Marie-Odile Junker

ᒋᓴᒋᐦᐃᑎᓐ chisâchihîtin ‘I love you’ : How to teach and learn the infamous Algonquian Transitive Animate Verb

Verbs in Algonquian Language fall into four major classes, based on the animacy and transitivity of their subject and object: Intransitive verbs with an inanimate (VII) or an animate (VAI) subject, and Transitive verbs with an inanimate (VTI) or an animate (VTA) object, as illustrated in these East Cree examples [1] :

ᒪᓯᓈᑌᐤx masinaateu. (VII) ‘It is written.’
ᒪᓯᓈᓱx masinaasuu. (VAI) ‘She (her name) is written down.’
ᒪᓯᓇᐦᐊᒻx masinaham. (VTI) ‘She is writing it.’
ᒪᓯᓇᐦ·ᐁᐤx masinahweu. (VTA) ‘She writes him (his name) down.’

The Transitive Animate Verb (VTA) class contains the richest inflection of all four classes, numbering over 800 forms in a language like Innu [2]. Such complexity often has the effect of relegating the VTA to advanced levels of language learning, of only considering subsets that match English or French verb conjugation, or of simply ignoring it in curriculum plans. It is also often the last properly documented.
In this presentation, we survey existing pedagogical approaches to teaching the VTA for first and second language learners, outlining the pitfalls and positive models. We then propose a pedagogical progression based on frequency of use and on developing morphological awareness.
We illustrate this with concrete examples in the development of online learning materials for East Cree and Innu, with a focus on Verb conjugation from a “Word and Paradigm” approach [3] integrated into a conversational approach.

REFERENCES:

[1] Junker, M.-O., Blacksmith, L., & MacKenzie, M. (2015). East Cree Verbs (Southern Dialect). [Revised and expanded from 2006 original and 2013 revised edition] In The Interactive East Cree Reference Grammar. Retrieved from: https://www.eastcree.org/cree/en/grammar/southern-dialect/verbs/cree-verb-classes/

[2] Baraby, Anne-Marie, and Marie-Odile Junker. 2020. (4th edition). Innu Verb Conjugations. Available at: verb.innu-aimun.ca

[3] Blevins, James P. 2016. Word and Paradigm Morphology. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 249.