

Number and obviation for possessors

Child and child-directed speech in Northern East Cree

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Roadmap

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1. Terminology

Child-directed speech (CDS): language spoken to young children by adults or older children

Type: an individual noun stem

Token: each occurrence of that noun stem

Possessee: noun possessed by someone

Possessor (PSR): someone doing the possessing

misinihîkin 'book'

misinihîkin^h 'books'

ⁿⁱmisinihîkin 'my book'

ⁿⁱmisinihîkin 'my book'

ⁿⁱmisinihîkin 'my book'

2. Northern East Cree (NEC)

Four Eeyou Istchee communities, Northern Québec

Chisasibi: 2475 “mother tongue” speakers

(Statistics Canada, 2016)

Ongoing language change, loss

(Brittain & MacKenzie, 2010; Collette, 2018; Grand Council of the Crees, 2019; Louttit et al., 2018)

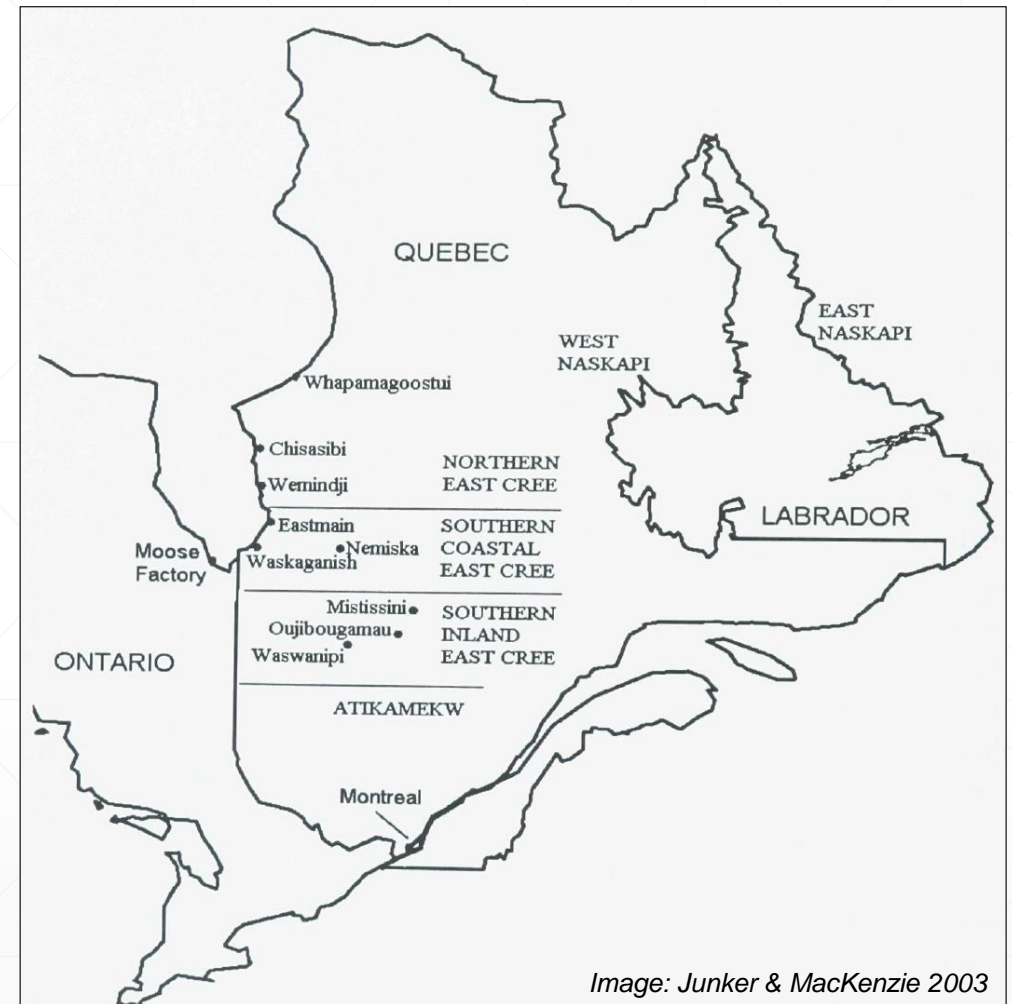
- Fewer children acquiring NEC as mother tongue

Not much known:

How children acquire languages like NEC

(e.g., Chee & Henke, Submitted; Kelly et al., 2014)

Crucial time for language science, teaching, revitalization



3. Grammatical background

The big question: How do children acquire the **inflectional** system of NEC?

Ex) Noun template encodes information related to **possessee** and **PSR** (Collette, 2014; Junker et al., 2013)

(1) chitiwaashishimich

chit=iwaashish-**iim**-**ich**

2=child-**POSS**-**3PL**

‘your children’

Noun is **possessed** + **animate** + **plural**

PSR is **2nd** **person**

Focus today: Additional **suffixes** encode more grammatical information for **PSR**

- person, number, clusivity, and obviation ...

3. Grammatical background

PSR is **2nd** or **3rd person + plural**

(2) chitiwaashishiimiwaach

chit=iwaashish-iim-**iwaau**-ch

2-child-POSS-**2/3PL.PSR**-3PL

'**your** (PL) children'

(3) utiwaashishiimiwaauh

ut=iwaashish-iim-**iwaau**-h

3-child-POSS-**2/3PL.PSR**-3.OBV

'**their** children'

PSR is **1st person + plural + inclusive** or **exclusive**

(4) chitiwaashishiiminiuch

chit=iwaashish-iim-**iniu**-ch

2-child-POSS-**1PL.INCL.PSR**-3PL

'**our (INCL)** children'

(5) nitiwaashishiiminaanich

nit=iwaashish-iim-**inaan**-ich

1-child-POSS-**1PL.EXCL.PSR**-3PL

'**our (EXCL)** children'

3. Grammatical background

PSR is **3rd person** and **obviative**

(6) utiwaashishiimiuiuh
ut=iwaashish-iim-**iyiu**-h
3-child-POSS-**3.OBV.PSR**-3.OBV
'**her/his/their (OBV)** child(ren)'

Summary: Four suffixes mark **multiple** grammatical categories for **PSR**

- Person, number, clusivity, obviation
- I call these suffixes **PSR suffixes**

-(i)waau	2/3PL.PSR
-(i)niu	1PL.INCL.PSR
-(i)naan	1PL.EXCL.PSR
-(i)yiuh	3.OBV.PSR

4. This study and the “data”

Descriptive account of **PSR suffixes** from corpus of **CDS** and **child language**

- *Not much known*: How PSR suffixes used w/ children, how they are acquired, etc.

Exploring two Research Questions:

- **RQ1**: Which PSR suffixes are used, and how frequently?
- **RQ2**: How might the usage of PSR suffixes tied to specific noun types?

No strong claims made here, but we’ll see interesting patterns

4. This study and the “data”

Chisasibi Child Language Acquisition Study (Brittain et al., 2007) (we’re drawing from Henke, 2020)

Videos of child speech and CDS in home setting: Two children + one adult

	Age	Videos	Hours	Utterances
Daisy	3;08–5;10	14	9	5,742
Billy	4;05–5;10	11	7	3,173
Adult	--	25	16	10,423

Let’s begin by looking at **PSR suffixes in CDS ...**

5. PSR suffixes: CDS

RQ1: Which PSR suffixes are used, and how frequently?

- **696** total noun tokens w/ POSS inflection ...
- But only **79** (~11 percent) involve a **PSR suffix**
- **2/3PL** most common: 59/79 tokens (~75 percent)
- Other PSR suffixes **rarer...**

PSR suffix	Morpheme	Tokens
2/3PL	-(i)waau	59
1PL.INCL	-(i)niu	8
1PL.EXCL	-(i)naan	6
3.OBV	-(i)yi	6

(7) Mânâ utihchîwâuh awânichî kê âpichihtâch.

mânâ u=tihchî-**wâu**-h

awâni-chî

kâ-âpichihtâch

DEM 3=hand-**2/3.PL.PSR**-OPL

someone-3PL

CONJ-they.are.using

‘It’s the one where the people are using **their** hands.’ (Adult, 5;02, B1.13, 05:27)

5. PSR suffixes: CDS

RQ2: How might the usage of PSR suffixes tied to specific noun types?

- PSR suffix tokens spread out over **21 noun types** ... mostly **one** or **two** tokens per noun type

(8) Mâuhî mîn chispituniniuh.

mâu-hî mîn ch=**ispitun-iniu**-h
DEM-OPL again 2=**arm-1PL.INCL.PSR**-OPL

‘And here are **our arms**.’ (Adult, 4;04, B1.11, 22:35)

(9) Awâyiuh ukâwîyiuh.

awâ-yiuh u=**kâwî-yiu**-h
who-3.OBV 3=**quill-3.OBV.PSR**-3.OBV

‘**Whose (OBV) quills** are they?’ (Adult, 4;06, B1.14, 04:39)

- **English** noun types rare but occur: two tokens of *chicarimiwâu*

5. PSR suffixes: CDS

One noun type stands out: *îch* ‘home’ → Carries **most PSR suffixes**: 47/79 tokens (~59 percent)

- The only type that occurs w/ **each PSR suffix**

(10) Chîchiwâhch â.

ch=**îch-îwâ**-hch â

2=**home-2/3PL.PSR**-LOC Q

‘At **your (PL) place?**’ (Adult, 4;10, B1.20, 02:59)

(11) ... kiyâh mâk nîchinâhch.

kiyâh mâk n=**îch-inâ**-hch

and so 1=**home-1PL.EXCL.PSR**-LOC

‘... at **our (EXCL) place**’ (Adult, 5;02, B3.13, 01:06)

(12) ... iyihtutimâu aniyâ (name) Dorah wîchiyiu

iyihtutimâu

ani-yâ

(name)

Dora-h

w=**îch-iyiu**

s/he.does.to.her/him

DEM-0.OBV

name

name-3.OBV

3=**home-3.OBV.PSR**

‘... (name) did with **Dora’s (OBV) house**’ (Adult, 4;06, B1.14, 21:00)

5. PSR suffixes: CDS

Summary

1. PSR suffixes relatively **infrequent**
2. Big **imbalance** between four morphemes: *-iwaau* dominates PSR suffix tokens
3. Noun type *îch* 'home': **Special role** in helping children identify the **presence + function** of **PSR suffix** morphemes?

Let's look at PSR suffixes in **child** speech ...

6. PSR suffixes: Daisy (3;08–5;10)

RQ1: Which PSR suffixes are used, and how frequently?

- **246 total** noun tokens w/ POSS inflection ... **41** tokens (~17 percent) involve a **PSR suffix**
- **Unlike CDS:** 1PL.EXCL.PSR most frequent
- **Like CDS:** 2/3PL suffix prominent ... other suffixes rarer

PSR suffix	Morpheme	Tokens	Errors	First usage
2/3PL	-(i)waau	15	1	3;09
1PL.INCL	-(i)niu	2	0	3;09
1PL.EXCL	-(i)naan	21	0	3;09
3.OBV	-(i)yiuv	1	1	3;11

6. PSR suffixes: Daisy (3;08–5;10)

RQ2: How might the usage of PSR suffixes tied to specific noun types?

- PSR suffix tokens spread out over **9 noun types** ... mostly **one** or **two** tokens per noun type

(13) ukâwîwâuh
u=kâwî-wâu-h
3=mother-2/3.PL.PSR-3.OBV
'**their mother(s)**' (Daisy, 4;02.06, B1.08, 10:43)

(14) lyihch îtishtâu shâsh ninipâwininân.
iyihch îtishtâu shâsh ni=nipâwin-inân
different it.is.placed already 1=bed-1PL.EXCL.PSR
'**Our bed** is now placed differently.' (Daisy, 5;07.03, B1.30, 25:18)

- Includes four **English** noun types

ucakeimiyiuh	' her/his (OBV) cake '
chiphoneiminiu	' our (INCL) phone '
nibusiminân	' our (EXCL) bus '
niroominâhch	'in our (EXCL) room '



6. PSR suffixes: Daisy (3;08–5;10)

As in CDS, **one noun type** really stands out: ***îch*** ‘home’

- Carries **33/41** PSR suffix **tokens** (~80 percent)

(15) Wîchiwâhch an kâihtât nimâ.

w= îch-<i>iwâ</i> -hch	an	kâihtât	nimâ
3= home-2/3PL.PSR -LOC	DEM	that.it.is	NEG

‘That one is at **their house**, right?’ (Daisy, 3;09.22, B1.03, 9:32)

(16) Nîchinân kwâshch niki ushihtân.

n= îch-<i>inân</i>	kwâshch	ni=ki-ushihtân
1= home-1PL.EXCL.PSR	in.turn	1=FUT-make.it

‘I will draw **our house** this time.’ (Daisy, 4;06, B1.14, 20:49)

6. PSR suffixes: Daisy (3;08–5;10)

Two tokens of *îch* ‘home’ are special: w/ **two PSR suffixes**

(17) ... âih wîchiwâyhch anitâh awâyih.

âi-h	w-îch- iwâ-yi -hch	ani-tâh	awâ-yih
HES-3.OBV	3= home-2/3.PL.PSR-3.OBV.PSR -LOC	DEM-LOC	someone-3.OBV

‘... um, somewhere at **somebody’s (OBV) place**’ (Daisy, 5;07.03, B1.30, 10:09)

(18) ... tânitâh û wîchiwâyhch âihch (name)ish.

tâni-tâh	û	w-îch- iwâ-yi -hch	âi-hch	(name)-ish
where-LOC	DEM	3= home-2/3.PL.PSR-3.OBV.PSR -LOC	HES-LOC	name-DIM

‘... over at **their (OBV) house**, uh, little (name)’s’ (Daisy, 3;11.11, B1.04, 33:09)

- Not totally sure if **adult-like** (Henke, 2019) ... but Billy does it too

6. PSR suffixes: Daisy (3;08–5;10)

Summary

1. PSR suffixes a **bit more frequent** than in CDS
2. Suffixes for **2/3PL** and **1PL.EXCL** represent almost all the tokens
3. Noun type *îch* ‘home’ plays crucial role in bearing PSR suffixes
 - Two **double-marked** tokens with two PSR suffixes

Let’s look at PSR suffixes for the other child: **Billy** (4;05–5;10)

7. PSR suffixes: Billy (4;05–5;10)

RQ1: Which PSR suffixes are used, and how frequently?

- **95 total** noun tokens w/ POSS inflection ... **16 tokens** (~17 percent) involve a **PSR suffix**

Not much data, but patterns **similar** to **Daisy's usage**:

- 1PL.EXCL.PSR most frequent, 2/3PL suffix prominent ... other suffixes rarer

PSR suffix	Morpheme	Tokens	Errors	First usage
2/3PL	-(i)waau	7	0	4;05
1PL.INCL	-(i)niu	0	0	4;08
1PL.EXCL	-(i)naan	8	0	n/a
3.OBV	-(i)yiuv	1	0	4;08

7. PSR suffixes: Billy (4;05–5;10)

RQ2: How might the usage of PSR suffixes tied to specific noun types?

- PSR suffix tokens across just **8 noun types**: again, mostly **one** or **two** tokens per noun type

(19) nitâminân

ni=**tâm-inân**

1=**dog-1PL.EXCL.PSR**

'our dog' (Billy, 4;08, B3.07, 0:01)

- Includes four **English** noun types

ucarimi**wâuh**

'their car'

usledimi**wâuh**

'their sled'

utreeimi**wâuh**

'their tree'

niwindowimi**nân**

'our (EXCL) window'



7. PSR suffixes: Billy (4;05–5;10)

As in CDS, **one noun type** really stands out: **îch** ‘home’

- Carries **8/16** PSR suffix **tokens** (50 percent)

(20) Uyâ â utreeimiwâu wîchiwâu.

u-yâ â u=tree-im-iwâu

DEM-0.OBV Q 3=tree-POSS-2/3PL.PSR

w-îch-iwâu

3-home-2/3PL.PSR

‘Is this **their** treehouse?’ (Billy, 4;06.08, B3.04, 25:51)

(21) ... âi anitâh kiyipwâ âh wîh îtuhtâyân nîchinâhch

âi ani-tâh kiyipwâ âh-wîh-îtuhtâyân n=îch-inâ-hch

HES DEM-LOC of.course CONJ-want-I.go 1=home-1PL.EXCL.PSR-LOC

‘... because I want to go at **our** place’ (Billy, 4;10, B3.09, 17:47)

7. PSR suffixes: Billy (4;05–5;10)

One double-marked token of *îch* ‘home’: **two PSR suffixes**

(22) (name) wîchiwâyhch

(name) w-îch-**iwâ-yi**-hch

name 3=**home-2/3.PL.PSR-3.OBV.PSR**-LOC

‘at **(name)’s (OBV) house**’ (Billy, 5;10.06, B3.18, 14:03)

7. PSR suffixes: Billy (4;05–5;10)

Summary

1. PSR suffixes a **bit more frequent** than in CDS ... but not much data for Billy
2. Like Daisy: **2/3PL** and **1PL.EXCL** dominate the tokens
3. Again, noun type *îch* 'home' plays crucial role in bearing PSR suffixes
 - One **double-marked** token with two PSR suffixes

8. PSR suffixes: Takeaways

CDS:

1. PSR suffixes relatively **infrequent** and **imbalanced** between morphemes
2. Most w/noun type *îch* ‘home’ → special role illustrating presence, function of PSR suffixes?

Child speech: *(Not making strong claims ... but some patterns emerge)*

1. PSR suffixes **slightly more frequent** than in CDS
2. Mostly **2/3PL** and **1PL.EXCL**: Lots of talk about ‘our house’ and ‘their house’
3. PSR suffixes used w/ small number of noun types—*îch* ‘home’ most prominent
4. Both produce **double-marked** nouns: Unsure if child “error” or language change (see Henke, 2019)



8. PSR suffixes: Takeaways

Potential applications:

Informing **languages nests**, other **immersion** programs

- e.g., models for how adults can talk to children
- e.g., shape expectations about child language development

Models for **language teaching**

- e.g., informed targeting of **particular morphemes**
- e.g., using forms like *îch* 'home' to help students grasp morphology

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