

PANU HALLAMAA

**THE UNANGAN AND  
THE SUGTESTUN LANGUAGES  
IN THE 1990'S**

**A PRELIMINARY REPORT**

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## 1. Introduction\*

This paper is a preliminary report of my sociolinguistic fieldwork on two Alaskan languages during the summers of 1993 and 1994. The languages concerned were Unangan and Sugtestun, which both belong to the Eskaleut language family. Unangan, which has commonly been known as Aleut, is spoken on the Aleutian and the Pribilof Islands and the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, while Sugtestun is spoken in the Kodiak archipelago, Prince William Sound, the southern parts of the Kenai Peninsula, and the eastern part of the Alaska Peninsula. The latter language has been called by a multitude of names: Sugtestun, Sugpiaq, Alutiitstun, Alutiiq, Pacific Eskimo, Pacific Yupik and Pacific Gulf Yupik. While the speakers of the language in question maintain, at least when they are speaking in English, that they are Aleuts, it is quite clear that their language belongs to the Eskimo languages, and to be more exact to the Western or Yupik branch, as its closest linguistic relative the neighboring Yupigutun or Yugtun, which has commonly been called Central Alaskan Yupik.

I have chosen to use the indigenous names of these languages, partly out of respect to their speakers, partly in order to avoid confusion. It is well known that all the Alaska Natives from the Aleutian Islands in the west and to the Bristol Bay area in the north as well as Prince William Sound in the east refer to themselves as "Aleuts" when speaking English, yet they belong to three distinct linguistic groups and call themselves Unangas, Alutiit/Yupit and Alutiit/Sugpiat respectively. The Native terminology avoids all the usual confusion, and perhaps the Natives themselves will also appreciate the fact that their language usage has been respected.

There were two reasons why I chose to study the present situation of these languages. First, I was travelling in Alaska for entirely non-linguistic reasons, but my itinerary was taking me close to the places where these languages are spoken. The other reason was, that while it was quite well known that these languages were gravely endangered, there was no recent and reliable data available concerning the last strongholds of these languages, which amounted to one or two villages per language. Thus it was not known whether these two languages were still viable in their last strongholds or whether they

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\*A great number of people have helped me during the course of my fieldwork and while I was preparing myself for it. Prof. Pekka Sammallahti from Utsjoki, Finland (or rather from Ohcejohka, Sápmi) wrote numerous recommendations for my grant applications, while Prof. Knut Bergsland from Oslo and Dr. Jeff Leer from Fairbanks put me in touch with the Atka and Nanwalek people respectively. In Nanwalek Mrs Sally Ash provided invaluable help, while Mrs. Nancy Radtke and Mr. Kevin Seville made sure everyone was included in the survey. In Atka messrs. Simeon Snigaroff, Andrew Zaachney, Alan Zaachney and Dennis Golodoff each gave valuable help, and in Anchorage two local Atkans, Mrs. Alice Petrivelli and Mr. Moses Dirks prepared me for my fieldwork in Atka. Dwight and Dora Johnson of Anchorage provided the data from Nikolski. Finally, Alaska Airlines kindly helped me with my travel itinerary, while Reeve Aleutian Airways and MarkAir helped me to reach Unalaska and Atka respectively.



were, and this was what I was not hoping to find, on their way to the point of no return, to the state of being moribund. Of the other 18 Alaska Native languages, 16 are already known to be moribund, and the two remaining languages, that is, the Sivuqaghmiistun language of St. Lawrence Island and the Yupigtun language of the Yukon-Kuskokwim-delta are still known to be viable, however with the qualification that Yupigtun is viable only along the lower Kuskokwim River.

With the above mentioned considerations in mind I decided to try to visit the village of Nanwalek (formerly known as English Bay) in 1993 and the village of Atka in 1994. I was also able to collect data on the village of Nikolski on Umnak Island thanks to the courtesy of an Anchorage friend who has had longtime contacts with the village. My plan to visit the village of Port Graham, however, I was not able to carry out due to a stomach disease that I was confronted with in Nanwalek.

Before I describe my field experiences and the data I collected I shall give a brief outline of the classification of the Eskaleut languages as well as a brief account of the prehistory and history of the Unangan and Sugpiat peoples.

## 2. Classification of the Eskaleut languages

Ever since the famous Danish linguist Rasmus Rask met speakers of the Unangan language in St. Petersburg in 1819, it has been established that Unangan is related to the language of the Inuit of Greenland. Subsequent research has found five other languages that belong to the same language family, which came to be known as the Eskaleut language family. The first branching off from their common protolanguage took place between the Unangan and the rest, resulting in the Unangan branch and the Eskimo branch. The Eskimo side of the family, according to the work of Nikolaï Vakhtin and Evgeniï Golovko (1987), then divided into three branches, the Uqeghllistun branch (often called Sireniskii, according to the village of Sighinek or Sireniki), the Inupiaq-Inuit branch (often called Eastern Eskimo) and the Yuppik branch (often called Western Eskimo). The two first mentioned branches each consist of a single language, although one might say that were it not for all the intermediate dialects between Alaska and Greenland, it could perhaps well be said that the languages of the Inupiat of Northern Alaska and the Inuit of Greenland should be considered two separate languages. The Yuppik branch, however, consists of four different languages: Of these Sivuqaghmiistun is spoken on St. Lawrence Island in Alaska and in the vicinity of Provideniia in neighboring Chukotka in Russia (where it might be called Ungazighmiistun), while Nuvuqaghmiistun was earlier spoken in Nuvuqaq (Russ. Naukan) at the East Cape of



Chukotka in Russia, before its speakers were twice relocated into settlements where Chukchi and Russian have been the dominant languages. The two remaining languages are Yupigtun and Sugtestun, which have already been mentioned.

The full picture comes out as follows<sup>1</sup>:

## ESKALEUT LANGUAGES

### I. The Unangan branch: Unangan (Unangam tunuu)

### II. The Eskimo branch:

#### 1. Uqeghllistun (in Sighinek)

#### 2. The Eastern Eskimo branch: Inupiatun to Kalaallisut (Alaska to Greenland)

#### 3. The Western Eskimo Branch:

##### a. Sivuqaghmiistun/Ungazirmiistun

##### b. Nuvuqaghmiistun

##### c. Yupigtun

##### d. Sugtestun

Since the theme of this paper as well as of this whole conference is that of language survival and language death, it might be appropriate to mention that out of the above mentioned languages Uqeghllistun is the one with the fewest speakers: only one 84-

<sup>1</sup>The indigenous names of the Eskaleut peoples and languages in Alaska are the following:

Ethnonym (sg.)	Ethnonym (pl.)	Language	
Unangaŋ	Unangas	Unangam tunuu	(Western dialect)
"	Unangan	" "	(Eastern Dialect)
Sugpiaq	Sugpiat	Sugtestun	
Yupik	Yupiit	Yupigtun	
Sivuqaghmiit	Sivuqaghmiit	Sivuqaghmiistun	
Inupiaq	Inupiat	Inupiatun	

For the language of the Unangas or Unangan I have chosen to use the form Unangan, without the relative case marker *-m*. One particular problem in naming the Eskimo languages is that there is no expression that would mean just the language. All the expressions ending with *-tun*, e.g. Yupigtun, mean something like 'in the Yupik way'. One can therefore speak or sing or dance Yupigtun, i.e. 'in the Yupik way'. Furthermore, it is commonly thought that expressions like Yupik, Inupiaq and Sugpiaq mean 'real people' as if other people really weren't people. In fact these expressions mean 'typical or proto-typical people'. I am indebted to Roy Iutzi-Mitchell for these insights.

year-old lady in Sighinek (Sireniki) knows the language. In the spring of 1994 she was still reported to be alive (Nikolai Vakhtin, personal communication, St. Petersburg, April 1994).

### **3. On the Prehistory of the Unangan and the Sugpiat**

Archaeological research has established with relative certainty that the Unangan people have occupied the eastern Aleutian Islands for the past 4 000 to 4 500 years (Dumond 1987: 66). The most famous excavation site in the Aleutians dating back to those times and representing the Aleutian tradition is the Chaluka mound in the Nikolski village on Umnak Island, and there are also other comparable sites on the same island. From that region the Unangan people spread westward to Amchitka in the Rat Islands about 3 000 years ago, and to Attu in the Near Islands about 2 400 years ago (Dumond 1987: 72, 75).

The Eskimo people, however, come to the picture much later, appearing in the Bering Strait region about 2 000 years ago. The earliest finds have been made on St. Lawrence Island (the Old Bering Sea culture) and on one of the two Punuk Islands off the eastern end of St. Lawrence Island (the Okvik culture) (Dumond 1987: 118–119; Ackerman 1984: 108). From there the Eskimo people spread to North Alaska to the vicinity of present-day Barrow around 500 or 600 A.D., and to the Seward Peninsula around the same time. From there they came to the vicinity of Kodiak Island around 1 000 A.D.. (Dumond 1987: 131–33, 139, 149.) In the north the Eskimo people spread to the Canadian Arctic during the 10th century and to northern Greenland during the following 100 years (Dumond 1987: 141). It may be noted however, that in the south of Alaska the picture is complicated by the fact that on Kodiak Island as well as in some of the places on the way there the Eskimo people were not able to impress the earlier inhabitants with too many innovations, which has led some archaeologists to believe that the Eskimo people originated from the Kodiak area (Rick Knecht, personal communication, Kodiak, August 1993). From a linguists' point of view, however, such a view has no plausibility.

It may be concluded that the Unangan people have occupied the Aleutian Islands for over 4 millennia, whereas the Sugpiat (or at least their language) are relative newcomers with only one millennium in their present home area. From these dates the conclusion must be drawn that the point of divergence between the Unangan and the Eskimo languages must be placed beyond 2 500 B.C..



#### 4. The Russian Period 1745–1867

Contact between the white man and Alaska Natives began after Vitus Bering and Alekseĭ Chirikov had sailed in the Northern Pacific in 1741 and discovered — from the European point of view — the Northwest Coast of Northern America, as well as some of the Aleutian Islands. The first contacts between Alaska Natives and the white man took place between Bering's crew and the inhabitants of the Shumagin Islands and between Chirikov's crew and the Natives of Adak Island (Fisher 1990: 25–27; Pierce 1990b: 55, 88–89). After Bering's and Chirikov's voyage the next Russian to encounter Alaska Natives was the promyslennik (fur hunter/trader) Mihail Nevodchikov, who sailed to the Near Islands in 1745. The encounters between his men and the Natives of Attu and Agattu were violent (Berkh 1974: 4–5), as were many of the subsequent visits by the Russians to the Aleutian Islands, although it might not be wholly accurate to say that the early Russian period amounted to a massacre. It is true that especially Ivan Solov'ev treated the Unangan people inhumanely, having e.g. blown up a Native *barabara* (underground sod house) with between 200 and 300 persons in it (ibid., 41), but it was by destroying the hunting gear of the Unangan people in several villages that he managed to break their resistance (Black 1980: 94–95).

The whole island chain had been travelled by the Russian fur hunters by 1761, and the first contacts with the Sugpiat on Kodiak Island took place in 1763–64, 1776, and in 1779–80 (Berkh 1974: 35–37, 53, 57–58) and in Prince William Sound (or Chugatsk Bay, as the Russians called it) in 1783 (ibid., 62–63). However, the inhabitants of Kodiak Island were not submitted until Grigorĭi Shelihov established the first permanent Russian settlement at Three Saints' Bay on Kodiak Island in 1784 and massacred about 200 Sugpiaq with the cannons he had brought along.

Although the Russians posed a threat towards the society and the culture of the Unangan and the Sugpiat people, they never posed a threat to their languages. The Russians were far too few in numbers to impose their language on significantly large portions of the Native peoples, and even in families of mixed marriage (first often common-law) the children grew up fully competent in both Russian and Unangan or Sugtestun. Towards the end of the Russian period some of the Russian Orthodox clergy who were brought to the colonies began to do serious linguistic and translation work, and they established bilingual schools as well. The foremost of these priests was Father Ioann Veniaminov at Unalaska (now St. Innocent), who devised an orthography based on the Church Slavonic alphabet for the Unangan language and wrote a grammar of it, translated parts of the Gospels into the language, and even wrote an original piece in Unangan. His Creole colleague in Atka, Father Iakov Netsvetov, who was canonized in Anchorage in October 1994, provided Atkan dialect footnotes to many of Veniaminov's translations and writings, and

also compiled a massive 6 000 word dictionary of his native Atkan dialect of the Unangan language. Both priests established bilingual schools in their parish centers. (Krauss 1990: 206–209.)

After Veniaminov had become Bishop Innocent of Kamchatka, the Kuriles and the Aleutian Islands, with his see in Novo-Arhangel'sk, the present-day city of Sitka, he himself tried his hand on the Tlingit language, while priests under his authority were encouraged to follow his example wherever they were stationed. Fr. Lavrentii Salamatov in Atka and Fr. Innokentii Shaiashnikov in Unalaska translated Gospels, while at least three Sugpiat laymen were engaged in similar work on Kodiak Island. Some of the resulting works were printed in Russia for use in Alaska, and their influence continued long after the sale of Alaska in 1867. (Krauss 1990: 208–210.) Nevertheless, it must be said that the bulk of the Natives in Russian controlled areas did not achieve literacy, at least it has not been possible for scholars to prove so (Veltre 1990: 182). The small numbers of Russians in Alaska meant that the numbers of the clergy also remained small, and thus it was not possible to provide education to all the Natives who were under Russian domination.

## **5. Alaska as a Part of the United States 1867–**

After Alaska was sold to the United States the education of Alaska Natives was neglected until 1885, when Sheldon Jackson became the Commissioner of Education. From that year on different protestant churches were assigned to provide education to the Natives in various areas in Alaska, the language of instruction being English in most of the schools. The use of Native languages was forcibly discouraged, and Jackson and his associates considered the Native languages too “sin-ridden” even for Bible translation. The Moravians and the Roman Catholics were an exception, but they did not work in the areas where the Unangan or the Sugpiat lived. Methodists were assigned to Unalaska and Unga in the Aleutians, and Baptists began work in Kodiak. The United States Bureau of Indian Affairs also began to build schools for the Natives, and from about 1910 on it began to implement an English only policy in its schools. The last bilingual Russian Orthodox Church school, where the Russian and the Native languages were used in instruction, was forcibly closed in the Pribylov Islands in 1912, and after that instruction was given to the Natives only in English for the next 60 years. (Krauss 1980: 19–24.)

Besides the school system, another hardship the Unangan people have had to endure during the American period is the Japanese attack on the Aleutian Islands in 1942 and the consequences that followed it. The island of Attu was occupied by the Japanese, and its



inhabitants, 42 in all, were taken to Hokkaido as prisoners of war. Of these, only 24 survived the wartime experience (Oliver 1988: Appendix 3).<sup>2</sup> The rest of the Unangan population west of Unalaska were evacuated to southeastern Alaska, where they, too, as did the Attuans on Hokkaido, suffered from malnutrition and inadequate housing, with the result that many of them died during the evacuation. By the time the Unangan people were able to return after the war, almost half of the Attuans had died, and because of several reasons they were resettled in Atka. All of this resulted in the extinction of the Attu dialect, which was one of the three Unangan dialects that had survived the Russian era, the two other being Atkan and Unalaskan.

In 1972 there was a turn for the better, as far as the educational situation was concerned. In that year the Alaska State legislature in Juneau passed bills which require state-operated schools with at least 15 students whose primary language is other than English to employ at least one teacher who is fluent in the local Native language. Although this meant an enormous breakthrough, it still left BIA schools and schools operated by a local school district outside its scope. (Krauss 1973: 801–802.) And for the most part, the damage had already been done. In the Unangan area the villages of Atka and Nikolski had been safe from the inundating English language because of their isolated position in the Aleutian Islands, and in Nanwalek and perhaps also Port Graham the same was true because these villages had lacked a school until the mid 1960's. The local languages in these communities therefore continued to be spoken by everybody, even the youngest children, at least to the 1950's.

When visiting the village of Atka in 1950, Knut Bergsland noted that the dominant language of the village was the local dialect of the Unangan language more or less mixed with the Eastern Unangan dialect. But 20 years later, in 1971, he was surprised to find out that "the Atkan children could barely count to three or four in the Aleut language", which means that even there the Unangan language had become seriously endangered. (Bergsland 1979: 22–24.) No exact information is available for Nikolski from the same time period, all that Michael Krauss was able to say in 1973 was that the Unangan language in Nikolski *possibly* was not moribund (Krauss 1973: 804).

For the Sugpiat in Nanwalek and Port Graham the situation was similar. Krauss reported in 1973 (p. 828) that many people under twenty in Port Graham were able to speak Sugtestun well, while there was no-one there under ten who could speak it at all. In the neighboring Nanwalek it was said that even the youngest children could speak the language fluently, but by the end of the decade even there the English language had become predominant (Krauss 1979a: 816, 1979b: 44). In 1981 Pekka Sammallahti finally

<sup>2</sup>Two Attuans died in the Aleutians before they were transported to Hokkaido, where 16 more died of tuberculosis and malnutrition. Five children were born in Japan, of these only one survived. Thus altogether 25 people returned from Japan after the war. (Oliver 1988: Appendix 3.) Most of these were relocated in Atka, according to Bergsland (1979: ?) they numbered less than 20.



published exact data from Nanwalek from the previous year, revealing the truth that no-one under ten was able to speak the Sugtestun language in Nanwalek, and no children under the age of 5 could understand any of it. "Unless miracles occur, the end of the road near for the Alutiiq language," wrote Sammallahti in his article. (Sammallahti 1981: 181–185.)

In 1972 so-called bilingual programs was initiated both in Atka and in Nanwalek, but there appears to be a significant difference between the two villages in how the programs was implemented. In Atka Bergsland worked with the villagers for 8 weeks during the summer of 1973 producing a Roman orthography for the language and 18 booklets for the school. Two villagers were given literacy training in Fairbanks, and a third one, Moses Dirks, was given additional training with Prof. Bergsland in Oslo besides receiving training in Fairbanks. (Bergsland 1979: 24–25, 1994: x; Moses Dirks, personal communication, July 1994). It seems that the Unangan language program in Atka was a successful one, at least judging from Bergsland's 1991 report on the Unangan language in which he said that "almost all of the 80 people in Atka, including children, are active speakers of Aleut, although English is also used in the home" (Bergsland 1991: 181).

In Nanwalek the approach was quite different. At first the policy was "you speak, you teach", whereby some of the villagers employed as teachers lacked any enthusiasm for teaching their native language, and it is likely that none of them was well prepared for the job of language instructor (Sally Ash, personal communication, July 1994).

Since the Unangan language is also spoken on Bering Island in the Russian Far Northeast, a word on the situation there might be in order. In 1991 Nikolai Vakhtin gives the Unangan language maintenance percentage there as 17.7, which means that out of the 500 Unangan on the island little less than 90 can speak the language (Vakhtin 1991: 111). One of the Atka residents, Simeon Snigaroff (26), who is a fluent speaker of the Unangan language and has visited the Unangan people on Bering Island, told me during my visit to Atka that those who are able to speak the language there are in their 50's and 60's (Simeon Snigaroff, personal communication, July 1994), and later in Anchorage Evgenii Golovko confirmed this (Evgenii Golovko, personal communication, August, 1994).

The following table and the information above, with the obvious exceptions in the two previous paragraphs, was the general information that was available concerning the situation of the Unangan and the Sugtestun languages as I prepared myself for my field trips to Alaska. The contents of the table below come from Sammallahti (1981: 179), and from Krauss (1992) for the 1992 data as well as the viability index. The languages are arranged according to their maintenance percentage and viability index.



## Language Maintenance of the Eskaleut Languages of Alaska and Their Degree of Viability

### Degree of viability (1992):

- a = The language is spoken by most or all of the adults as well as all or most of the children
- b = The language is spoken by most of the adults but not by most of the children.
- c = The language is spoken only by older people (mainly those above 50 years of age).
- d = The language is spoken only by a few elders (mostly over 70 years of age).
- e = The language is extinct.

	1980			1992			
	Population	Speakers	%	Population	Speakers	%	Viab.
Sivuqaghmiistun	1 100	1 050	95	1 100	1 050	95	a
Yupigtun	17 000	14 000	80	18 000	12 000	67	a-b
Inupiatun	12 000	5 000	40	13 000	4 000	31	b-c
Sugtestun	3 000	1 000	33	3 100	600	19	b, c
Unangan	2 200	700	35	2 100	400	19	b, c

## 6. Fieldwork in Alaska in 1993 and 1994

### 6.1. The Sugtestun Language: Nanwalek

Nanwalek is located in the southern part of the Kenai Peninsula and is accessible by air or by skiff from Homer, Seldovia and Port Graham. Distance from Homer is about 30 miles, or about 20 minutes by airplane, and 10 miles from Seldovia and 3 miles from Port Graham. *The Alaska Wilderness Guide* (7th edition, 1993) gives its population as 172, which is somewhat overestimated. The village was formerly known as English Bay, which did not correspond to historical reality, because the place that the Russians called *Angliiskaia buhta* was in fact the place the village of Port Graham is now located.

In Nanwalek the Russians had a fort called Aleksandrovskii Redoubt, which was established between 1787 and 1791 while Evstratiĭ Delarov was the chief manager of the Shelihov-Golikov Company in Kodiak (Pierce 1990: 116; Tikhmenev 1978: 25). How-





Apart from the fact that my time in Nanwalek was very limited, my fieldwork experience in there in August-September 1993 was a pleasant one. Three out of the five days I taught at the school, and it seemed that some of the high school students were quite concerned about the chances of their language to survive. My response to their questions concerning this issue was that it depends very much on whether the older generation of the villagers are also concerned and whether they make an active decision to speak the language to the younger generation. But overall my impression was that the language still has some kind of a chance.

Several individuals in the village helped me complete my research, and without their help it would not have been possible. One young woman took me to the village store, and introduced me to those villagers who came to do shopping there and had not yet been interviewed. Then she asked her cousin to drive me around with an all-terrain-vehicle and help me find the people who had not been included in the survey yet, and thus I was able to collect the necessary information on every single individual in the village.

My aim was to go to each of the houses and talk to one of the adults in each household. I trusted, as had Sammallahti also done, on the knowledge that the parents had concerning how much of the language their children knew. It is true that in this way the data will probably turn out to be somewhat uneven, but in hindsight I thought that the "mistakes" would probably amount to no more than one point on my final scale, which would still give quite an adequate picture of what is happening in the village. But in most cases I would suspect that the data gives a fairly close approximation of the truth.

One reason for deciding to be content with the parents' own evaluation was that I did not want to embarrass the villagers or to harass them with too many detailed questions which would have clearly pointed out the obvious flaws in the language skills of the younger generation, but which would not have produced a different picture once I made a visual representation of the data. Later in Fairbanks I heard from Jeff Leer, a Tlingit and Sugtestun expert that he had once been asked by state officials to go to the Alutiit (Sugpiat) communities in the Alaska Peninsula and find out whether the children there spoke the language and consequently whether there was a need for Sugtestun instruction in the local schools. Dr. Leer had decided to conduct the survey by talking Sugtestun to the children, and of course none of them were able to understand anything. All he was doing was pounding into their heads the fact that they did not know the language at all, and as a consequence making them feel humiliated. "It was the most frustrating and unproductive month of my entire life", he said. Hearing about this I realized I had made the right decision.

## NANWALEK LINGUISTIC PROFILE 1980

Age group	Male   Female	
70 —	S	70 —
60 — 69	[uS]   S	60 — 69
50 — 59	SSS   S	50 — 59
40 — 49	[x]SSSSS   SSSS	40 — 49
35 — 39	SSSS   SS	35 — 39
30 — 34	[x]SS   SSS	30 — 34
25 — 29	SSSSSSSS   SSS[u]	25 — 29
20 — 24	usSSSS   SSsxx	20 — 24
15 — 19	uuUUSSS   SS	15 — 19
10 — 14	usSS   SSSsUuu	10 — 14
5 — 9	xxxuuUU   UUUUuuux	5 — 9
3 — 4	xxxxxxuUU   Uxx	3 — 4
0 — 2	xU   xx	0 — 2

Key: Number of individuals in each category

	1980	1993
S = Speaks fluently or well	63	37
S = Speaks some	2	6
s = Speaks a little	2	10
U = Understands well	5	2
U = Understands some	8	33
u = Understands a little	14	25
x = Doesn't understand	19	29
[ ] = Non-Sugpiaq		
Sugpiaq	108	129
Non-Sugpiaq	5	13
Total population	113	142

From the results of my study it appears that the miracle that Pekka Sammallahti was hoping for in 1981 has only been a partial one at best. The number of fluent speakers has reduced drastically, and no-one from the younger generations has been able to learn true fluency in the language. If it were not for the classroom instruction, hardly anybody below the age of 20 would be able to understand any of the language. The present



## NANWALEK LINGUISTIC PROFILE 1993

Age group	Male   Female	
70 —	[uS]   S	70 —
60 — 69		60 — 69
50 — 59	xSSSSSSS   SS[s]	50 — 59
40 — 49	[xU]SSSSSS   SSSSS[u]	40 — 49
35 — 39	SSSSS   SSsu[x]	35 — 39
30 — 34	[xuu]UUSS   SSsU	30 — 34
25 — 29	uUsS   SSS[U]	25 — 29
20 — 24	[x]uUUUS   sUUUuu[x]	20 — 24
15 — 19	xuuUUUUUUUssS   SUUUxx	15 — 19
10 — 14	xuuUU   SsssUUUUux	10 — 14
5 — 9	xxxxxuUUUU   SSUUuu	5 — 9
3 — 4	xxuu   uu	3 — 4
0 — 2	xxxxxxx   uuuuxxxxx	0 — 2

“bilingual” teacher, Sally Ash, seems to be fully competent for the task of teaching Sugtestun to the children, and quite motivated as well, but with classroom time limited to 45 minutes a day per grade, it is not possible to perform miracles, especially when support from the community is meager. In these circumstances I feel that Mrs. Ash has done a very good job at teaching the children. Some of the children also told me that she has helped them to understand what is written in the grammar book, whereas her predecessor had not been able to do this.

As I already mentioned above I had plans to visit Port Graham also during the summer of 1994, but nothing came of this plan due to a stomach disease I caught in Nanwalek.

## 6.2. The Unangan Language

### 6.2.1. Atka

The village of Atka is located about 400 miles west of Unalaska and about 1100 miles southwest of Anchorage. The distance to Adak, where there is a Navy base, is 90 miles to the west.

A permanent Russian settlement was established on Atka Island in 1795, and from 1798 on it was known as the Atkha Company, part of the United American Company,

which a year or two later became the Russian American Company. The Russian settlement was first located at Korovin Bay, and apparently called Nikol'skoe, but in 1761 Tikhmenev (1978: 404) writes: "The native settlement of Nikol'skoe and the company's establishment have recently been moved to Nazan Bay. Only the church and the house for the priest and his attendants have been left in the old village. The natives move back and forth from one village to another."

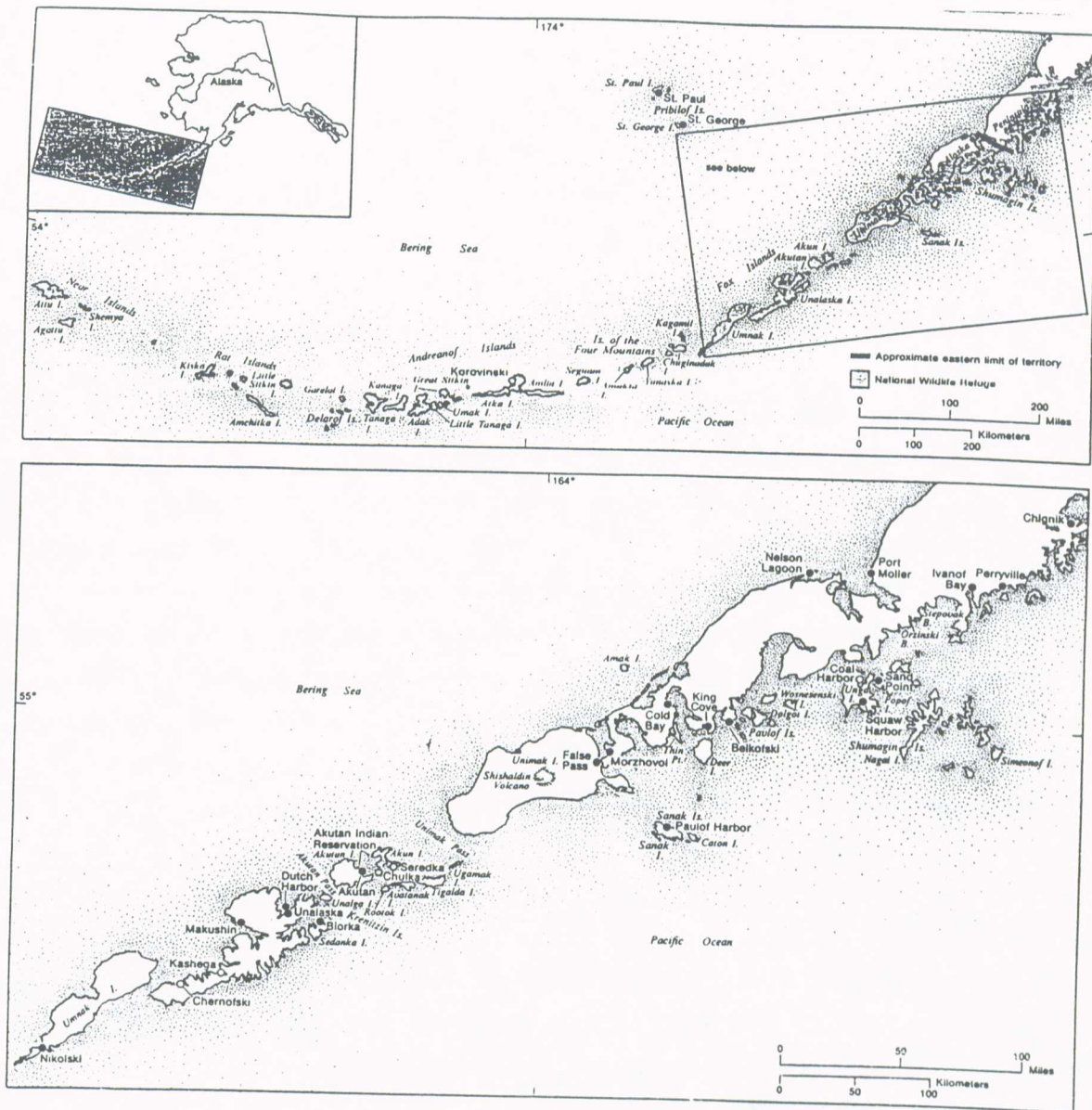
When the Japanese had taken the islands of Attu and Kiska, the United States stationed two seaplane tenders in Nazan Bay just opposite the village of Atka. The planes were sent out to bomb the Japanese and they in turn attacked the tenders in Nazan Bay. The civilians therefore had to be evacuated, and they were first told to go to their fishing camps. After this the US troops set the village on fire so that the Japanese would not be able to use the buildings in case they decided to invade Atka, too. The villagers were not told of this, they saw the smoke rising from the village, but it was too late to try to save anything. The Atkans were then taken to southeast Alaska, where they spent about three years in inadequate camps. The death toll resulting from tuberculosis and other diseases was 10 %. After the war both the Atkans and the Attuans were resettled in Atka, in Nazan Bay, where new houses were built for the villagers. The village population was around 90 at that point. (Bergsland 1979: 22; Ross 1988: xvii-xviii; Margaret Lantis in Ross 1988: xxix; Smith & Petrivelli 1994: 1.)

Today the village of Atka consists of the village that was built after the war plus a subdivision which was built in 1983. Of the 75 residents, 13 live in 6 households in the old village, while 59 live in 17 households in the subdivision. The distance between these two settlements is about a mile, it takes around 15 minutes to walk from the village to the subdivision. An additional 3 persons live in two households in Korovin Bay.

Most of the services are still in the old village. These include the city office (Atka has been incorporated as a second class city), the clinic, the Native store, the post office, the IRA office, the Atkam Corporation and, of course, the bingo hall. A diesel generator producing electricity and a garage likewise are located in the old village. A small pier and a cold storage house are located between the village and the subdivision, they enable the village men to fish commercially, which has been done since about 1985 (*Aleutian Wind* '86). The fish is delivered to floating processors, which occasionally visit the island. The schoolhouse is located west of the subdivision, and the airport further to the west.

Communication with the outside world improved significantly in the 1980's. In 1976 the first telephone unit was installed in Atka, it served the whole community until in 1983 telephones were provided for every household. Since the late 1950's until 1978 Atka could be reached from Adak by a Navy tug, once a month, weather permitting. From 1978 to 1983 a Grumman Goose, an amphibious airplane, replaced the tug. As part of the improvements in 1983, a paved runway was constructed, and regular scheduled flights





Map 2. *The Unangan territory. Notice that the present-day village of Atka is not on the map, it should be located across the isthmus from Korovinski, on Nazan Bay, which opens toward Amlia Island.*

now come from Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island twice a week. (Field observations; Moses Dirks in Ross 1988: xiii.)

My week of fieldwork in Atka in July 1994 began with pitching my tent on the hills outside of the old village just as a low pressure center was starting to move over the island. The choice for the location of my tent was not the best possible one: as there are no trees on any of the Aleutian Islands, the winds blow quite unobstructed, especially on the hills. Consequently, the next couple of days were not very comfortable. After that, however, the weather improved considerably, and I was also able to spend the last four nights indoors.

## ATKA LINGUISTIC PROFILE 1994

Age group	Male   Female	Age group
80 —	S   S	80 —
70 — 79	S	70 — 79
60 — 69	U S S S S S   S S S S S	60 — 69
50 — 59	x S S S S	50 — 59
40 — 49	S S S S S   S S S S S S	40 — 49
35 — 39	S S S S S   S S S S	35 — 39
30 — 34	S	30 — 34
25 — 29	S S S S   S	25 — 29
20 — 24	U s   S S	20 — 24
15 — 19	u U   s U u	15 — 19
10 — 14	U s   s U U U u u	10 — 14
5 — 9	u   s u u u x	5 — 9
3 — 4	x u   x x	3 — 4
0 — 2	x x x	0 — 2

Key:                      Number of individuals in each category:

S = Speaks fluently	44
S = Speaks some	1
s = Speaks a little	5
U = Understands well	1
U = Understands some	7
u = Understands a little	9
x = Doesn't understand	8

Total village population:                      75

I began with visiting some of the people in the old village. The first few people with whom I talked there told me that "everybody speaks the language here, we all speak". The very oldest individuals even expressed their surprise at someone even asking whether the language was spoken by everyone. Indeed, all of the 13 people living in the old village turned out to be fluent speakers, the families with children having their houses in the subdivision.

Work proceeded slowly at first, until two of the local young men helped me by telling me who all lived in the old village and by drawing me a map of the subdivision with names and telephone numbers so I could call the villagers and ask if it was alright to interview them on the Unangan language skills of the household members. When calling I told them that I had been corresponding with Prof. Knut Bergsland of Oslo, the grand old man of Unangan linguistics and a very well known person for most of the villagers,



and pointed out that even he did not know how many people still lived in the village and how many still spoke Unangan. Most people were willing to answer my questions, but for various reasons in three households the people refused to talk to me. Fortunately their neighbors knew them well enough to give me the data I needed, and the information on the ten or so remaining people I received at the airport from Mr. Dennis Golodoff, the Unangan instructor at the Atka school. He was returning to Atka on the same plane that I was leaving, and the survey was completed only a couple minutes before the plane took off again. Two days later in Unalaska I met the head of the one household whose members had been in Anchorage during my visit, and he corrected some of the data where Mr. Golodoff's evaluation had been a bit too harsh. When I returned to Anchorage I met with Moses Dirks, who gave me some additional insight into the data.

The results of the survey showed that just as in Nanwalek, the youngest fluent speakers were somewhat under 30 years old. It seems that the language of the homes where there are children is mostly English. One may also note the relatively small number of children, 26 out of the 75 residents, that is, about one third, is below 20 years of age. This must be due to the fact that among those between 20 and 34 years there is only one couple in the village.

### 6.2.2. Nikolski

The village of Nikolski is located on Umnak Island about 116 miles west of Dutch Harbor and 880 miles southwest of Anchorage. The present population is 20, while in a little less than a decade ago, in 1985, there were still 30 residents (*Aleutian Wind* 1986). Nikolski is the place where the first baptism in the Eastern Aleutians took place in the early 1760's, and this first convert, Ivan Glotov, built the first chapel on the Aleutians in Nikolski in 1806. It seems that during the Russian period Nikolski never had a Russian settlement.

The data on Nikolski was provided by a friend in Anchorage. The population now consists of older people mostly, the younger generation having moved away. All the Unangan people in Nikolski are fluent speakers, but the younger generation is missing totally. The village itself is slowly dying, and together with the last residents the Unangan language in Nikolski will also die.

When looking at the Nikolski profile of 1994 I am reminded of what Mr. Lawrence Prokopeuff, the president of the Atkam Corporation, said to me the on my first day in Atka. He said that the corporation wants to build a dock in Atka, in Nazan Bay, because "We don't want the same thing to happen here that happened to Nikolski. They don't have a dock, and now it's a dying village." Dwight Johnson's comment on this was that

## NIKOLSKI LINGUISTIC PROFILE 1994

Age group	Male   Female	Age group
70 —	SSS   S	70 —
60 — 69	SSS   SSSS	60 — 69
50 — 59	SSSS   S	50 — 59
40 — 49	[x]	40 — 49
35 — 39	[x]   [x]	35 — 39
30 — 34	S	30 — 34
25 — 29		25 — 29
20 — 24		20 — 24
15 — 19		15 — 19
10 — 14		10 — 14
5 — 9		5 — 9
3 — 4		3 — 4
0 — 2		0 — 2

Key:                      Number of individuals in each category:

S	=	Speaks fluently	17
§	=	Speaks some	
s	=	Speaks a little	
U	=	Understands well	
Ū	=	Understands some	
u	=	Understands a little	
x	=	Doesn't understand	3
[ ]	=	Non-Unangan	3
Total village population:			20
Unangan			17
Non-Unangan			3

even a dock would not have helped Nikolski. The village is located so close to Dutch Harbor on Unalaska that the boats fishing in the waters near Nikolski can take their catch to Dutch Harbor within a few hours. In the waters of Atka, however, floating processors are used, because the trip to Unalaska would take several days.

It is therefore possible that a dock in Atka would attract a fish processing plant to the island. Atxam Corporation would lease some of their land to the processing plant and could start making profits for its shareholders, who could possibly also find employment at the processing plant. But this would also mean that Atka would receive a non-Unangan population, which in the present state of affairs would definitely seal the fate of the Unangan language there.



### 6.3. On the Recent Development in Nanwalek, Atka and Nikolski

The village surveys indicate that there are very few non-Native residents in all three villages that I have studied. In Nanwalek there were 5 non-Native residents in 1980 and 13 in 1993. In Atka there were none this year while in Nikolski there were 3. The white teachers and their families are excluded from the profiles, in Nanwalek there were five such outsider teachers and one of the teacher couples had two children. Because of the small number of non-Native residents we cannot conclude that the Natives have been overrun by an English-speaking linguistic majority. What has happened in these villages is therefore something of a puzzle. For Nikolski all that I am able to say at this point is that practically everybody in the younger generations have left the village. While in 1985 there were 30 residents in village, including three high school students, today here is no-one left to raise another Unangan-speaking generation.<sup>3</sup> For Nanwalek and Atka one must come with explanations which have more insight into the developments in the recent past.

It is evident that the language in the homes during the past 20 years or so has been English, and that a language shift has already taken place. It is therefore meaningless to look at the domains of language use only and attempt to explain the present situation from them only. Although there are such domains of language use where English is used almost exclusively it is the situation in the homes that we should be able to explain.

In Nanwalek I was told that at the first school there was built in the late 1950's, perhaps in 1958. Up to that time the local Sugpiat were left alone by the educators. Once the school was established, the English-only policy came to Nanwalek also, but the real blow, as I was told by several villagers, came when the children were sent to the neighboring village of Seldovia. At the Seldovia school the Sugpiat children were ridiculed because of their language and their color of skin, which was darker than that of the Seldovia children. The Nanwalek children were also kept separate from each other so that they could not speak their language together. This experience resulted in the fact that those Nanwalek residents who had gone to school in Seldovia in the 1960's and who towards the end of that decade got married and began to raise families did not want their children to experience the same kind of humiliation and consequently chose to speak English to them at home. Mrs. Ash describes these developments in her own way in a paper she wrote for a college class on teaching methods in September 1993:

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<sup>3</sup> In Unalaska I was told by Mr. Joseph Beckford, superintendent of both the Aleutian and the Unalaska school districts, that the Nikolski school was kept in operation because a family from Unalaska with ties to Nikolski flew their children over to the village for the period when the students were counted. As it was found that there were at least 8 students in the village, the school was kept in operation, and after the counting period was over the children were flown back to Unalaska.



"There are many reasons why the kids don't speak Sugtestun in our community anymore. From my own and other peoples' personal experiences the reasons are simple. Many times we were made fun of for speaking our language or just being Native. This happened when we were trying to fit in different communities, like when we were going to high school or maybe even on a shopping trip. Most of that time we were young and defenseless and when that happened we had to swallow a lot of anger and hurt. Many times I was embarrassed about being a Native or I really didn't want to be a Native. Then we grew up to be adults and most of us got married and had kids. We didn't want to hurt our children like we had been hurt and made fun of or punished when we spoke our Native language, it was bad enough that the [physical] features and the color [of our skin] were there. I have to admit that I went along for a long time believing that education will get me far in life. It didn't really do much. I've come back home and have had to pick up where I left off being a Native."

Another factor is that many of those Nanwalek residents who had not been able to go to school received their GDE's (General Education Diploma, equivalent of a high school diploma) by other means, and thus there were not many monolingual Sugtestun-only speakers left in Nanwalek. Father Nicholas Moonin (1878–1972) was one of these, but his influence on the village was not quite what Sammallahti (1981: 184) describes. He may have been a village patriarch, but it seems that most everybody was afraid of him, and his character may not have been something that would have strengthened the status of the Sugtestun language in the eyes of the younger generation. "All he ever did was yell at us children", said one of his daughters to me. Another daughter, Anesia, who died in 1975 and was another monolingual Sugtestun speaker, is mentioned by Sammallahti as having been baby sitting for many of the families in Nanwalek, and being careful about not speaking English to the children. However, I was told that she baby-sat only for her own grandchildren. In 1993 there was only one such grandchild left in Nanwalek who was a speaker and who could have learned his Sugtestun from her. Anesia's daughter Nadia, who passed away around Easter 1993, was the last monolingual Sugtestun speaker of Nanwalek. She apparently did not have any children of her own, but one of her nieces lived with her until she was about 10 years old. At that time she was told by a friend about who her real parents were, and she then decided to move to live with them. This young woman, who is now 28 years old, is one of the youngest fluent speakers of the Sugtestun language, perhaps the very youngest, because I suspect there is a mistake in my material concerning a 19-year old female Nanwalek resident.

Finally, one must keep in mind that white man's Alaska, which in essence does not differ from the lower 48 states, is as close to Nanwalek as the city of Homer, only a 20 minute flight away from the village, with half a dozen scheduled flights every day.

For Atka I suspect that the reasons are somewhat similar. High schools in Alaska were built in smaller villages only after the famous "Molly Hootch vs. the State of Alaska case" around 1981 which was settled outside the court room with the result that the state



built high schools in all villages where there were more than 15 students (Mr. Joseph Beckford, personal communication, July 1994). Before that children from Atka had to go to high school elsewhere, often at Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka. It is probable that a message similar to the one in Seldovia went across to the Unangan students there. Today's Atka is similar to Nanwalek also with respect to the number of monolingual Unangan speakers, which is 0. Even the oldest person in the village, who is 85 years old can speak English, although she says, with excellent pronunciation, that "I can speak English, only the deep words I can't understand". "There's no practical use for the language anymore", says Moses Dirks of the situation. On the contrary, one can hear fluent speakers of Unangan speak English in the city office (Atka has been incorporated as a 2nd class city), and even in the bingo hall all announcements are made in English, even though everybody whom I observed playing were fluent speakers of Unangan.

Besides TV, which shall be discussed shortly, communication with the outside world has been increased by a telephone system and a paved airstrip, which was built in 1982.

Of the developments that have affected all Native villages in Alaska from the 1960's on, one can note the following: The Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed in late 1971, creating both regional and village corporations where all Natives born before the passing of the law became shareholders. None of the Native languages, of course, were prepared to face corporate business or legal jargon and incorporate them into their sphere, and therefore English became even more dominant in the Native circles in Alaska than it had been before the end of 1971. Also one must note that the issues that resulted in the ANCSA developed during the 1960's, when they also began to be discussed by the Natives. The final threat to all Alaska Native languages may have been the TV satellite which the State of Alaska launched in 1982 in order to provide TV for rural Alaskans. "The Alaska State Television Project" contains a satellite, satellite dishes for every Native village, and a small transmitter that more or less covers the village area. Thus the so-called RAT-Net (Rural Alaska TV Network) has been penetrating into the living rooms of Alaska Natives for some 12 years now, and video movies are also watched in the homes. In Nanwalek I counted some 7-8 satellite "dishes" which give their owners close to 40 different TV channels. In Atka there was only one privately owned satellite dish, but the whole subdivision gets its TV via a cable from the local school, an arrangement which provides 3 to 4 TV channels for every house. Dr. Michael Krauss is quite right in saying that the battle around the Native languages of Alaska has moved from the classroom to the living rooms (Krauss 1980: 82). It is quite ironic that I had to travel to Atka in order to learn that Arnold Schwarzenegger's movies are quite decent after all, and to Napaskiak in the Yupik area to learn that the corresponding Jean-Claude van Damme products are quite brainless.

## 6.4. Impressions on the Situation of the Yupigtun Language

In late July and Early August this year I spent about a week in the Yuppik area where I visited the villages of Kuiggluk (Kwethluk on the map), Napaskiak, Nunapichuar' (Nunapichuk on the map) and Kasigluk. All of these villages were 100,0 % Yupigtun speaking twenty years ago, but now my first impression was alarming. As I was talking to the local Orthodox priest in Kuiggluk his young son of perhaps 6–8 years old came around and the father and the son exchanged a few words. "See what's happening here", the Father told me, "I'm speaking Yuppik to the kid but he answers to me in English. A lot of the kids are that way now."

I went on to do some family surveys in Kuiggluk, too, and besides finding many families where the children spoke only Yupigtun I also found a family where there was a 14-year old son who could not speak the language. In another family there was an 8-year old daughter who had, at the age of 2, suddenly decided to speak English only, as she had discovered that one of her female cousins was that way, and she didn't want to be different. At the moment she still refuses to speak a word of Yupigtun.

In Napaskiak I was told that there is a language problem mainly in families of mixed marriage, where the language of the home is English. In both Kuiggluk and Napaskiak I was told that the Yupigtun instruction in schools is limited to 30 minutes a day, and knowing that most of the TV broadcasts as well as all of the videos are in English one is afraid that once there are a few English-only children in a Yuppik village, there will be a snowball effect which is very hard to stop unless the position of the Yupigtun language is strengthened e.g. in the schools.

## 7. Future Prospects of the Eskaleut Languages in Alaska

The situation in which most of the Eskaleut languages in Alaska are at the moment, of course, is making members of many communities concerned. This was evident at the Alaska Federation of Natives annual meeting in October 1993, which began with a so-called "Youth and Elders Conference". Many Eskimo elders said in their speeches that the young generation is losing their ancestral language, and that it is very important to teach them to speak it again. In Nanwalek these feelings of concern became manifest at a language workshop in February 1993, of which Dr. Jeff Leer (1993) reported as follows:

"On Wednesday evening Sally Ash and her students gave a presentation at the community hall, which was billed as the students «reading for» the elders. I attended this event, not knowing what was to take place. It turned



out to be a most effective presentation. Sally had asked the students to write two short papers, one on their perception of the current state of the Sugpiaq language and culture, and one on what they thought should be done about this state of affairs. Most of the more articulate students' feelings coincided almost exactly. They recognized that if they did not learn the language, it would die. They felt sad about this; some of them even cried as they read their papers. In the second paper they pleaded with the elders to teach them, to help them learn how to be real Sugpiat by teaching them the language. After the presentations were over, many elders told me that they were deeply moved by what the children said. Others expressed reservations, saying that if these young people really wanted to learn, then they had to be more respectful and listen more."

From the last sentence in the above paragraph it can be noted that there are elders in at least Nanwalek who seem to feel that it is the youngsters' own fault that they have not learned the language of their ancestors. These elders are evidently not going to help the youngsters, they are merely going to blame them for the situation and keep speaking English to them at the same time. For the concerned elders it might be very difficult to try to teach the language to the younger generation, and it could also be very difficult for them to try to limit their English usage to the minimum.

It is also clear by now that the so-called "bilingual education" is not able to work miracles and save the Native languages in Alaska. For those students who are not able to speak their ancestral language, 30 to 45 minutes of school instruction a day is not enough to turn them into fluent speakers. On the other hand, for those who do speak the ancestral language, this amount of classroom time "is not enough to give them the needed skills in reading and writing their native language that are necessary in order for them to become valuable resources for their cultures in their native language", as Roy Iutzi Mitchell (1993: 11) has observed.

A summary of all the problems that a Native language teacher in Alaska faces was given by Sally Ash in a short paper she wrote for a college class in May 1994:

1. No matter how much we teach the Sugtestun language, we are still being bombarded with English, via school, TV and radio.
2. We have no immersion [programs] either at the school or in the village.
3. We don't have a large number of Sugtestun speakers left in the village to propagate the language.
4. The village does not acknowledge the Sugtestun language being lost as a problem because of too many other problems and diversions, like alcohol and drugs and trying to run local government and native corporations.
5. We have lukewarm support and lipservice from the school districts. Our language is more of a filler/elective type of class.



A possible attempt to solve this problem, which already was hinted at in the above quote, came up in the workshop of which Leer (1993) reports. One of the parents in Nanwalek had stood up and talked about the possibility to start a Sugtestun-only preschool program. Roy Iutzi-Mitchell (1992) has also been advocating a similar idea, that of a total language immersion program for such Yupik children in Bethel who have not learned the Yupigtun language at home.

So far I have only looked at these problems from the point of view of language maintenance, where the Alaskan school system is doing very poorly. But these issues can also be looked at from a human rights point of view. It should be taken for granted that members of any linguistic group, whether a minority or a majority in the area it occupies, should be entitled to have instruction given to their children in their native language. The fact that e.g. English is used by the rest of the people in that country should not be accepted as an excuse for not wanting to provide instruction in the native language of the students. But the very name by which native language instruction is called, "bilingual education", betrays the goal of the educators to turn Native children into speakers of English only. The students are given "bilingual instruction" when they should be entitled to monolingual instruction in their native language. They should be attempted to turn into civilized speakers of the Native languages. With "bilingual" programs that aim at "partial language maintenance" (Iutzi-Mitchell 1992: 2), whatever is being meant by it, the Native languages of Alaska will be killed gently, not exterminated as was the goal during Sheldon Jackson's time.

Total immersion of the students in the Native languages, in my opinion, is the only possible solution to the problems that the Native languages in Alaska have today. Monolingual instruction should be given to the students in grades K-3, and in grades 4-8 perhaps 80 % of instruction should be in the Native language, and in high school perhaps 50 %, while the rest could be given in English. A policy of this kind is imperative not only for such languages as Sugtestun or Unangan, which are very close to the point of no return, but also for Yupigtun and Sivuqaghmiistun, which are being pushed aside by the English language in all spheres of life. My experiences in the Yupik villages were enough to convince me of this need.

## 8. A Note on How to Present Data From Village Surveys

My initial aim was to find out whether the Sugtestun and the Unangan languages still had a chance to survive, i.e. whether they still had any children speakers. As a mode of presenting the data I adopted the monolingual village linguistic profile model that Pekka



Sammallahti used in his 1981 article, only with slight modifications as to what categories and which symbols I was using. During a discussion with Philomena Knecht in Kodiak, however, I realized that for some purposes one should also attempt to show the process of how a majority language is gradually replacing an ethnic minority language. Mrs. Knecht was telling me about a large grant for endangered languages that had been announced in the United States recently. The fact that all the Native languages in all of the United States are going to be competing for these funds makes it important not only to show how many speakers there are left and what are their ages, but also to show how English is progressively replacing the Native language as one looks at younger and younger age groups. A good way to show this is exemplified by Dr. Nikolaï Vakhtin in his articles on the small languages of the Russian Far North (Vakhtin 1992 and 1993).

During my discussion with Dr. Vakhtin in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1994 we noticed that we had both been using a 7-point scale in describing the linguistic abilities of the members of ethnic minorities. Vakhtin's scale looks like this (Vakhtin 1993: 68), in the parenthesis I give the symbols from my system which would best correspond to his categories:

1. Speaks the language perfectly freely and easily, excellent knowledge of the "old language" and possibly the folklore; this is often the individual's only language. (S)
2. Speaks the language freely, but can (or prefers to) speak some other language with the same or greater ease. (S)
3. Speaks the language freely, but his fellow villagers who belong to groups 1 or 2 notice insignificant flaws in his speech; careless word use, simplifications of grammar, a limited vocabulary, an accent. (S)
4. Speaks the language, but with serious flaws and errors; the language clearly is not the persons's mother tongue. (s?)
5. Understands the spoken language well, but does not speak it, with the exception of two dozen or so everyday phrases. (s, U)
6. Understands the standard set of imperative and interrogative expressions, may be capable of understanding the general meaning of a conversation, but is not capable of speaking. (U)
7. Does not know the language. (u, x)

In Vakhtin's system each individual scores as many points as is the rank of his/her category of language mastery. The best speakers thus score 1 point while those who do not know the language at all score 7 points. Besides being the reverse of most grading systems this system has one major disadvantage, at least with respect to the multilingual communities Vakhtin was studying in the Russian Far North. If the scale had been the

reverse, it would have been to calculate a total language mastery score for individual members of the communities, a point that was made by Juha Janhunen in Helsinki.

For future studies I would recommend Vakhtin's system with the scale reversed in the following way, and for example with the following accompanying symbols to be used in village profiles for each category:

<u>Category/description</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Points</u>
1. Speaks fluently, prefers the language	<b>S</b> (bold)	6.0
2. Speaks fluently but prefers another language	<i><b>S</b></i> (bold and italic)	5.0
3. Speaks with minor flaws	<u>S</u> (outlined)	4.0
4. Speaks with major flaws, a grave accent	s (plain)	3.0
5. Understands the language well	<b>U</b> (bold)	2.0
6. Understands some	<u>U</u> (outlined)	1.0
7. Understands isolated words	u (plain)	0.5
8. Does not know the language	x (plain)	0.0

Category # 7 is included here partly because it had a corresponding category in my system, partly because I feel there is a need to give at least a little credit to those who understand a minimal amount of the language. Besides this being polite towards these individuals, who often are outsiders, it may also influence their attitudes toward the Native language in a positive direction. The major difference between this system and my earlier system is that those fluent speakers who prefer to speak the majority language are distinguished from those who prefer the Native language.

In Vakhtin's system the ratings described above, which are usually produced by local language experts, provide only raw data, which then is run through a table of corrective coefficients. These are determined from the "linguistic biography" of each individual included in the survey, and only after this can the data be presented in its final form. The idea is that the later the individual has learned the language, the lower he can score on the language mastery scale, even if he has been given the top rating by the evaluating language expert. The scale for the "linguistic" biography is given here in an abbreviated form (Vakhtin 1993: 72-72):

1. Language was acquired in infancy from parents, and it has ever since been the dominant language of his/her environment.

2. Language was acquired in infancy from parents, but in some point in time another language became the dominant one in his/her environment.



3. Language was acquired at a day-care center or in primary school or on the streets (for Vakhtin's cases this is usually Russian).

4. Language was acquired in childhood from a person outside the core of the family.

5. Language was acquired in labor activities (at the age of 10–12) or in secondary school or college.

6. Language was acquired as a result of a marriage into a family where the language is spoken, or from one's own children, who learned it at a day-care center or at school.

7. Language was acquired on the job, in daily life from interaction with neighbors, and so forth.

The following table contains the input data under the heading of "expert assessment" and columns of final scores under the "linguistic biography" ratings (following the revised system of this presentation):

#### Language mastery scores

Expert assessment	"Linguistic biography"						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6 (S)	6.0	5.5	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.0	–
5 (S)	5.0	4.5	4.0	4.0	3.5	3.0	3.0
4 (S)	4.0	4.0	3.5	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.5
3 (s)	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.0	2.0
2 (U)	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.5	1.0	1.0
1 (U)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.5
0.5 (u)	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
0 (x)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

As can be seen, the scores might drop by up to 2 points depending on when knowledge of the language has been acquired.

As an example of "bilingual" presentation I have rendered Vakhtin's (1993: 74) table 2 to correspond to the system outlined above. The language in question is Ungazirmiistun (same as Sivuqaghmiistun in Alaska). Note that in this mode of presentation average scores are given for each age group:

**Level of Mastery of the Eskimo and Russian Languages Among Residents of Novoe Chaplino Settlement (correlation with age)**

Age groups	>60	51–60	41–50	31–40	21–30
Eskimo	6.0	6.0	5.4	4.6	2.8
Russian	3.7	4.6	5.5	6.0	6.0

As can be seen, the oldest generation masters the Ungazirmiistun language perfectly, but speaks Russian with more or less noticable flaws. The Ungazirmiit people in their 20's speak Russian perfectly, but speak the Native language only with a grave accent or don't speak it at all while being able to understand the language well.

Precautions like this are necessary when the execution of the survey is delegated to someone else than the researcher himself/herself, especially the person conducting the survey is not well known to the researcher and does not have a background in linguistics, and also when one is studying multilingual communities such as some of the villages where Vakhtin has been doing research. In Vakhtin's examples even up to 5 languages were spoken in the same village, the languages being Russian, Yakut, Evenki, Chukchi and Yukagir.

When the researcher is conducting the survey himself/herself in a bilingual or maximally trilingual community, such correction tables may not be necessary. Also I might note, that using of a correction table perhaps produces a rather pessimistic picture of the situation, whereas my aim in my studies was to produce an optimistic picture, to find out whatever potential the language would have were the external circumstances to change in the near future. Such a change might well be brought about by a different school curriculum.

## 9. Conclusion

Both the Sugpiat and the Unangan have suffered from most of the calamities that Wurm mentions in his paper. They have suffered from European exploitation and the diseases they brought with them, disruption of their culture by the White man, oppressive and racist educational policies and, in the case of the Unangan, forced relocations to the Pribylov and the Commander Islands besides forced relocations on the Aleutian Islands themselves, and of course the traumatic evacuation during World War II, which for



Attuans meant captivity on Hokkaido. It can also be noted that the Sugpiat or Alutiit of the Kodiak Archipelago were also concentrated by the Russians into a few villages at the turn of the 1830's and the 1840's.

When the children were taken to boarding schools by the U.S. educators the "linguistic backbone" of most of the Unangan and Sugpiat people was broken. Only one or two communities for each of these languages were able to hold out until two or three decades ago. Now it seems that the last strongholds of these languages, Nanwalek for the Sugtestun language and Atka for the Unangan language, have been invaded by the English language to an alarming degree. If no drastic measures are taken in the immediate future, these two languages will soon reach the point of no return, if indeed they have not yet reached it.

The language policy that Sammallahti (1981: 199–200) outlined, and which Kaplan (1990: 157–158) and Wurm in his present paper quote, has not been taken heed of in Alaska. For the Sugpiat and the Unangan people it would perhaps be utopistic to hope to achieve an official status for their languages or to gain control over mass media. But what could be done is to change the syllabus in the Atka, Nanwalek and Port Graham schools so that the Native languages there could have the best possible support from the educational system. This would also signal to these linguistic communities the fact that their languages are an important and valuable component in the Alaskan linguistic and cultural landscape. If nothing is done, the Unangan and the Sugpiat people are made to understand that whether these languages continue to live or not, it doesn't really make much difference.

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