

# How synchronic analysis informs subgrouping: Against Proto- Algonquian-Blackfoot

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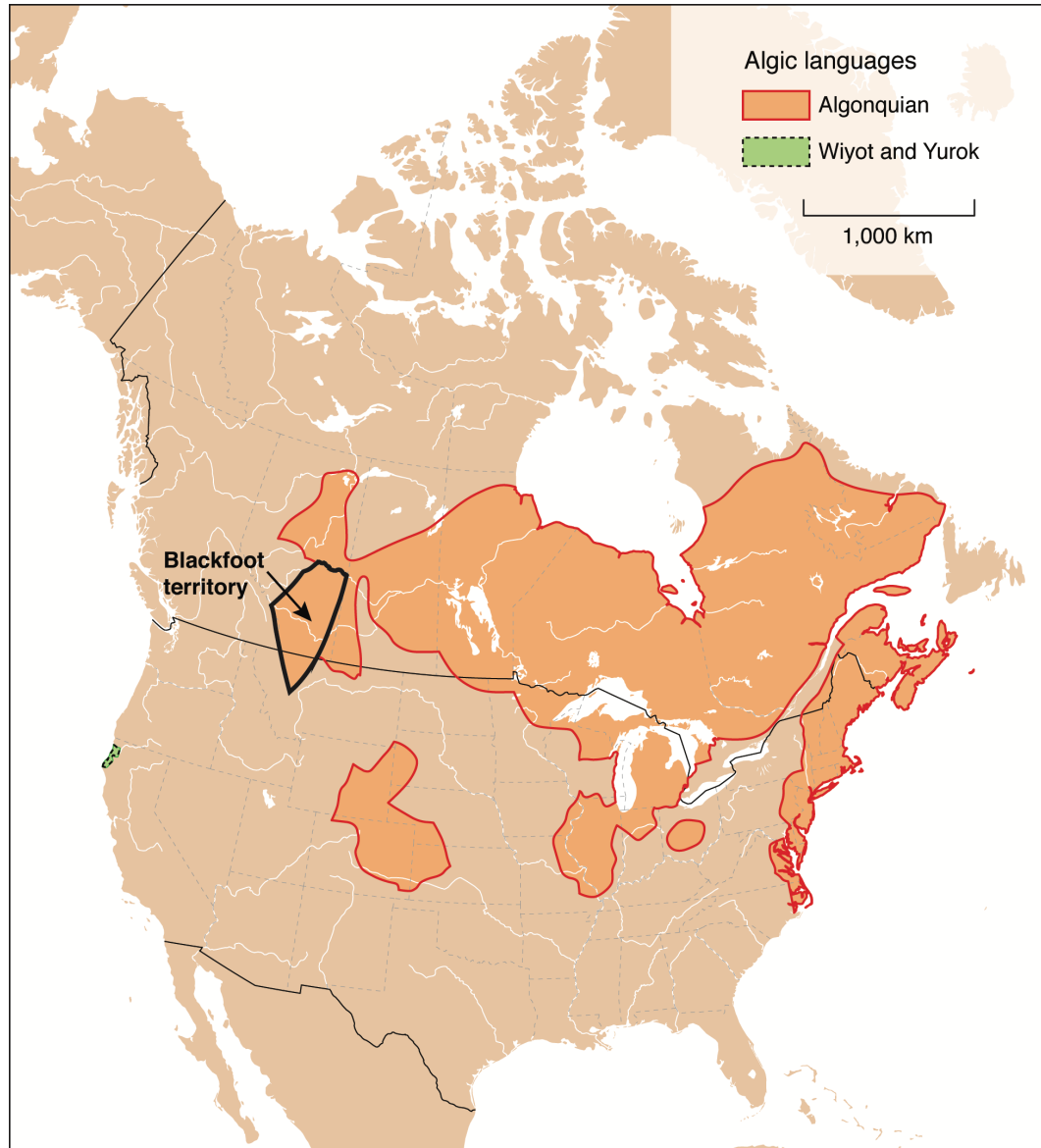
# Overview

- Recent argument in Goddard (2018) that Blackfoot is a sister to the rest of the Algonquian family
- Two claims supporting this argument
- This paper:
  - synchronic phonological analysis provides simpler alternative
  - neither claim provides evidence for subgrouping
- (Today: just the first claim)

# Outline

1. Blackfoot's position in Algonquian
2. Goddard's (2018) proposal (Claim #1)
3. Problems with the proposal
4. An alternative analysis
5. Discussion

# Blackfoot's position in Algonquian



# Algonquian

- Blackfoot = westernmost language
- Spoken in:
  - Alberta, Canada
  - Montana, USA

(Frantz: 2017; Goddard 1975; Mithun 1999: 336–337)

# Blackfoot

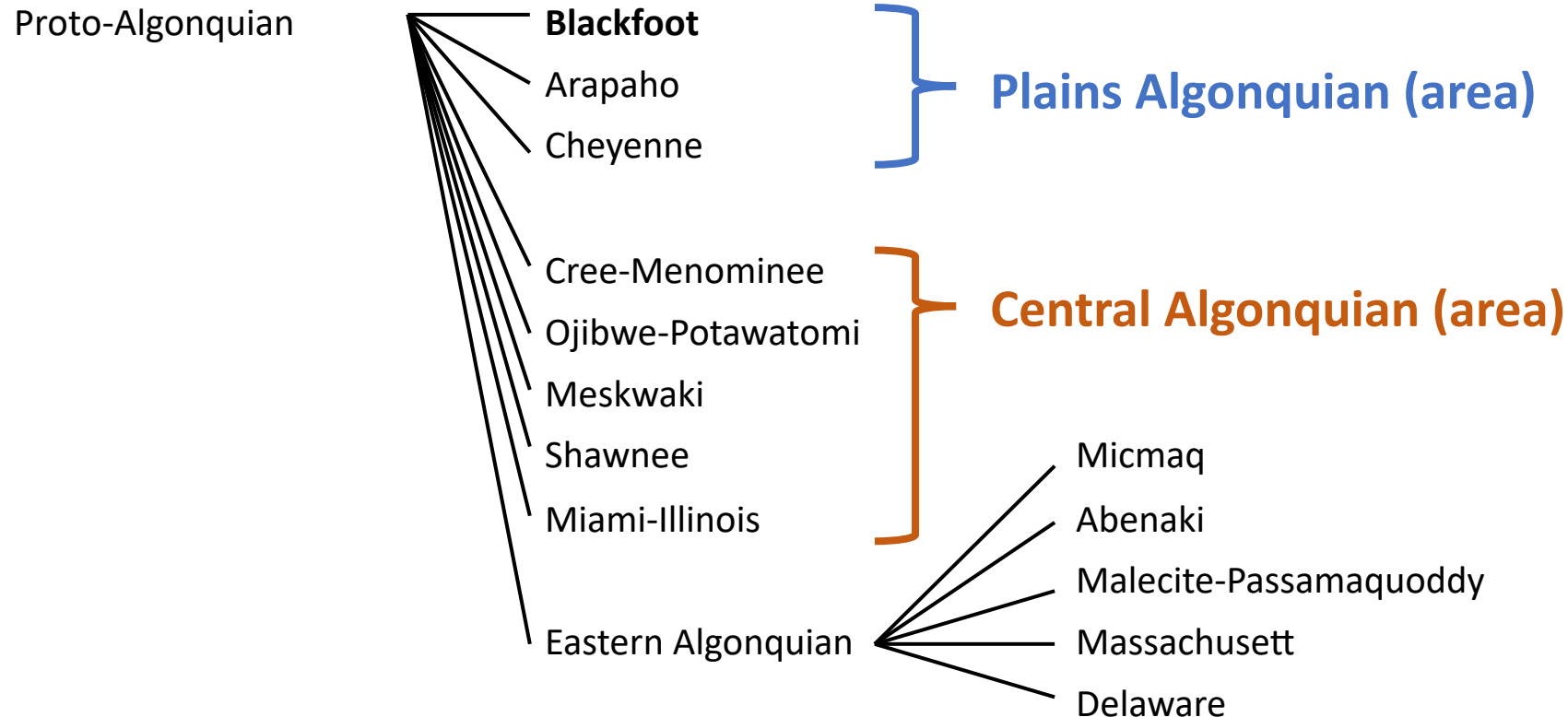


[Map by Kevin McManigal]

- Blackfoot Confederacy = four sovereign Nations
- Share common language, culture, and history
- Alliance of solidarity; not a governing body
- 3 reserves in Canada (Siksiká, Káínai, Aapátóhsipikani)
- 1 reservation in USA (“Blackfeet” = Aamsskáápipikani)

(Dempsey 2019; Grinnell 1892: 153; Hungry Wolf & Hungry Wolf 1989: 3; Juneau 2007: 13ff)

# Proto-Algonquian (subset of languages shown)



[**Proto-Algonquian**: Aubin 1975; Bloomfield 1925, 1946; Goddard 1979; Hewson 1993; Hockett 1942; Michelson 1935; Miller 1959; Pentland 1979; Siebert 1941, 1975; Silver 1960; Voegelin 1941; but see Rhodes 2021 on Core Central Algonquian; **Eastern Algonquian**: Goddard 1974, 1980; but see Pentland 1992; Proulx 1984; **Areal groupings**: Mithun 1999]

# Innovations and archaisms in Blackfoot

- Innovative sound changes “all contribute towards making Blackfoot vocabulary as a whole **appear as un-Algonquian**” (Michelson 1935: 142–143).
- “There are some apparent **lexical archaisms** in Blackfoot” (Goddard 1994: 188)
- “Blackfoot is clearly the most **divergent** language in the Algonquian family” (Goddard 2018).



# Blackfoot's position is contested!

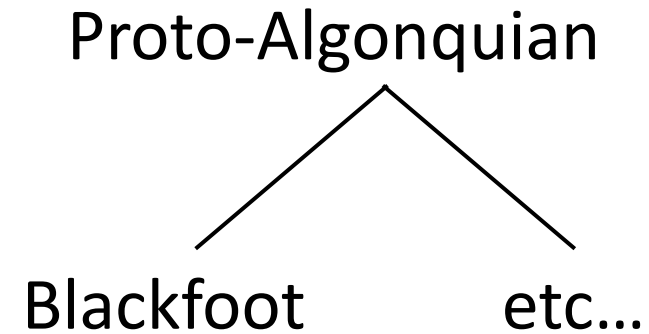
- Not even Algonquian (Franklin 1823: 109; Gallatin 1836; Howse 1849: 113; Mackenzie 1789)
- Various relationships to Algonquian have been proposed:
  - A branch of its own (Michelson 1912)
  - Grouped with Cree and Cheyenne (Hayden 1863)
  - Grouped with Conoy and Beothuk (Pentland 1979)
  - Oldest dialectal layer of Algonquian (Goddard 1994)
- Earliest diverging language (Goddard 2018; Proulx 1980)
  - “Blackfoot is by far the most **divergent** of the Algonquian languages [...] and it remains to be shown whether [...] Blackfoot is a **sister language of PA** rather than a daughter” (Proulx 1980)

# Goddard's proposal

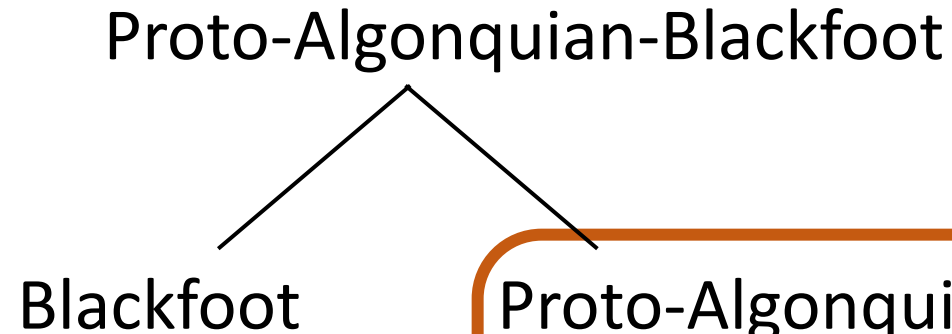
Claim #1: Word-initial \*#iC

# Goddard's (2018) proposal

## Traditional family tree



## Goddard (2018)



# Two arguments for shared innovations

1. Proto-Algonquian deletes word-initial #i / \_\_C
2. Proto-Algonquian restructures an older paradigm of “post-inflectional suffixes” into the so-called absentative paradigm

This talk: just the first claim

# Observation: Blackfoot has many stems in #iC

PA stems with #C related to Blackfoot stems with invariant #iC

- PA \*ketem- (root)
  - Meskwaki keteminaw- ‘take pity on, bless with supernatural power’
- Blackfoot *ikimm*- TA ‘show kindness to, bestow power on’
  - ikímmisa! ‘bestow power on him!/care for her!’
  - ikímmiwa ‘he bestowed power on him’
  - nitsíkimmoka ‘he bestowed power on me’

# Observation: Blackfoot has many stems in #iC

PA stems with #C related to Blackfoot stems with alternating #C ~ #iC

- PA \*po·n- ‘cease’
  - cf. Meskwaki po·nikegwa ‘he pays his debt’
- Blackfoot *ipon*- ‘terminate, end, be rid of’
  - ponihtáát ‘pay!’
  - nitsipónihta ‘I paid’
  - iipónihtaawa ‘he paid’

*“Independently, under synchronic conditions that have not been described, word-initial Bl |iC-| is sometimes realized as C-” Goddard (2018).*

# Observation: Initial \*#i rare in PA

- No PA short \*i in the first syllable, except:
  - before consonant clusters (some but not all);
  - before PA \*r                      only reconstructible in PA \*iren- ‘ordinary’
  - in demonstratives              e.g. \*iyog ‘this (inan.)’, \*ini ‘that (inan.)’
  - and in relative roots          e.g. \*iθ- ~ \*iš- ‘{so}; to {somewhere}’
- But no lexical roots begin in \*ip-, \*ič-, \*it-, \*ik-, \*is-, \*iš-, \*im-, or \*in-.

# Motivation for proposal

- Initial syllables in PA are “weak”
  - No true consonant clusters
  - No contrast between \*i and \*e
  - Relative roots beginning in \*t, e.g. PA \*taθ- ‘somewhere’

	<b>PA</b>	<b>Unami Delaware</b>	
Initial	*taθ-	té·kəne <u>talá</u> ·wsu	‘he lives in the woods’
Non-initial	*entaθ-	ntə <u>ntalá</u> ·wsí·ne·n	‘for us to live there’
Changed <sup>†</sup>	*e·ntaθ-	yú <u>entalá</u> ·wsíenk	‘here where we live’

<sup>†</sup> initial change = morphological ablaut of initial syllable (Costa 1996)

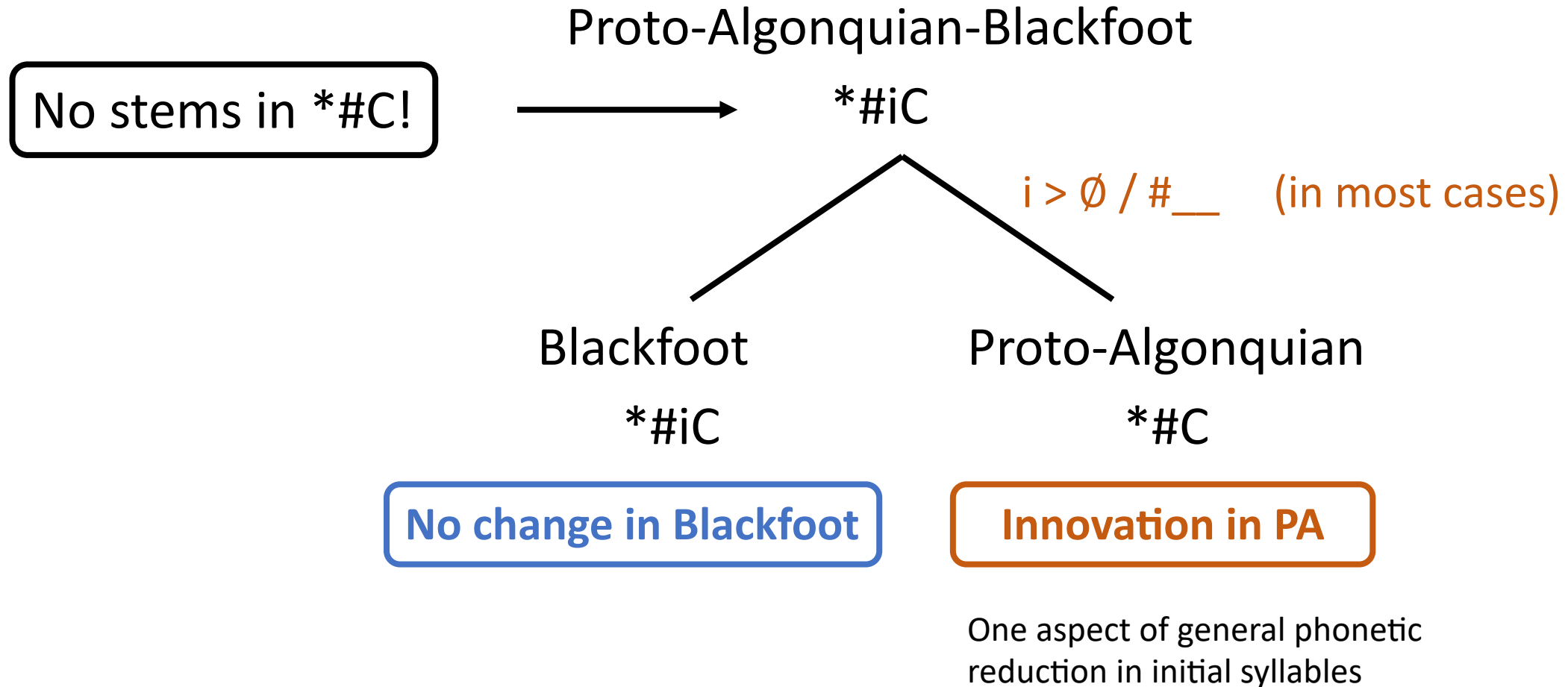


# Motivation for proposal

- Case study: PA \*taθ- ‘somewhere’

	PA		pre-PA	
Initial	* <b>ta</b> θ-	<	*entaθ-	<div>reduction</div>
Non-initial	*entaθ-	<	*entaθ-	
Changed <sup>†</sup>	*e·ntaθ-	<	*e·ntaθ-	

# Proposal: innovation in Proto-Algonquian



# Problems with the proposal

# Problems with proposal

1. Blackfoot *also* has initial weak syllables
2. Deletion does not occur in nouns (and other non-verbal categories)
3. Deletion does not occur for all clause types and valencies

# 1. Blackfoot *also* has initial weak syllables

- No true consonant clusters
- No contrast between \*i and \*e (> B *i*) (Berman 2006; Oxford 2015)
- Relative roots show reduction, e.g. *oht-* ‘instrumental, source’

Initial	<u>ts</u> ítskixpissi	‘when he danced by’
Non-initial	áx <u>kuxt</u> sitokoopsskaaʔwa	‘so she can make broth with (them)’
Changed	<u>ix</u> tsítsksspaiʔwa	‘he is looking past’

[Blackfoot Words: word-AT1969-0758, word-AT1969-0016, word-AT1969-0293]

# 1. Blackfoot *also* has initial weak syllables

- Case study: *oht-* ‘instrumental, source’

	Blackfoot <sup>†</sup>		pre-Blackfoot	
Initial	<b>ts-</b>	<	*oht-	reduction
Non-initial	uxts-	<	*oht-	
Changed	ixts-	<	*e·ht-	

<sup>†</sup> /t/ → [ts] / \_\_{i, j}

## 2. Deletion does not occur in nouns

- Blackfoot nouns begin in C, not iC
- Unexpected if Blackfoot reflects PAB forms in \*iC!

### Blackfoot

kóóna	‘ice’
mííni	‘berry’
miistsísa	‘tree’
<u>ksíssk</u> stakiwa	‘beaver’
<u>pisstóó</u> htsi	‘inside’

### Proto-Algonquian

*ko·na	‘snow’
*mi·ni	‘berry’
*mi·twiya	‘quaking aspen’
*ki·šk-	‘cut, chop, sever’
*pi·nt-	‘inside’

### 3. Deletion does not occur for all clause types and valencies

- Clause types: Imperatives and subjunctives (with no prefixes)
  - PA \*po·n-           ‘cease’
  - B ponihtaát       ‘pay!’
- Valencies: Statives (with no prefixes)
  - PA \*ra·nk-           ‘light in weight’
  - B saahksstssímma anná pookááwa ‘the child is light in weight’ [F&R 2017: 232]

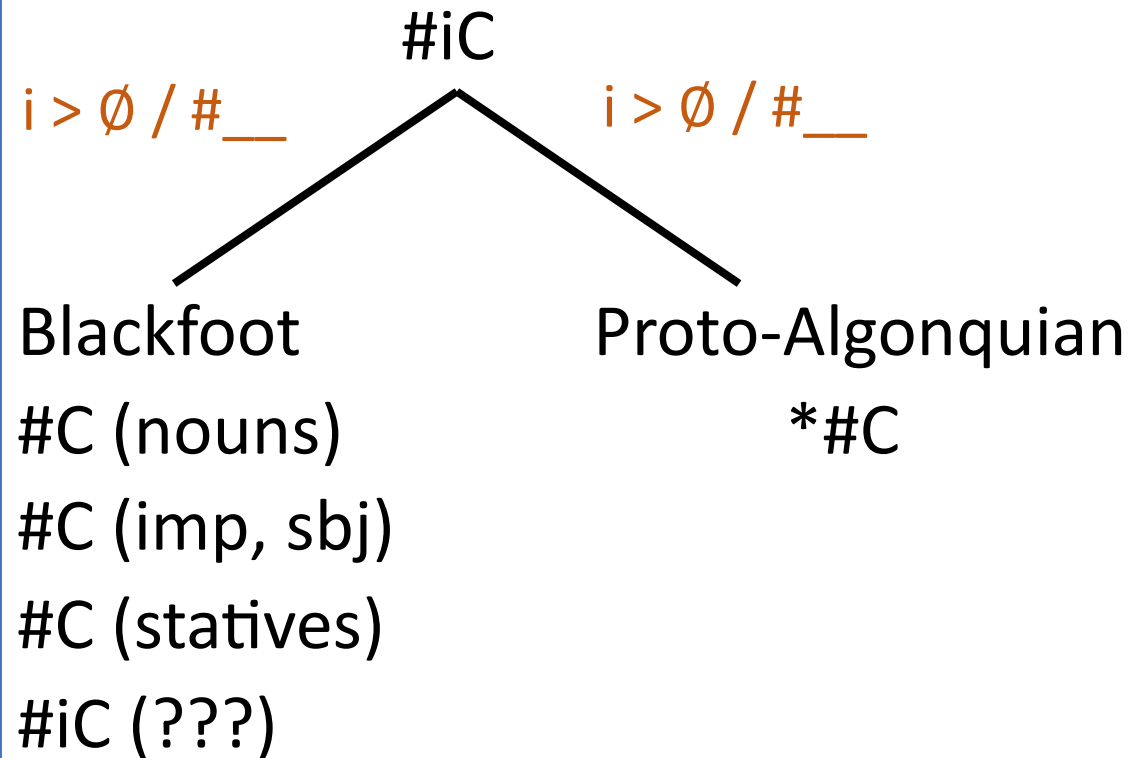


# Summary: Problems with proposal

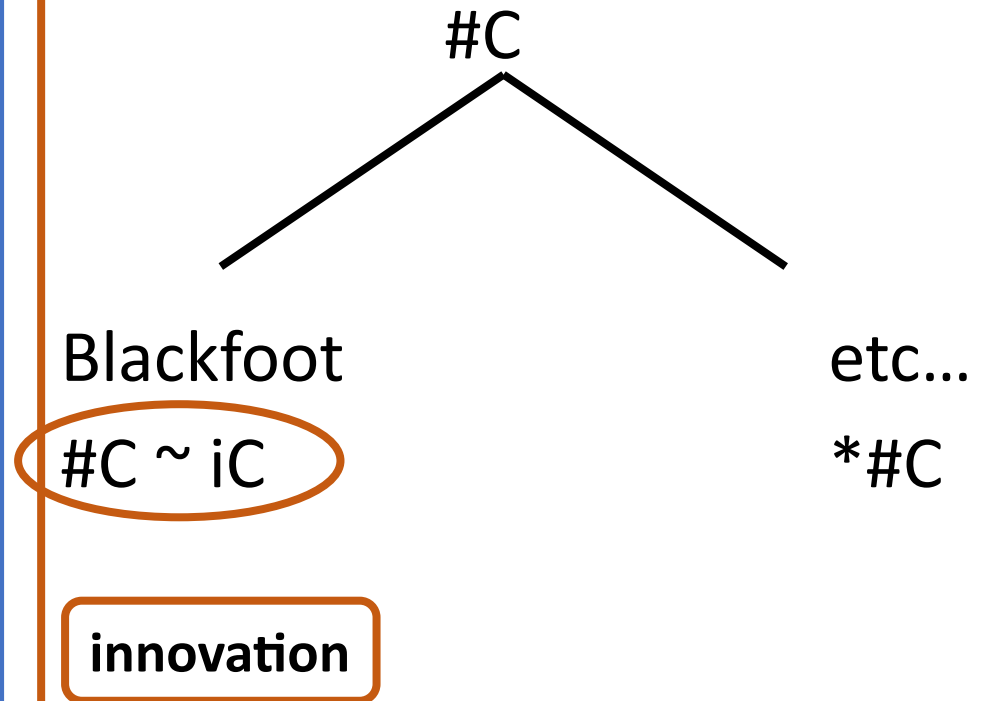
- Blackfoot shows synchronic reduction in initial syllable
  - This was motivation for  $*i > \emptyset / \#\_$  in Proto-Algonquian
  - So why doesn't Blackfoot delete...?
- Blackfoot must delete in many cases
  - Nouns and non-verbs
  - Imperatives and subjunctives
  - Statives

# An alternative analysis

## Proto-Algonquian-Blackfoot



## Proto-Algonquian



# An alternative analysis

# Arguments that #i was added in Blackfoot

- Initial #i only occurs
  - after a prefix
  - in past tense (a novel alternative to archaic initial change)
- Evidence that Blackfoot roots begin in \*C
  1. Synchronic analysis explains roots in #C ~ #iC
  2. Historical record explains roots in invariant #iC
  3. Morphological ablaut additional evidence

# Synchronic analysis: roots in #C ~ #iC

## Left edge

ponihtáát  
'pay!'

## After prefix

áaksiponihtaawa  
'she will pay'

*After C*

ákáiponihtsiwa  
'he is dead'

*After V*

(Frantz & Russell 2017: 91)

# Synchronic analysis: non-alternating roots

## Left edge

ipótsimatsísa!

‘poison him!’

ikímmisa!

care for her!

## After prefix

áaksipótsimatsiiwa

‘she’ll poison him’

áaksikimmiiwáyí

‘he will bestow power on her’

Non-alternating roots have been reanalyzed as /i/-initial.

(Frantz & Russell 2017: 46, 92)

# Synchronic analysis: two groups of roots

Left edge	After prefix	UR	Gloss
<b>p</b> on-	- <b>i</b> pon-	/pon-/	'cease'
<b>i</b> pot <b>s</b> im-	- <b>i</b> pot <b>s</b> im-	/ipotim-/	'poison'
*p	*-p		

- NB: very few roots in #iC under this analysis
- Similar to Proto-Algonquian

(Similar argumentation: Weber 2020, 2021, 2022, in press)

# Historical record

- For roots with invariant #i, often possible to show this is a recent addition by looking at the historical record.
- Tool: Blackfoot Words database (<https://www.blackfootwords.com/>)

## Blackfoot Words

A database of lexical forms

[About](#) [How-to](#) [View](#) [Download](#) [Sources](#) [Credits](#)

Blackfoot Words is a database of lexical forms in Blackfoot (Algonquian). By “lexical forms” we mean inflected words, stems, and morphemes. These have been collected and digitized from many different written sources. We created the database and this website to provide access to a large amount of lexical data for the Blackfoot communities and for language researchers.

Version 1 of the database includes lexical forms from legacy language documentation materials, including grammars, dictionaries, and wordlists, from the years 1743-2017.

- **How-to:** instructions on how to log in and view the database. (Note that you must email [natalie.weber@yale.edu](mailto:natalie.weber@yale.edu) for a login.)
- **View:** using a free, online smart spreadsheet.
- **Download:** a mysqldump of the full database on Zenodo.
- **Sources:** bibliographic information for all of the sources in the database, with links to all sources in the public domain.
- **Credits:** Blackfoot Words was created by the [Blackfoot Lab](#) at Yale. The language and words belong to the Blackfoot Nations.

### Land acknowledgement

The database is hosted on a Yale-affiliated server. Yale University acknowledges that indigenous peoples and nations, including Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Niantic, and the Quinnipiac and other Algonquian speaking peoples, have stewarded through generations the lands and waterways of what is now the state of Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.

(Weber 2022;  
Weber et al. forthcoming)



# Historical record: Blackfoot Words

- relational database of inflected words and phrases, and their subparts
  - 63,493 lexical forms have been digitized to date from 30 sources
  - timespan: 1743–2017 (almost 300 years!)
  - Version 1.1 includes 9 of 30 sources
- 
- F&R 2017 = Frantz & Russell (2017)
  - word-AB1234-000789 = unique id from the database

# Historical record: kimm- ‘pity’

- ikímmisa! ‘bestow power on him!/care for her!’ [F&R 2017: 46]
- kímmisa! pity thou him! [word-AT1969-1405]
- kĩm’ís pity him! [word-JT1889-6231]
- kĩm’okĩt pity me! [word-JT1889-6232]
- kímmokit pity me! [word-CU1938-13981]

# Morphological ablaut (“initial change”)

- Initial change = morphological ablaut of first syllable (Costa 1996)
- In C-initial stems, initial change has been restructured:
  - Archaic: first vowel ablauts (~100 stems; Taylor 1967)
  - Novel: add an initial *i*- or *ii*-
- Archaic changed forms can diagnose whether a syllable is initial
- Not all stems have archaic changed forms

(aspects of Blackfoot initial change in Berman 2006; Frantz 2017; Proulx 2005; Taylor 1967, 1969)

# Root: ipotsim- ‘poison’

Plain:                    ipótsimatsísa!            ‘poison him!’            [F&R 2017: 92]

Changed (arch.):    náápotsimatsiiway ‘he poisoned him’ [word-AT1969-2978]

niipotsímatsisa            ‘poison thou him!’ [word-AT1967-107]

Changed (new):    iiipotsímatsiiway            ‘he poisoned him’ [word-AT1967-105]

ipótsimatsiiwáyí            ‘she poisoned it’            [F&R 2017: 92]

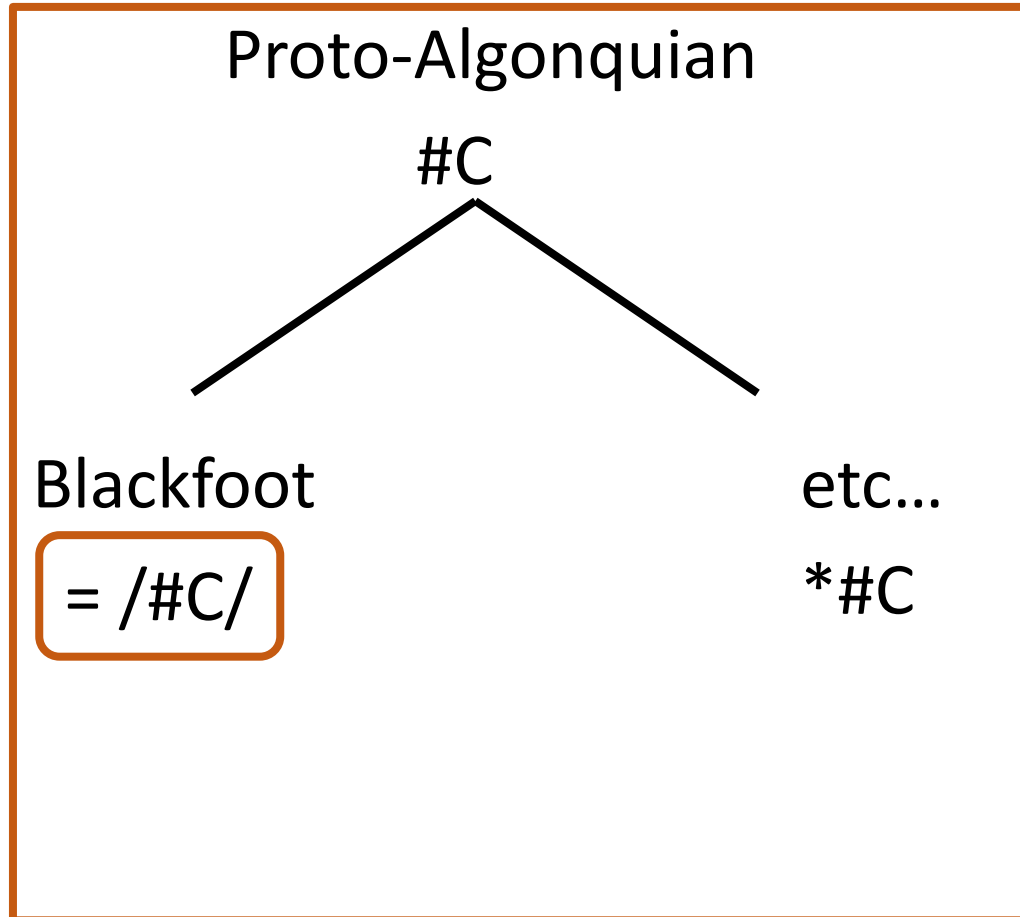
# Root: pon- ‘cease’ is C-initial

- Plain:                    ponihtaát!                    ‘pay!’                    [F&R 2017: 91]  
                              poonixtátsisa ‘pay thou him!’                    [word-AT1967-112]
- Changed (arch.): paanixtátsisa                    ‘pay thou him!’                    [word-AT1967-111]  
                              (not: \*naáponixtatsisa, \*nííponixtatsisa)
  - Changed (new):    iipónihtaawa ‘he paid’                    [F&R 2017: 91]
  - If this root were /ipon-/, it should pattern with other *i*-initial roots
  - Initial change only affects first syllable, showing that *p* is initial

# Summary

- Evidence that Blackfoot roots begin in \*C
  1. Synchronic analysis explains roots in #C ~ #iC
  2. Historical record explains roots in invariant #iC
  3. Morphological ablaut additional evidence

# An alternative analysis: Blackfoot innovations



- Blackfoot #C continues in:
  - nouns
  - imperative and stative verbs
- Blackfoot #iC innovated for:
  - verbs, after prefixes
  - verbs, past tense (< initial change)

# An alternative analysis

- Blackfoot roots are **shared retentions from PA** with additional innovations within the verbal system
  - Roots in non-initial position have initial #i
  - Some roots reanalyzed as truly #i-initial, contrasting with C-initial roots
  - Initial change in C-initial roots was restructured
- *No* innovations for the remaining languages = no subgrouping
- Shared retentions cannot support subgrouping (cf. Atkinson & Gray 2005; Koch & Bower 2004).



# Discussion

# Synchronic analysis

- Synchronic analysis is necessary!
  - Morphophonological alternations
  - Phonological underlying forms
  - Internal reconstruction
- Cannot look at words in isolation without considering their place in the system.
- (See our organized session on prosodic structure on Sunday!)

# Historical record

- Digitizing and annotating the historical record is necessary!
  - Blackfoot Words aims to do this (Weber et al. 2022)
  - Huge task!
  - Two years and counting...

# Comparative method

- New cognate sets are needed!
  - Many papers on historical phonology in Algonquian compare forms in a language to the established Proto-Algonquian reconstructions
  - But new data might reveal new things!
  - Need new cognate sets and correspondence sets
  - (Perhaps Pentland's posthumous Proto-Algonquian dictionary?)
- Comparison of prosodic structure is necessary!
  - (See our organized session on prosodic structure on Sunday!)
  - Possibly: Blackfoot has *restructured* prosodic structure over time.

# Summary

- No evidence for Proto-Algonquian-Blackfoot
  - No major prevalence of #iC roots in Blackfoot
  - Determined by synchronic analysis
  - Alternative: Blackfoot continues PA roots in #C

# In memoriam

Donald Frantz (d. 2021)



David Pentland (d. 2022)

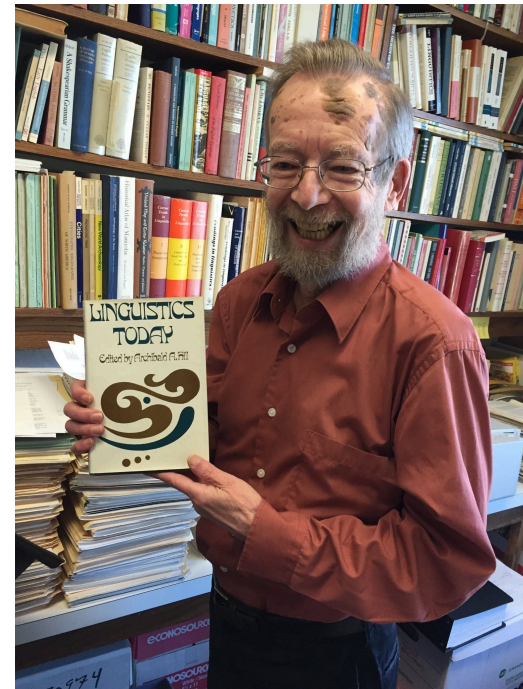


Photo by Arden Ogg

# Nítohtsikaahsi'taki! Thank you!

- Many thanks especially to Joseph Salmons, who has consistently encouraged me to continue working on this project.
- Thanks as well to my Blackfoot teachers, including Beatrice Bullshield, Natalie Creighton, and Rod Scout.

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