

Noun Gender in Miami-Illinois
David J. Costa
Myaamia Center at Miami University
costad@miamioh.edu

A fundamental and ubiquitous feature of all Algonquian languages is that of 'animacy', whereby every noun is specified as belonging to one gender or another, conventionally called either 'animate' or 'inanimate'. In this paper I will discuss the patterns of noun gender assignment in Miami-Illinois. The Miami-Illinois language is actually very well placed for such a study, due not only to the very extensive lexical documentation of the language (dating back to the late 1600s), but also to the fact that Miami-Illinois is the only Algonquian language other than Meskwaki-Sauk-Kickapoo to consistently preserve word-final Proto-Algonquian vowels, and thus to preserve gender marking on all nouns. The preservation of these final syllables has the happy result that there are thousands of nouns in the Miami-Illinois corpus explicitly marked for noun gender, including many nouns which are never given with plurals or found in sentences. I will also discuss the shortcomings of the terms 'animate' and 'inanimate', and show that a better understanding of this latter issue helps shed light on the subject of how gender assignment does and does not work in Miami-Illinois, and to what degree it can be predicted.