

Morphosemantics and their limits: three Inuit examples

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1. Introduction

Morphosemantics may be defined as the semantic analysis of words through their constituent morphemes (Dorais 1984a: 3; 2010: 137). In polysynthetic languages, where lexemes generally result from the aggregation of several morphemes, morphosemantics can offer a particularly interesting and, hopefully, useful tool for getting access to the underlying meaning of words, often yielding significations that go beyond the surface meaning of the lexeme.¹ For instance, in several Canadian dialects of the Inuit language, the words for “good” and “bad” are, respectively, *piujuq* and *piunnigittuq*, which can be analysed as follows:

- (1)a. *piujuq*
pi-u-juq
something-be-which
‘Which is something.’
- b. *piunnigittuq*
pi-u-nngit-tuq
something-be-NEG-which
‘Which is not something.’

¹ Morphosemantics are currently used in the computerized classification, parsing and translation of scientific terms, medical terminology in particular (Namer & Zweigenbaum 2004).

So, it could be surmised that for Inuit speakers, goodness is equated to the fact of existing ('be something'), while evil is tantamount to non-existence, although nothing proves that this is, or ever was, actually the case. Indeed, I can testify that when native speakers are presented with examples such as those given above, they often deny that words like *piujuq* or *piunngittuq* have any meaning other than 'which is good' or 'which is bad,' even if from a linguistic point of view, analyzing them as 'which is something,' etc. perfectly fits with current synchronic grammar. This means that these speakers perform an inflectional analysis of their speech more directly inspired by semantics than by derivational morphology *stricto sensu*:²

- (2)a. *piujuq*
 piu-juq
 be.good-which
 'Which is good.'
- b. *piunngittuq*
 piunngit-tuq
 be.bad-which
 'Which is bad.'

This apparent discrepancy between different levels of morphemic analysis entails a few remarks. One has to do with the nature of morphemes in polysynthesis. Since I do not intend to discuss that question here, I shall simply quote Emmon Bach, who states that one should distinguish between two types of linguistic "items." In polysynthetic languages, these generally occur as word-internal morphemes, but elsewhere, they can appear under other guises. There are those "that are part of the recursive specification of how to make complex expressions starting from a base of lexemes and [...] those items that are used for making or analyzing lexemes themselves" (Bach 2009). The former are inflectional and the latter derivational. By contrast with morphosyntax, morphosemantics are primarily concerned with derivational morphemes. Bach adds that derivational "items" are "diachronic in nature" (*ibid.*), *i.e.* their etymology may disclose meanings

² In Inuktitut, the negation of a qualifying verbal morpheme is usually expressed by adding the affix *-it-* (*-git-* or *-ngit-* after two vowels), as in *salumajuq/salumaittuq* ('it is clean'/'it is not clean [dirty]'). With non-qualifying verbal morphemes, the negative affix is *-nngit-*. The form *piunngittuq* (rather than **piungittuq*) thus brings one to believe that this word behaves morphologically like a non-qualifying verb ('not being something') rather than like a qualificative ('not being good').

that lexicalization has rendered opaque to current speakers. This can have consequences for morphosemantic analysis.

Such a finding entails a second remark: for whom are meanings elicited through morphosemantics really significant? If native speakers do not recognize nor accept the morphosemantician's analysis of their language, even if it is linguistically sound, who will? Can a sign signify significantly without being accepted as significant beyond its current signification? In other words, are morphosemantics a mere intellectual game for a few native and non-native specialists trained in semantics? As we shall see later on, the answer depends on two major factors: the synchronic inflectional productivity of the morphemes underlying a particular derived lexeme (*i.e.* the fact that such morphemes are currently used for coining words), and the time elapsed since such a morphemic cluster has been lexicalized into one encompassing surface meaning. As found with our *piujuq/piunngittuq* example, the first factor is not sufficient in itself for ensuring that morphosemantics are meaningful to contemporary, non-trained speakers.³ In spite of that, though, it can be argued that however abstruse their findings may sound to the ears of native speakers, morphosemantics open a door on semiotics, a deeper level of a language's system of significations. In this sense, they might help understanding the very symbolic and cognitive basis upon which a culture and its linguistic expression rest.

From a methodological standpoint, another question arises: beyond synchronic inflectional productivity, might there not exist morphemes which have now become non-productive or very weakly so, but whose meaning could be deciphered through the comparison of various lexemes within which they occur? Some specialists of Inuit semantics – like Collis (1971) – have answered positively, and as will be seen later on, such research has yielded intriguing, albeit sometimes questionable results. Defining non-productive morphemes is a difficult task; in the worst possible case, any syllable, or even phoneme, can be considered semantically meaningful if its presumed signification is hazy and shallow enough.

³ According to Fortescue *et al.* (2010: 287), the Proto-Eskimo base **pingu-*, 'be useful or right' (> 'be good') might be analysed as *pi-* ('thing') + *-ngu-* ('be'). But this cannot be proved, and any morphemic reconstruction not readily recognized by current speakers remains hypothetical.

In this article, three examples will illustrate morphosemantic analysis as applied to Inuttitut Nunavimmiutit (henceforth IN), the Nunavik (Arctic Quebec) dialect of Eastern Canadian Inuktitut. Like other current varieties of Inuktitut, IN is characterized by a rather regular morphology – save for surface morphonological adjustments, grammatical flections, albeit numerous, are not at variance, whichever stem they are attached to – and a high rate of regressive consonant assimilation (Dorais 2010: 66-87).⁴ Within Inuktitut, consonant assimilation is higher in IN than in dialects such as North Baffin or Aivilik, and in Nunavik (and Labrador) Inuttitut, geminate consonants as well as clusters delete their first element when following another geminate or cluster within the same word (the so-called law of double consonants; cf. *ibid.*: 68-69). Compare for instance:

- (3) *inuktitut – tusarupta – qattaq* (Aivilik)
inuktitut – tusarutta – qattaq (North Baffin)
inuttitut – tusarutta – qattaq (IN)
 ‘[speaking] like Inuit’ – ‘if we hear’ – ‘bucket, pail’
 (Regressive consonant assimilation.)
- (4) *piunnngittuq – pirliqtut* (Aivilik, North Baffin)
piunnngituq – pirlitit (IN)
 ‘which is bad’ – ‘they starve’
 (Law of double consonants.)

Together with the Alaskan Inupiaq, Western Canadian Inuktun and Greenlandic Kalaallisut groups of dialects, Eastern Canadian Inuktitut belongs to the Inuit language, a polysynthetic and agglutinative tongue. Word-initial stems (radicals) are followed by optional affixes that cannot occur independently, and by obligatory, generally word-final grammatical markers.

The morphosemantic examples chosen here will be: 1) lexemes belonging to the vocabulary of acculturation, *i.e.* those words denoting items (mostly material) introduced to the Nunavik Inuit as a result of European contact; 2) terms describing gender relations, and 3) lexemes that

⁴ As morphology is concerned, compare, for instance, Alaskan Inupiaq *iqaluich* (‘many fish’), *tupqit* (‘tents’), *nutaqqat* (‘babies’), *arvirit* (‘whales’) and *umijjat* (‘boats’), with IN *iqaluit*, *tupiit*, *nutarait*, *arviit* and *umiat*, where the absolutive plural morpheme always occurs as *-it* (or *-t* after two vowels). Note that throughout the text, all Inuit words are transcribed in the Canadian Inuktitut standard orthography in use in eastern Nunavut and in Nunavik, with minor differences – not taken into account here – in the latter region.

have to do with the notion of leadership. As we shall see, the examples reflect interesting differences as the presence of productive morphemes within each of them – compared to that of currently non-productive but possibly meaningful word-parts – is concerned, as well as in terms of the relative antiquity of the lexicalization process that may have generated particular lexemes. Examining how morphosemantics work in each of these three cases should hopefully allow us to understand some of the limits to morphosemantic analysis, while assessing its linguistic and semiotic usefulness.

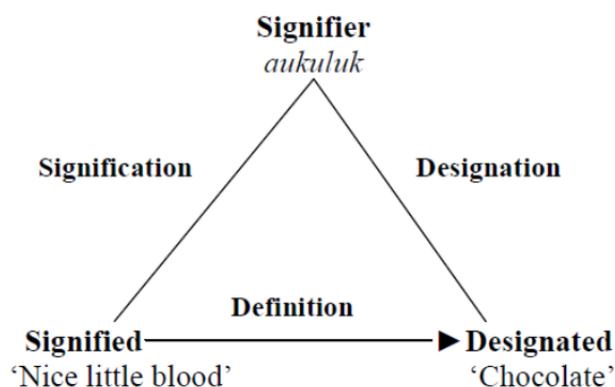
2. The Vocabulary of Acculturation

From the 17th century on, the Inuit of Nunavik started getting acquainted with various utensils, foods and other items introduced by the European fishermen, whalers, explorers and traders who navigated the surrounding waters: Belle Isle Strait, the Labrador Sea, southern Hudson Strait and eastern Hudson Bay. Low at first, the number and variety of imported implements increased when *Qallunaat* (white people) established permanent trading posts, Christian missions and, later on, police detachments in Inuit territory. By the first third of the 20th century, Nunavik Inuit had become familiar with several hundred Euro-American objects and concepts.

Names had to be given to these novelties. As early as 1765, the Moravian missionary Jens Haven, who spoke Greenlandic *Kalaallisut*, noticed upon his arrival in southern Labrador that in contrast with the general vocabulary, similar in both regions, “such objects as have more recently fallen under their notice, are distinguished by different appellations, which are, however, in both languages, expressive of the nature of the thing signified” (quoted in Cranz 1820: 293). Inuktitut being a polysynthetic language, it was easy for it to use existing morphemes in order to derive new lexemes describing the function – (5a) below – or, more infrequently, the appearance (5b) of the items thus designated. In only a few cases were such items denoted by a word borrowed from English (5c), or by an unmodified term from the pre-contact lexicon (5d) whose meaning had been changed or extended (Dorais 2010: 153-157):

- (5)a. *nijjauti*
 nijja-uti
 to.utter.a.sound-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used for uttering a sound’
 ‘Accordion.’
- b. *aukuluk*
 au[k]-kuluk
 blood-nice.little.thing
 ‘Nice little blood’
 ‘Chocolate.’
- c. *tii*
 from English ‘tea’
 ‘Tea.’
- d. *pullaq*
 air bubble
 ‘Electric bulb.’

Morphosemantics are concerned with those neologisms that consist in derivative lexemes, such as in (5a-b) above. It can be noticed that these two examples have a double translation: the literal rendering of the lexeme (e.g. ‘nice little blood’) is followed by its current surface meaning (‘chocolate’). To borrow de Saussure’s terminology, it is as if the form of the sign (the signifier), rather than entering in relation with a single meaning (the signified) within a dyadic relation, would be simultaneously related to both a signified and a designated (Dorais 1977: 41-42). In example (5b), the signifier *aukuluk* signifies (i.e. has as its signified) ‘a nice little chunk of blood,’ but, at the same time, designates the food item called ‘chocolate’ in English. The relationship is, thus, triadic, involving a process of signification, one of designation, and a third one, linking the signified to the designated, that consists in a significant definition – functional or metaphorical – of the latter by the former.

Figure 1. The Triadic Relationship

Morphosemantic analysis thus enables to add a second level to the presumably simple Saussurean link between the signifier and the signified. Such a double semantic process had already been suggested in 1887 by the Danish eskimologist Henry Rink, when he wrote that: “[The composite word] as a derivative besides the general signification resulting from its composition can have a peculiar sense too” (Rink 1887: 47; cf. also Holtved 1958 for a similar view). These two levels are complementary. It is because the signified (*e.g.* ‘nice little blood’) is semantically inserted into a specific field of experience (*i.e.* a conceptualized arrangement of various items understood as being used together in a culturally well-defined situation) that the designated (*e.g.* ‘chocolate’) may be linguistically translated thanks to a particular signifier (*e.g.* *aukuluk*). Conversely, a signified cannot exist if it is not perceived as a salient defining trait conceptually attributed to a specific cultural reality (*e.g.* chocolate in the field of edible sweets available in contemporary Inuit villages).

The existence of such double – or possibly multiple – levels of signification opens the door on a more advanced understanding of polysemic relations, one that penetrates far below surface semantics: “It [is] felt that a careful study of the structure of a defined lexical field unveils the complex logic of polysemy and metaphor and shows how they go beyond the immediacy of the experience leaving one to discover the nature of underlying concepts” (Therrien 2002, quoted in Cancel 2011: 29). Some of these underlying concepts may still be relevant

synchronically, but even if this is not the case anymore after decades of lexicalization, their mere existence could open the door on a deeper, semiotic level of Inuit semantics.

2.1. Modes of Designation

Over the years, the IN vocabulary of acculturation was the object of a number of studies (that sometimes included other dialects too). Graburn (1965) noted that the genesis of neologisms is linked to the circumstances of Euro-Inuit contact as well as to the structure of Inuktitut. Dorais (1970, 1978, 1983) achieved the morphosemantic analysis of 2,153 Nunavik and Labrador lexemes designating some 950 items, mostly from material culture, introduced by Euro-Canadians. Saint-Aubin (1980) examined how bilingual Inuit from Nunavik, South Baffin and Kivalliq (western Hudson Bay) translated English verbs without an equivalent in Inuktitut, while Harnum (1989) studied the presence of borrowed and newly derived lexemes in all Canadian Inuit dialects.

These authors conclude that, as illustrated in examples (5), three methods (or “modes of designation”) are in use for naming items introduced from the outside: derivation, semantic change, and borrowing from another language.⁵ As far as derivation is concerned, it resorts in almost all cases to synchronically meaningful morphemes, with the result that speakers of the language should, in principle, be able to decipher the literal signification of any lexeme designating an imported item. We will now cast a look at some derived words in IN, where derivation accounts for over 75% of all Nunavik words compiled in my study of the vocabulary of acculturation (Dorais 1983: 93); semantic change accounts for *ca.* 18% of the corpus, and borrowing for *ca.* 5.5%.⁶

⁵ A fourth method, semantic borrowing (translating a foreign signified into Inuktitut), has appeared more recently (cf. *itsivautaq*, ‘seat,’ referring to the president of an assembly and calqued on English ‘chair [of a meeting]’). For recent appraisals of the modes of designation in Inuktitut, see Therrien (2000) and Cancel (2011: 391-419). For a West Greenlandic example, see Enel (1982).

⁶ These percentages do not take into account the corpus’s lexemes belonging to the Labrador dialect of Inuktitut.

2.1.1. Functional Definitions

When submitted to morphosemantic analysis, a majority of derived lexemes denoting a post-contact item yield a literal meaning that defines the basic function (*i.e.* role or use) of this item, as conceptualized and codified by the language. According to Dorais (*ibid.*: 94-95), in the Hudson Strait (northern Nunavik Tarramiutitut) sub-dialect of IN, 58.6% of derivatives describe the function of the designated item, while in the Hudson Bay (western Nunavik Itivimmiutitut) sub-dialect, it is the case with 62,0% of derived lexemes. This means that the preferred way for naming a newly-introduced object or concept is to explain its basic usage.

Functional definitions may be expressed in various ways. Many of them make use of the affix *-uti* – as in (5a) – or one of its allomorphs (*-guti, -ruti, -jjuti*, etc.), meaning ‘which is used for doing (*or* is in relation with) something.’

- (6)a. *kapuqqauti*
 kapuqqa-uti
 to.thrust.a.sharp.instrument-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used for thrusting a sharp instrument’
 ‘Table fork.’
- b. *aupalutsiguti*
 aupalut-si-guti
 red-to.become.so-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used so that it becomes red’
 ‘Lipstick.’
- c. *pujjusiuti*
 pujju-si-uti
 to.inflate-to.become.so-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used so that it inflates’
 ‘Yeast, baking powder.’
- d. *itigaguti*
 itiga[q]-guti
 foot-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used for (in relation with) the foot’
 ‘Footwear, shoe.’

Another current way for deriving functional lexemes is to add the affix *-vik* (‘place where, or time when something is done’) to stems expressing an

activity perceived as characteristic of what is usually accomplished there or then:

- (7)a. *allavik*
 alla[r]-vik
 to.draw.lines [> to.write]-place.where
 ‘A place for writing’
 ‘Office.’
- b. *sinittavik*
 sinit-ta[r]-vik
 to.sleep-FRE-place.where
 ‘A place for sleeping frequently’
 ‘Hotel.’
- c. *quviasuvvik*
 quviasuv-vik
 to.rejoice-time.when
 ‘A time for rejoicing’
 ‘Christmas-time.’

A third, often-heard functional affix is *-ti* (*-ji* after a vowel), ‘one who does something on a regular basis.’ This affix is very useful for designating the numerous trades and professions that appeared in the Arctic over the last decades. A semantically related morpheme, *-juuq* (‘which does it habitually’) is used for denoting a number of modern appliances:

- (8)a. *ilinniatitsiji*
 ilin-nia[r]-titsi-ji
 to.learn-to.seek.to-FAC-one.who.does.it.regularly
 ‘One who regularly makes someone seek learning’
 ‘Teacher.’
- b. *niuviqti*
 niuviq-ti
 to.trade-one.who.does.it.regularly
 ‘One who trades regularly’
 ‘Trader, merchant.’
- c. *timmijuuq* (Itivimmiutitut sub-dialect)
 timmi-juuq
 to.fly-which.does.it.habitually
 ‘Which is in the habit of flying’
 ‘Airplane.’

Several other instances of lexemes expressing a functional definition can be found. As mentioned above, this mode of derivation constitutes the preferred mean for designating post-contact items in IN.

2.1.2. Descriptive Definitions

Another form of derivation consists in coining lexemes that describe one or another trait characterizing the appearance of the designated item. This type of derivation occurs less frequently than the preceding one, but it still accounts for more than a third of the Nunavik corpus of derivatives found in Dorais (*ibid.*): 37.8% in Tarramiutitut, 34.0% in Itivimmiutitut. To these figures should be added a small percentage of metaphorical lexemes (3.7% in Tarramiutitut, 4.0% in Itivimmiutitut) made up of a noun stem designating an item belonging to pre-contact culture, followed by a qualifying affix – augmentative, diminutive, or attributive.

The boundary between functional and descriptive derivatives is not always clear-cut. The word *nunakkuujuuq* ('which is in the habit of going by land') for instance, that designates any land vehicle (automobile, truck, snowmobile, etc.), could be interpreted as describing the appearance (a contrivance characterized by its overland movement) as well as the functional usage (something used to transport persons or goods by land) of the vehicle thus identified. It is only through its analysis within the field of experience to which it belongs (the means of transportation) that '*nunakkuujuuq*' can be understood as a functional definition, because it establishes a contrast between land, air (*timmiujuuq* or *qangattajuuq*, 'which is in the habit of flying *or* ascending') and water (*umiaq*, 'boat,' a pre-contact term) carriers.⁷

Some affixes may occur within functional as well as descriptive definitions, depending on the stem to which they are attached. If, for instance, *-juuq* ('which does it habitually') often belongs to derivatives that define the basic function of a post-contact item – as in (8c) – it also occurs within lexemes that clearly convey a descriptive definition, as in the following example:

- (9) *supuujuuq*
 supuu[r]-juuq
 to.blow-which.does.it.habitually
 'Which is in the habit of blowing'
 'Oil heater; primus stove' [referring to the noise it makes when turned on].

⁷ In pre-contact times, the word *umiaq* designated a large open collective craft made of bearded seal skins. Its meaning was later extended to include any kind of boat.

Other affixes, however, generally help to define the appearance of a denoted item. Such is the case with *-ujaq*, ‘which looks like,’ as in:

- (10)a. *aqiggiujaq*
 aqiggi[q]-ujaq
 ptarmigan-which.looks.like
 ‘Which looks like a ptarmigan’
 ‘Chicken; turkey.’
- b. *pataujaq*
 pata-ujaq
 butter-which.looks.like
 ‘Which looks like butter’
 ‘Engine grease, lubricant.’⁸
- c. *qaritaujaq*
 qarita[q]-ujaq
 brain-which.looks.like
 ‘Which looks like a brain’
 ‘Computer.’⁹

Another descriptive affix is *-nnguaq* (‘imitation of; to imitate’), sometimes found in lexemes expressing the look of a post-contact item:

- (11)a. *inunnguaq*
 inu[k]-nnguaq
 person-imitation.of
 ‘Imitation of a person’
 ‘Statue, doll.’
- b. *sanannguagaq*
 sana-nngua[q]-gaq
 to.make-to.imitate-PAS.NOM
 ‘Which is made by imitating something’
 ‘Handicraft, carving, sculpture.’

When deriving neologisms, IN often uses morphemes in a subtle way, in order to establish lexemic distinctions between designated items perceived as sharing a relatively similar appearance, as in:

⁸ It should be noticed that in this example, the stem *pata* (‘butter’) designates a post-contact item and has been borrowed from English.

⁹ It is arguable here that alluding to the brain refers to the function of the computer rather than its physical look.

- (12)a. *kiinaujaq*
 kiina[q]-ujaq
 face-which.looks.like
 ‘Which looks like a face’
 ‘Money.’
- b. *kiinannguaq*
 kiina[q]-nnguaq
 face-imitation.of
 ‘Imitation of a face’
 ‘Postage stamp.’
- (13)a. *pullaujaq*
 pulla[q]-ujaq
 air.bubble-which.looks.like
 ‘Which looks like an air bubble’
 ‘Bottle.’
- b. *pullaq*
 ‘Air bubble’
 ‘Electric bulb.’

In (13), the language resorts to different modes of designation, derivation (13a) and semantic change (13b), to distinguish between two objects whose look is conceived as partly similar. Because, perhaps, of its smaller size, the electric bulb ‘is’ metaphorically an air bubble (*pullaq*), while the bottle ‘looks like’ one (*pullaujaq*). Perceptions may also differ between different groups of speakers. In the Itivimmiutitut sub-dialect of IN, the postage stamp is called *kiinannguaq* (12b), ‘imitation of a face,’ a direct allusion to its appearance (in older times at least, Canadian stamps usually bore the image of the reigning British monarch or of a prime minister or other famous figure). In Tarramiutitut, however, a stamp is a *qangattauti* (‘which is used for ascending [*i.e.* flying]’; this word also applies to an airplane ticket), a reminder of its primary function: to allow letters to be taken away in a region without roads, where long-distance transportation is mostly done by airplane.

A small number of derived lexemes describing the appearance of the designated item consist in a stem denoting an element of pre-contact culture, to which is affixed a qualifying morpheme. Such derivatives are metaphorical. The designated item is semantically equated, although in a qualitatively different dimension, to something already present in the

traditional Inuit cultural environment. Three types of qualifications predominate: augmentative (14), diminutive (15), and attributive (16).

- (14)a. *kamialuk*
 kami[k]-aluk
 sealskin.boot-big
 ‘Big sealskin boot’
 ‘Store-bought boot.’
- b. *qimmijuaq*
 qimmi[q]-[j]juaq
 dog-superior
 ‘Superior dog’
 ‘Horse.’
- (15) *qamutikallak*
 qamuti[ik]-kallak
 sled-short
 ‘Short sled’
 ‘Snowmobile.’
- (16) *atsunaajaq*
 atsunaa[q]-jaq
 leather.thong-piece.of
 ‘Piece of leather thong’
 ‘String, cable.’

Qualifying affixes can be used for differentiating between various post-contact items semantically conceptualized as belonging to one generic category stemming from the traditional environment:

- (17)a. *umiaq*
 ‘Bearded sealskin collective craft [> any boat].’
- b. *umiarjuaq*
 umiar-[j]juaq
 boat-superior
 ‘Superior boat’
 ‘Ship.’
- c. *umiaraaluk*
 umiar-aaluk
 boat-big
 ‘Big boat’
 ‘Motorized schooner.’

- d. *umiaraaq*
 umia[q]-raaq
 boat-small
 ‘Small boat’
 ‘Rowboat.’
- (18)a. *imiq*
 ‘Water.’
- b. *imialuk*
 imi[q]-aluk
 water-big
 ‘Big water’
 ‘Alcoholic beverage.’
- c. *imiraq*
 imi[q]-raq
 water-little
 ‘Little water’
 ‘Soda water; fruit juice.’

Some metaphorical derivatives that may appear as describing the appearance of a designated item should rather be considered as functional definitions. This often happens when their stem has a non-apparent literal signification, only decipherable through historical linguistics. Such is the case with *qamutikallak* (15) (‘short sled’), used by some speakers for designating snowmobiles. Its stem (*qamuti[ik]-*, ‘sled’) cannot be readily parsed by way of synchronic morphological analysis, but its first two syllables are etymologically very close to Proto-Eskimo **qamur-*, ‘pull’ (Fortescue *et al.* 2010: 308). *Qamuti[ik]-* might, thus, be analysed as follows:¹⁰

- (19) *qamuti[ik]-*
 *qamu[r]-ti-[ik]
 *to pull-which.is.used.for-DUA
 *‘Which is used for pulling’
 ‘Sled.’

Morphosemantic analysis would show that at a second, etymological level, *qamutikallak* could mean ‘the short instrument used for pulling,’ which may be considered a functional definition. In a subsequent section, examples will be given of such a deeper stratum of morphosemantics, one

¹⁰ Proto-Eskimo (PE) is the reconstructed language ancestral to all contemporary Inuit and Yupiit forms of speech.

that may be opaque to contemporary speakers. As we shall now see, however, lexemes cannot be completely understood when taken out of the conceptual fields of experience within which they operate. As the vocabulary of acculturation is concerned, the derivative nature of a majority of its components yields a meta-language of literal significations that can help explaining how Inuit cultural experience is conceptualized.

2.2. The Fields of Experience and their Semantic Structure

As already mentioned, a field of experience may be defined as a conceptualized arrangement of various items understood as being used together in a culturally well-defined situation. In order to become the object of reflection and communication, these items must be translated into grammatically organisable lexemes.¹¹ Vocabulary thus consists of a set of translation-definition relationships between lexical units and semantic categories, the latter having logical primacy because of their defining role. Since these categories express and describe the culturally and socially organized experience of the speakers, their overall structure should be divisible into semantic fields broadly patterned over the fields of experience they reflect (Dubois 1970; Dorais 1979).

Wherever it is applicable, morphosemantic analysis enables us to understand how semantic designations interrelate with each other within various fields, because their literal significations may be considered as meaningful definitions of the perceived experiential roles they reflect. Out of my corpus of lexemes belonging to the vocabulary of acculturation, I have thus analysed the semantic reflections of 48 fields of experience – elicited through ethnographical observation – ranging from the preparation and consumption of food to the maintenance of motors. Some of these analyses have been published (Dorais 1977, 1985). One of them is given here as an example, a rather simple one due to limited space.

For the Nunavik Inuit, the experience consisting in veiling, closing and locking a house's or room's openings includes ten principal elements: 1)

¹¹ Without opening a debate on the origin and nature of human speech, it may be surmised that the mere fact of understanding one's environment with a reasonable degree of reflectivity would be impossible in the absence of language.

the door and 2) its knob; 3) the lock and 4) its key; 5) the padlock; 6) the latch; 7) the window and 8) its curtain or 9) shade; 10) the door's (or window's) hinges. These items are linguistically translated thanks to seven IN lexemes, three of which belong to the pre-contact lexicon. All three denote elements whose role was formerly filled by relatively similar implements of traditional culture:

- (20)a. *ukkuaq*
 'Snow or skin closing device in an igloo or tent'
 'Door.'
- b. *igalaaq*
 'Window in an igloo, made of a pan of frozen fresh water'
 'Glass window.'
- c. *taalutaq*
 'Veil made of seal or caribou skin'
 'Curtain, shade.'

By contrast, most contemporary closing and locking instruments were introduced by Europeans. Pre-contact culture ignored latches, locks, padlocks, keys, hinges and doorknobs. These are now designated by derived lexemes whose morphosemantic analysis shows that each implement (or type of implement) seems to be perceived as performing a specific function in the overall process of closure:

- (21)a. *atsungiuti*
 atsungi-uti
 to.fasten-which.is.used.for
 'Which is used for fastening'
 'Door lock, padlock, latch.' (Tarramiutitut)
- b. *palairuti*
 palai[r]-ruti
 to.close.securely-which.is.used.for
 'Which is used for closing securely'
 'Door lock, padlock, latch.' (Itivimmiutitut)
- (22)a. *piiruti*
 pii[r]-ruti
 to.unfasten-which.is.used.for
 'Which is used for unfastening'
 'Key.' (Tarramiutitut)

- b. *ukkuiruti*
 ukkui[r]-ruti
 to.open-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used for opening’
 ‘Key.’ (Itivimmiutitut)
- (23) *qiviqtauti*
 qiviq-ta[r]-uti
 to.turn.around-to.do.it.repeatedly-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used for turning around repeatedly’
 ‘Hinge.’
- (24)a. *tigummijaaq*
 tigummi-jaaq
 to.grasp.it-PAS.NOM
 ‘Which is grasped in the hand’
 ‘Doorknob.’ (Tarramiutitut)
- b. *tigummivik*
 tigummi-vik
 to.grasp.it-place.where
 ‘Place for grasping something in the hand’
 ‘Doorknob.’ (Itivimmiutitut)

In both sub-dialects of IN, the door lock, padlock and latch are defined as fastening or closing instruments (21), while their complement, the key, is perceived as an unfastening or opening device (22). The hinge (23) is described as an implement enabling the door or window to rotate, and the doorknob (24) as one allowing the door to be grasped with the hand in order to close or open it.

The field of experience of closure is, thus, semantically expressed as a combination of items perceived as continuing pre-contact elements, and of truly ‘modern’ implements whose specific functions complement each other. The seven lexemes used in either IN sub-dialect form an organized structure whose literal signification explains what is needed for closing, opening, locking or unlocking the orifices in a contemporary Inuit home.

Besides shedding light on how various types of experience are conceptualized and expressed, the morphosemantic analysis of lexemes designating post-contact items, as well as comparison between the modes of designation of these items, their possible similarity with a pre-contact implement (the ‘etymological constraint’), and the fields of experience to which they belong, allow us to understand why a particular element is

designated in such or such a way.¹² A series of rules governing the designation of objects and ideas introduced from outside can, thus, be postulated (Dorais 1985: 16; 2010: 159). According to these rules, when a new cultural element is perceived as similar in both form and function to a pre-contact one, it is given the same name as the older element – as with examples in (20). Conversely, “when an element is seen as completely alien to any already existing semantic category it may be designated with a borrowing from English. In most cases, however, when newly introduced notions appear as only partly linked to already existing forms or functions, speakers resort to lexeme-coining [derivation] or, more rarely, to semantic change” (Dorais 2010: 159).

In derivation, objects and concepts which belong to a field of experience that is deemed “actantial” – *i.e.* perceived and conceptualized as an active process to the occurrence of which various elements contribute – tend to be designated with lexemes expressing their function – cf. (21)-(24).¹³ These constitute the major portion of the Nunavik corpus. Those items linked to classificatory fields – combinations of elements perceived as static and playing the same basic part, but differentiated from each other thanks to their special form or function – are usually named according to their appearance.¹⁴ “The existence of any lexeme can thus be explained in relation to the specific semantic structure within which it operates. Each structure expresses a particular type of cultural experience, while being influenced in this expression by the traditional substratum to which this experience is eventually linked” (*ibid.*).

As mentioned earlier, derivatives designating post-contact items are morphologically and semantically meaningful in synchrony, and they are often recognized as such by native speakers. This fact facilitates

¹² This applies to ‘natural’ neologisms, *i.e.* those spontaneously coined by ordinary speakers. Nowadays, there exist various committees made up of Inuit language specialists commissioned for creating new lexemes (Cancel 2011: 287-295). Their lexicological production may not always correspond to the rules exposed here.

¹³ In addition to nouns, these lexemes should also include the verbs used in relation to various fields of experience.

¹⁴ Classificatory fields can sometimes be analysed by resorting to cognitive anthropology, the elicitation of the semantic classifications (taxonomies) present in the minds of those speaking a specific language (cf. Tyler 1969).

morphosemantic analysis. But as shall be seen now, such synchronicity is not always present.

3. The Vocabulary of Gender Relations

When discussing the stem *qamuti[ik]-*, ‘sled,’ (19), it was mentioned that beyond lexemes analysable as derivatives generated by way of synchronically productive morphemes, morphosemantics could give access to a deeper level of signification. In the case of *qamuti[ik]-* this level became accessible through etymology. By resorting to a Proto-Eskimo (PE) word-root (**qamur-*, ‘pull’), the stem could be understood as meaning ‘which is used for pulling.’

Morphosemantic analysis can, thus, also apply to fully lexicalized terms, *i.e.* to words which are not derived from elements productive in contemporary language, but whose component parts (phonemes and syllables) are deemed semantically significant. The hypothetical meaning of such word-parts is elicited by comparing them with homophonous syllables occurring within plausibly semantically related lexemes. For instance, pre-contact Inuit considered the human body – with its ten fingers and ten toes – as their basic measuring standard. Accordingly, the linguistic expression of numeration reflects this standard (Dorais 2010: 144-145). In many Inuit dialects, some numerals are designated by way of synchronically understandable body-linked metaphors, or by derivatives with a more general meaning, such as (in IN):

- (25)a. *qulit*
 ‘The upper limbs of the body’
 ‘Number ten [referring to the ten fingers].’
- b. *avatit*
 ‘Which are around something [< the four limbs]’
 ‘Number twenty [referring to the ten fingers and ten toes].’
- c. *atausiq*
 ata-usiq
 to.adhere-NOM
 ‘The adherence, what is indivisible’
 ‘Number one.’

Some other numerals, however, are not made up of synchronically productive morphemes, although their form can suggest that they possess

an underlying signification. In IN, such is the case with numbers two and five:

- (26)a. *marruuk* [< PE *malrug*]
 *mal[ig]-ru-uk¹⁵
 *to.follow-?-DUA¹⁶
 *‘The two following ones [?]’
 ‘Number two [*they follow number one].’
- b. *tallimat*
 *tal[liq]-li-mat¹⁷
 *arm-to.make-CAU.3SG
 *‘Because it makes an arm’
 ‘Number five [*because five fingers have been counted on one hand].’

In (26), the literal meanings tentatively deciphered through morphosemantic analysis are highly speculative. If native speakers of Inuktitut do not readily recognize the underlying signification of words like *piujuq* and *piunngittuq* (1), which are perfectly derivable in synchrony, they would most probably reject the analysis of *marruuk* and *tallimat*. In spite of this probable rejection, it can be interesting to apply morphosemantics to lexicalized, apparently non-analysable terms, provided researchers keep in mind that in most cases, their findings will remain both unproved (in the eyes of science) and unapproved (by speakers). Analysing the vocabulary of gender relations offers a good example of such a use of morphosemantics.

3.1. Gendered Personal Categories

Among all IN terms pertaining to the characterization and differentiation of men and women according to their age and position in the kinship system, ten (five gendered pairs) appear as playing a nodal role, *i.e.* as being at the very core of the Inuit conceptualization of male-female relationships (Dorais 1986: 175). None of these terms is derivable in synchrony, except, perhaps, for the first one. All of them, however, yield a plausible, though

¹⁵ According to Fortescue *et al.* (2010: 205), there may be a relation between PE *malrug* and *malig-* (‘to follow’).

¹⁶ The use of the dual number is due to the fact that in Inuktitut, numerals are grammatical nouns: ‘one entity,’ ‘two entities,’ ‘three entities,’ etc. From three on, basic numerals end with the plural marker *-t*.

¹⁷ This reconstruction, based on Fortescue *et al.* (2010: 358), has been suggested by Marc-Antoine Mahieu.

improvable – and, therefore, questionable – underlying signification. The five pairs are:

- (27)a. *anguti*
 angu-ti¹⁸
 to.reach/catch-which.is.used.for
 ‘Who is used for catching something’
 ‘Man, male.’
- b. *arnaq*
 *ar-naq
 *to.be.in.movement-which.makes.it.so¹⁹
 *‘Who makes something move, who agitates something’
 ‘Woman, female.’
- (28)a. *ui*
 *ui-
 *to.swerve/make.a.protuberance²⁰
 *‘Swerving, protuberance’
 ‘Husband.’
- b. *nuliaq*
 *nuli.aq
 *female.animal.in.heat-little²¹
 *‘Little female in heat’
 ‘Wife.’
- (29)a. *surusiq*
 *su[q]-rusiq
 *something-smaller/secondary²²
 *‘The smaller one’
 ‘Boy.’

¹⁸ According to Fortescue *et al.* (2010: 38), PE *angun* (‘male human’) might derive from *ange-* (‘being big’) rather than *angu-* (‘to catch’). However, the *angu-*-based derivation I propose here is morphologically sound in Proto-Inuit, if not in Proto-Eskimo.

¹⁹ Cf. *ar[<aq]-* as in *aqpa-*, ‘to run or move continuously’ (from **aq-*, ‘move, run’ + *-pa-*, FRE or AUG).

²⁰ Cf. *ui-* as in *uigu-*, ‘to lengthen;’ *uivaq-*, ‘to go round by swerving from a straight direction;’ *uit-*, ‘to open eyes.’

²¹ Cf. *nuli-* as in *nuliu-*, ‘to be in heat’ (from *nuli-*, ‘female in heat’ + *-u-*, ‘to.be’). In North Baffin Inuktitut, *nulik* designates the father or mother of Ego’s son- or daughter-in-law. *Nuliaq* could thus mean ‘the little in-law,’ although the word *nuliaq* is unknown in IN, and it would not explain the meaning of *nuli-* (‘female in heat’) in *nuliu-* above.

²² Cf. *suq*, as in *suq una*, ‘what[’s] that?’ and *-rusiq* as in *kuugusiq* (*kuu[k]-* [‘river’] + *-gusiq*), ‘smaller river’.

- b. *niviaqsiag*
 *nivi[r]-a[q]-rsiaq
 *to.knock.down.backwards-PAS.NOM-nice²³
 *‘The nice one who has been knocked down backwards’
 ‘Girl.’
- (30)a. *irniq*
 *irni-q
 *to.beget.him/her-PAS.NOM²⁴
 *‘Who has been begotten’
 ‘Son.’
- b. *panik*
 *pa-nik
 *heat-to.supply.someone.with²⁵
 *‘Who supplies with heat’
 ‘Daughter.’
- (31)a. *ani*
 *ani-
 *to.come.out²⁶
 *‘Who comes out’
 ‘Brother (when the speaker is a woman).’
- b. *najak*
 *naja-
 *to.quake/tremble²⁷
 *‘Who quakes, trembles’
 ‘Sister (when the speaker is a man).’

If we hypothesize that the preceding morphosemantic analysis is valid, the underlying significations of the five pairs of lexemes may be considered as yielding a meta-discourse on gender relations (Dorais 1986: 175-177).

²³ Cf. *-aq* as in *nuviqsaag* (*nuviqsa-* [‘to knit’] + *-aq*), ‘knitted garment.’ This parsing would also explain the term for ‘girl’ in use in some other Inuktitut dialects: *niviaqsaq*, *‘the future one to be knocked down backwards.’ According to Fortescue *et al.* (2010: 255), PE *neviar* [$>$ *niviaqsiag*] could be related to PE *neve-* (‘cling to’) or Proto-Inuit *neviuq-* (‘hang around near’), rather than to PE *never-* (‘fall or lie on one’s back’). If this holds true, the etymology of IN *niviaqsiag* could be: ‘the one who is made to cling, or stay close to someone.’ Special thanks to Marc-Antoine Mahieu who made me aware of this and other etymologies.

²⁴ Cf. *-q*, as *-aq* in the preceding footnote.

²⁵ Cf. the stem *pa-* (*‘heat’) as in *paqqaag-* (‘to emit heat’) + *-nik* (*‘to get, to supply with’) as in *uiniq-* (‘to get a husband’).

²⁶ Cf. *anijuq*, ‘he/she comes out.’

²⁷ Cf. *naja-* as in IN *najangaq-*, ‘to stir while quaking’ (from **naja-*, ‘to quake’ + **ngaq-*, ‘to start doing so’), possibly related to PE *nayangar-* (‘nod;’ cf. Fortescue *et al.*, 2010: 243).

3.2. The Dynamics of Gender Relations

The word *arnaq* ('woman, female') may be taken as the starting point of that discourse. It was analysed as meaning 'who agitates something.' The female can thus be considered the motive power of the system. She generates motion, not on herself but in the male, defined as an active catching instrument (see below). Her role as generator of motion is linked to at least two characteristics she is attributed with: heat and vibration. These are used for defining two categories of female kinship, those of daughter (*panik*, 'who supplies with heat') and sister (when Ego is a man): *najak*, 'who trembles.'

As males are concerned, they may be defined in various ways according to their age and position in the kinship system. Any man or male is an *anguti*, 'one who is used for catching something.' But a male can also be characterized as 'one who comes out [*i.e.* 'is born']' (*ani*, a woman's referring term for her brother) or 'one who has been begotten' (*irniq*, 'son'). In all cases, he is perceived as a mobile and active being who moves forward, comes out, sticks up.

The young boy is defined as 'the smaller one' (*surusiq*). This seems to refer to the adult man (*angutimmarik*, 'complete male'), who would be the 'bigger or principal one.' The boy would thus be seen as an **angutigusiq*, a 'secondary, virtual catcher' who, although smaller than the central referent (*anguti*), is essentially similar to him.

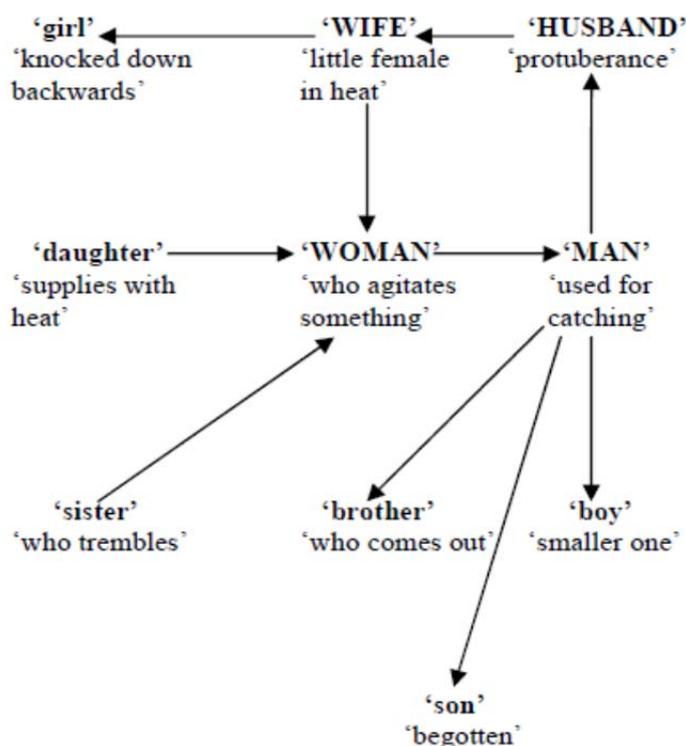
The adult male man, this 'instrument used for catching something,' is primarily a *ui* ('husband'), a 'swerving or protuberance.' The allusion appears to refer to the erection of the penis, the pre-eminent way for 'catching something.' Indeed, the game that is pursued seems to be the woman.²⁸ She is, first of all, a *nuliaq* ('wife'), a 'little female in heat,' who is assaulted by the 'protuberance' but who, in her capacity as a woman, 'agitates' the man, thus looping the loop and starting the whole process anew. As young girls are concerned, they are defined as virtual wives, 'the nice ones who have been knocked down backwards,' or 'those who are

²⁸ In Nunavik, women who have had sexual intercourse with their husband may tell jokingly that they were 'harpooned' by him (Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, personal communication).

made to cling or stay close to [men],’ in order to be caught more easily by the ‘protuberance.’

According to morphosemantics, gender relations seem to be centered on the quartet woman-man-husband-wife. The woman agitates the man who, thanks to his protuberance, catches the little female in heat who makes him move. All other relations are defined in reference to this central quartet. This diagram is androcentric. All lexemes defining general functions or notions – to be begotten, to come out (be born), small thing – exclusively denote male categories, the masculine gender thus appearing as prototypical of all human beings.²⁹ By contrast, women appear as being defined through one dimension only, their sex.

Figure 2. The Dynamics of Gender Relations



3.3. Are Such Definitions Useful?

As mentioned earlier, native speakers of Inuktitut do not recognize as meaningful such definitions derived from lexemes that are not analysable

²⁹ For instance, according to IN, the offspring *par excellence* would be the son (*irniq*, ‘the begotten one’).

in synchrony.³⁰ This entails two questions: 1) does this level of morphosemantic analysis lead to significant definitions?; and 2) up to what degree is it really useful?

If we presume that at least part of the hypothetical derivatives elicited through morphosemantics – and mostly based on diachronic lexicology as in examples (27-31) – are semantically and grammatically valid, we may postulate that they open a door on a deeper level of meaning, one lying beyond the linguistic consciousness of modern speakers. This level might have been generated during the Proto-Inuit (the language ancestral to all Inuit dialects) phase of Inuktitut, or even earlier, in the proto-Eskimo phase. It could be coeval to the formation – or derivation from older forms – of Inuit myths, beliefs, and other symbolic representations. Correspondences should, thus, be sought between morphosemantic reconstructions and other Inuit symbols, hypothesising that they all belong to the same semiotic substratum.

In this sense, the usefulness of diachronic morphosemantics would rest on the light they shed on structured images that form the core of how Inuit understand the universe. More concretely, some of the diachronic definitions based on these images could be used for deriving modern lexemes denoting new realities. Interestingly enough, a number of Inuit speakers elicit spontaneously what can be considered auto-, or folk definitions of fully lexicalized terms. For example, the Alaskan Inupiaq linguist Edna Agheak MacLean (1990: 169) notes that the common Inupiaq words *siqiniq* ('sun') and *uvlugiaq* ('star') might be analysed as follows:

- (32)a. *siqiniq*
 siqi-niq
 to.splash.outward-action.of
 'The splashing'
 'Sun.'

³⁰ However, comparative lexicology shows that some Inuit dialects resort to productive morphemes for generating definitions relatively comparable to non-analysable ones found elsewhere. For example, in East Greenlandic, man and woman are not called *anguti* and *arnaq* as in IN, but *tikkaq* and *nuliakkaa* (Robbe and Dorais 1986: 143). These two terms, whose definitions are synchronically significant and which mean respectively 'rutting male' and 'one who is sexually assaulted by males,' would fit very well into the IN quartet of gender relations.

- b. *uvlugiaq*
 uvlu[q]-giaq
 daylight-trajectory
 ‘Pathway of light’
 ‘Star.’

She notices that such definitions express a way of thinking quite akin to modern astrophysics, suggestive for instance of the Big Bang theory and of the fact that light travels through space at a constant speed.³¹ In a similar vein, an Inuk from South Baffin, heard during a language symposium held in Iqaluit in 2010, mentioned that the wolf was called *amaruq* because it carried its prey on its back, the same way Inuit women carry their child (*amaaq-*) in their parka’s dorsal pouch.

Of course, as interesting as they may appear, such folk, as well as scholarly derivatives are tributary to the often improvable – and sometimes improbable – validity of the linguistic analysis upon which they rely.³² Consequently, they should not be taken for granted at first glance.

4. Describing Leadership

At this point, on the basis of the IN data exposed in the preceding pages, we may be left with the impression that there exist two types of morphosemantics. One, grounded in the analysis of derived lexemes made up of synchronically productive morphemes, has to do with the way contemporary speakers of Inuktitut devise – and have devised for many decades – words designating items introduced into their environment as a consequence of European contact. It generates derivatives describing the function or appearance of the designated object or notion, and fluent native speakers can usually understand how most of these terms were derived. In

³¹ It could be added that the word *siqiniq* also expresses a way of thinking close to the astrophysical explanation of solar radiation emanating from unceasing atomic explosions within the star. It must be mentioned too that a myth from the eastern Canadian Arctic, *Atungaq*, relates the tale of a man and his wife who travel around the world with their dog team. “When they come back home, they are under the impression of having travelled for a year or two, until they discover that their daughter, who had been a child when they left [...], has now become an old lady,” in accordance with Einstein’s theory of relativity (Dorais 2010: 270).

³² Folk etymologies generally stem from the spontaneous perception by native speakers of formal similarities between different words, while scholarly morphosemantics are based on the morphological analysis of lexemes.

the eastern Canadian Arctic, this mode of designation is still currently used by Inuit interpreter-translators and techno-linguists for coining neologisms.

By contrast, the second form of morphosemantic analysis has to do with potential derivatives that, in most cases, are not synchronically analysable. Its practitioners presume that by having recourse to etymology and comparative parsing, they can elicit significant morphemes – and, thus, underlying significations – out of lexicalized words or stems that, apparently, cannot be parsed into synchronically productive linguistic elements. In the best of cases, this leads to intriguing, albeit linguistically questionable meta-discourses on various topics.

Research on Inuit lexicology shows that there is a third way for investigating the wider – surface and underlying – signification of words. It is based on the assumption that the lexicon constitutes a total linguistic phenomenon. Lexemes are explainable as proceeding from a mix of morpho-syntactic, semantic, semiotic, etymological, sociolinguistic, and other factors, and they are related to each other within significantly structured lexical arrangements. Analysing such arrangements – that often correspond to the fields of experience mentioned in section 2.2. – consists in eliciting the designated and, when possible, the signified of each of their lexemic components. These components must be understood in terms of their use in actual speech acts (and, thence, of their cultural and social substratum), as well as of their relations with morphological and/or semantic cognates and correlates within and without the arrangement under study. Interference between faulty translations and actual meanings must also be accounted for (Tersis & Mahieu 2006).

This type of lexicological analysis, where morphosemantics constitute one tool amongst several others for understanding a semantic domain, yields more encompassing and productive results than the two analytical methods proposed up to now. It is illustrated, amongst other titles, by Therrien's (1987) study of the human body, Randa's (1994) dissertation on ethno-zoology, Bordin's (2003) lexicon of human anatomy, Cancel's (2011) analytical survey of Nunavut's current language of the public sphere, and Dorais's (1984a, 1984b) short discussions of, respectively, the vocabulary of customary law in Labrador, and that of animal species in

East Greenland.³³ As the use of the morphosemantic tool is concerned, it often has to do with both synchronically productive and etymology-based derivatives, the analysis of the latter being liable to suffer from the same limitations as those previously mentioned.³⁴

To illustrate – in a limited way for sure – how morphosemantics operate within the larger field of a multi-faceted lexicological analysis, we will now describe the significant arrangement formed by lexemes expressing in IN the nodal political concepts known in Nunavik during the first years of the era of administrative autonomy inaugurated in 1975 by the signature of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (cf. Dorais 1982: 276-278).

4.1. Power and Leadership

Power in general can be expressed by the words *piqqajarniq* or *pigunnaniq* ('the fact of being able to do something'). As governmental authority is concerned, one can distinguish between legislative and executive power:

- (33)a. *piqujaliurniq*
 piquja[q]-liur-niq
 law-to.make-NOM
 'The fact of making laws'
 'Legislative power.'
- b. *piqujanik atuqtisiniq*
 piquja[q]-nik atuq-ti[t]si-niq
 law-MOD to.use-FAC-NOM
 'The fact of making [people] use laws'
 'Executive power.'

The expression of political power is thus understood in terms of its institutionalization in a Western-style democracy. Governance is embedded in the possibility of making laws and imposing their use.

³³ The East Greenlandic Kalaattisut (or Tunumiisut) dialect is characterised by the fact that due to specific cultural factors, a large proportion of pre-contact lexemes consist in synchronically productive derivatives. This makes their morphosemantic analysis quite akin to that of the vocabulary of acculturation.

³⁴ For example, in his otherwise excellent analysis of the lexicon of human anatomy, Bordin (2003: 276) might err when stating that the word *itiq* ('anus') is "probably linked to *itiqpuq*, he enters, comes in." In most current Inuit dialects, the stem for 'entering' is *isiq-*, not *itiq-*. True enough, *isiq-* might be a relatively modern reflection of the PE form *iter-* (Fortescue *et al.* 2010: 160), but this form still contrasts with PE *eter*, 'anus' (*ibid.*: 129).

Law is defined as *piqujaq*, ‘what is ordered/wished:’

- (34) *piqujaq*
 pi-qu-jaq
 to.do-to.require/wish-PAS.NOM
 ‘That which is requested or wished’
 ‘Law.’

The morpheme *-qu-* (‘to require or wish that someone do something’) may or may not include an element of coercion. The degree of constraint of the law is, thus, ambiguous: a *piqujaq* can be seen as an order or a simple wish. However, the context of use of the lexeme, which was originally employed for speaking about the obligations and taboos prescribed by traditional Inuit spiritual beliefs and, later on, Christianity, hints at the pre-eminence of its coercive signification. Law would thus be ‘what is requested.’³⁵

If law has a constraining power, it is not the case with the decisions through which it is generated:

- (35) *tukitaaruti*
 tuki-taar-uti
 understanding-to.get.something-which.is.used.for
 ‘Which is used to get the understanding of something’
 ‘Decision.’

Decision is not seen as an act of power, but as an effort to understand how things should work properly. Coercion is, thus, justified by the informative role of the underlying decision. Legislators give orders, but they are motivated by a desire to make people understand the proper way to behave rather than by a lust for power.³⁶ Such a conception is in accordance with Inuit views, that value knowledge, understanding and *isuma*, ‘reason,’ over coercion (Hervé 2015).

Among legislators, decision-making is motivated by responsibility:

³⁵ Another word for ‘law’ or ‘rule,’ *maligaq* (‘what is followed’), does not contain the same ambiguous semantic nuance (wish/requirement) as *piqujaq* and, accordingly, cannot apply to a customary rule.

³⁶ Incidentally, *tukitaaruti* also means ‘explanation’.

- (36) *ippigialik*
 ippi-gialik
 to.take.into.account-that.should.be
 ‘That should be taken into account’
 ‘Responsibility.’

Responsibility is perceived as a duty. Those whose task it is to guide other people should be careful about what they have to deal with, and consider all sides in a given situation before taking a decision.

The decision-maker can be a ‘chief’ or a ‘leader.’ In IN, the former is designated by the same term as one’s father or mother, *angajuqqaq*, and the latter by the name given to the leading animal in a dog team, *sivuliqti*:

- (37)a. *angajuqqaq*
 *angaju[k]-qqaq
 *older.one-the.first.one³⁷
 *‘The first older person’
 ‘Parent; chief.’
- b. *sivuliqti*
 sivuliq-ti
 who.goes.first-who.does.it.regularly
 ‘One who goes first regularly’
 ‘Lead dog; leader.’

As seen above, those who take decisions are not autocrats but individuals who, like parents, are responsible for educating people by showing them ‘how to behave.’ Authority thus stems from experience – in a family, the father and mother are the ‘first elders.’ Deciders can also be considered as guides who, because they ‘go first,’ allow their followers to remain in the axis of good sense: in IN, the word-base *tuki-* (as in *tukitaaruti*, ‘decision, explanation’) means, at the same time, the process of understanding something and the axial direction of a line in space.

The somewhat paternalistic signification of the term *angajuqqaq*, equating chiefs with parents – it echoes the Chinese saying: “The Emperor is father and mother to his subjects” – goes back to the time of the fur trade companies, when chief traders were called *angajuqqaq*. By controlling access to consumer goods, the trader manipulated the activities of his Inuit customers the same way parents influence the behaviour of their children

³⁷ Cf. *angajuk* (‘older sibling’) + *-qqaq* (‘first one’) as in *uvangaqqaq* (‘me first’).

by alternatively offering and refusing something. With the extinction, in the 1960s, of the commercial monopoly of the Hudson Bay Company, which was contemporaneous with the development of government administration in Nunavik, the notion of a quasi-parental authority seems to have been extended to political bodies as a whole.

Politics are defined as *piniarniliriniq*, ‘the fact of dealing with action.’

- (38) *piniarniliriniq*
 pi-niar-ni[q]-liri-niq
 to.do-to.be.occupied.at-NOM-to.deal.with-NOM
 ‘The fact of dealing with occupying oneself at doing something (an action)’
 ‘Politics.’

Politics are a science of action. This is in accordance with the role of the chief who, by his or her decisions, shows people ‘how to behave.’

If politicians are interested in action, it is governmental administration that constitutes the motor of this action:

- (39) *aulatsiniq*
 aula-tsi-niq
 to.move.something-FAC-NOM
 ‘The fact of making things move’
 ‘Administration.’

It is through administration that those who ‘deal with action,’ politicians, can effectively act on the events and situations they oversee. In contrast with a common Euro-American opinion that bureaucrats are essentially immovable and ineffective, Nunavik Inuit define administrators as *aulatsijiit*, ‘those who make things move.’

4.2. The Structure of Governance

All political chiefs, leaders and administrators belong to an encompassing, although composite entity that dominates Inuit life. It is *kavama* (or *gavama*), from English ‘Government.’ In Nunavik, *kavama* appears under various guises:

- (40)a. *kanataup kavamanga*
 kanata-up kavama-nga
 Canada-REL government-POS.3SG
 ‘Of Canada its government’
 ‘Canadian federal government.’
- b. *kupaip kavamanga*
 kupai[k]-p kavama-nga
 Quebec-REL government-POS.3SG
 ‘Of Quebec its government’
 ‘Quebec provincial government.’
- c. *kativvik nunalilimaat kavamangat*
 kativ-vik nunali[k]-limaa-t kavama-nga-t
 to.meet-place.where village-all.inclusive-REL.PLU government-POS.3SG-PLU
 ‘The meeting place, of all villages their government’
 ‘Kativik regional government of Nunavik.’
- d. *nunaliup kavamaapinga*
 nunali[k]-up kavama-api[k]-nga
 village-REL government-small-POS.3SG
 ‘Of the village its small government’
 ‘Municipal government.’

The multiform governmental entity detains the power of giving and withholding like the traders of old, but on a totally different scale. Thence the symbolic meaning of the lexeme *itimakkut* (‘people of the palm of the hand’), that once designated the government among speakers of the Itivimmiutitut sub-dialect of IN. According to an elder interviewed in 1969 (Dorais 1983: 18), Inuit used to refer to the palm of the hand because “government people often open the palm of their hands to distribute money.”³⁸

In Canada, government is formally headed by the British sovereign, the *ataniq* (‘king, queen’), designated by a term formerly applied, in Nunavik at least, to the leaders of semi-nomadic kinship-based seasonal camps:

- (41) *ataniq*
 ata-niq
 to.adhere/be.in.one.piece-NOM
 ‘The fact of being undivided’
 ‘Camp leader; king/queen.’

³⁸ Of course, this vision of government dates back to a period (up to 1975-80) when Nunavik Inuit had no power of decision over the administration of their territory, or were just starting to gain some. This is not the case anymore and the vision may have changed.

Like the leaders of traditional Inuit camps, the king or queen is seen as one who unifies those he or she has the responsibility to guide towards proper behaviour.

Governments and administrations are headed by assemblies and boards of leaders and directors. Members of such ruling bodies – and the bodies themselves – are called *katingajit* or *katimajit*:

- (42) *katingajit/katimajit*
 katinga/katima-ji-it
 to.be.meeting-one.who.does.it.regularly-PLU
 ‘Those who are participating in meetings/sessions on a regular basis’
 ‘Members of an assembly or board; assembly, board.’

The *katingajit* constitute groupings of rulers or administrators who are most often organized in a hierarchy – they have their own *angajuqqaat* (‘chiefs’) and *sivuliqtiit* (‘leaders’): prime ministers, presidents, directors, etc. They meet together in order to fulfill their collective role of decision-makers.

Contemporary deciders are generally chosen by way of an election (*niruarniq*, ‘the fact of choosing’). They may thus be considered as delegates of the people:

- (43) *kiggatuqti*
 kiggatuq-ti
 to.bring.a.message-one.who.does.it.regularly
 ‘One who brings messages on a regular basis’
 ‘Delegate, deputy, representative.’

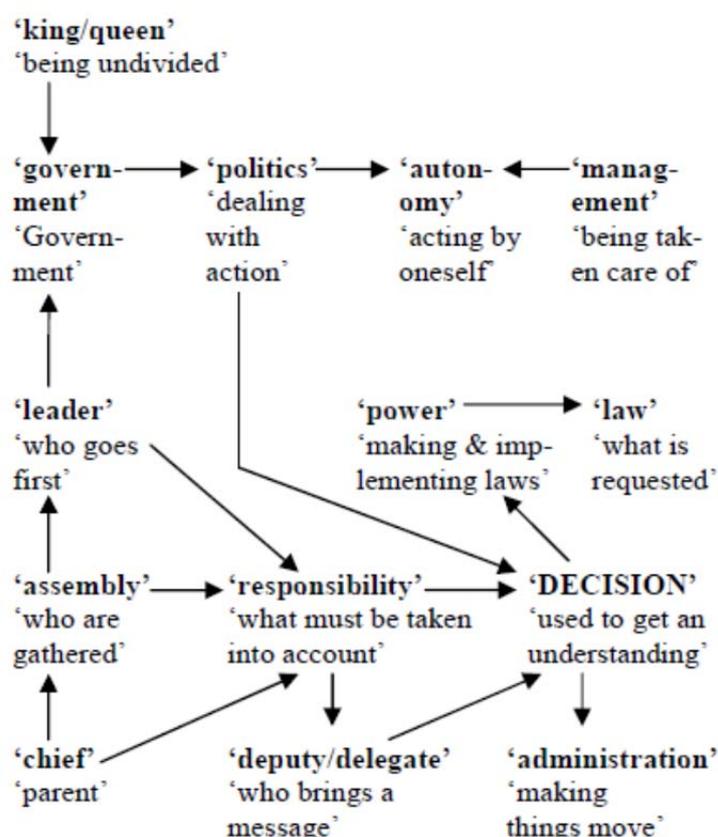
The mission of a delegate is to communicate ‘what must be taken into account,’ *i.e.* the needs and wishes of the population, to those who have the responsibility to decide, so that deciders can knowingly ‘show people how to behave’ in order to answer their needs. This mission also includes transmitting and explaining to the population the decisions taken by ruling authorities.

The dialectical movement consisting in receiving information, taking an informed decision and transmitting/explaining the decision back should, in principle, allow people and their rulers to act for the best in all circumstances, without having to resort to external power. Such a process generates autonomy, *immiguurniq* (‘the fact of acting by oneself’), a fundamental Inuit value (see Qumaq 2010). If autonomous governance is

supported by good management practices (*kamajauniq*, ‘the fact of being taken care of’), Inuit should be able to live in accordance with their needs and wishes.

Taken as a whole, this analysis shows that the central concept pertaining to governance is that of decision (cf. Dorais 1982: 280). Decision – in IN, this word is synonymous with ‘explanation’ – is understood by Inuit as an indication about how one should behave. Deciding is a responsibility of the chief, leader and collective ruling body, whose quasi-parental power is justified by their role as moral and social guides. Their decisions are implemented by administration, seen as a mover of things. All these people and bodies form a government that deals with the actions of its constituents by way of politics. With the support of good management, such a process should lead to autonomy, a primary value for Inuit.

Figure 3. Leadership and Governance



5. Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we have seen that when applied to a polysynthetic language like Inuktitut, morphosemantics (the semantic analysis of words through their constituent morphemes) can open a window on a deeper level of meaning, a literal signification lying beyond the simple surface designation of the object, person or notion denoted by a lexeme. In Saussurean terminology, signifiers would express both a designated and a signified, the latter defining the former. Three examples drawn from the Inuktitut Nunavimmiutitut dialect of the Inuit language illustrated various applications of morphosemantics: the vocabulary of acculturation (neologisms spontaneously coined by speakers), the lexicon of gender relations, and words denoting core political concepts.

Analysing the underlying significations of neologisms within well-defined fields of experience allows the elicitation of the semantic structure of such fields. When brought into relation with the various modes in use for designating post-contact items, these structures contribute to the disclosure of why one or another item is designated by a lexeme describing its perceived function or appearance, rather than through semantic change or borrowing from English. This is largely due to the fact that the morphology of neologisms is generally synchronically analysable and, thus, significant to native speakers.

Such is not the case with the second example (gender relations), where morphosemantics are applied to hypothetic derivatives that have presumably been lexicalized for a very long time and are not readily decipherable by speakers, even if in some cases their inner morphology is clear to specialists. By resorting to etymology and morphological reconstruction, morphosemantics can propose analyses that seem to yield significant results, but these remain hypothetical at best, although they might give access to an underlying semiotic substratum common to all forms of symbolic expression. The length of time elapsed since a given lexeme was lexicalized thus seems to have some influence on the adequacy of its morphosemantic analysis with current language use, although this influence remains debatable.

Finally, we have seen that when used within a more encompassing type of lexicological analysis (as with political terms), morphosemantics can add a welcome dimension to the study of meanings, one that opens a way leading far beyond surface semantics. Morphosemantic analysis has its limits for sure, but if used with caution, it can generate surprising results.

Abbreviations

3SG=3rd person singular; AUG=augmentative; CAU=causative mode; DUA=dual; FAC=factitive; FRE=frequentative; IN=Inuktitut Nunavimmiutit; MOD=modalis; NEG=negation; NOM=nominalizer; PAS=passive; PE=Proto-Eskimo; PLU=plural; POS=possessive; REL=relative; *=hypothetical morphemic reconstruction and/or translation.

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