Signs of the arctic: Typological aspects of Inuit Sign Language

Schuit, J.M.

Citation for published version (APA):
Acknowledgements

The idea for this project, which became this thesis, germinated after I read a document by Jamie MacDougall on the access to justice for deaf persons in Nunavut. After contacting Jamie in 2005, I was invited to travel to Iqaluit the following year to attend a focus group discussing the status of Inuit Sign Language and whether this language should be included in Nunavut’s language legislation. This fascinating experience with an undocumented sign language was not only the trigger for setting up this project, but it was also the first time I met with my (future) sign language informants. Jamie, your support and work on Deaf Inuit and Inuit Sign Language have been important for my own research and I thank you for sharing information with me in the early stages of my project.

The key people to this project were the language informants and their families. I am very grateful to Susan and the late Yvo Samgushak, Philip Ugiuk, Bobby Suwarak, David Kautaq, and Johnny, Mary, and Marlene Umingmak. Not only did you all help me understand Inuit Sign Language, you also taught me about Inuit culture and daily life and welcomed me into your lives. The entire Ugiuk family welcomed me into the Rankin Inlet community and it amazes me how every family member seemed to know who I was. Special thanks to Philip, who showed me around town even though it was -30 °C, and for creating the art that features the cover. David, staying with you and your family for a few days in Baker Lake is something I will always remember and I learned much more about daily life in the Arctic than I had expected. Marlene, you came to my rescue and opened your home to me when there was no accommodation in Taloyoak to be found. Staying with your family was a lovely experience and I especially enjoyed the boat trip.

I have met so many friendly and interesting people every time I went into the field to collect data – people who shared a coffee with me, took me on outings, or joined me for dinner. Adam Tallman and his family welcomed me, a stranger, into their home when I had to unexpectedly stay in Winnipeg for a week. Brenna and Clara Haimes-Kusomoto, I wish I had had more time to spend with you.

During my first two fieldwork trips to Rankin Inlet, I stayed in Kivalliq Hall, the local campus of Nunavut Arctic College. Mike Shouldice made it possible for me to stay there and Dorothy Tootoo welcomed me with the warmest welcome I could imagine. Returning in 2010 felt like returning to my Arctic residence. Robert Janes and Bill Nowak from campus security provided me with information regarding Rankin and its surroundings. Thank you, Bill, for the historical take on the area and thank you Robert for the caribou leg (it was an experience cooking it!). Thanks also to Noreen Russell for defying the cold with me during our walks and to Janet McGrath for all your native Inuktitut information, for all the jamming and for all the laughing we did in Rankin.

The best bed & breakfast that I ever stayed at was in Rankin Inlet. Run by Colleen and Sandy Napier, Tara’s B&B was my home away from home and anyone going to this area should stay here. My final trip to Rankin in 2012 was an experience of all things Arctic jammed into two weeks. Although “stuck” inside the B&B for a few days because of a blizzard, the other guests and I enjoyed ourselves immensely which was partly due to Colleen’s exquisite cooking. Even when the pipes had frozen, the mood stayed positive, and I secretly preferred the coffee to the melted snow. Thank you, little Cylas, for
bouncing around and lifting my mood when I needed it. The film of you bouncing still makes me smile.

The Nunavut Research Institute allowed me to carry out my research in Nunavut. Thanks to Leetia Janes and Mary Jean Katiak for translating my documents so I could apply for a research license. Leetia and Mary Jean also translated the non-linguistic summary of my work into Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun, which can be found in the extra book containing a summary in non-linguistic terms in four languages.

Of course, research cannot take place without funding. The first fieldwork trip was made possible due to a research grant from the Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication, and a Student Research Award granted to me by the Association for Canadian Studies in the Netherlands. The following trips were financed by an Individual Graduate Studentship granted by the Endangered Language Documentation Program. I wish to express my gratitude towards these funding bodies in seeing the importance of documenting Inuit Sign Language.

I have always felt at home at the ACLC and many people have crossed my path during my five years there. It is, I have to say, these people who made linguistics most worthwhile for me. You inspired me during lectures and conversations, you counselled me on both academic and personal life issues during lunch breaks and I enjoyed exchanging news with you at the weekly ACLC “borrel”. A number of people deserve specific recognition.

First and foremost, I could not have completed this dissertation without the supervision of Anne Baker and Roland Pfau. You have both been so patient and supportive during this process. Anne, in addition to helping me find structure in the texts, you also mentored me when I started teaching. Roland, you edited my work and commented on even the tiniest details, and I loved our little chats that were not work related.

Mirjam Trapman and Tessa Verhoef, who shared office 309 with me, have been such fantastic officemates. We shared much more than work related issues and being in a new office has made me realise how much we know about each other’s lives. Thank you for all the reciprocal trust.

Thanks to Arjen Florijn for the use of your tripod during my first fieldwork trip in 2009 and thanks to Niels Smit for supplying words my brain could not come up with, and for giving advice on my presentations. I really appreciate your input on an earlier version of the first chapter. Thank you also to Marijke Scheffener and Joni Oyserman for the ‘Deaf view’ on things and for helping me with the correct NGT examples. And finally, credits to Renee Clapham, who unlocked the funk in this particular piece.

My contact with linguists was not restricted to the ACLC and I enjoyed meeting other sign language linguists. I would like to thank Pamela Perniss and Inge Zwitserlood who supplied me with the elicitation materials, Asli Özyürek, Inge Zwitserlood, Connie de Vos and Olivier LeGuen from the MPI Nijmegen who were invaluable in interpreting elicitation material and Victoria who I had the most inspirational discussions with during meetings at a cute little coffee place in Leiden. Being affiliated with the Circumpolar Cultures research group meant very useful anthropological feedback. Thank you to all the member of this group for your feedback on the cultural aspect of my research.
Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude towards the members of my thesis committee, Martha Crago, Ulrike Zeshan, Kees Hengeveld and Victoria Nyst, for reading and approving my thesis, and for their constructive comments.

Not included in this book is the summary for non-linguists, which became a little book on its own. These texts were proof-read by Dirk Lak, Sterre Leufkens, Alison Phillips and Kevin Williamson. Thank you all for your invaluable comments, which made it possible for me to print this extra book, which contains four different languages!

Een pluim voor de allerleukste paranymphen, Sterre en Anika! Ik vind het de leukste combinatie van typologie en gebarentaal, zeker als ik al jullie andere hobbies en werkzaamheden erbij bedenk. Ook veel dank voor het doorlezen van de samenvattingen.

Op veldwerk zijn is niet altijd rozengeur en maneschijn, en soms had ik echt moeite met het feit dat ik zo ver weg was van huis. Dan zijn het de berichtjes van familie en vrienden die het hart verwarmen, en dat heb ik zeer gewaardeerd. In het bijzonder waardeerde ik de berichten van thuis. Mam, alle nieuwsupdates die je me stuurde als ik op veldwerk was waren zoveel leuker dan het lezen van een online krant. Ik vond het heerlijk om alle kleine nieuwtjes uit het dorp en het land toch mee te krijgen in Nunavut. Pap, veel dank voor alle informatie omtrent videocamera’s en de tips over monteren. Ik ben heel blij (en een beetje trots) dat ik jouw hobby in mijn project kon meenemen! Dit hele project had bovendien zonder jullie nooit bestaan: de Focus Group in 2006 kon ik alleen bijwonen doordat jullie me financieel steunden. Ik kan niet beschrijven hoe dankbaar ik jullie ben, ook voor al het andere waarin jullie me steunden.

Tom, dank voor alle films die je me meegaf zodat ik ’s avonds lekker een filmpje kon kijken. Ellen, ik vond het heel fijn om tegelijk online te zijn. Ook al zeiden we niet altijd iets, we waren zo min of meer samen aan het werk. En jullie bruiloft in Florida was een heel bijzondere afsluiting na mijn laatste veldwerk. Eimar, wat een goed idee om Ellen ten huwelijk te vragen! Ook heb ik genoten van de mogelijkheid om bij jullie in Amsterdam te kunnen als ik een paar uur moest overbruggen, en dat ik dan de laatste maanden meteen kon genieten van Amy.

Dirk, de laatste woorden zijn voor jou, maar dat zijn er veel te veel. Dank voor alle afleiding die je eigenlijk niet wilde zijn.