ci-* negation, which shows how a speaker can construe the same information in different ways. This was given by the hard-of-hearing elder, who frequently paused to think between thematic units, and several times softly remarked:

(17) ᑲᐃᐧᓂᐣ ᑌᐯᐧ ᕆᑲᓄᐦᑫᔭᐣ | kaawiniin tepwe ci-kanoohkeyaan
kaawin=iin *tepwe* *ci-kanoohke-yaan*
NEG=but really SUB.IRR-remember.AI-CJ.1SG
'I don't really remember' [BM01.26]

In this case the phrase 'I don't remember' is used neutrally as a hesitation strategy, said in isolation outside of the narrative, and she is not asserting it in contrast to any salient background.

Examples of *hsii-* negation have so far involved speakers making negative assertions in contexts where the corresponding affirmative is somehow salient, whether as a result of previous discourse or otherwise. But *hsii-* negation is also often used when a

speaker has a high level of confidence in the content of what they are saying, and wishes to assert something from a position of personal knowledge on the topic.

In (18), the speaker has just finished describing the method his mother taught him for setting a rabbit snare. He explains the importance of placing birch tips on either side to attract the rabbit into the snare – a method apparently not in wide use today. "And that's how he will be snared," he assures his audience:

(18) ᑲᐃ·ᓂᓪ ᐃᑯ ᐅᐱᒉᑕᐦᔨᓪ ᒋᓇ ᐁᑲ ᐅᑕ ᖃᑯᓂ ᑲᒋᑎ⁻.
Kaawiniin iko opimentahsiin, miina ekaa ota kekoonini kaa-miicic.
Kaawin=iin=iko ohpimentam-hsiin
NEG=but=EMPH bother.TI-NEG
miina ekaa ota kekoon-ini kaa-miici-c
CONN NEG PRT thing-OBV SUB.REL-eat.TI-CJ.3SG
'He doesn't bother with it if there's no bait.' (lit. 'there being nothing to eat.') [MM01.70]

This is an assertion about the way rabbits behave based on the authority of the speaker's experience. He is teaching, and projecting knowledge of what will happen in a given situation. Even though examples like (18) carry no tense marking, they are often translated into English future tense "he won't bother it," showing they can carry the strong assertive quality of a prediction.[14]

Another example comes from an elder teaching about the uses of medicinal plants.

(19) And then you put that thing over where the person chopped himself… that thing that was chewed.
ᒋᓴ ᑲᐃ·ᓂᓪ ᒋᓇᐊ· ᐸᐣᑲᖁ·ᓱᓂ.
Mii hsha kaawiniin miinawaa paashkaakwehsiini.
Mii hsha kaawin=iin miinawaa paashkaakwe-hsiin
FOC ASS NEG=but again bleed.AI-NEG
'and it won't bleed again' (lit. 'and it doesn't bleed again') [IM01.217]

[14] This use of *hsii-* negation relates to a stance of *epistemic authority*, which refers to the way a speaker positions themselves as more knowledgeable (and assumes the addressee is less knowledgeable) (Stivers et al. 2011). This concept grew up in the field of conversation analysis and has recently proved fruitful in the description of indigenous languages. See, for example, Grzech (2020) for discussion of clitics in Upper Napo Kichwa which express epistemic authority; also Mansfield (2019) for a Murrinhpatha verbal distinction which is related to culturally defined notions of epistemic authority.

The speaker here makes a prediction based on her experiential knowledge of treating wounds. Although the corpus only contains a few didactic texts, my impression is that *hsii-* negation occurs more frequently in sermons, and in the speech of elders, who carry a certain cultural authority by virtue of their lifetime of accumulated experience.

A different type of example comes from a translated text, where the translator looked at an existing draft using *ci-* negation and amended it to *hsii-* negation to make it more natural in Oji-Cree. Both versions were grammatical, but *hsii-* negation was judged to better fit the context of contrastive negation.

(20) That anointing is real,
ᐅᐃᐧᐣ ᑲᑭᓇᐃᐧᐱᐢᑭᒪᑲᓂᐢᐦᓯᓄᐣ.
kaawin kakiinawishkimakan-hsinoon.
NEG be.false.II-NEG
'it is not false' [1John 2:27]

Overall, the patterns of use for *hsii-* negation show a clear association with polemic contexts not observed with *ci-* negation.

3.4 Tense restrictions

While *ci-* negation and *hsii-* negation overlap in most contexts, there are a few grammatical restrictions on *ci-* negation related to tense. Miestamo's (2005) typological study of standard negation identifies many languages with multiple SN constructions split along TAM categories. For example, the Meithei language displays a future/nonfuture split (2005: 10) and Brahui contains separate SN constructions for four different tense-aspect categories (2005: 264-265).

In Oji-Cree, *ci-* negation is restricted to non-future contexts; only *hsii-* negation is felicitous in (21).

(21) ᐅᐃᐧᐣᓐ ᑕᐱᐦᐁᐢᐦᓯᐣ.
Kaawin=iin ta-piishaa-hsiin.
NEG=CONN 3.FUT-come.AI-NEG
'He's not going to come.' [observed]

Formal equivalents with *ci- negation* do not exist, either as **kaawiniin ke-piishaac* (with future/irrealis$_2$ subordinator *ke-*) nor with any combination of *ci-* followed by future prefixes.[15] It also cannot occur in future contexts without tense marking.

Even though *hsii-* negation is the sole strategy for expressing SN in the future, the negative future context itself shows associations with strong assertion in Oji-Cree. Future-tense statements are a frequent strategy for giving polite commands in Ojibwe, independent of the dedicated set of imperative forms (Rhodes 1988). The illustrative command in (22) was observed at a community event, as the building was reaching capacity. Newcomers were still arriving, and there was an air of uncertainty as to whether some people should leave. An elder stood up and addressed the room in a loud voice:

(22) ᑲᐃᐧᓂᐣ ᐊᐃᔭ ᑕᒪᒐᐦᔨᐣ.

Kaawin awiya ta-maacaa-hsiin.

NEG someone 3.FUT-leave.AI-NEG

‘Nobody is going to leave.’ [observed]

Here the future negative is clearly associated with strength of assertion and the respected social position of the speaker. The expression is still polite however, reinforcing the assumption of group cooperation (Rhodes 1988).

In the past tense, *ci-* negation is also blocked from taking the simple past marker *kii-*, since the special combination of *ci- + kii-* expresses ability.[16]

(23) ᑲᐃᐧᐣ ᑎᑭᐳᑕᐁᐧᐊᐧ⁻.

Kaawin ci-kii-pootawe-c.

NEG SUB.IRR-ABLE-make.fire.AI-CJ:3

‘He can’t make a fire.’ (NOT: ‘He didn’t make a fire.’)

Ci- negation regularly occurs in past tense contexts though as seen above, either without explicit tense marking (11) or with preterite inflection (c.f. example 10).

[15] The closest communicative equivalent would be *Kaawiniin ci-wii-piishaac* ‘He doesn’t want to come.’

[16] The full pattern consists of any future/irrealis marker (*ta-/ka-, ke-, ci-*) followed by ‘past’ *kii-*. Apparently this is an older pattern remaining from when *ci-* was itself a future prefix. See Rhodes (1985) for discussion of the historical development of future prefixes in Ojibwe and Cree from Proto Algonquian **kataw* (which has reflexes in multiple languages associated with ‘ability’).

3.5 Summary

The grammatical/pragmatic contexts of *ci-* negation and *hsii-* negation are summarized in Table 4. The following section will consider the diachronic development of this system. I show that as the newer construction, *ci-* negation has extended its range to to overlap with *hsii-* negation in all environments except future tense and emphatic/polemic contexts.

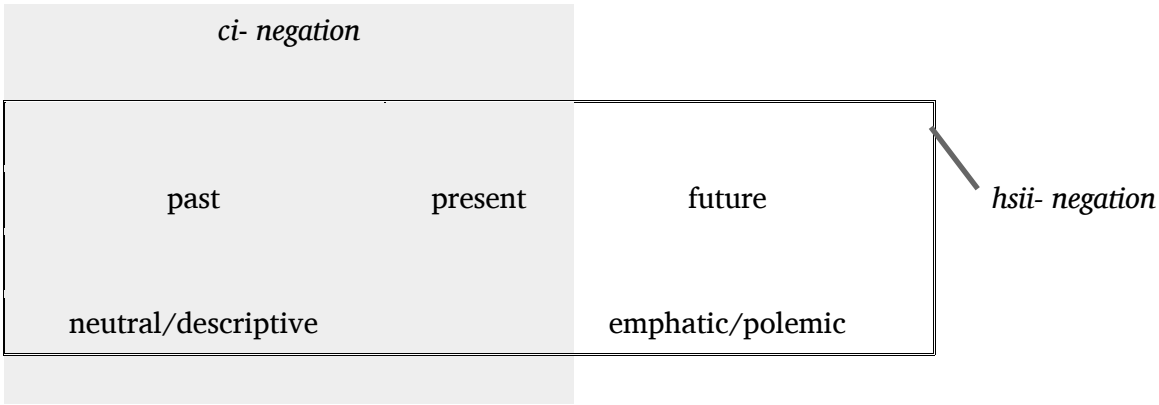

Table 4: The distribution of standard negation constructions in Oji-Cree

4. The rise of descriptive negation

This section demonstrates that *ci-* negation is the newer construction and identifies potential steps in its development from subordinate potential/irrealis clauses. The development of this negation system also shows some evidence of contact-induced change from Cree.

4.1 Diachronic pathways

The clearest evidence that *ci-* negation is the newer SN construction comes from the fact that the *hsii-* negative paradigm is common to all the sprawling dialects of Ojibwe while *ci-* negation is unique to Oji-Cree (Valentine 1994: 237-8). As the standard method of negation across Ojibwe, *hsii-* negation dates to at least "Proto-Ojibwe."

The affirmative uses of c*i-* as a future/potential subordinator are also common to all dialects – it is only in Oji-Cree where it has been combined with a main clause negator and extended into the domain of standard negation. Miestamo (2005: 208-209) discusses languages in his study which show a structural association between

negation and some irrealis category, grouping negation semantically along with other kinds of non-realized events. Oji-Cree *ci- negation* shows this type of structural parallel, being an innovative extension of the irrealis prefix and retaining some residual pragmatic meaning of indirectness (in Givón's terms, irrealis assertions are only "weakly asserted").

The connection between negation and expressions of indirectness is explored in Jespersen (1917: 22-38). For example, a hanging hypothetical 'if I were rich' can be used to "express by tense and mood something that is irreal, implying 'I am not rich'" (1917: 36). The following example pairs demonstrate irrealis *ci-* used in several environments associated with diachronic sources of negation: an indirect suggestion in the form of a subordinate clause (24), a negatively phrased question (25) and a negative purpose clause (using subordinate negator *ekaa* and irrealis *ci-* expressing purpose) (26).

(24) a. ᒋᒪᐣᑭᐦᐋᑲᐌᑌᔨ.
Ci-mankipiihikaate-k.
SUB.IRR-be.written.large-CJ
'should it be/maybe it could be written large?' (tentative suggestion) [observed]

b. ᐊᐌᐧᓂᐣ ᒋᒪᐣᑭᐦᐋᑲᐌᑌᔨ.
Kaawin = iin ci-mankipiihikaate-k.
NEG = but SUB.IRR-be.written.large-CJ
'It's not written large.'

(25) a. ᐊᐌᐧᓇᐋᐧᐣ ᒋᒪᑊᑯᓯᐣᔨ?
Kaawin = na = wiin ci-maaciikoocin-k?
NEG = Q = but SUB.IRR-fly.off.AI-CJ.3SG
'Isn't he flying out?' (negative request for confirmation)

b. ᐊᐌᐧᐣ ᒋᒪᑊᑯᓯᐣᔨ.
Kaawin = iin ci-maaciikoocin-k.
NEG = but SUB.IRR-fly.off.AI-CJ.3SG
'He isn't flying out.'

(26) a. They tied it around here [gesture to arm] with rabbit hide,
∇ᐦ ᐅᐦᐅᒪ ᒋᑲᐊᐧᒋᐧ,

Ekaa ohomaa ci-kawaci-c.
NEG.SUB here SUB.IRR-feel.cold.AI-CJ.3SG
'so that she wouldn't feel cold here,' here [gesture to arm] where the snow enters. [BM03A.122]

b. ᑲᐃᓱᐣ ᐅᖨᐅᒪ ᑎᑲᐊᑎᒃ.
Kaawin ci-kawaci-c.
NEG SUB.IRR-feel.cold.AI-CJ.3SG
'She doesn't feel cold.'

These environments represent possible intermediate steps along a pathway of development whereby irrealis *ci-* was extended to the domain of negation. The diachronic connections between *ci-* negation and indirectness show that its association with weakly-asserted denials is related to the residual semantics of its source construction.

In the terminology of grammaticalization theory, the rise of *ci-* negation has led to *layering*, which occurs when older constructions (*hsii-* negation) persist alongside newer ones (*ci-* negation) with the same or similar meaning (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 124). Frequently this leads to *specialization*, which "may be manifested simply as textual preferences, conditioned by semantic types, sociolinguistic contexts, discourse genres, and other factors" (2003: 116). Hopper & Traugott (2003) go on to say that "during any phase of coexistence there are some contexts in which the two (or more) types in question involve a clear pragmatic difference. There are other contexts in which the choice between them is less clear" (2003: 126). The domain of standard negation in Oji-Cree contains just this type of subtle pragmatic difference due to layering between an old negation construction and an emergent one.

4.2 Language contact

A second factor which may have had indirect influence on the rise of *ci-* negation is language contact. Like Oji-Cree, neighbouring dialects of Cree have multiple negation constructions which express pragmatic contrasts, including one that functions as the default for (descriptive) past narrative.

Woods Cree and Swampy Cree, located north of Oji-Cree territory, maintain a complex system of negators. Woods Cree boasts five separate negators, a few of which are associated with distinct pragmatic contexts. These include *mwāc* (general/factive

negator), *mwā* (negative opinion or ability), *mōða* (restrictive/contrastive including acts of correcting and contradicting), *īkā* (general subordinate negation) and *kāða* (negative imperative and jussive) (Starks 1987). It is likely that the number of pragmatic distinctions in the Cree negation system influenced the rise of a new construction in Oji-Cree to meet a perceived communicative need.

Swampy and Woods Cree also share a past tense negator, *ohci-*, cognate with Oji-Cree *onci-* (a form with several grammatical uses including *negative perfect*). Cree *ohci-* and Oji-Cree irrealis *ci-* are not cognate and express different meanings, yet they each represent the development of a separate negation construction which acts as the default way to negate main events in running narrative.[17] Although neither of these influences from Cree involves the borrowing of forms, we know that neighbouring languages often influence the number of grammatical distinctions they make within a system and the meanings they express.[18]

Although contact with Cree led to the morphological simplification of the negation system – the loss of the conjunct negative paradigm and prohibitive inflection, for example – it likely also played a role in the addition of a second standard negation construction and its patterns of use in narrative.

5. Social-pragmatic motivation

What is interesting about the Oji-Cree system is that it is not the newer construction which is associated with emphasis, but the older one. This section will explore the social pragmatic factors motivating the rise of a neutral, descriptive negation construction. §5.1 demonstrates how speakers can use *ci-* negation to express denial in an ostensively neutral (unemphatic) way. §5.2 connects this pattern with the conversational norms of Ojibwe culture, particularly those associated with the desire to reinforce social solidarity and downplay tension through indirectness.

5.1 Ci- *negation in interaction*

The interactional function of *ci-* negation is best illustrated with examples of *dispreferred* response types such as disagreeing, refusing a request, rejecting an offer,

[17] This can be confirmed with a perusal of Ellis (1995), a collection of Swampy Cree narratives.

[18] See, for example, Aikhenvald (2007). Mithun (2021) similarly outlines parallel pathways of development for negation constructions across several language families of Northern California.

denying a question, and so on. These tend to occur in *disaffiliative* contexts, those which create social tension rather than solidarity (Couper-Kuhn & Selting 2018).[19]

Example (27) contrasts each construction in the context of *disagreeing with an assessment* about the weather (normally a safe, pragmatically neutral topic). Speaker A remarks 'it's very cold out!', but speaker B explicitly disagrees 'it's not cold'.

(27) A: ᐃᒪᐧᐦ ᑕᖏᑦ.
Maawac tahkaayaa.
Maawac *tahkaayaa.*
very be.cold.II
'It's very cold out.'
B: i. ᑲᐃᐧᐦᐢᑭᐣ ᑕᖏᑦᖏᓂᐣ.
Kaawiniin tahkaayaahsinoon.
Kaawin=iin *tahkaayaa-hsinoon.*
NEG=but be.cold.II-NEG
'It's not cold out.' (interpretable as emphatic)
ii. ᑲᐃᐧᐦᐢᑭᐣ ᑎᑕᖏᑦᐠ.
Kaawiniin ci-tahkaayaahk.
Kaawin=iin *ci-tahkaayaa-hk.*
NEG=but SUB.IRR-be.cold.II-CJ
'It's not cold out.' (neutral)

The expression using *hsii-* negation in (i) could be interpreted neutrally, but would also be the strategy used if speaker B wanted to forcefully disagree with a person who enters a room and loudly complains 'it's very cold!'. Such a response might be given, for example, by an elder who grew up living on the land through intense winters, and who could take the position of having more experience than the complainer about weather conditions. The response with *hsii-* negation can convey the evaluative attitude associated with polemic negation: "oh, that's nothing – *I* know what *real* cold feels like." In (ii), speaker B's response using *ci-* negation merely informs in a neutral way, as if speaker A simply misspoke.

[19] Pomerantz (1984) first developed the idea of dispreferred response types, which fall more broadly under the umbrella of *disaffiliative social actions* as summarized in chapter four of Couper-Kuhn & Selting (2018). Within the conversation analysis literature, Ford (2001) has begun to explore this affiliative/disaffiliative distinction specifically as it relates to the domain of negation.

Consider another typically disaffiliative context: the act of *refusing a request*. The responses in (28) were constructed in response to a situation in which a relative calls to ask a ride using the speaker's truck. (Note that *otaapaan* 'truck' is grammatically animate, indexed by an AI verb.)

(28) a. Direct refusal using *hsii-* negation
ᑲᐃᐧᐁᐃᓂᓐ ᑕᒋ ᐃᓯᐦᑎᐦᓯᓱᓐ, ᐁᑲ ᐁᐱᒥᐱᓯᓐ.
Kaawiniin takii-isihsehsinoon, ekaa e-pimipisoc.
Kaawin=iin ta-kii-isihse-hsinoon
NEG=BUT 3.FUT-ABLE-happen.II-NEG
ekaa e-pimipiso-c.
NEG.SUB SUB-drive.AI-CJ.3SG
'No it's not possible; it's not running.' (Lit. 'it won't be able to happen, she's not driving')

b. Indirect refusal using *ci-* negation
ᑲᐃᐧᐁᐃᓂᓐ ᒋᒪᐦᑎᐨ.
Kaawiniin ci-maacihsec.
Kaawin=iin ci-maacihse-c.
NEG=but starts.AI-CJ.3SG
'It's not starting.'

c. Indirect refusal using *-hsii* negation
ᑲᐃᐧᐁᐃᓂᓐ ᒪᒋᐦᑎᐦᓱᓐ.
Kaawiniin maacihsehsiin.
Kaawin=iin maacihse-hsiin.
NEG=but starts.AI-NEG
'It's not starting.' (stronger assertion)

The response in (28a) would represent an extremely direct, explicit refusal. Alternately, the refuser can take a more indirect strategy, by reporting some circumstance in a way which implies refusal (28b-c).[20] (28b) represents a way of accomplishing this using *ci-* negation to take a normative cooperative stance. The

[20] Indirect refusal strategies such as this are well-known from languages studied from an interactional approach (Couper-Kuhn & Selting 2018), and have been reported as normative for northern dialects of Ojibwe. See, for example, Chief & Spielmann (1986); Spielmann (1987).

information is described neutrally at face value, and the requester is invited to cooperatively come to the expected conclusion: she cannot get a ride.

However, the corresponding *hsii-* negation construction (28c) would allow for a more emphatic reading, for example if the speaker's relative is always calling for rides. Here she is asserting the circumstance more strongly: "*actually*, it's not starting today".[21] The refusal is still reporting a circumstance, but the speaker is positioning herself in contrast to the ongoing assumption that her truck is available. The two constructions allow the speaker to communicate the refusal in a way that is somewhat more explicit and direct versus one that is more indirect or non-assertive.

These two examples have relied on discussing hypothetical contexts with speakers, who give judgements with differing degrees of confidence. Undoubtedly we will continue to better understand the interactional meaning of these constructions once a fuller corpus of conversational materials has been transcribed. Yet the functions illustrated in this section are clearly identifiable across corpora under this broad distinction I have provisionally characterized as "strength of assertion." It is likely that *ci-* negation arose as an indirectness strategy, motivated from the desire to mitigate these kinds of disaffiliative actions which create social tension rather than solidarity. It has come to represent the default cooperative stance taken in normative Oji-Cree interaction.

5.2 Social solidarity in Ojibwe conversational norms

The motivation of downplaying tension and reinforcing cooperation is consistent with known conversational norms in northern varieties of Ojibwe. Ojibwe society was traditionally organized into small intimate family groups, and the language continues to be spoken in small communities where the amount of shared context is very high. Rhodes (1988: 171-172) explains patterns of Ojibwe politeness and request-making in terms of "the cultural assumption that Ojibwa speakers form a single, cooperative in-group" and that "the speaker and hearer are cooperators." He shows that speakers assume and reinforce this sense of social solidarity in their politeness strategies. Requests which are understood to require little effort are carried out with a simple imperative ('Give me a cigarette'). For more significant requests, avoidance strategies

[21] English 'actually' has been analyzed as expressing similar types of contrast in speaker interaction (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018: 321-323) and fits many translations of *hsii-* negation.

are the norm. Chief & Spielmann (1986: 319), for example, record an Algonquin (Ojibwe) conversation in which a successful request for help is achieved without an explicit ask or explicit acceptance. They similarly note that the rejection of a request is often accomplished with an indirect "I don't know," which is contextually understood to mean 'no' (1986: 85).[22]

The indirect nature of *ci-* negation also relates to the Oji-Cree norm that speakers only assert information they have a reliable degree of certainty about. This typically includes information that was witnessed or gained from a reliable second-hand source, but excludes information merely inferred by reasoning, such as knowledge of community patterns, etc. A question like 'did the freight plane arrive?' is unlikely to receive an informative answer if the addressee has not had reliable confirmation, even if the addressee knows the plane schedule, for example.[23] This value on identifying *level of certainty* shows up in other areas of the grammar such as verbal dubitative inflection, which marks "the inability or unwillingness of the speaker to vouch for the certainty of the occurrence of the event of the verb. This may be due to lack of personal observation, supposition or inference, forgetfulness or traditional nature of the speaker's knowledge" (Nichols 1980: 124). Social role is also a factor, since elders fill the role of teachers and are more likely to make assertions solely based on their own experience. It is possible that social factors like this play a role in the use of *ci-* vs. *hsii-* negation, but without further study it is hard to distinguish this factor from age-based variation in the language.

Overall, the underlying assumption of cooperation in Oji-Cree culture and the corresponding indirectness around disaffiliative situations likely provided a favourable social context for the emergence of *ci-* negation from an indirect irrealis expression to an ostensively neutral, descriptive way to make denials.

6. Conclusion

In sum, the descriptive nature of *ci-* negation appears to serve a pragmatic function, allowing speakers to negate in an indirect way, avoiding some of the abruptness

[22] I can attest that this is often a source of misunderstanding for visitors to Kingfisher Lake, even in English. A visitor to the community once barged into a workplace and brashly demanded "Hey, can I take this T.V.?" The strongest refusal his addressee could muster was "I don't know". He walked out with the T.V., which had to be retrieved later.

[23] In addition to my own observations, the cultural orientation package for the regional health authority contains several examples along these lines, provided by an Oji-Cree speaker.

inherent to acts of denial and instead projecting a stance of cooperation. It has extended from subordinate irrealis into negative contexts where the speaker does not need to make a particularly strong assertion, but has *not* spread into emphatic/polemic contexts or into the domain of future tense. At the same time, *hsii-* negation (historically the rule) is increasingly associated with stronger, more emphatic, assertions, though it has no overt markers of emphasis and remains grammatical in all contexts.

Table 5 visualizes the cross-linguistic functional connections between negation, non-reality, and strength of assertion, based on an elaboration of Givón (2001). The language-specific constructions *hsii-* negation and *ci-* negation are positioned in relation to one another according to strength of assertion, spatially illustrating the proximity between *ci-* negation, irrealis statements and weak strength of assertion.

	← *Stronger assertion*		*Weaker assertion* →
realized	emphatic assertion	realis assertion	
non-realized		negative assertion	irrealis assertion
	Oji-Cree hsii- negation	*Oji-Cree ci- negation*	

Table 5: Relationship between negation, non-reality, and strength of assertion

In this way, Oji-Cree divides negative assertions between those which are more versus less abrupt.

Cross-linguistically the sources of negation are varied. Much of the discussion in the typological literature has centred around general pathways such as Jespersen's Cycle (Dahl 1979) and the Negative Existential Cycle (Croft 1991; Veselinova 2014). The most striking aspect of Oji-Cree *ci-* negation is that it arose not from the desire to emphasize negative assertions, but from the desire to downplay them. This pattern represents an interesting alternative to Jespersen's Cycle, wherein an emphatic expression is added to an existing negation construction and subsequently becomes

bleached into a new negation marker itself.[24] Instead, the case of Oji-Cree points to the functional utility of an *un*emphatic negative – one limited to contexts of neutral, descriptive negation. It also suggests that cultural factors such as the avoidance of social tension may be associated with this type, perhaps connected to the kind of social characteristics associated with small, intimate in-groups.

Within Algonquian linguistics, much of the detailed comparative work has focussed on formal comparison between languages. The approach taken here highlights the importance of also comparing the underlying functions of each construction. The results give insight into the way each language continues to develop in relation to culture, and provide insights to community professionals working to revitalize their languages.

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Abbreviations

→ = separates agent-like from patient-like argument
1, 2, 3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person
ABLE = ability
AI = animate intransitive verb
ASS = assertive clitic
CJ = conjunct verb form
CONN = connective
DETRANS = detransitive
DUB = dubitative
EMPH = emphatic clitic
NEG = negative
NONSPEC.ACT = nonspecific actor
OBV = obviative
PERF = perfect
PL = plural
PST = past
PE = plural exclusive
PRET = preterite
PRT = particle

[24] Dahl (1979) dubbed this "Jespersen's cycle" after Jespersen's (1917:4) initial characterization; see Breitbarth (2020) for an overview of the subsequent literature.

FOC = focus particle
FUT = predictive future
II = intransitive inanimate verb
INDEF = indefinite
INDR = indirect evidential
IMPER = imperative
IRR = irrealis (potential, purpose, negative)
IRR_2 = $irrealis_2$ (future, counterfactual, modal)
PRON = pronoun
REL = relativizer
SG = singular
SUB = subordinator
TA = transitive animate verb
TI = transitive inanimate
Q = yes/no question particle

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