

# INNU LANGUAGE PROJECT ACTIVITIES IN LABRADOR

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THE INNU LANGUAGE PROJECT (ILP) in the Department of Linguistics has been very productive over the past few years: The Innu dictionary is finally out; a large number of books have been produced for use in Innu schools and homes; specialized workplace vocabularies have been developed in the fields of law, education, environment, with a medical glossary currently in final revision; older Innu language books have been reprinted; and websites and mobile apps have been developed in order to make use of the newest technology to make Innu language tools and resources more easily accessible than ever.

The ILP team, and its partners in Quebec and Ontario, were honoured with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Impact award (Insight category) in October 2013, which came with substantial funding for further work.

Three Innu dictionaries (Innu-English, English-Innu, Innu-français), produced from an Innu language database consisting of over 27,000 Innu words with translations into English and French, are now available in print, and a fourth (Français-Innu) will soon follow. There is also a trilingual online dictionary (<http://www.innu-aimun.ca/dictionary/Words>), as well as a free app for iOS and Android devices which can be downloaded from iTunes and the Google Play store, respectively. A thematic dictionary of Innu words grouped by topic is currently in development.

Many books have been produced for use in the Innu schools, twenty written by Innu teachers and classroom assistants, others adapted from books written for other Aboriginal languages. A partnership between Mamu Tshishkutamashutau – Innu Education (the Labrador Innu school board), the provincial Department of Education and the ILP has produced two additional sets of books which appear in three translations: Innu-aimun, English, and French. The first series consists of eleven social studies readers at the Kindergarten level with photos of children and adults from Sheshatshiu and Natuashish engaged in different activities. The second series, *The Adventures of Uapikun*, currently includes five books in which a young girl learns lessons about Innu life on the land and in the community. In the most recent book of this series, *Uapikun Learns about Rabies*, written by the Chief Veterinary Officer for the province, the issue of rabies in Labrador is addressed. This book has received attention within the international rabies community as embodying an effective way to communicate with local communities.

Reciprocal agreements have been established with the Naskapi Development Corporation for printing four beautifully illustrated children's books in Innu-aimun, with more to come. This strategy addresses the serious lack of material available to children learning to read in their own language, by increasing, at reasonable cost, the number of books in the community. The Labrador Institute has funded the Innu language version of the *Polar Bear in the Rock* book, based on an Inuit legend written in Inuktitut, and containing information about the geology of the Nain region. A second book, *The Man who Married a Beaver*, based on an Innu legend about a man who tries out various animals as wives, will include information about each of the animals. These books combine the traditional stories with scientific information sidebars written by members of Memorial departments and high-quality illustrations. An agreement has been reached with the publisher of over thirty books in the out-of-print Circle program to produce them in Innu-aimun. These books, originally produced as part of an English as a Second Language program for northern schools, have culturally appropriate topics and illustrations which will be familiar to young Innu students.

Various projects to provide workplace vocabulary for interpreters, translators and educators have resulted in glossaries of terminology in the fields of criminal law, family law, environmental assessment and education. A glossary of medical terminology, now nearing completion, will have over 1,000 terms and 30 anatomical diagrams labelled in both Labrador dialects of Innu (spoken in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish) and English. A free mobile app of the Innu Medical Glossary will also allow users to access sound files for each term in English and the two dialects of Innu-aimun.

Several out-of print books and pamphlets in Innu-aimun have been re-typed and printed for local distribution, including old prayer books, hymnals and the order of service for the Catholic Mass. To appear soon is the English version of the biography of Philomène McKenzie, known as Mishta Pinamen, the matriarch of a large family and an influential figure in the church and community until her death in 1962. Another is *Tents in the Wilderness*, a tale of Innu life written for young readers in the early 1940s. It follows a boy from a Quebec Innu community through a year in the country as he learns the traditional ways and becomes a hunter.

In collaboration with our partners, the Institut Tshakapesh in Quebec and Dr. Marie-Odile Junker at Carleton University in Ottawa, we have been contributing Labrador Innu sound files and content to online spelling and grammar lessons being prepared for those who wish to learn Innu-aimun, or improve their spelling skills. This team is also preparing grammar pages, including extensive verb paradigms, which will be available on the web.

The ILP has its own website devoted to sharing a wide range of Innu language resources ([www.innu-aimun.ca](http://www.innu-aimun.ca)). The ILP also manages a Facebook page that keeps people informed of current projects underway, and promotes the most recent Innu language books being published ([www.facebook.com/InnuLanguageProject](http://www.facebook.com/InnuLanguageProject)). The project has also contributed to an award-winning website of Innu place names *Pepamuteiati nitassinat: As we walk across our land* ([www.innuplaces.ca](http://www.innuplaces.ca)) with accurate geo-referencing of over 400 toponyms, sound files to illustrate the pronunciation of the names, and stories, photos and film clips of culturally important locations. Lastly, the ILP has contributed to the *Algonquian Linguistic Atlas* website ([www.atlas-ling.ca](http://www.atlas-ling.ca)), where people can click on various locations on a map of Canada to learn to pronounce useful phrases in a variety of Innu, Naskapi and Cree dialects spoken across the country.

Through a collaborative project with Dr. Lori Morris, a linguist at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and Mamu Tshishkutamashutau, assessments are being made of the Innu language knowledge of over 600 students in three schools, one in Pessamit, Quebec and the other two in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, Labrador. When this information is combined with the assessments carried out in the majority language (French in Quebec, and English in Labrador), a language profile of each student can be compiled. In this way, children whose language is developing normally in only one of the languages, but not the other, due to a variety of external factors, can be distinguished from those with language difficulties which need intervention from specialists, such as Speech Language Pathologists. However, the results of this work indicate an alarming situation of rapid language change, where English and French are gaining ground quickly in the speech of young children. The next step is to work with the communities to develop a strategy for ensuring that the Innu language is passed on to children in the home before school-age.

More detailed information about the ILP and the works referred to here can be found on the project website and Facebook page. Information on the Insight Award can be found at: [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/prizes-prix/prizes\\_previous-prix\\_anciens-eng.aspx](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/prizes-prix/prizes_previous-prix_anciens-eng.aspx).

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## Recent publications for Innu-aimun

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- MacKenzie, Marguerite. 2013. An Innu dictionary for all. *Newfoundland Quarterly* 6:1:49-52. Available at: <http://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/reports/nlquarterly/MemorialPresentsNQ-SUMMER2013.pdf>
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