Incorporation of Body-Part Medials in the Contemporary Innu (Montagnais) Language

ANNE-MARIE BARABY, ANNE BELLEFLEUR-TETAUT, LOUISE CANAPÉ, CAROLINE GABRIEL AND MARIE-PAULE MARK
Université du Québec à Chicoutimi et à Montréal

The incorporation of nouns to form complex verbs is a well-known morphological process in Algonquian linguistics. The aim of our research was therefore not to make a detailed description of this distinctive morphological characteristic, but to verify if incorporation of nouns is still a productive process among all speakers of the Innu language or if it has been replaced by a structure more closely reflecting the influence of French. With this end in view, we decided to study the use of incorporation of morphemes derived from body-part nouns. In fact, we suspect that younger speakers, influenced by French, their school language, would use a syntactic structure of verb + noun instead of the morphological structure.

We are aware that a minority language lexicon may be affected when two languages are in contact and diglossia is present. Thus, we expect bilingual speakers to borrow words from the second language, to use code switching and code mixing; we also expect to see the traditional and specialized vocabulary diminish. But, what do we know about morphological and syntactic structures of a minority language? Will these structures be modified under the influence of a majority second language? For the indigenous languages of North America, it seems that this issue has up to now not been the object of much scholarly attention.

We wanted to address this issue in order to better understand how Innu is evolving today, and also in order to respond to a number of pedagogical concerns. Indeed many decisions will have to be taken about the way Innu should be taught in school, about linguistic norms and about what should be found in an eventual reference grammar.

The results presented here are, to be sure, only the first steps of a wider research program which will have to be pursued more thoroughly in

2. Innu is synonymous with Montagnais. This term is used by the speakers themselves and is the name they prefer for their language. It is also the official name of this First Nation.
the future. It is actually a work in progress, a preliminary report. Above all, it was really a matter of initiating some form of linguistic consciousness among a number of informed speakers (teachers or other language specialists) on the evolution of their language in general and on a number of specific ongoing language changes.

INCORPORATION OF BODY-PART MEDIALS IN INNU

Before reporting on the research itself and presenting some of the results, we will briefly describe the body-parts incorporation process in Innu. The morphemes involved in incorporation, all derived from body-part nouns, are called medials in Algonquian linguistics, because these morphemes are added in a medial position, between the verb root and other suffixes, such as finals and inflexions, as in the following example:

(1) *apishituneu*³ ‘s/he has a small mouth’

\[
\begin{array}{llll}
\text{apishi} & \text{- tun} & \text{- e} & \text{- u} \\
\text{ROOT} & \text{MEDIAL} & \text{FINAL} & \text{INFLExION}
\end{array}
\]

small mouth 3rd sing.Ind.Indic.

In Innu, there are three types of medials: body-part medials, classificatory medials and other medials derived from nouns.⁵

There can be more than one medial or final in the same verb, as in the following examples from Drapeau (1983), where classificatory medials are combined with body-part medials:

(2) *mamitshashkupuameu* ‘s/he has big thighs’

\[
\begin{array}{llll}
\text{mamitsh} & \text{- ashku} & \text{- puam} & \text{- e} & \text{- u} \\
\text{ROOT} & \text{MEDIAL} & \text{MEDIAL} & \text{FINAL} & \text{INFLExION}
\end{array}
\]

round, wooden, solid

3. Our examples are written following the Innu standard orthography that is now used by all Innu communities in Québec.

4. Other finals can be added to e, for example, the diminutive suffix in *aiapishititsheshu* ‘s/he has small hands’.

5. Wolfart (1973) only has two classes of “simple” medials: body-part medials and classificatory medials. In his classification, kinship terms and intimate possessions belong to body-part medials. Drapeau (1983) classifies these medials in a third class, derived medials (médianes dérivées), in which other medials are found such as animals, geographical features, everyday objects, etc. It is this classification we follow here.
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(3) kanuashkutitsheu ‘s/he has big hands’ (kanu-ashku-titsh-e-u)
uishauashkuapiteu ‘s/he has yellow teeth’ (uishau-ashku-apit-e-u)

(4) with classificatory medial -apek- ‘threadlike’:
kanuapetshishiteu ‘s/he has long feet’ (kanu-apetsh-ishit-e-u)

In contrast with body-part medials and derived medials, classificatory medials are not derived from nouns. We restricted our study to body-part incorporation because of the regularity of the morphological process involved with these medials and the possibility of using a syntactic structure instead of the incorporation structure. Body-part medials are also easy to identify because they resemble the corresponding body-part noun.

METHODOLOGY

The team

This study was partly carried out during a linguistics workshop held in Sept-Îles, Québec, in July 2001 and which involved mostly Innu language teachers. The research team included a linguist and four experienced Innu language teachers, in their forties, from different Innu communities of Québec: La Romaine and Natashquan for the Eastern dialect, Schefferville and Betsiamites for the Western dialect. Thus, all Innu dialects and subdialects spoken in Québec were represented, except Uashteuiahtsh (Lac St-Jean).

The speakers involved in this research have a good knowledge of how the younger members of their own community speak because they have a lot of teaching experience; and because of their age, they have good access to the language spoken by the elders. In fact, we believe that the majority of speakers who are forty years old and over are able to use different ways of speaking (different registers) depending on their interlocutor. This does not seem to be the case with younger speakers. However, we should add that Innu language teachers, like most language teachers, are well aware of the question of linguistic norms; they have a more conservative approach to what they consider to be “good Innu language,” usually the elders’ way of speaking.

6. Western Innu dialect: Betsiamites, Uashat (Sept-Îles) / Maloitenam and Schefferville (Matimekosh); Eastern Innu dialect: Lower North Shore communities (Mingan, Natashquan, La Romaine and St-Augustin) and Sheshatshiu (Labrador).
The corpus

We started our study by making an inventory of forty-five body-part nouns and of the medials corresponding to these nouns. This corpus is in no way exhaustive, but it does include most body-part terms in current use. We subsequently checked the possibility of incorporating each of these medials in a complex verb. Complex verbs derived from eighteen verb roots were found spontaneously by the members of the team. Below is most of this inventory:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>MEDIAL</th>
<th>COMPLEX VERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>piskkueun</td>
<td>-piskkueun-</td>
<td>kanupiskkueuneu ‘s/he has long hair’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushtikuan</td>
<td>-shtikuan-</td>
<td>akushiuushtikuanu ‘s/he has a headache’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushpitun</td>
<td>-pitun</td>
<td>natuapituneu ‘s/he has a broken arm’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkashi</td>
<td>-kash</td>
<td>uinakasheu ‘s/he has dirty nails’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ussun (W)</td>
<td>-ssun</td>
<td>mikussuneu (W) ’s/he has a red nose’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkush (E)</td>
<td>-kut</td>
<td>mikukuteu (E) ‘s/he has a red nose’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkhatik</td>
<td>-shkatiku-</td>
<td>akushiushkatikueu ‘s/he has a sore forehead’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utun</td>
<td>-tun-c</td>
<td>mishituneu ‘s/he has a big mouth (big lips)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utukai</td>
<td>-tutsh</td>
<td>miniututsheu ‘s/he has an abscess in his/her ear’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utapissikan</td>
<td>-apissikan-</td>
<td>pimitapissikanu ‘s/he has a hooked chin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ussishiku</td>
<td>-ap-d</td>
<td>miniuap ‘s/he has an abscess in his/her eye’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ukueiau</td>
<td>-kuei</td>
<td>mikukueieu ‘s/he has a red neck’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utitiman</td>
<td>-titiman-</td>
<td>manatitimaneshinu ‘s/he has a dislocated shoulder’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushpitun</td>
<td>-pitun</td>
<td>natuapituneshinu ‘s/he has a broken arm’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utushkun</td>
<td>-tushkun</td>
<td>tshinitushkuneu ‘s/he has sharp elbows’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkashi</td>
<td>-kash</td>
<td>uinakasheu ‘s/he has dirty nails’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkassikan</td>
<td>-shkassikan-</td>
<td>akushiushkassikanu ‘s/he has a pain in the chest’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkatai</td>
<td>-shkatai</td>
<td>uinashkataieu ‘s/he has a dirty belly’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utukan</td>
<td>-tukan</td>
<td>teitukaneshinu ‘s/he hurts her/his hip’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utishi (W)</td>
<td>-tishi-</td>
<td>minautishieu (W) ‘s/he has a hairy navel’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utishiapi (E)</td>
<td>-tishiapi-</td>
<td>minautishiap eu (E) ‘s/he has a hairy navel’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upuam</td>
<td>-puam-</td>
<td>miniupuameu ‘s/he has an abscess on her/his thigh’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utshikun</td>
<td>-tshikun-</td>
<td>patshitshikuneu ‘s/he has a swollen knee’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushkat ‘leg’</td>
<td>-kat</td>
<td>mikukateu ‘s/he has a red leg’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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ushit ‘foot’  -shit- mamishiteu ‘s/he has long feet’
uttutan ‘heel’  -tutan- teitutaneu ‘s/he hurt her/his heel’
utashtan ‘calf’  -tashtan- matshitashtaneu ‘s/he has big calves’
ushikakun ‘back of the knee’  -shikakun- nutimashikakuneu ‘s/he has round back of the knees’
ushukun ‘hip’  -shukun- matshishukuneu ‘s/he has wide hips’
ushkipshkun ‘back’  -pishkun- uatshipishkuneu ‘s/he is round shouldered’
utikuai (W)  -tikuai- unatikuateu ‘s/he has dirty armpits’
utikut (E) ‘armpit’
utitshi ‘hand’  -titsh- mikutitsheu ‘s/he has red hands’

a.  W: Western dialect; E: Eastern dialect.
c.  The medial -tun- is often translated by ‘lips’ (‘levres’) in French, here: ‘s/he has small lips’.
d.  This medial, very productive, is not derived from the noun but suppletive.

Among the body-part terms selected, we were unable to find medials (and thus use incorporation) for the nouns denoting eyelash, eyebrow, cheek7, wrist, fingers (including the different finger terms, index, middle, etc.) and toes. In the case of the terms for ‘fingers’ and ‘toes’, the nouns for ‘hand’ or ‘foot’ are used instead in incorporation, and we think this is also the case for the terms ‘wrist’ and ‘ankle’.

Even if this list is not exhaustive, it gives a good idea of the productivity of incorporation, since we found complex verbs for thirty-five terms out of a possible forty-five.

We then chose seven verbs (five of which are very common), all of which are known to allow body-part medial incorporation, to be systematically tested for the extent to which they allow incorporation of all body-part medials or whether they can be used with a syntactic structure of verb + noun.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

We found that productivity of body-part incorporation varies according to the specific verb used. Thus, with akushu ‘to be sick’ and tshishtaputau ‘to wash’, incorporation is either impossible or is optional with some particular body-part terms.

7.  The body-part term for ‘cheek’ is problematic. In Western dialect, unuai could be used instead of utamakan. There seem to be two medials, depending of the dialect, but our team could not find a verb using incorporation. Drapeau (1991:194) gives this form: kuku-anamakanu (W), kukanitamakanuneu (E) ‘il a les joues creuses’.
akushu ‘to be sick’

   \[Nitakushiushpitunen\] ‘my arm hurts (literally, I am sick in my arm)’

b. Incorporation or syntactic structure: ‘head’, ‘chin’, ‘neck’
   \[Nitakushiushhtikuaneu / Nitakushun nishtikuun\] ‘I have a headache (literally, I am sick in my head)’

   \[Nitakushin nitun\] ‘my mouth hurts (literally, I am sick in my mouth)’

Comments: With this verb, the syntactic structure seems easier to produce, that is, would be used more spontaneously. It is probably the structure used by younger speakers.

Parallel to the data collected, we found little information in the dictionaries. Drapeau’s \textit{Lexique montagnais de la santé} gives three words using incorporation with \textit{akushu}, which is not much, compared to other verb roots:

\[akushiupiteu\] ‘s/he has a toothache’
\[akushiushkateu\] ‘s/he has a stomach ache’
\[akushiushhtikuaneu\] ‘s/he has a headache’ (Drapeau 1990)

\[tshishtaputau\] ‘wash’

a. Incorporation only: ‘body’, ‘leg’ (E), ‘head’ (E)
   \[nitshishtaputshikaten\] ‘I wash my legs

b. Incorporation or syntactic structure: ‘hair’ (W), ‘face’, ‘arm’, ‘hand’, ‘mouth’
   \[Nitshishtaputshikuen / Nitshishtaputan nitashtamik\] ‘I wash my face’

c. Syntactic structure only: ‘navel’, ‘leg’ (W)
   \[Nitshishtaputan nitishi (W) / nitishiapi (E)\] ‘I wash my navel’

Comments: With this verb, incorporation is spontaneously used, but the syntactic structure is also used. For the terms ‘head’ and ‘hair’, different expressions are used, according to dialects: in the Eastern dialect, we would say \[nitshishtaputshishtikuaneu\] ‘I wash my head’; in the Western dialect, it would be \[nitshishtaputan nipishkueuna\] ‘I wash my hair’.

In the \textit{Dictionnaire montagnais-français} (Drapeau 1991), we found two occurrences of incorporation with this verb root: \textit{tshishtaputitsheu}
Incorporation of Body-Part Medials in Innua

’s/he washes her/his hands’; tshishtaputshikueu ‘s/he washes her/his face’.

Incorporation is very productive with descriptive verbs such as mikuau ‘to be red’, uinakuan ‘to be dirty’, apishashu ‘to be small’. For these verbs, our consultants mostly use the morphological structure. But they also said that the syntactic structure is possible and that what young speakers would use should be checked out.

(8) mikuau ‘to be red’


nimikutunen ‘I have red lips’
nimikukueien ‘I have a red neck’
nimikututshen ‘I have a red arm’

b. Incorporation or syntactic structure: ‘heel’

nimikututanen / mikuau nitutan ‘I have a red heel’ / ‘my heel is red’

(9) uinakuan ‘to be dirty’


nuinatshikunen ‘I have a dirty knee’
uinakashen ‘I have dirty nails’
nuinatushkanen ‘I have a dirty elbow’

b. Incorporation or syntactic structure: ‘face’

nuinatashtamikuen / uinakuan nitashtamik’ ‘I have a dirty face’ / ‘my face is dirty’

(10) a(ia)pissho ‘to be small’


nitapishitatissikanen ‘I have a small chin’,
nitapishishtikuanen ‘I have a small head’.

In the Western dialect, we found reduplicated verb forms with paired body-part terms: ‘ears’, ‘hands’, ‘eyes’, ‘legs’, ‘thighs’

nitaiapishitatishen ‘I have small hands’
nitaiapishikaten ‘I have small legs’.
In Drapeau (1991), we found more entries for incorporation with *apishashu* ‘to be small’ than with the two other verbs. Here are a few forms:

- *aiapishapishu* ‘s/he has small eyes’;
- *aiapishipuameshu* ‘s/he has small thighs’;
- *aiapishititsheshu* ‘s/he has small hands’;
- *apishikuteshu* ‘s/he has a small nose’.

Drapeau (1991) also has forms with the classificatory medial -*ashku*-

- *aiapishashkuapiteshu* ‘s/he has small teeth’;
- *aiapishashkukateshu* ‘s/he has small legs’;
- *aiapishashkupituneshu* ‘s/he has small arms’;
- *aiapishashkutitsheshu* ‘s/he has small fingers’.

Two other verbs tested showed mostly incorporation. These are *teishinu* ‘s/he hurts himself/herself’ and *uishatshishu* ‘s/he has an irritation’. Incorporation is very productive with these verbs.

(11) **teishinu** ‘s/he hurts himself/herself’


- *niteikatikueshin* ‘I hurt my neck’;
- *niteipiteshin* ‘I hurt my tooth’;
- *niteipishkuneshin* ‘I hurt my back’;
- *niteititsheshin* ‘I hurt my hand’;
- *niteishtikuaneshin* ‘I hurt my head’;
- *niteipuameshin* ‘I hurt my thigh’;
- *niteitshikuneshin* ‘I hurt my knee’.

Even if our consultants mentioned that this verb may be used with the syntactic structure, noun incorporation seems to be more productive. They easily found examples of complex verbs with this verb root. And, compared to other verbs tested, Drapeau (1991) gives a longer list of verbs derived from this root and incorporation of body-part medials.

(12) **uishatshishu** ‘s/he has an irritation’


- *nuishakapin* ‘I have an irritation in my eyes’, *nuishatshitunen* ‘I have an irritation in my mouth (my lips)’, *nuishatshipitunetishun* ‘my arm is irritated by something’
b. Syntactic structure only: ‘elbow’, ‘foot’

nuishatshishin nitushkun ‘I have an irritation on my elbow’,
uuishakapauen nishilit ‘my foot is irritated by the water’

Comments: Incorporation is spontaneously used with this verb, but the syntactic structure is also possible.

Drapeau (1991) mentions a few forms using incorporation with this verb root:
uishatshipuameshinu ‘s/he has her/his thigh irritated by something’;
uuishatshitshikuneshinu ‘s/he has her/his knee irritated by something’;
uishakapu ‘her/his eye is irritated’.

To sum up, in our corpus, the verb root which most spontaneously uses body-part noun incorporation is *tei*- from *teishinu*. ‘s/he hurts himself/herself’. Descriptive verbs such as *mikuau* ‘to be red’, *uinakuan* ‘to be dirty’, *apishashu* ‘to be small’, as well as *uishatshishu* ‘s/he has an irritation’, are also good bases for this morphological process. With *akushu* ‘to be sick’ and *tshishtaputau* ‘to wash’, we observed a tendency to use a syntactic structure instead, even if nominal incorporation is still productive. In this latter case, it would be necessary to verify if common body-part nouns are used more frequently with a syntactic structure than with less common terms.

We now return to the question of speaker age. Our study focused mostly on speakers of forty to fifty years old. Extrapolations made in this research about the linguistic behavior of other generations are based on the knowledge and impressions of the consultants involved. Because of their role as Innu language teachers and specialists, as well as their excellent relationships with the elders of their communities, they are ideal observers of the present situation of their language.

Below are a few observations based on the results obtained:

- The syntactic structure of verb + noun is now productive among the generation of speakers of forty to fifty years old with common verbs and body-part nouns. That would explain the variability obtained with *tshishtaputau* ‘wash’ and *akushu* ‘to be sick’.
- Incorporation is probably very productive in the elders’ speech, but this should be studied further.
- Among speakers under forty, the tendency is to use the verb + noun structure more frequently rather than the morphological structure. We also believe that
this tendency is growing among those under twenty. In fact, there seems to be a risk that these speakers, sooner or later, will not know or understand verbs derived by noun incorporation. A documented research project should be carried out among young speakers to verify this hypothesis.

- The speakers involved in this study believe that, even though incorporation is still productive among speakers forty years old or older, the fact that the younger generation does not use it anymore and does not understand the vocabulary derived from it may threaten the productivity of this morphological process. Indeed, they underline that the elders often have to adapt their vocabulary to be understood by the young. This tendency to adapt their way of speaking may harm the transmission of this typical Innu structure and accelerate language erosion.

**LANGUAGE PRESERVATION AND LINGUISTIC NORM**

When the preliminary results of this research were presented to all members of the linguistics workshop in Sept-Iles, the question of linguistic norms was raised. Language teachers tend to have a “purist” point of view concerning their language. Innu teachers usually favor the transmission and the teaching of what they consider to be the “good Innu language”, that is, the way elders speak. So, in this case, where noun incorporation is in competition with a less typical syntactic structure, the teachers believe that only incorporation should be taught. In a document prepared for Innu teacher training, Drapeau (1983) wrote:

Les médianes sont une caractéristique saillante de ce qu’on pourrait appeler “le génie de la langue montagnaise”. En effet, si on regarde une rivière et que l’eau y est belle et calme, on ne dira pas *miluashu nipi*, mais plutôt *milupeiau*; pourtant les deux expressions ont le même sens, seule la deuxième cependant est conforme au “génie de la langue”. De la même manière, on a vu plus haut l’utilisation des médianes désignant les parties du corps: leur emploi correct désigne tout de suite quelqu’un comme parlant bien montagnais. Ainsi pour désigner quelqu’un qui a comme caractéristique d’avoir le nez petit, on dira *apishissuneu*. On pourrait aussi dire *apishashilu usson* mais c’est moins bien dit que le premier.

But ignoring the way the young – and indeed a good part of the population – actually speak may eventually become problematic: would the language taught in school become too artificial?

The issue of linguistic norms is no easy matter, above all for a language like Innu, which has neither a tradition of literacy nor recognized reference materials. We should mention here that Innu orthography
standardization is very recent. And at the present time, there is no ques­
tion of oral standardization for the Innu language. Thus, with significant
dialectal variation, is it possible to define a single norm to be taught in
schools?

As mentioned above, the "good Innu language" is often based on
elders’ speech. But, this elders’ language is itself a kind of abstraction,
since it is not invariant. In fact, language does not necessarily evolve in
the same way everywhere and there are differences in the elders’ lan­
guage from one Innu community to another. So, if we were to conduct a
research with older Innu speakers from all dialects, we would probably
get different results with speakers from Betsiamites and La Romaine
communities, the former being considered more innovative than the latter.
Also, do we know what will happen in the future? Speakers who are now
seen as a linguistic reference will have disappeared and those who take
their place and become themselves elders will not speak in the same way.
That is why defining linguistic norms is not an easy task.

The solution may be to take into account both the traditional lan­
guage and the actual linguistic situation. Thus, in teaching the language at
school, it is more realistic to draw a parallel between tradition and innova­
tion. In the case studied here, body-part terms should be taught using both
structures, the traditional morphological one and the innovative syntactic
one. Teachers may emphasize the typical morphological structure, if they
wish to, but they should not ignore the evolution of the language.

Teachers are not really conscious of all changes occurring in their
language. They do have good intuitions about it: they feel that the young
people’s language is different compared to that of other generations; they
can describe some of these differences, but they do not clearly know what
is happening. Actually, speakers who were part of our research team have
a good knowledge of the incorporation mechanism and know how to use
it, but they have no idea of the current evolution of this morphological
process, even in their own speaking. They were quite surprised when they
saw the results of the research.

A reference grammar for Innu speakers is now in preparation. In a
case such as noun incorporation, how should these data be described? In
this type of reference work, should we take into account the current state
of the language? And if so, how far should we go? Again, decisions have
to be made in consultation with those primarily concerned, the Innu speakers themselves.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, the research here reported is still preliminary. Our aim was to provoke thinking about structural changes occurring in minority languages facing strong pressures from a dominant second language. More precisely, we wanted to see how typical morphological structures might be modified under the potential influence of the dominant language. Our study of the use of incorporation of body-part medials to form complex verbs shows that the Innu language is undergoing significant changes. Evidently our research must be pursued in order for us to understand more clearly what is going on with this morphological structure, above all among the younger speakers. In fact, our results raise numerous questions which will eventually require answers. In this paper, we simply wish to share this problem, thereby hoping to open a discussion which could be very useful in guiding future research.

REFERENCES

