Morpheme Structure Change in Labrador Inuttut

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Labrador Inuttut consonant clusters historically underwent complete regressive assimilation, with the result that mixed clusters of cognates in conservative dialects of Inuktut such as Paallirmiutut (Inuktut Tusaalanga 2020) in (1a) correspond to geminates (some of which were subsequently affricated) in Labrador (1b). Assimilation obscures the lexical identity of coda consonants. We propose that the loss of coda contrasts in Labrador has facilitated an unrecognized wide-ranging reanalysis of the morphology (see Smith 1975, 1977 for elements that point to this change).

(1) a. Paal:	tu**kt**u	ta**tq**iq	ti**ŋm**iat	ni**ɣl**ina**qt**uq	pa**tq**ut	pi**ph**i	ni**pk**u
b. Lab:	tu**tt**uk	ta**kx**ik	ti**mm**iat	ni**ll**ina**tt**uk	pa**kx**ujak	pi**ts**ik	ni**kk**uk
	‘caribou’	‘moon’	‘birds’	‘cold’	‘caribou fat’	‘dried fish’	‘dried meat’

In many dialects of Inuktut, again exemplified by Paallirmiutut (2a), verb stems end in a vowel (V) or in /t, k, q/ (C). This is reflected in the allomorphy of mood markers such as the participial, which begins with /j/ before V and /t/ before C. In Labrador (2b), all verb roots end in vowels:

(2) a. Paal:	niʁ**i-j**ut	tiki**t-t**ut	pihu**k-t**uq	miʁia**q-t**uq
b. Lab:	niɣ**i-j**ut	tiki**-j**ut	pis**u-j**uk	miɣi**a-j**uk
	‘3PL are eating.’	‘3PL arrived’	‘3SG is walking.’	‘3SG is vomiting.’

Consider now noun stems. Bare nouns in other Inuktut dialects (3a) end in diverse segments. By contrast, Smith (1977) states that all Labrador noun endings have been neutralized to /k/ (3b). This /k/, however, is a citation affix (Andersen & Johns 2005), not part of the underlying form.

(3) a. Paal:	kiat**i**	kiɣu**t**	kiŋu**k**	iɣli**q**
b. Lab:	kiati**k**	kiɣuti**k**	kiŋu**k**	illi**k**
	‘blouse’	‘tooth’	‘sea louse’	‘bed’

We propose that the loss of coda consonants in both verb and noun stems is part of a single phenomenon related to the loss of coda contrasts in Labrador. We further argue that final-consonant loss is related to a general morphological reanalysis involving affixes: consonant clusters that originally occurred across morpheme boundaries have been reanalyzed in Labrador as belonging entirely to the following morpheme. Examples of this reanalysis are shown in (4). Thus, many derivational and inflectional affixes which in other dialects have a single consonant onset now appear in Labrador with two consonants, even when attached to roots which historically end in vowels (see also Nicoll 2019); examples in (4a) are from Baker Lake and Paallirmiutut.

(4) a. BL/Paal:	**V**	anuʁ**i-m**ut	**k/ŋ**	inu**ŋ-m**ik	**q/ʁ**	tuluɣa**ʁ-m**ik
b. Lab:	**V**	anuɣ**i-mm**ut	**V**	in**u-mm**ik	**V**	tuluɣ**a-mm**ik
		wind-ALLATIVE		person-MODALIS		raven- MODALIS

Learners acquiring a dialect like (4a) would have a lot of evidence that the affixes begin with one C and that the preceding C belongs to the stem (see also Fortescue 1992). In Labrador, original stem-final consonants would have assimilated to the initial consonant of the affix, making the position of the boundary uncertain. The change in Labrador was enabled (but not determined) by the fact that all Inuit dialects have a certain number of morphemes that begin with underlying CC clusters. Such morphemes always delete the final consonant of the stem to which they attach, exhibiting no sensitivity to whether roots end in a vowel or a consonant. In Labrador this pattern has been generalized and has contributed to the loss of stem-final consonants.

References

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