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.