

Mi'gmaq Wh-Indefinites

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1 Preliminaries

- Mi'gmaq traditionally described as a polysynthetic, “non-configurational language” based on characteristics outlined by Hale (1983)
 1. Free word order
 2. Null anaphora
 3. Syntactically discontinuous expressions
- Recent study showed that word order in Mi'gmaq is subject to focus effects (e.g. OVS word order observed in answers to questions with object focus)—talk to Mike Hamilton!
 - suggests that Mi'gmaq may actually be a discourse configurational language like Japanese or Russian

1.1 Nouns

- Classified according to animacy (animate or inanimate)¹
- Classified and marked according to possession (alienable or inalienable)
 - * *Alienable*: most material possessions (e.g. book, car)
 - * *Inalienable*: things that require a possessor (e.g. kinship relations, body parts)

1.2 Verbs

- All Algonquian verbs minimally consist of an **initial** (root), a **final**, and person marking (Bloomfield 1946)
 - * For the purposes of this presentation, we can think of **finals** as category-defining heads in the sense of DM (*n*, *v*, *a*).
- Verbs are marked for person, number, animacy, obviation and negation.²
- Traditionally, Algonquian literature splits verbs into four classes based on transitivity of the verb and the “animacy of its absolutive argument” (McCulloch 2013)
 1. *Animate Intransitive Verbs (VAI)*: an intransitive verb with an animate subject
 2. *Inanimate Intransitive Verbs (VII)*: an intransitive verb with an inanimate subject

*I thank my consultant, Janine Metallic, for this data. Other data comes from my fieldwork with Mi'gmaq in Listuguj and other resources. Typos, etc. are of course mine.

¹*n.b.* This distinction seems to be arbitrarily determined. Although it is safe to assume that all humans and animals are animate, not all stationary objects are inanimate (Manyakina 2012).

²Mi'gmaq is a language with negative concord.

3. *Transitive Animate Verbs (VTA)*: a transitive verb with an animate object
4. *Transitive Inanimate Verbs (VTI)*: a transitive verb with an inanimate object

2 Some Data

2.1 Wh-questions

Question Word	Translation
wen	who
wenewei	whose
tal-	what/how
ta'n/ta'n tujiw	when
tami	where
tal gis	why (explain the facts)
ugjit goqwei	why (explain for what purpose, lit. 'for what')
tegen	which
ta'sit	how much/many

Table 1: Wh-words in Mi'gmaq

- **Wh-movement is obligatory.** Interrogatives in Mi'gmaq appear in pre-verbal position (ex. (1-a).) Post-verbal wh-words receive a wh-indefinite interpretation (ex. (1-b)).
- Note, that the utterances in (1) must be interpreted as questions as they use the *indirect evidential*—used to mark information that is not acquired firsthand (Little 2013).

- (1) a. **Goqwei** nemitu-s-'p?
 what see.VTI.2-INDIR-PST
 'What did you see?'
- b. Nemitu-s-'p **goqwei**?
 see.VTI.2-INDIR-PST what
 'Did you see anything/something?'

- This evidential is obligatory in questions in the past.³ Without it, as a declarative, the utterances in (1) are ungrammatical.

- (2) a. ***Goqwei** nemitu'-tp
 what see.VTI.2-PST
 'You saw something' (intended)⁴

³Even if you want to say something like 'Did I eat this morning?'

⁴*n.b.* These examples do not use the indirect evidential *-s* but instead use *-t* preceding the past marker *-p*. However, I do not think that this is a consistent declarative marker in Mi'gmaq as it does not appear in all declarative forms. For this reason I have not separated it out in the gloss.

- b. *Nemitu'-tp **goqwei**
 see.VTI.2-PST what
 'You saw something' (intended)

- The only way to say 'You saw something' is using the specific indefinite *natgoqwei*:

- (3) Nemitu'-tp **nat-goqwei** / **nat-goqwei** nemitu'-tp
 see.VTI.2-PST NAT-what / NAT-what see.VTI.2-PST
 'You saw something'⁵

2.2 Wh-Indefinites

- Particle + interrogative = wh-indefinite (“derivationally related” in the words of Bhat (2000))

Use	Particle	Example
Specific Indef.	<i>nat-</i>	<i>natgoqwei</i> 'something'
Non-specific Indef.	<i>tampas (ta'n pas'g)</i>	<i>tampas goqwei</i> 'any thing'
Negative	<i>mu</i>	<i>mu goqwei</i> 'nothing'
Universal	<i>ms't</i>	<i>ms't goqwei</i> 'everything'
Relative	<i>ta'n</i>	<i>ta'n goqwei</i> 'what'

Table 2: “Indefinite” Particles in Mi'gmaq

- Some of the particles in Table 2 can also freely combine with nouns (e.g. *ms't*, *ta'n pas'g*):

- (4) a. Ge' jugw-a't-u-i **ms't** wi'gatign-n
 please bring-VTA-APPL-1 all book-PL
 'Please bring me all the books.'
- b. Ge' jugw-a't-u-i **ta'n pas'g** wi'gatign
 please bring-VTA-APPL-1 TA'N only book
 'Please bring me any (random) book.'

Side Note: *pas'g* is the word for *only* in Mi'gmaq. My consultant noted that there are different variants of *pas'g*, including *pas'g na*, *pas na* and *pas('g)*.⁶

⁵It is possible to say (3) as a rhetorical/confirmation question, meaning 'You saw something?', by using the *-s* indirect evidential. For instance, this question could be used in the following context: I see something out of the corner of my eye and say "I saw something". You heard me clearly but want to confirm or just ask rhetorically, "You saw something?"

⁶*Na* often acts as discourse particle (something akin to 'that') and a copula. For instance, to say 'This is a man', a speaker of Mi'gmaq would say:

- (i.) Ula **na** ji'nm
 this NA man
 'This is a man'

This particle is also found as part of many connectives, e.g. *pasna* = 'but' (actually *pas'g na*); *na pas'g* = 'that's

- **Example with negation:** The negative particle *mu* must appear before the negated constituents (verb always follows). The example below illustrates possible and impossible word orders for ‘I don’t like anything’:

- (5) a. **Mu** ges-at-m-u goqwei
 NEG like-VTI-1-NEG what
 ‘I don’t like anything’
- b. **Mu** goqwei gesatmu
- c. *Gesatmu **mu** goqwei

2.3 An Example with Multiple Wh-Questions

Context: There is a Secret Santa party. Everyone receives a gift, and then all the participants want to know who bought what.

- (6) a. **Wen goqwei** pegwatel-g-’s?
 who what buy.VTI-3-INDIR
 ‘Who bought what?’ (triggers pair-list response)⁷
- b. * **Goqwei wen** pegwatel-g-’s?
 what who buy.VTI-3-INDIR
 ‘Who bought what?’ or ‘What did who buy?’ (intended)
- c. **Wen** pegwatel-g-’s **goqwei**?
 who buy.VTI-3-INDIR what
 ‘Who bought anything/something?’; *Who bought what?⁸
- d. Pegwatel-g-’s **wen goqwei**?
 buy.VTI-3-INDIR who what
 ‘Did anyone buy anything?’

2.4 An Embedded Example

Embedding this sentence is fairly straightforward. The only restriction that my consultant noted was that the complementizer *ta’n* must be followed by the wh-word ‘who’:

- (7) a. Geitu ta’n **wen goqwei** pegwatel-g-’p
 know.VTI.1 COMP who what buy.VTI-3-PST
 ‘I know who bought what’

all’; *gisna* = ‘or’ (*gis* = ‘already’); *na tujiw* = ‘then’

⁷Consultant’s mother and aunt had a different word order to offer, where ‘what’ preceded ‘who’.

⁸This example may also use the specific indefinite *natgoqwei*.

- b. Geitu ta'n wen pegwatel-g-'p goqwei
 know.VTI.1 COMP who buy.VTI-3-PST what
 'I know who bought something'
- c. *Geitu ta'n pegwatel-g-'p wen goqwei

3 Questions & Further Research

- To become an indefinite, does the wh-word have to be after any verb, or does it have to come after the verb that it's an argument of?
- Need some data with embedding (Modal embedding, psych verbs, nonfactive epistemic verbs (Lin 1998))
- Need data with future (haven't looked into this at all!)
- More negative data
- Suggestions..?

3.1 *If* clause...

- Scenario: Imagine you are at work and you have a very strict boss that says, "If someone leaves early, they will get in trouble."
 → "I think it would be something like: 'Lpa wen...'"

3.2 Some questions from Hadas

- Can other wh-words act as indefinites? (e.g. which book, where, how)
 → Not sure re: 'which book' or 'how', but I am fairly certain 'where' can be indefinite. Also, *tegen* 'which' can be used as a non-specific indefinite with *ta'n pa*:
 (8) Ugsua'l **ta'n pa** **tegen** pewalt.
 choose TA'N ? which want.2.VTA
 'Choosy any one you want'
- Can we get a wh-indefinite interpretation of an embedded subject? Is there such a thing as an ECM like predicate? e.g. I believe who to be a liar, I know who is a liar.
- How do modals interact with wh's? is there anything that looks like "must who be a liar" (someone must be a liar) or "John must give what to Mary" (John must give something to Mary).
- What is the distribution of the complex wh-indefinites from section 2.2? Are they restricted in any way?
- For the sentences with a wh-indefinite interpretation, is it a specific reading or a non-specific reading?
 → The usual interpretation is non-specific, but my consultant has mentioned that it could also mean 'something'. This needs to be checked closely in contexts. Usually *natgoqwei* is used for a specific interpretation.