# Acquisition Sketch Project

Meeting 15:

Morphosyntax in Child-Directed Language

11/12 February 2025

**Box 6.** Key areas of focus in child-directed language: Morphosyntax.

#### Core

- (i) Do you observe any differences in the mean length of utterance? If yes, in what way?
- (ii) Do you observe any morphosyntactic differences to adult-directed language? If yes, which ones?
- (iii) Do you observe any repetitions and variations? If yes, which types (e.g. variation sets, formulaic utterances etc.)?

#### Extension

- (iv) Expand on (iii): What are the structural properties of repetition and variation?
- (v) Expand on (iii): What are the functions of repetition and variation? Who produces them? How does the child respond to them?

NOTE: All examples in this talk are from Inuktitut (Inuit-Yupik-Unangan family; Lee & Allen 2023)

# Mean Length of Utterance

Are there differences in the length of utterances addressed to younger vs. older children?

# Utterances addressed to younger children are shorter than utterances to older children

Table 15. Average	e MLUm ir	CDS.				_
	1;4	1;10	2;4	2;10	3;4	
MOT A	2.35	2.65	3.50	4.62	4.52	
MOT B	2.50	2.86	3.22	3.62	4.28	
Average	2.43	2.76	3.36	4.12	4.40	

# Words addressed to younger children are shorter than words to older children

Table 23. V	Word length	in morphe	mes by age	in CDS.			
Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1;4	0.42	0.32	0.18	0.03	0.04	0.01	
1;10	0.44	0.22	0.19	0.05	0.06	0.03	0.01
2;4	0.43	0.24	0.19	0.08	0.03	0.01	0.02
2;10	0.29	0.24	0.26	0.13	0.05	0.02	0.01
3;4	0.30	0.20	0.27	0.16	0.05	0.01	0.02
The number o	of words by ag	e is as follows	: 1:4=276, 1:10	)=126, 2:4=262	2. 2:10=375. 3:4	=139.	

### Typical CDL utterances at younger vs. older ages

#### CDL to child aged 1;4

qai-git come-IMP.2SG.SBJ 'Come here.' taku-guk see-IMP.2SG.SBJ>3SG.OBJ 'Look at it.'

#### CDL to children aged 3;2 / 3;3

aanni-tau-tsarua-ravit. hurt-PASS-might-CTG.2SG.SBJ 'You might get hurt.' qausi-alu-nnik atu-qatta-qit? wet-AUG-MOD.DU wear-HAB-INT.2SG.SBJ 'Did you wear wet (boots)?

Inuktitut; Defina et al. 2023: 59-60

# Morphosyntactic Differences

- Are child-directed utterances essentially correct and complete?
- Do you observe ungrammatical structures, simplifications, omissions?

### CDL utterances in Inuktitut are correct and complete

- 96% of verbs have inflections
- Utterances are simpler/shorter but not ungrammatical

# Typical Morphosyntactic Structures

- ➤ What are the typical morphosyntactic structures?
- Do you observe preference for particular constituent orders, specific TAM morphology, specific speech acts?

More types (and tokens) of verbal inflections used in CDL as children get older

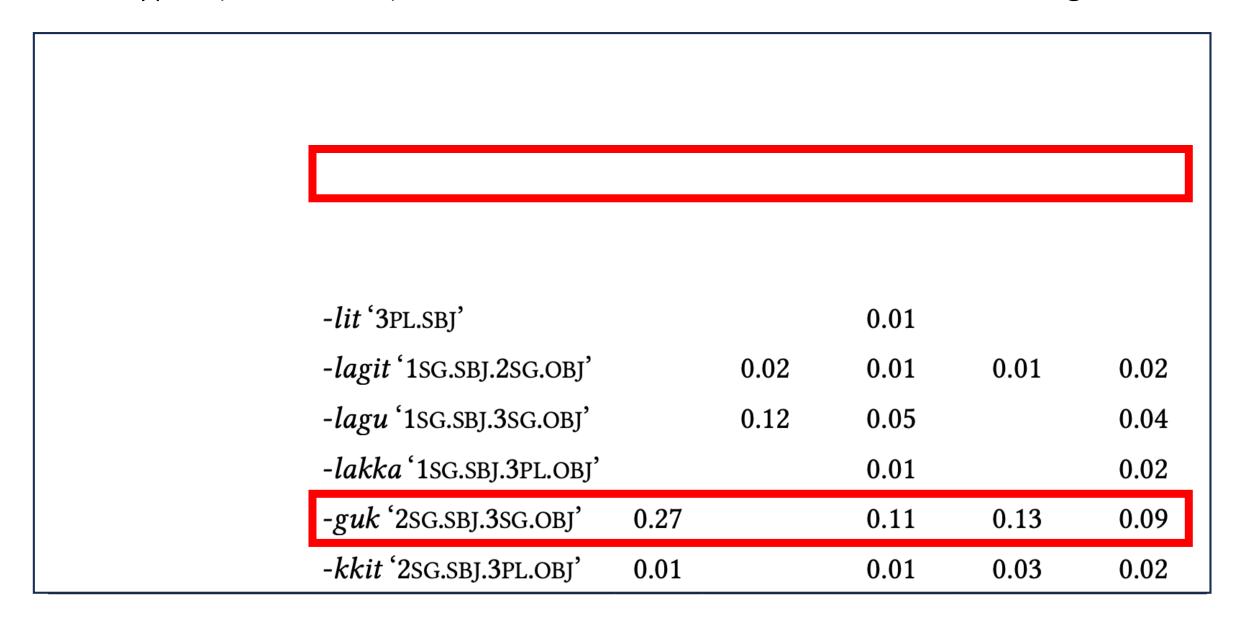
Table 16.	Types and	tokens of verba	l infle	ections by ag	ge in CDS	•		
		Number of		VI Type:	S		VI Tokens	S
Group	Child	Utterances	N	Per Utterance	Group Mean	N	Per Utterance	Group Mean
1;4	Jini	86	8	0.09		37	0.43	
	Sarah	137	11	0.08	0.09	56	0.41	0.42
1;10	Lucasi	23	6	0.26		7	0.30	
	Sarah	77	13	0.17	0.21	36	0.47	0.39
2;4	Paul	40	13	0.33		27	0.68	
	Lizzie	125	17	0.14	0.23	17	0.44	0.56
2;10	Elijah	66	14	0.21		30	0.45	
	Lizzie	174	25	0.14	0.18	101	0.58	0.52
3;4	Louisa	32	17	0.53		22	0.69	
	Lizzie	48	18	0.38	0.45	35	0.73	0.71

Inuktitut; Lee & Allen 2023: 164

### Most frequent verbal inflections in CDL are ...

- > Imperative mood (45%), then indicative (15%)
- > Intransitive (75%)
- ➤ Singular (90%)
- > 2<sup>nd</sup> person subject (60%)
- Consistent with the context: mothers are typically giving commands or requests to the child

More types (and tokens) of verbal inflections used in CDL as children get older



Inuktitut; Lee & Allen 2023: 164-165

More types (and tokens) of nominal inflections used in CDL as children get older

Table 18.	Types and	l tokens of nomi	nal inf	lections by a	ige in CD	S.			
		Number of		NI Types			NI Tokens		
Group	Child	Utterances	N	Per Utterance	Group Mean	N	Per Utterance	Group Mean	
1;4	Jini	86	3	0.03		9	0.10		
	Sarah	137	1	0.01	0.02	1	0.01	0.06	
1;10	Lucasi	23	3	0.13		3	0.13		
	Sarah	77	5	0.06	0.10	12	0.16	0.14	
2;4	Paul	40	4	0.10		5	0.13		
	Lizzie	125	9	0.07	0.09	27	0.22	0.17	
2;10	Elijah	66	11	0.17		30	0.45		
	Lizzie	174	20	0.11	0.14	51	0.29	0.37	
3;4	Louisa	32	4	0.13		7	0.22		
	Lizzie	48	8	0.17	0.15	13	0.27	0.24	

Inuktitut; Lee & Allen 2023: 169

### Most frequent nominal inflections in CDL are ...

- ➤ Absolutive case (50%)
- Singular (90%)
- Possessive inflections more frequent at 1;4 and 1;10 (>70%)
- Non-possessive inflections more frequent by 2;4 (>60%)

More types (and tokens) of nominal inflections used in CDL as children get older

Table 19. No	ominal inflections	at each age ii	n CDS.			
Case	Inflection	1;4	1;10	2;4	2;10	3;4
Absolutive	- <i>Vk</i> 'du'			0.03		
'plural'	-it 'PL'		0.31		0.19	
	-gaʻ1sG.sg'				0.06	
	- <i>kka</i> '1sg.pl'				0.01	
'your'	-it '2sg.sg'	0.80	0.08	0.06	0.09	0.05
	-tit '2SG.PL'				0.01	
'his/her'	-nga '3sg.sg'		0.38	0.03	0.07	0.05
	-Vngik '3x.du'				0.01	
	-ngit '3X.PL'	0.10		0.03	0.04	0.05

### Subjects and objects are typically omitted (realized only in inflection)

<b>Table 24.</b> Subject r	ealization by a	age in CDS.			
	1;4	1;10	2;4	2;10	3;4
Null subject	0.96	0.96	0.97	0.89	0.98
Overt subject	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.11	0.02

	1;4	1;10	2;4	2;10	3;4
Null object	0.78	0.83	0.86	0.79	0.69
Overt object	0.22	0.17	0.14	0.21	0.31

### Word order follows default patterns

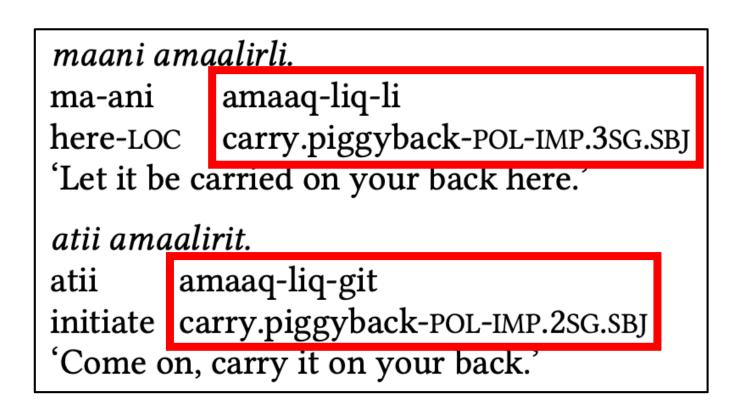
- > Default word order is SOV, flexible for information structure
- CDL shows:
  - > No utterances with both S and O
  - > Subject: 100% SV, 0% VS
  - Object: 89% OV, 11% VO

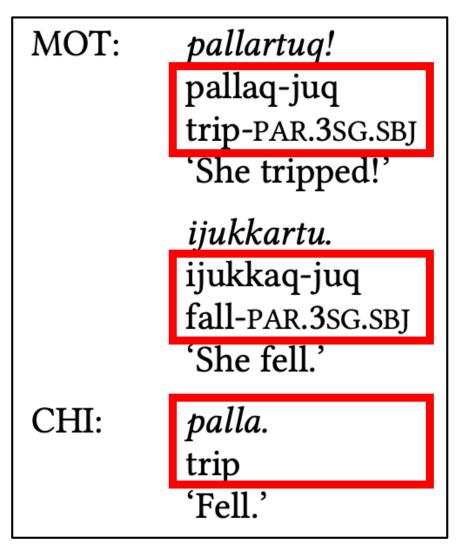
## Repetitions and Variations

- ➤ Do you see exact repetitions? Formulaic utterances? Variation sets?
- ➤ How common are they?
- ➤ What are their functions?
- > Who uses them?
- > Do you observe any age-related differences?

### Mothers use some variation sets

>Sequence of utterances with lexical overlap that highlight segmentation





Inuktitut; Lee & Allen 2023: 167

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## Questions and Discussion

Good luck in writing up the CDL morphosyntax section!