

Strategies for Lexical Expansion in Algonquian Languages

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This paper explores word formation and lexical expansion in eight Algonquian languages. We propose a framework which consists of two intersecting categories of strategies: the grammatical process by which a word is built and the semantic process by which a sense is related to another sense. We examine 154 terms, drawn from online dictionaries and other sources. The paper comes out of [Nisinoon](#), an NSF-funded project to create a cross-Algonquian database of derivational components.

Grammatical strategies found include compounding, derivation, and borrowing. Semantic strategies identified are metonymy (by far the most common), semantic extension and narrowing, and markedness reversal.

The type of metonymy found most often in our sources is associated action metonymy (Ahlers 1996), defined in Hinton and Ahlers (1999:64) as “associating a lexical item with a salient feature of an action.” For example, the SW Ojibwe word for ‘screwdriver’, *biimiskwa’igan*, is a nominalization of the verb meaning ‘twist, screw it’, while the Potawatomi word for ‘wrench’, *gitakw’egen*, is a nominalization of ‘take it off, remove it’.

We distinguish several other subtypes as well, such as associated sensation metonymy, illustrated by the Potawatomi participial compound *mégwétsek médwéwék* ‘thing that makes a sound which is audible at a distance many times; machine gun’ and the Menominee word for ‘goat’, *menūkuapos*, literally ‘stink rabbit’.

We conclude by considering the implications this framework has for language reclamation. All programs feel the need for lexical expansion, e.g., languages which were formerly sleeping often need to fill in gaps in lexicons derived from archival documents. Immersion schools bring another set of needed words, for concepts in science and math and other elements of the modern curriculum. This paper identifies existing strategies for neologisms in Algonquian languages which may be useful to communities extending their lexicons.

References:

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- Hinton, Leanne and Jocelyn Ahlers. 1999. The Issue of ‘Authenticity’ in California Language Restoration. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 30(1):56-67.