

Possessive Paradigms in Mi'gmaq: Alienability as Syntactic Proximity

Many Algonquian languages grammaticalize differences between alienable and inalienable possession: *alienable* indicates possessive relationships that may change over time, and *inalienable* is a permanent possessive relationship like those denoting blood relatives (see Nichols & Bickel in *World Atlas of Language Structures*, or Nichols 1988). This presentation uses original fieldwork data of Listuguj (QC) Mi'gmaq to explore the phonological and morphological consequences of overtly-marked alienability. These distinctions present a structural dissimilarity between the types of possession: alienable possessums are syntactically distant from their possessors compared to inalienable possessums (Dobler 2008, Ritter & Rosen 2010).

Possession in Mi'gmaq: Phonological support

Inalienable possession is *uniquely* expressed by the affixation of a possessor-indicating prefix to the possessum stem. This is the minimal form of any inalienably possessed noun, though additional affixes may be added to express plurality of the possessum or possessor.

- i) **n-ujj**
 1-father
 "my father"

Alienable possession, in contrast, may be expressed through multiple strategies unavailable to inalienable possession. One of these methods is the affixation of a version of the same prefix set as used for inalienable possession, with an epenthetic [-t-] not included in Listuguj orthography. This form requires a suffix [-m] which may introduce a possessor as a type of external argument.

- ii) **'n^t-a'su'n-m**
 1-blanket-poss
 "my blanket"

Modification: Morphological support

Alienability affects the position of the modifying prefixes relative to the stem: the possessive affix is adjacent to the inalienable "grandchild" but the modifier 'gji interposes between the affix and the alienable possessum "bishop".

- iii) **'nt-'gji-pa'tlia's-m-inu**
 1-great-priest-POSS-poss'r.pl
 "our bishop"fdf
- iv) **pitui-g-ujij**
 great-2sg-grandchild
 "your (sg) great-grandchild"

The outcome

Phonological evidence from the prefixes (the epenthetic [t]), combined with morphological evidence from modification, indicates that there is a difference in syntactic proximity between the possessive affix and alienable/inalienable possessums.

References

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