

On the Composition of Verbs in Cree-Montagnais-Naskapi

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This project falls within the scope of a larger project investigating Cree-Montagnais-Naskapi (CMN) child language development.¹ CMN is a continuum of dialects spoken from Alberta to Labrador (MacKenzie, 1980); but the mutually intelligible dialects of interest in this project are spoken on the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, and include Northern East Cree (Quebec) and Innu-aimun (Labrador).

The larger project constitutes an exploration of the stages children go through as they learn to compose the long verb complexes of CMN. CMN is unlike English in that most of the information in a sentence is conveyed in small pieces that cannot stand alone, but must become part of what is called a verbal complex. The result is long words that contain a great deal of information: a different kind of challenge for a child learning such a language.

In this project, I will conduct fieldwork with adult speakers of Northern East Cree to gather baseline comparison data against which to compare child language data. This project will make theoretical contributions to our understanding of child language development, and Northern East Cree/CMN in particular. At the same time, on a practical level, the output of this project will include a profile of child language for use by the Cree School Board in Quebec and the Innu School Board (Mamu Tshishkutamashutau) in Labrador.

¹ See the Chisasibi Child Language Acquisition Study (CCLAS) at <http://www.mun.ca/cclas/>