Cree Child Language Acquisition Study (CCLAS) www.mun.ca/cclas

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First Language Acquisition in Cree: The Development of Inflection (preliminary observations)

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Funding

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for Canada

- 2004-08 Standard Research Grant
- 2008-11 Standard Research Grant

Cree School Board (James Bay Region)

- 2006-07 funding for Cree-to-English translation

Chisasibi population:

- 3,800 Cree (Cree/English)
- 200 Inuit (English/Cree; Inuktitut)
- 300 non-native (French/English)
**POLYSYNTHETIC**

Âtichinâpihîkinuwishtikwânikiwâu.

“S/he gives him/her the package of the meat from the head of a caribou that was cleaned out.”

âtichinâpihîkinuwishtikwânikiwâu

**SYLLABICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ni-pûshî-m</th>
<th>my cat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ni-pûshî-m-îsh</td>
<td>my kitty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni-pûshî-m-îsh-inân</td>
<td>our kitty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni-pûshî-m-îsh-inân-îch</td>
<td>our kitties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

127 videos made over 30 month period: 2004 - 07)

In 2004, Group A are 2 years old, Group B are 4 years old.

- Overview of CCLAS methodology and progress
- Overview of Cree inflection
- Preliminary observations on Cree L1 acquisition
2007 to present: Data processing

STEP 1

• SEGMENTATION, using PHON.
• This creates, usually, several hundred records per session.
• Each record has detailed information about what the child says.
• Retains access to adult exchanges with child for context.

(KT) The interlocutor has just asked 'Why don't you play?' in Cree.

000:00:875 to 000:11:331

JT: 916:32:574 to 916:34:646
GROUP A (2 - 4 ½ years)

GROUP B (4 - 6½ years)

What we have …

Cree inflection

3 syntactic categories traditionally recognized (Bloomfieldian tradition):

• verb, noun, “particle” (morphological classification)

• Oxford 2008: adnominal particles (adjectives and quantifiers), prepositions, adverbs, focus particles, question particles, negators, conjunctions, and interjections.
Verbal morphology

3 “orders”

– Independent order (declarative main clause)
– Conjunct order (wh-clauses, subordinate clauses)
– Imperative order

Independent Order

\textit{chinikimun}
\textit{chi-} nikimu -n
2 sing(AI) Subj:non.3.indicative
‘You.sg sing/are singing.’

• AI (animate intransitive); II (inanimate intransitive); TA (transitive animate); TI (transitive inanimate)

Conjunct Order

\textit{aa-nikimuyin}
\textit{aa-} nikimu-yin
preverb sing(AI) Subj:1.sg.indicative
‘… when you.sg sing/are singing.’

• Inflection is less transparent in Conjunct than in Independent.

Imperative Order

\textit{nikimuh}
nikimu (\textit{-h})
sing(AI) S:2sg
‘Sing!’
What might we expect? (frequency of forms in input yet to be determined)

In early productions ...

- higher number of intransitive forms (TA forms might be especially harder to learn – Person/Gender hierarchy to be figured out)
- Independent order – morphology more transparent (and resembles nominal morphology)
- Conjunction order – high frequency (wh-questions)
- Imperative order – high frequency + 2s form = bare root

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Evidential*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Indicative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td>TI</td>
<td>Indicative</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Dubitative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Preterit*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>(Subjunctive) (Habitual/Iterative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preterit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dubitative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Preterit Preterit (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB MEANING/TYPE</th>
<th>CREE (CITATION FORM)</th>
<th>NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES IN SESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animate Intransitive (AI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘be’ (locative)</td>
<td>ihtaau</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘do’</td>
<td>ihtiu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘cry’</td>
<td>maatuu</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘say’</td>
<td>itaaau</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘eat’</td>
<td>naanaa (“baby form”)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inanimate Intransitive (II)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitive Animate (TA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘have it (animate)’</td>
<td>iyâwâu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitive Inanimate</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘see it / look at it (inanimate)’</td>
<td>waapîhtim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘open it (inanimate)’</td>
<td>aapiham</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘close it (inanimate)’</td>
<td>chipiham</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- AI verbs: child is getting most of the inflectional suffixes (mostly person); no prefixes in target (either Independent 3rd person forms, or Conjunct)
- II verbs: none
- TA verbs: child fails to produce inflection (no suffixes or prefixes)
- TI verbs: child produces all the suffixes (there are no prefixes)
- AI and TI may be acquired earlier?
Research completed, underway

Swain 2008, “The Acquisition of Stress in Northern East Cree: A Case Study” (MA thesis)
• based on longitudinal case study of A1 (aged 2;02 to 4;01)
• pitch is the primary cue for marking stress in NE Cree; Swain argues that A1 is able to use this cue from the first session (acoustic analysis shows A1 uses an increase in pitch on stressed syllables)
• Further, argues that A1 has already acquired all but one of the relevant metrical parameter (extrametricality)
• settings for NE Cree acquired early (by 2;1); theoretically significant in light of claims that children are born with a universal set of default metrical parameter settings, thus supporting a neutral start in the acquisition of stress.

Kevin Terry (MA), ongoing, the development of verbal inflection, a Case study (A1 age 2;1 to 4;1).
• Caregiver speech (“baby forms”, intonational patterns; non-target-like (over)use of pronouns)
• Perceptual vs. morphological salience

Oxford 2007: Development of the NEC pronoun/demonstrative inventory (A1 data)

See Algonquian conference handout (2007).
Preliminary generalizations – sequences of acquisition:
• Non-adverbial demonstratives: Prox Sg > Inan Obv Sg, Anim Prox Pl > Inan Prox Pl
• Adverbial demonstratives: Extended > Restricted

Child produces stressed syllables (final syllable in disyllabic forms)

Two syllables in target, one syllable produced

chipiha ‘close it’
Adult: [tsəbə]
Child A1: [ba]

mâtû ‘s/he is crying’
Adult: [mædə]
Child A1: [dʌ]
Nominals

- A high proportion of A1’s nouns are English; none of her verbal productions are. English nouns are sometimes inflected with Cree morphology (also found in target language).

Our current interests

- Development of inflectional morphology in general.
- W.r.t nominals: number, gender; obviative/proximate distinction; possession; verbal morphology (preterit suffix)
- W.r.t verbs, how is the development of argument-referencing morphology related to the target-like use of DPs?
- What about: transitivity; orders; conceptual complexity; morphological typology; frequency of forms in target language?

References