

Acquisition Sketch Project Meeting 8: Background Information

12th June 2024

Agenda:

- Language Information
- Typology
- Multilingualism
- Learning Environment

Language Information

Language Information

Identify the language

- ISO (<https://iso639-3.sil.org>)
- Glottocode (<https://glottolog.org>)
- Language family
- Dialect situation and your focus dialect

Locate the language

- Where in the world is it typically used?

Linguistic Situation

Identify the people

- How many people use the language?
- Are they a distinct subset of the population?

Linguistic situation across the lifespan

- Are users evenly balanced across age groups or language shift occurring?
- Shift to bilingualism / multilingualism at later age via schooling etc.?

Setting Information

Is the language one of several used within the community?

Is the language restricted to particular domains of use (e.g. within the home)?

What language(s) are used in school?

Previous studies of child language acquisition in this or related languages

Example from Inuktitut – Language Info

1.1 Inuktitut

Inuit languages are spoken across Alaska, northern Canada, and Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) by around 100,000 people (Dorais 2010). Inuktitut¹ – a language of the Inuit-Yupik-Unangan language family – is spoken in the eastern parts of Canada by approximately 34,000 speakers (Dorais 2010). The data for this sketch, collected in the late 1980s, come from speakers of the Tarramiut² variety of Inuktitut living in the Nunavik region of northern Quebec (Allen 1996; Crago 1988). Inuktitut is the native language of most Inuit in this region. Speakers then and now are typically fluent in Inuktitut and use it as their main language at home. Some Inuit children grow up bilingually from birth, typically as a result of one parent who is a native speaker of English or French. At the time of data collection, schooling occurred in Inuktitut until the end of grade 2 (age 8), and Inuktitut was usually the main language at work. Since schooling after grade 2 occurs mostly in English or French, speakers of Inuktitut older than age 8 are typically bilingual in English and/or French, although they typically remain dominant in Inuktitut in the region investigated in this study (Allen 2007).

¹ Glottocode east2534 (Glottolog 4.6, 2022).

Example from Inuktitut – Previous Research

1.2 Acquisition studies of Inuktitut

Considerable research on Inuktitut has focused on child language acquisition. Studies on **communicative competence** (Crago 1988) and **morphosyntactic development** (Allen 1996) investigated the language of eight children ages 1;0 to 3;6. A study on early **finiteness** examined the language of one child with specific language impairment and one typically-developing child, both age 5;0 (Crago & Allen 2001). Another study explored **code-switching** in the language of six Inuktitut-English bilingual children ages 1;8 to 3;9 (Allen, Genesee, Fish & Crago 2002). The data for these studies were collected longitudinally between 1986 and 1996; they represent spontaneous speech from natural, everyday interactions between children and their families and friends. These studies have additionally resulted in numerous publications on the acquisition of morphosyntax and **information structure** in Inuktitut, as well as **general acquisition patterns** (e.g., Allen 1996, 1998, 2000, 2013, 2017, in press; Allen & Crago 1996; Allen & Dench 2015; Crago 1988; Crago & Allen 1998, 2001; Doroski 2020; Johnson & Allen 2022; Lee et al. 2023; Skarabela 2007; Swift 2004). They have also led to the adaptation of **two children's language development tests** for Inuktitut: the Language Assessment, Remediation and Screening Procedure (LARSP (Allen, Dench & Isakson 2019)) and the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (CDI (Allen, Cain, Dench, Genest & Trudeau 2017)). The present study uses five hours of data from Crago (1988) and Allen (1996) to create an acquisition sketch of Inuktitut following the guidelines of the Sketch Acquisition Manual (Defina et al. 2023).

Typology

Principles

General grammatical properties → not full grammar

Refer to general patterns here; put details in later sections as relevant

Provide references for grammars if available

No need for a full grammar to exist!

What to Include

Phonology

- Overview of basic phonology
- Notable phonological properties (e.g. lexical tone)

Example from Inuktitut – Phonology

The structure of Inuktitut is described in detail in Dorais (1988, 2010). In this section, we summarize relevant points for the present acquisition sketch. First, Inuktitut has a relatively simple phonological system. The language has three vowels /a, i, u/, which can be both short and long, as well as 13 consonants /p, t, k, q, v, s, l, j, ʃ, r, m, n, ŋ/, most of which can appear singly or as geminates. Stress and intonation patterns are external to words and primarily demarcate words and clauses (Arnhold et al. 2018).

What to Include

Phonology

- Overview of basic phonology
- Notable phonological properties (e.g. lexical tone)

Word Order

- Fixed or flexible
- Possible word order options for sentence and noun phrase

Example from Inuktitut – Word Order / Syntax

Inuktitut is a **morphologically ergative** language, so subjects of transitive verbs are marked with ergative case while subjects of intransitive verbs and objects of transitive verbs are marked with absolutive case. However, the **syntax follows a nominative-accusative system** which relies on the subject and object for determining the structure of clauses.

Verbal inflections mark the subject and object while the overt realization of subjects and objects apart from the inflection is optional. In this way, the word-internal syntax is more important than the word-external syntax. Inuktitut has **default SOV word order** but the word order can vary for discourse-pragmatic reasons.

Finally, **valency and word class alternations are common** in Inuktitut. Passive, antipassive, and noun incorporation structures decrease the valency, while causative structures and a transitivizing morpheme increase the valency. Word class can change more than three times within a single word. The preceding example (1) contains two examples of noun incorporation – *ulla-* ‘morning’ and *pi-* ‘thing’ – with the verbalizers *-tuaq-* ‘become’ and *-qaq-* ‘have’, which both decrease valency and change word class from noun to verb. The example also contains a verb-to-noun change in word class with the use of the nominalizer *-jialik*.

What to Include

Phonology

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- Notable phonological properties (e.g. lexical tone)

Word Order

- Fixed or flexible
- Possible word order options for sentence and noun phrase

Morphological Type

- Isolating / synthetic / agglutinative / etc.
- Head or dependent-marking properties
- Rough template of predicate and/or noun

Example from Inuktitut – Morphology

The morphological system, however, is relatively complex. Inuktitut is polysynthetic, so a single word can contain over 10 morphemes. The language is typically described as having three word classes: nouns, verbs, and uninflected particles. Nouns and verbs begin with a root, allow several derivational affixes, and end with an obligatory inflection and optional enclitics. The derivational affixes are agglutinative, meaning each affix typically has only one meaning. The 1200 obligatory word-final inflections on the other hand, are portmanteau morphemes, meaning each inflection realizes multiple meanings. These include 900 verbal inflections that mark four persons (first, second, third coreferential, third disjoint), three numbers (singular, dual, plural), and nine moods (indicative, participial, interrogative, imperative, contingent, conditional, dubitative, contemporative, incontemporative³). The 300 nominal inflections mark three numbers and eight cases (absolutive, ergative, modalis, allative, ablative, locative, vialis, equalis), as well as person and number of the possessor and number of the possessee if relevant. Example (1) illustrates the pervasiveness of inflections in Inuktitut. In the example, five of the six words contain an inflection. The morphemes *-mmat* ‘CTG.3SG.SBJ’ and *-tsuni* ‘CTM.4SG.SBJ’ are verbal inflections, *-minik* ‘MOD.4SG.SG’ is a possessive nominal inflection, and *-na* ‘ABS.SG’ and \emptyset ‘ABS.SG’ are simple nominal inflections without possession.

Multilingualism

Possible Multilingual Scenarios

Scenario 1: Mostly use focal language, other language less prevalent

- Highlight focal language in data collection – prioritize settings where it is used
- Write sketch on focal language
- Note patterns in other language in introductory section – when and where is other language typically used

Scenario 2: All people highly bilingual and regularly use both languages

- Focus sketch on one or other language
- Focus sketch on mixed language (e.g. Light Warlpiri)

Overview of Multilingual Situation

Official languages in country / area

Lingua franca

Languages in daily use in different situations (e.g., home, work, school, TV, radio, religious ceremonies, community activities, health services)

Number and age distribution of multilinguals

Effects of multilingualism for focal language / community

General use of code switching, cross-linguistic influence, language change, etc.

Multilingual situation for children in sketch

Example from Inuktitut – General Situation

In the 2001 census, 440 Inuit in Nunavut identified themselves as simultaneous bilinguals, speaking both Inuktitut and either English or French from birth (Statistics Canada, 2001). This constituted about 2% of the Inuit population. Although figures are not available for Nunavik, a similar percentage is likely, and was also the case in the communities where the sketch data were collected. Virtually all other Inuit born after the early 1950s have become bilingual to varying degrees in either English or French through schooling, which began in this region around 1960; individuals born before that time typically do not speak a language other than Inuktitut (Dorais & Sammons 2002). Some 5% of individuals living in the communities where the sketch data were collected were not Inuktitut-speaking, including non-Inuit spouses of Inuit, teachers, and itinerant health and construction personnel. English is typically the lingua franca among speakers of different languages, and non-Inuit rarely learn more than a few common words and phrases in Inuktitut.

Example from Inuktitut – Effects of Multilingualism

The presence of multilingualism in the communities has had a number of ramifications for Inuktitut, as revealed by a study in Nunavut showing patterns mirrored in Nunavik (Dorais & Sammons 2002). Within homes the majority of utterances still occur in Inuktitut (70% in Nunavut but higher in Nunavik), so most topics are discussed in Inuktitut. Conversations on traditional topics such as religion and the environment occur overwhelmingly in Inuktitut, while conversations on leisure (especially involving younger speakers) have the lowest use of Inuktitut (under 50% in Nunavut but higher in Nunavik). English and French are used more frequently in homes with older children who have started attending school in a majority language. Allen et al. (2006) suggests that there is some amount of first language stagnation in Nunavik as a result of school or community exposure to a second language (comparing children after grade 2 with only Inuktitut schooling vs. after grade 8 with six years of majority language schooling and comparing communities with less vs. more presence of a majority language). Similarly, Wright et al. (2000) found that schooling in grades K-2 in French rather than Inuktitut (an option in one large community in Nunavik) caused disruptions in the development of Inuktitut in children whose first language was Inuktitut. These results are specific to sequential bilingual children who were first exposed

Example from Inuktitut – Multilingualism in Study

Overall, young children acquiring Inuktitut attain a strong command of the language within their first four years. As they age, exposure to English or French in the school and community leads to greater use of the majority languages, which could disrupt the development of Inuktitut. However, Inuktitut is still not typically replaced by English or French. Instead, there is a more balanced use of both depending on the situation (Allen 2007). All the children in this current study were growing up in families in which Inuktitut was by far the predominant language used in the home. While other family members spoke English to varying degrees, the children had relatively little exposure to English and did not speak it at these ages. Thus, this sketch focuses only on Inuktitut.

Possible Phenomena to Cover in Sketch

Code switching / mixing (Muysken 2000)

Cross-linguistic influence (Serratrice 2013)

Evidence of diachronic change (differences in older vs. younger speakers)

Evidence of emergence of new language (e.g. Light Warlpiri ← Warlpiri + English/Kriol)

Compare trajectory of acquisition of a particular phenomenon across two languages

Compare trajectory of acquisition of monolingual vs. bilingual children

How to cover

- Document patterns qualitatively
- Quantitative analysis only if frequent enough

Learning Environment and Ethnotheories

Ethnotheories on Language Development

Ideas about how children acquire language

- Do adults play a role in children's language development?
- Can/should children be taught language?
- Are there different attitudes about acquiring different languages (if bilingual)?

Developmental stages recognized (if any)

- Stages when children master specific skills? Which ages? Which skills?
- Ideas on when children start using language? What their first words are? When children have acquired most of the features of their language?

Other points

- Are children's gestures, gaze and early vocalizations considered language?
- Do people assess children's language ("better" or "worse" skills)? How?

Views on Language Use

Special register used with children – ‘child-directed language’ (CDL)

- Do people reflect on why they are using (or not using) CDL?
- Are people aware of any specific lexical or structural properties of CDL?
- When is CDL used? How common is CDL?

Comprehension vs. production

- Do people focus differently on children’s comprehension vs. production?
- Effect on attitude about children as conversational partners – e.g. not talking to children until they are able to respond verbally?

Salient language features

- Any features of child language that strike caregivers as salient?
- Any common non-target-like forms, speech acts, routines?

Interactional Contexts

Types of communicative interactions

- What types of interactions do children typically engage in? In what language(s)?
- What activities associated with interactions? (e.g. peer interaction looking for firewood)

Behavior in interactions

- Do children produce language and/or gestures to demonstrate active participation?
- How do the children's interlocutors respond to these productions?
- Do they facilitate children's contributions? Discourage them? Correct them? Ignore them?
- Age- or gender-related differences in communicative interaction?

Distribution of interactions

- What does an average day look like for a child?
- How are types of communicative interactions typically distributed over the day?

Example from Inuktitut – Values and Caregiving

Based on interviews with Inuktitut speakers, Crago (1988) describes several values in the community, including knowledge of language, respect for others, cooperation, knowledge of family tree, community, and individuality. These values are evident through methods of caregiving and language socialization. Mothers typically have the primary caregiver role, but babies and small children are also taken care of by grandparents, siblings, and fictive kin (Allen 1996; Crago 1988). Children are present at adult functions and multiage gatherings, but adults do not cater to the children (Crago 1988). The relationship of mothers to children is typically one of caregiving, not a play partner (Allen 1996).

Example from Inuktitut – Views on Language Use

Traditionally children are socialized to be silent with adults rather than vocally expressive because this demonstrates respect and understanding. Similarly, mothers and caregivers are more concerned with children's comprehension than production, so they often do not respond to or attempt to interpret vocalizations of very young children (Crago 1988). Adults may simplify their utterances when children appear to not understand (Allen 1996). However, there are some prevalent language teaching strategies. First, caregivers will elicit greeting routines and politeness conventions from their children. Also, people may play verbal games with children that involve non-confrontational communication and questioning the child. Verbal curiosity on the part of the child is not encouraged instead, children are expected to learn by watching and listening (Crago 1988).

Questions and Discussion

Good luck in writing up the
background information!