

The Acquisition of Locative Incorporation Structures in Inuktitut

The purpose of my current research is to explore the acquisition of different types of noun incorporation in Inuktitut and to examine if and when the child grammar begins to mirror the adult grammar, and how this process occurs.

Despite the fact that locative noun incorporation constructions in Inuktitut behave differently in the adult grammar than do non-locative instances (possessive or plural inflection can appear on the noun root on the former, but not the latter for example) (Allen 1996, Parkinson 1999, Johns 2007, Johns 2009), no study, to my knowledge, has yet investigated whether the production of locative incorporation differs from other noun incorporation structures over the course of acquisition.

The cross sectional and longitudinal data comes from four Inuktitut speaking children aged 2;0 – 2;10 collected over a 9 month period. I examined the differences and similarities of the acquisition of locative noun incorporation in comparison to more typical noun incorporation (bare nouns only).

One would expect locative incorporation to be more difficult to acquire and therefore to emerge later, however this does not appear to be the case. Despite the added complexity of optional possessors and the added syntactic complexity of locational postpositions, locative incorporation appears to be acquired early and similarly to noun incorporation as both structures are produced by all children at the earliest ages studied.

Additionally, an interesting pattern of acquisition emerged in the production of possessives. A phonologically reduced possessor form emerges for several of the subjects, however the possessor is never reduced in the adult grammar. Morphosyntactically speaking, this shows evidence of acquisition. The production of the reduced possessor shows that the concept is acquired in terms of morphology and syntax but is not yet fully acquired phonologically.

References

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