

Five things linguists should know about snow, raspberries and washable items  
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In this talk I would like to evaluate the contribution of selected North American Indian families to the development of morphology and typology. Specifically, I discuss the treatment of nominal classification systems (gender and classificatory verbs), polysynthesis and incorporation in Algonquian and Iroquoian, and its implications for our understanding of such issues as redundancy, referential basis of grammar, as well as the notion of “primitive” languages and the cognitive ability attributed to the speakers of the languages. While the examples I discuss have not done as much harm as the “Eskimo words for ‘snow’”, they can tell us as much about the changes in the description of language structure and about the consequences of a sloppy approach to linguistic data.