Towards a grammar of Innu-aimun particles

Context
Algonquian languages such as Innu-aimun are traditionally analyzed as having three parts of speech (as in, for example, Bloomfield 1946): nouns and verbs, which are extremely morphologically complex, and particles, a catch-all class of morphologically simple words that correspond with English prepositions, adverbs, quantifiers, conjunctions, and interjections. Since most studies of Algonquian grammar have focused almost exclusively on nouns and verbs, little is known about the grammatical properties of particles. This lack of knowledge is reflected in Drapeau’s (1991) dictionary of Innu-aimun, which labels all particles simply as $p$, and in Clarke’s (1982) grammar of Innu-aimun, which contains only a few brief mentions of particles. It is entirely appropriate that these pioneering works focused on nouns and verbs, given their complexity and conceptual importance. However, now that the grammar of Innu-aimun nouns and verbs is better understood, the time has come for particles, too, to be placed under the grammatical microscope.

Objectives
My plan is to examine the grammatical properties of Innu-aimun particles using a variety of morphological, syntactic, and semantic tests, with the ultimate aim of establishing a classification scheme that divides particles into precise, well-motivated subgroups. The primary focus of this project is empirical, not theoretical; however, generative syntactic theory will be employed when it provides insight into the nature and patterning of particles. The project will have two major outcomes: it will help to establish and justify a classification scheme for particles; as well, it will document various aspects of the grammar of particles. Of course, I cannot study all of the estimated 1000 Innu-aimun particles in equal depth. I plan to begin with a general survey of all classes of particles; subsequently, I will single out a particularly interesting and grammatically intricate subset of particles for more extensive study.

Methodology and timeline
I will use existing Innu-aimun texts (e.g. Mailhot et al. 1999) to arrive at a preliminary categorization of particles. This categorization will then be refined and expanded
through fieldwork that I will conduct in Sheshatshiu, Labrador from mid-August to mid-October 2006. I will spend two to three hours each day with native speakers of Innu-aimun, eliciting sentences containing particles of interest and discussing their meanings. The remainder of the day will be spent transcribing the recorded sessions, entering the data in a Toolbox database, and planning material for the next day’s session. On my return from the field in October 2006, I will begin writing the thesis.

Funding for this project has been secured from ISER, NSTP, and the Smallwood Foundation. Ethical approval has been granted by ICEHR.

**Significance**

This project will have several beneficial results. On a practical level, it will contribute to the creation of more thorough dictionaries and grammars of Innu-aimun. On an empirical level, it will expand our knowledge of the grammar of Innu-aimun particles and serve as a base for future research. As well, to the extent that the theory of generative grammar explains the patterning of particles in Innu-aimun, my research will help demonstrate that Innu-aimun can be described using the same categories and processes of Universal Grammar that have been proposed for other, more thoroughly studied languages.

**Bibliography**


