

## REVIEW

### *KINGIKMI SIGUM QANUQ ILITAAVUT: WALES IÑUPIAQ SEA ICE DICTIONARY*

*Compiled by Winton Weyapuk, Jr. and Igor Krupnik, 2012. Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Paperback, 112 pages. For copies, contact the Arctic Studies Center at <http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/> or 202-633-1889.*

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Weyapuk and Krupnik's *Kingikmi Sigum Qanuq Ilitaavut: Wales Iñupiaq Sea Ice Dictionary* was created to aid an Iñupiaq community to retain terminology used by generations of hunters and travelers. This truly collaborative project involved Iñupiaq elders, whalers, and community scientists along with professional linguists and anthropologists in a multiyear effort. Endorsed by the Native Village of Wales, the project received funding from the National Park Service's Shared Beringian Heritage Program, as well as the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center and the National Museum of Natural History, among others. This initiative was part of the larger Sea Ice Knowledge and Use (SIKU) project, in which scientists and indigenous communities from six nations were tasked with documenting sea ice terms in local languages and dialects.

The SIKU project takes place in a context of declining Native language use for many Alaska communities. As Weyapuk describes, language shift to English began with the introduction of new items into the daily lives of the Kinikmiut (people of Wales). Over time, English "gradually encroached upon and began replacing Iñupiaq as the... fundamental language" (p. 8). Rather than being used solely for word borrowings relating to modern life and western items, English has become the *lingua franca* for most community and home communication. This process has progressed until younger generations can sometimes understand few Iñupiaq environmental terms, despite the inexactness of the English language in describing the environmental conditions and dangers faced when hunting or traveling.

Endangered language communities faced with language shift often initiate terminology development to address lexical gaps, reduce the need for borrowing, and enhance the relevance of the heritage language in the lives of potential young speakers (Kimura and Counciller 2009). Terminology development has been primarily defined as new words creation, but often goes hand-in-hand with language documentation and dissemination of existing, obscure terms. The Alutiiq New Words Council on Kodiak Island, Alaska, has found that in addition to the creation of new words, elders and language learners desired strategic remembering of old words, due to the speed of overall lexical contraction (Counciller 2010). The need to remember old terms is clearly on the forefront for Wales community members, who feel that this information is especially relevant today when climate change creates constantly changing and sometimes hazardous conditions that require detailed observation and description.

While a dictionary is a document that describes the meaning of words, describing *Kingikmi Sigum Qanuq Ilitaavut* as simply a "dictionary" seems limiting. It is more of a topical *encyclopedia* in its comprehensive presentation on sea ice. A focus on the words themselves belies the environmental knowledge embedded in the language and the strong connection to visual cues and observation needed to accurately use these terms. Sections of the book are devoted to alphabetical listings of sea ice vocabulary, sea ice categories (organized by season, location, and function), annotated photographs of ice scenes and conditions (historical and contemporary), and essays, all of which

emphasize the importance and relevance of sea ice terms and knowledge. By mastering the words as well as the cultural environmental expertise embedded within them, younger generations of community members have greater tools to survive and thrive on the ice, even as it changes.

Although Weyapuk and Krupnik state that this book alone cannot help reverse Inuit language shift in Wales, it can be one of many tools used by the community towards language survival. This project and publication fit within *status planning* (Cooper 1989), a type of language planning affecting the functions and community spaces where a language is used, i.e., in hunting, traveling, and relating narratives of subsistence. The greater number of settings and functions where a language is the primary mode of communication, the greater the odds that language will be maintained (Fishman 1991). This is especially true when zones of language use involve families, the “nexus of intergenerational mother tongue transmission” (Fishman 1991:67). Although the presence of English is acknowledged as irreversible in today’s Alaska communities, *Kingikmi Sigum Qanuq Ilitaavut* demonstrates that a space can be carved out of the ice for the continued relevance of the Inuit language.

## REFERENCES

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