

THREE DECADES OF ESKIMO-ALEUT LINGUISTICS IN ALASKA: 1972 TO 2002

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Abstract: This paper discusses research in Alaskan Eskimo languages since the founding of the Alaska Anthropological Association, a period which coincides rather nearly with the founding of the Alaska Native Language Center in 1972 to study, document, cultivate, and teach Alaska Native languages. Bilingual education was also begun in Alaska, ending a period of official neglect of Native languages, which were already largely on the decline. The body of the paper presents highlights of Eskimo-Aleut linguistics in Alaska since the early 1970's, covering Aleut, Alutiiq, Central Alaskan Yupik, Siberian Yupik, Inupiaq, and Comparative Eskimo. The fruits of research on Alaska Native languages have been collected in the ANLC archive, which houses some 10,000 items in and on Alaska Native languages, including published works, manuscripts, audio and video tape, and periodicals, with materials from related languages outside Alaska as well.

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The founding of the Alaska Anthropological Association coincides rather nearly with the founding of the Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) by Michael Krauss in 1972. The ANLC brought about a major change in Alaskan linguistics, since there was now an entity whose sole purpose was to study, document, cultivate and teach Alaska Native languages. At the same time, bilingual education was set up and funded in Alaska for state schools with more than fifteen children whose primary language was other than English. Our progressive state legislature of that time saw fit to end a century of near total official neglect of Native languages, which were already beginning to decline in most areas of the state. The mission of the ANLC involved several goals: (1) to document the languages, under the assumption that the level of cultural and linguistic knowledge found among the Native elders at that time would not otherwise be available to future generations of Alaskans; (2) to assist in the training of Native language teachers for the new school programs; (3) to produce Native language teaching materials for the schools; (4) to design practical writing systems for the languages and foster literacy in them; and (5) to conduct linguistic research and analysis that would make all of the above possible.

Given the goals just outlined, most of the research at ANLC was necessarily applied in nature because it was intended for communities of speakers and language learners. In the second half of this paper where I present highlights of Alaskan linguistics over the past three decades, I have not nearly succeeded in separating

scholarly from applied research, for in this field it almost cannot be done. Grammars written for language teachers are regularly consulted by linguists for grammatical information. The same is true for dictionaries, which are used by speakers and scholars both. Even schoolbooks serve as documentation of the languages. There is some blurring of the lines, since what is of use to scholars can also be comprehensible to non-linguists and what is appreciated by the language community need not be devoid of interest to scholars. Where a major world language like English has an array of dictionaries and grammars appealing to varied audiences, smaller languages typically do not have the same luxury. Even a simple literacy manual intended to teach basic reading and writing would still contain important information about phonology and lexicon.

If the research and publications are not easy to categorize, neither is the personnel that produced them. In addition to professional linguists with doctoral degrees, our ranks have included many who were long on talent and short on official credentials. Jeffrey Leer, for one, was fathoming the mysteries of Tlingit and Alutiiq long before he had a college degree. Krauss uncovered much linguistic talent and brought many Native speakers to work productively on their own languages. He has remarked that people who find irregular verbs to be a bother are not the types he looks for. On the other hand interest in irregular verb paradigms can be taken as an indicator of linguistic proclivity.

One important linguistic achievement of the period under consideration and which deserves mention from the beginning is the collection of all available material written in or on Alaska Native languages, and many related languages, into the ANLC archive. The avid pursuit of manuscripts, books, articles, and field notes was conducted mostly by Michael Krauss with assistance from ANLC staff, and the result has been a collection of over 10,000 items used by researchers, often from outside Alaska and even from outside the country.

In the next part of the paper, I intend to survey important accomplishments in Alaskan linguistics over the past three decades, including who has worked on which languages and what some of the major results have been. An important event occurred in 1970, when Eric Hamp at the University of Chicago organized an international Conference on Eskimo Linguistics, attended by many of the leaders in the field and which produced an interesting set of proceedings.

ALEUT

Beginning with Aleut, the language of the Aleutian Chain and the Pribiloff Islands, the most important work in modern times is clearly by the Norwegian linguist Knut Bergsland, who first did fieldwork on Western Aleut in the early 1950's, documenting Attuan and Atkan. He returned to Alaska in the 1970's to work with school programs and collaborated especially with Moses Dirks and others also to produce schoolbooks, classroom dictionaries with simple grammatical introductory material, and traditional texts. In his later years, Bergsland went on to produce a number of important publications for ANLC, notably the *Aleut Grammar* and the *Aleut Dictionary*. With Moses Dirks of Atka, Bergsland undertook the decipherment of the wax cylinder recordings made by Waldemar Jochelson in 1909-10 in Attu, Atka, Unalaska, and Nikolski. The poor quality of the recordings made the task very challenging, and original transcriptions have been sought but not yet found. Their work is published in a book entitled *Aleut Tales and Narratives*. Linguist Anna Berge is currently working on Aleut discourse, metaphor, and syntax.

On the Russian side the linguists G.A. Menovshchikov and more recently Evgeniy Golovko studied the very Russianized form of Aleut found on Copper Island, developed over the years by the Attuans who had been sent there from Alaska. This so-called mixed language is of interest because of the extent to which the Aleut has incorporated Russian vocabulary and inflections, noteworthy because language contact usually results in less dramatic phenomena.

ALUTIIQ

The Alutiiq language of Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula is also known as Sugpiaq, Sugcestun, and Pacific Yupik and has been studied by Jeffrey Leer since 1971, building on earlier work and text collection by Irene Reed. Leer gained an understanding of the complex Alutiiq prosodic phenomena, which create automatic vowel length in some situations and vowel compression in others, together with lenition and fortition of consonants depending on position in the word. These phenomena make the language difficult to write, since it is hard to decide what level the orthography should represent, and any solution has problems. Surface spellings fail to capture automatic sound rules, and spellings that represent a deeper level make writing very abstract. After a team of linguists at ANLC devised a writing system for Alutiiq in 1972, the first book in over 100 years was produced in the language. Leer has published classroom dictionaries for the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska Peninsula, and Kodiak dialects and is planning to finish a major dictionary of the entire language, with his student Sperry Ash of Nanwalek and April Laktonen Counciller of Kodiak.

CENTRAL ALASKAN YUPIK

Central Alaskan Yupik, the language of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, southern Norton Sound, and the Bristol Bay area of Southwest Alaska was the first Native language to receive the attention of linguists at UAF, probably because it has the largest number of speakers of any Alaskan language and also because there were quite a lot of first language speakers, including small children, when Krauss started the first Yupik class at UAF in 1961, with Martha Teeluk. Irene Reed took over the class the next year. Osahito Miyaoka arrived in Alaska to do fieldwork on Nelson Island in 1967 and later taught the Yupik class with Paschal Afcan. This group began work on a grammar and dictionary and also developed a practical orthography for the language. This work set the stage for the incorporation of Yupik into some schools in and around Bethel on an experimental basis beginning in 1970. Under Reed's direction, the Eskimo Language Workshop produced hundreds of schoolbooks in Yupik, with authors including Marie Meade (then Blanchett), Joe and Nellie Coolidge, Sophie Shield, and many others.

Since ANLC began, Steven Jacobson has been the major Yupik teacher and researcher at UAF and published the *Yup'ik Eskimo Grammar* with Reed, Krauss, Miyaoka, and Afcan in 1977. In 1985 he came out with

the much revised and expanded *A Practical Grammar of the Central Alaskan Yup'ik Eskimo Language*, with *Yupik readings* by Anna Jacobson. In 1984 ANLC published Jacobson's comprehensive *Yup'ik Eskimo Dictionary* and in 2003, the *Cup'ig Eskimo Dictionary* for the Nunivak dialect, compiled by Muriel and Howard Amos with editorial help from Jacobson. The *Yup'ik Dialect Atlas and Study* by Jacobson appeared in 1988, with maps showing distribution of lexical items and degree of relatedness of dialects.

Osahito Miyaoka continues his work on Central Yupik and is writing an extensive grammar of the language. Anthony Woodbury worked with the Chevak dialect of Yupik known as Cupik in the 1980's, writing on intonation patterns, which have scarcely been looked at otherwise, and publishing a collection of texts from several storytellers, with Leo Moses of Chevak.

The year 1975 saw the death of the Danish scholar L.L. Hammerich, whose fieldwork on Nunivak Island had resulted in a large collection of tapes and unpublished field notes, containing texts and lexicon. He compiled a list of Russian borrowings into Yupik and also took a systematic look at the mutual intelligibility of Yupik dialects with each other and with Koniag Alutiiq.

A number of books written in Yupik without translation suggest that the language remains viable, for example, Elsie Mather's study on Yupik ceremonies, *Cauyarnariuq*; the short novel *Elnguq* by Anna Jacobson; *Qipnermiut Tegganrita Egmirtellrit/The Legacy of the Kipnuk Elders*; and Yupik stories collected by Martha Teeluk. Ben and Eliza Orr have edited several bilingual collections of Yupik narratives, such as *Qanemcikarluni Tekitnarqelartuq: One Must Arrive with a Story to Tell*, and Marie Meade and Ann Fienup-Riordan wrote *Agayuliyararput* ("Our Way of Making Prayer: Yupik masks and the Stories they Tell").

SIBERIAN YUPIK

Central Siberian Yupik, the language of St. Lawrence Island, continues to be a fairly viable language still used by young people to some extent. Since a standard writing system was devised in the early 1970's by Krauss and St. Lawrence Islander Linda Badten and bilingual education began there in the fall of 1972, a number of publications have appeared. Badten, Kaneshiro, and Oovi compiled *A Dictionary of the St. Lawrence Island/Siberian Yupik Eskimo Language* published in 1987, and Jacobson published a grammatical sketch of the language in 1990. Willem de Reuse worked on the language and

wrote an extensive Ph.D. dissertation published in 1994 as a book entitled *Siberian Yupik Eskimo: The Language and its Contacts with Chukchi*, including much information about morphology, areal phenomena, language contact, and loan words. A number of St. Lawrence Islanders have written schoolbooks and prepared oral materials for publication, including Vera Kaneshiro, Linda Badten, and Grace Slwooko. In 2003 Christopher Koonooka published *Ungipaghaghlanga: Let Me Tell a Story*, a book of translated and transcribed Chaplinski texts originally published in the Soviet Union. Linguist David Shinen has worked on literacy materials as well as bible translation.

Eskimo languages on the Asian side include Naukanski, the now extinct Sireniksi, and Chaplinski, which is almost identical to St. Lawrence Island Yupik. Russian linguist G.A. Menovshchikov was the primary one who documented these languages, with books on each containing a grammatical sketch, texts, and brief lexicon. On the Alaskan side, Krauss developed an interest in Siberian Eskimo languages and brought them to the attention of Western linguists through articles and presentations. N.B. Vakhtin has written articles and a recent book on Sireniksi. In 1971 Rubtsova published her extensive Eskimo-Russian Dictionary shortly before her death. Emel'yanova in Leningrad conducted lexical research on the Eskimo languages of the Soviet Union and left behind an important corpus on all three. Elizaveta Dobrieva, Evgeniy V. Golovko, Jacobson and Krauss have recently compiled the *Naukan Yupik Eskimo Dictionary* in both Naukanski-to-English and Naukanski-to-Russian versions. Overall, the Siberian work has involved important collaboration with cultural anthropologists, including Evgeniy Golovko, Igor Krupnik, Peter Schweitzer, Mikhail Chlenov, and others.

INUPIAQ

Alaskan Inupiaq benefits, in terms of documentation and research, from its linguistic relationship with adjacent dialects in Western Canada and more distant dialects in Eastern Canada and Greenland, which have a fairly long history of study. Inupiaq language activity at UAF began in 1971 when Krauss and James Nageak of Barrow began co-teaching an Inupiaq class, using the North Slope dialect. They also began research on the grammar and developed tables of verb endings as well as information on phonology. The class was taken over by Edna MacLean a couple of years later, and grammatical research continued.

The 1970's saw a vast production of schoolbooks in Inupiaq by teams of language specialists, like the North Slope group in Barrow under the direction of Dave Baumgartner, including Martha Aiken, Emma Bodfish, and Harold Kaveolook to name only a few, and the primarily Kobuk group working with the National Bilingual Materials Development Center, including Ruth Sampson, Angeline Newlin and Susie Sun, who compiled the *Kobuk Inupiat Junior Dictionary*, as well as other books. Edna MacLean and I worked with both groups.

Inupiaq lexicography in this period began with the work of two members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Donald Webster and Wilfried Zibell, who published the *Inupiat Eskimo Dictionary* in 1970. Webster worked with Roy Ahmaogak and others on the North Slope, and Zibell provided Kobuk and Northwest items. At the Alaska Native Language Center, I worked with Leona Okakok and Edith Tegosiak to develop a lexical file on North Slope Inupiaq based on this earlier work. Edna MacLean took over the editorship of the dictionary and continued to expand it. To the primarily Barrow corpus I added material from Anaktuvuk Pass and Pt. Hope. James Nageak worked on the dictionary later, and Anna Berge and I are currently doing what we hope is final editing. MacLean also wrote children's books at ANLC and other pedagogical material, transcribed a number of texts, wrote teaching grammars of North Slope Inupiaq, and published the *Abridged Inupiaq and English Dictionary*.

Knut Bergsland's interest in Eastern Eskimo first yielded a sketch of West Greenlandic in 1955 and continued in the early 1970's, when he worked on Wales Inupiaq with Ron Senungetuk, also transcribing and translating Nunamiut stories collected in 1950 by Norwegian journalist Helge Ingstad. I assisted Bergsland on this project along with Justus Mekiana of Anaktuvuk Pass, and *Nunamiut Unipkaangich/Nunamiut Stories* was published in 1987.

In Northwest Alaska Ruth Sampson and many others at the Northwest Arctic School District have published a number of Inupiaq texts with translations, notably those in the *Lore of the Inupiat* series dating from 1989 and into the early 1990's. Wolf Seiler of the Summer Institute of Linguistics has worked on a dictionary for the Kobuk dialect as well as bible translation. My own *Phonological Issues in North Alaskan Inupiaq* was published in 1981 and compares the North Slope (Barrow) and Malimiut (Kobuk) dialects. A number of anthropological works contain language documentation, including *Kuuvangmiut Subsistence* by Douglas Ander-

son et al. containing ethnography of the Kobuk people as well as Inupiaq terms and place names.

The Seward Peninsula is home to some rather divergent Inupiaq dialects, with phonology evidencing what must be Yupik-derived prosodic phenomena, whose presence in the border area with Central Yupik gives rise to speculation as to the nature of the relationship and contact between the two languages. In the 1970's a range of schoolbooks was produced, often for each local dialect, providing interesting documentation of systematic differences among them. I worked with these dialects and edited a book of Inupiaq texts with translation, *King Island Tales*, with Margaret Seeganna and other King Islanders. I also have a King Island dictionary in progress. In 1971 Dorothy Jean Ray published an interesting article, "Eskimo Place Names in Bering Strait and Vicinity." I relicited and respelled as many of these names as I could find in the early 1980's and attempted to match them with what was on early Russian maps, as Ray had also done. Kathryn Koutsky also published a series of booklets containing place names and related information. Deanna Kingston is currently working with other King Islanders on place name documentation, with visits planned to King Island. The Eskimo Heritage Program of Kawerak, Inc. houses an important collection of oral history, stories, and place names, collected in the early 1980's by field workers as well as through regional Elders' Conferences. I am compiling a dictionary of Qawiaraq Inupiaq, including the Igloo and Fish River dialects, as well as Unalakleet, which shows lexical and phonological influence from the Unaliq dialect of Central Alaskan Yupik.

In 1980, Menovshchikov in Leningrad published *Yazyk Eskimosov Beringova Proliva* (The Eskimo Language of Bering Strait), which gives grammar, texts, and lexicon for Big Diomedes Inupiaq, essentially the same as the Little Diomedes dialect found in Alaska.

COMPARATIVE ESKIMO

Important work on Comparative Eskimo has also taken place during the time period I am considering, and I note first of all Woodbury's article "Eskimo and Aleut Languages" in the Arctic volume of the *Handbook of North American Indians*. Krauss edited a study of prosodic phenomena in Eskimo languages entitled *Yupik Eskimo Prosodic Systems*, with articles by Krauss, Leer, Jacobson, Miyaoka, and Kaplan. In 1994 ANLC published the *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary (with Aleut cognates)* by Fortescue, Jacobson, and Kaplan, which gives reconstructions and comparative sets for thousands of lexical items, in addition to postbases and inflectional

endings. In 1995 Krauss and ANLC produced *Inuit Nunait*, a language map of the circumpolar Eskimo-Aleut world with native village names and statistics on population and numbers of speakers, hence language viability.

If I have been able to present in only the briefest way what I see as highlights of Alaskan Eskimo-Aleut linguistics over the last thirty years, I hope at least to have shown how collaborative this work has been, since both linguists and anthropologists and also researchers and Native communities have worked together. Linguistics has a good deal to say about Eskimo prehistory. The Eskimo languages around Bering Strait, for example, show effects of contact of Inupiaq with Yupik, as well as contact of Alaskan languages with Asian ones, both Eskimo and others. Here is one of many areas that may continue to prove fruitful for collaboration between linguistics and other sub-fields of anthropology.

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