

**Unangam Tunuu and Sugtestun:  
A Struggle for Continued Life**

*To Elenore McMullen  
with gratitude  
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## Unangam Tunuu and Sugtestun: A Struggle for Continued Life

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This paper is a report of the author's sociolinguistic fieldwork on two Alaskan languages during 1993-1995. The objectives of the fieldwork were (1) to find out the current status of the two languages in question and, if possible, attempt to explain why their speakers are more and more commonly using English, and, at the same time, (2) to develop a method whereby it would be easy to demonstrate the fact that a rapid language shift is in progress.

### 1. ON THE BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

The languages on which this paper is focussed are *Unangam tunuu* and *Sugtestun*, both of which belong to the Eskimo-Aleut language family. *Unangam tunuu*, which has commonly been known as Aleut, is spoken on the Aleutian and the Pribilof Islands and the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, and on Bering Island in Russia 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 Yup'ik* and *Pacific Gulf Yup'ik*. 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 *Yup'ik* branch, as its closest linguistic relative is the neighboring *Yugcetun* or *Yugtun*, which has commonly been called Central Alaskan *Yup'ik*.

I have chosen to use the indigenous names of these languages, partly out of respect towards their speakers, partly in order to avoid confusion. It is well known that all Alaska Natives from the Aleutian Islands in the west and to the Bristol Bay area in the north, as well as to 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 *Unangaŋ*, *Alutiit/Yupiit* and *Alutiit/Sugpiat* respectively. Using Native terminology we avoid all the usual confusion about who really are Aleuts.

The reason why I chose to study the situation of these two languages was the following: While it was quite well known that these languages were gravely endangered, there was no recent and reliable data available concerning their last

strongholds, which amounted to one or two villages per language. Thus, it was not known whether these languages were still viable, or whether they were on their way to the point of no return. Of the other 18 Alaska Native languages, 16 were already known to be moribund, while the two remaining languages, that is, the Sivuqaghmiistun language of St. Lawrence Island and the Yugcetun language of the Yukon-Kuskokwim-Delta are still presumed to be viable, however, with the qualification that Yugcetun is viable only along the lower Kuskokwim River.

I began my research in Nanwalek in 1993, followed by a visit to Atka in 1994. In 1995 I was able to do research in a total of six villages: Nikolski, Akutan, Nanwalek, Paluwik, Caniqaq and Taatiillaaq.

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

#### 1) Classification of the Eskimo-Aleut languages

Ever since the famous Danish linguist Rasmus Rask met speakers of Unangam tunuu in St. Petersburg in 1819, it has been established that Unangam tunuu is related to the language of the Inuit of Greenland. Subsequent research has found five other related languages, which together came to be known as the Eskimo-Aleut language family (Table 1). The first branching off from their common protolanguage took place between the Unangaŋ and the rest, resulting in the Unangaŋ branch and the Eskimo branch.

The Eskimo side of the family, according to the work of Nikolai Vakhtin and Evgenii Golovko [VAKHTIN and 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 Yup'ik branch (often called Western Eskimo). Each of the two first-mentioned branches consists of a single language, although the Inupiat dialects of Northern Alaska and the Inuit dialects of Greenland are so different that they could well be considered two separate languages were it not for the fact that they are linked by a number of intermediate dialects. The Yup'ik branch, however, consists of four different languages: (1) Sivuqaghmiistun, which is spoken on St. Lawrence Island in Alaska and in the vicinity of Provideniia in neighboring Chukotka on the Russian side of the Bering Strait (where it may be called Ungazighmiistun), (2) Nuvuqaghmiistun, which 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, as well as (3) Yugcetun and (4) Sugtestun, which have already been mentioned.

**Table 1.** Eskimo-Aleut languages<sup>1)</sup>

- I. The Unangaŋ branch: Unangam tunuu
- II. The Eskimo branch:
  1. Uqeghllistun (in Sighinek, Chukotka)



2. The Eastern Eskimo branch: Inupiatun to Kalaallisut (Alaska to Greenland)
3. The Western Eskimo Branch:
  - a. Sivuqaghmiistun/Ungazighmiistun
  - b. Nuvuqaghmiistun
  - c. Yugcetun
  - d. Sugtestun

During the last few years the Uqeghllistun language had only one remaining speaker. However, she has past away in early January of 1997, and this language has thereby become extinct. (Darlene Orr, Sivuqaq, via Michael Krauss via Irene Reed, p.c., March 1997)

## 2) Methological prerequisites

The first impetus for this study was given by Pekka Sammallahti's 1980 study of Nanwalek. I wanted to do a follow-up for his study and therefore decided to present my findings in the same format, as a linguistic profile. At the same time, however, I realized that it was important to present the data in more detail than what Sammallahti had done. Whereas he had used a simple three-way distinction (speaks/understands/neither) I first adopted the following, still impressionistic seven point scale:

|    |   |                      |
|----|---|----------------------|
| 1. | S | Speaks fluently      |
| 2. | § | Speaks some          |
| 3. | s | Speaks a little      |
| 4. | U | Understands well     |
| 5. | U | Understands some     |
| 6. | u | Understands a little |
| 7. | x | Does not understand  |

In the spring of 1994 I met Dr. Nikolai Vakhtin in St. Petersburg who gave me two articles he had written [VAKHTIN 1992 & 1993] on similar research, which gave me much food for thought. In the course of the summer and fall of 1995 I developed the following **language proficiency evaluation scale**, which incorporates many ideas from Vakhtin plus Jeff Leer's suggestion that knowledgeable individuals be identified and given their own category for the benefit of future linguistic fieldwork. It is especially important to point out that most of the criteria used to place individuals in the appropriate categories comes from Vakhtin.

| No. | Category                                                   | Symbol | Points |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| 1.  | Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker                         | S      | 10     |
| 2.  | Speaks fluently and prefers the language                   | §      | 9      |
| 3.  | Speaks fluently but prefers another language               | §      | 8      |
| 4.  | Speaks with minor flaws (≈speaks some)                     | s      | 7      |
| 5.  | Speaks with major flaws, a grave accent (≈speaks a little) | §      | 6      |
| 6.  | Understands the language well                              | U      | 5      |



|                                             |   |   |
|---------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 7. Understands some                         | U | 4 |
| 8. Understands basic commands and questions | u | 3 |
| 9. Understands at least two dozen words     | u | 2 |
| 10. Understands half a dozen isolated words | u | 1 |
| 11. Does not know the language              | x | 0 |

- S** (bold uppercase) Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker. These individuals have an excellent knowledge of the "old language" and possibly of folklore as well, and they would thus be ideal informants for linguists engaged in fieldwork. Their identification should be done in co-operation with knowledgeable and respected elders in each community, and it requires some amount of consensus among the elders, since the person conducting the sociolinguistic fieldwork is often not in the position to identify these individuals just by interviewing household members in the houses he/she visits, especially if he/she does not know the language in question. (10 points)
- S*** (bold & italic uppercase) Speaks the Native language fluently and prefers it to other languages in most contexts, especially when he/she is communicating with fellow villagers belonging to the same age group. An active speaker. (9 points)
- S** (outlined uppercase) Speaks the ancestral language fluently, but prefers to speak another language or speaks two or more languages fluently and regularly without a clear preference. A passive speaker. (8 points)
- s** (bold lowercase) Speaks some. This would imply that the person would have insignificant flaws in his/her language. There could occur careless or uncertain uses of words, simplifications of grammar, and lexical limitations with numerous unassimilated loan words, perhaps also a slight accent. (7 points)
- s** (outlined lowercase) Speaks a little. This would mean that the person makes serious grammatical errors and has other major flaws in his/her speech, and may only be capable of a limited response in the language in question. Constant code-switching is characteristic of a person belonging to this category. The language is clearly not his/her dominant language, perhaps not even his/her first language. (6 points)
- U** (bold uppercase) Understands the language well, but is not able to speak it, with the exception of perhaps two dozen or so isolated words and expressions. (5 points)
- U** (outlined uppercase) Understands some. This would imply that the person is able to tell what elders are talking about as they are engaged in a freely flowing conversation in the Native language. A person belonging to this category would have a general awareness of what is going on in such a discussion. (4 points)
- u** (bold lowercase) Understands a little. This would imply that the person is able to understand a standard set of questions and commands, e.g. in a classroom setting. People who have had some amount of instruction in their ancestral language and who have showed an interest in learning it should in general belong to this category. (3 points)
- u** (outlined lowercase) Understands at least two dozen or so words in the Native language. (2 points)
- u** (plain lowercase) Does not understand the Native language but knows isolated words, at least 5 or 6 of them. (1 point)
- x** (plain lowercase) Does not understand the Native language, and knows less than 5 words in the language. (0 points)
- [ ] An individual who does not descend from the particular Native people in the territory of which he/she lives.

The advantages of the above system are that it allows the researcher to work comparatively rapidly, and it also allows for considerable detail in the presentation of the results. One has to remember, however, that this system has been developed in a particular setting, and that it may not highlight the problems in circumstances that differ from those found in Alaska. For example, in case of what I would call a "sneaking" language shift, such as is in progress in Finland from Swedish to Finnish, would be difficult to demonstrate with this system.

The actual work is done by visiting every house in the community and recording the necessary information of each member of the households. The basic idea is that the information exists and is in the possession of the villagers, and that the task of the researcher is only to record, systematize and present it, and draw conclusions from it.

It may be said that the languages and villages I chose for study are not the ones that most urgently need attention in Alaska. However, it was beneficial for the evolution of the present method to study villages where I was able to find a wide array of individual cases. This is reflected in the fact that the last details added to the scale were the direct result of the failure of my earlier scale to reflect the effects of instruction of the Native languages in the school. It is my feeling that the present method can now more safely be applied to situations where the language shift is only beginning.

### 3) Background of the present situation

The Unanga<sup>2</sup> people have inhabited the Aleutian Islands between 4,000 and 4,500 years, whereas the linguistic ancestors of the Sugpiat people have reached their present home area about 1,000 years ago [DUMOND 1987: 66, 139]. The period of Russian colonization, which began soon after Vitus Bering and Aleksei Chirikov had reached the American shores from the west in 1741, at first meant some very difficult times for Alaska Natives. However, although the Russians did occasionally treat Alaska Natives quite brutally, they never posed a threat to their languages. During the second half of Russian rule in Alaska (i.e. from 1824 to 1867) Russian clergy, foremost among them Bishop Innokentii Veniaminov, developed orthographies for a number of Alaskan Native languages and published translations of parts of the Bible as well as other works in these languages.

After Alaska was sold to the United States this new territory was neglected by the government until 1884, when the Organic Act made it a district with a civil government. The education of Alaska Natives was likewise neglected until the passage of this act. Now schools were to be established for all Alaskan children irrespective of their race. The actual implementation of education was trusted to protestant missions. They were supervised by the Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson, who was appointed the Commissioner of Education in 1885.

The language of these mission schools was exclusively English. 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 Unangañ 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 both Russian and a Native language, i.e. Unangam tunuu were used in instruction, was forcibly closed by the U.S. government in the Pribylov Islands around 1912, and after that instruction was given to the Natives in exclusively English for the next 60 years. [KRAUSS 1980: 19-24], [MIYAOKA 1980: 174-175], [DAUENHAUER 1982: 2].

The late 1960's began to see a turn for the better. The Bilingual Education Act, which President Lyndon B. Johnson signed in 1968 marked the beginning of the end of the "English-only in American schools" period. From now on it was possible, at least in principle, to provide instruction in languages other than English. Even if the maintenance of the Native languages was not the concern of the legislators, this act was the biggest single factor which changed the attitude of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, an institution which controlled a large segment of Native education in Alaska. Thus a pioneering "bilingual" education program was begun in 1970 in three Yup'ik Eskimo village schools. By 1977 fifteen schools, i.e. roughly half of the schools in the Yup'ik area, were participating in the program. It is important to note, however, that the aim of the BIA has been to turn the Eskimo children into English speakers with the aid of limited primary education in Yugcetun. The BIA has never been concerned with the maintenance of the Yugcetun language. [MIYAOKA 1980: 183-187].

In 1972 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. In 1975 the minimum number of non-English speaking Native children was changed to 8. Although this meant an enormous breakthrough, it must be noted that the BIA was not legally bound by this law. [KRAUSS 1973: 801-802], [MIYAOKA 1980: 188-189]. And for the most part, the damage had already been done. However, in the Unangañ area the village of Atka had been safe from the inundating English language because of its isolated position in the Aleutian Islands, and in Nanwalek the same was true because these villages had lacked a school until the mid 1950's. The local languages in these communities therefore continued to be spoken by everybody, even the youngest children, at least to the 1960's.

When visiting the village of Atka in 1950, Knut Bergsland noted that the dominant language of the village was the local dialect of Unangam tunuu more or less mixed with the Eastern Unangam 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". This meant that even there Unangam tunuu had become seriously endangered. [BERGSLAND 1979: 22-24]. Since no exact information was available for Nikolski from the same time period, all that Michael Krauss was able



to say in 1973 was that Unangam tunuu in Nikolski *possibly* was not moribund [KRAUSS 1973: 804].

For the Sugpiat in Nanwalek and Paluwik the situation was similar. Krauss reported in 1973 [KRAUSS 1973: 828] that many people under twenty in Paluwik 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 published exact data from Nanwalek for the previous year, revealing the truth that no-one under ten was able to speak the Sugtestun language there, and that no children under the age of 5 could understand any of it. "Unless miracles occur, the end of the road is near for the Alutiiq language," wrote Sammallahti in his article. [SAMMALLAHTI 1981: 181-185].

*use these statements in the design plan*

In 1972 so-called bilingual programs were initiated in both Atka and Nanwalek, but there appears to have been 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 Unangam tunuu 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 Unangam tunuu language program in Atka was a successful one, at least judging from Bergsland's 1991 report 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).

*training is the key -*

Since Unangam tunuu 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 Unangam tunuu maintenance percentage there as 17.7, which means that out of the 500 Unangax on the island little less than 90 can speak the language [VAKHTIN 1991: 111]. One of the Atka residents, Simeon Snigaroff, who is one of the youngest fluent speakers of Unangam tunuu in Atka and has visited the Unanga people on Bering Island, told me that those who are able to speak the language on Bering Island are in their 50's and 60's (Simeon Snigaroff, personal communication, July 1994), and later in Anchorage Evgenii Golovko confirmed this (personal communication, August, 1994).

The following table and the information above, with the obvious exceptions in

the three previous paragraphs, was the general information that was available to me concerning the situation of Unangam tunuu and Sugtestun as I prepared myself for field trips in Alaska. The contents of the table below come from Sammallahti [SAMMALLAHTI 1981: 179], and from Krauss [KRAUSS 1992]. The languages are arranged according to their maintenance percentage and viability index.

**Table 2.** Maintenance of the Eskimo-Aleut languages of Alaska (1980 and 1992) and their 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 | %  |      |
| Sivuqaghmiistun | 1 100      | 1 050    | 95 | 1 100      | 1 050    | 95 | a    |
| Yugcetun        | 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 |
| Unangam tunuu   | 2 200      | 700      | 35 | 2 100      | 400      | 19 | b, c |

## 2. FIELDWORK IN THE ALEUTIANS

1) **Atka**<sup>2)</sup> The village of Atka is located about 400 miles west of Unalaska and about 1,100 miles southwest of Anchorage. The distance to Adak, where there has been a U.S. Navy base, up to the present is 90 miles to the west.

Atka Island is one of the islands of the Andreanof group, which was named after Andreian Tolstykh (d. 1766), a fur hunter who was active on the central Aleutians between 1760 and 1764 [PIERCE 1990: 509-510]. When the Russians arrived, it seems that the island of Atka had been deserted for some time due to a volcanic eruption and that at the time it was only in the process of being repopulated. (Douglas Veltre as quoted in [BLACK 1984: 73-74, 87])

A permanent Russian presence on Atka Island began in 1795, and from 1798 on the Russians operated under the name of the Atkha Company, part of the United American Company, which a year or two later became the Russian American Company [TIKHMENEV 1978: 51, 53-55]. The Russian settlement was first located at Korovin Bay, which was named after Ivan Korovin, who hunted in the central Aleutians in 1768-1770 and 1772-1776. Korovin was one of the six Russians who had survived the uprising in the Eastern Aleutians in 1763/1764, which Ivan Solov'ev brutally revenged. [BLACK 1984: 91-92, 98][LAUGHLIN 1980: 125-126]

The Native village in Korovin Bay was located on a mountain slope, and the Russian settlement, which was called Nikol'skoe, was located below it on the shore.



In 1813 and 1823 the Native village was overrun by avalanches. In one instance an avalanche claimed 13 lives. The Native population was also thinned out by epidemics in 1808 and 1863-1864. In the first case there were so many dead that there were not enough men left to bury them. The second epidemic caused 55 deaths. [BLACK 1984: 97-98, 105]

The first priest to be assigned to Atka, Father Iakov Netsvetov himself half Unangaŋ, half Russian and fully bilingual arrived in 1829. He would remain the priest of the Western Aleutians until 1844, when he was transferred to the Yukon. Already two years prior to his arrival in Atka the construction of a church had begun, and at the same time a school was started in the settlement. The following year (1828) an eight-bed hospital began to function in Atka [BLACK 1984: 103][PIERCE 1990: 380-381].

Around 1860 the settlement in Korovin Bay was seriously damaged by an earthquake, and it was moved to Nazan Bay, which was known to be a much safer and more convenient harbor [BLACK 1984: 104]. The exact time of the earthquake and the subsequent moving of the settlement is not known, but in 1861 Tikhmenev [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." The old settlement of Nikol'skoe was later called Old Harbor, or Korovinski.

During the "American" period, it took over 40 years before the government opened a school in Atka. The first teacher, Kathryn Seller, herself an Unangaŋ from Unalaska, was sent to Atka around 1911, and according to her, only two Atkans were able to speak English at that time. Some white Americans were trapping on the Aleutians, including Atka, in the 1910's and the 1920's, but it seems that there were never more than a handful of English speakers at any one time in the Western Aleutians. Then the Great Depression brought the fur business in the Aleutians to an end. [MORGAN (ed.) 1980: 122-129]

World War II was a tragedy for the Atkans, as it was for all of the Unangaŋ people. 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. American seaplanes were sent out from there to bomb the Japanese, who 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 U.S. 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 plan at all, and got the news when they saw the smoke rising from the village, but by that time 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][OLIVER 1988: xvii-xviii][Margaret Lantis in OLIVER 1988: xxix][SMITH & PETRWELLI 1994: 1]

In July 1994 the village of Atka consisted of the village that was built after the war plus a subdivision which was built in 1983. Of the 75 residents, 13 lived in 6 households in the old village, while 59 lived 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 lived in two households across the isthmus on 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 are likewise 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 to the west of the subdivision, and the airport lies a bit further to the west.

Communication with the outside world improved significantly in the 1980's. The first telephone unit had been installed in Atka in 1976; it served the whole community until in 1983 a telephone was provided for every household that wished to have one. Since the late 1950's until 1978 Atka could be reached from Adak only once a month by a Navy tug, 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 now come from Unalaska twice a week. (Field observations) [Moses Dirks in OLIVER 1988: xiii.]

My week of fieldwork in Atka in July 1994 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, it turned out that all of the 13 people living in the old village were fluent speakers, while the families with children all had their houses in the subdivision.

Work proceeded slowly at first, until two of the local young men helped me by telling me who 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 their Unangam tunuu proficiency. When calling I told them that I had been corresponding with Prof. Knut Bergsland of Oslo, the grand old man of Unangam tunuu 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 Unangam tunuu. Most people were then willing to have a chat with me, and data on the rest of the villagers was obtained from friendly neighbors, and the last little bit I received at the airport from Mr.

Dennis Golodoff, the Unangam tunuu instructor at the Atka school. He was returning to Atka on the same plane on which I was leaving, and the survey was completed only a couple minutes before the plane took off again. A year later, that is, in the fall of 1995, I met with Mr. Moses Dirks in Anchorage and reworked the data. At that time I had obtained the 1986 list of residents from *Aleutian Wind* '86, and with help from Mr. Dirks and Mrs. Martha Murray of Unalaska I have been able to put together profiles for Atka for the years 1966 and 1986, as well. Mr. Dirks also provided me with valuable insight concerning the language situation in Atka.

The results of the survey showed that the youngest fluent speaker had been born in 1969, and the youngest active speaker a year earlier. The language of the homes where there were children was mostly English, a phenomenon which seems to have begun in the 1960's. Bergsland [BERGSLAND 1995] mentions as one of the reasons for the language shift in the homes the fact that many Atka men had begun to work in English language environments such as on fishing boats instead of earlier employment on the Pribilof Islands where the work environment consisted mostly of fellow Unanga. But according to Moses Dirks, one of the most decisive factors was the circumstance that youngsters from Atka had been sent outside for high school from the late 1950's on. When they came back, got married and started to have children, the language of their homes was English. Their children thus acquired an insufficient command of Unangam tunuu. In this respect the development in Atka seems to parallel that of Nanwalek.

One may also note that the Atka population has been thinning over the last decades, from 98 in 1966 to 89 in 1986 to 75 in 1994. The relative number of children, i.e. residents under 20 years of age, also seems to have been on the decline, from 57% in 1966 to 37% in 1986 to less than 35% in 1994. With the 1994 population one can not expect too many children in the future either, since among the residents between 20 and 34 years there is only one couple in the village. It thus seems that not only the fate of Unangam tunuu is at stake in Atka, but also the existence of the village itself. It is possible that Atka is now undergoing the same development that Nikolski has experienced from the 1950's on and which I will discuss next.

2) **Nikolski**<sup>3)</sup> The village of Nikolski is located on Umnak Island about 116 miles west of Unalaska and 880 miles southwest of Anchorage. The 1995 population was 26, out of whom eight belonged to the household of the health aide. Just a decade earlier, in 1985, there were still 30 residents in the village, including three high schoolers [*Aleutian Wind* '86].

White man's influence came to Nikolski relatively late. The first school was founded by Mrs. M. Larsen from Unalaska, and the school building was built in 1928-1929<sup>4)</sup>. In 1937 it was replaced by a BIA school. [*Aleutian Wind* '84]. At about the same time the U.S. military started to construct an airfield at what was to become known as Fort Glenn at the other end of the island. The villagers sometimes travelled through the Fort Glenn Air Force base to their village which at



**Table 3.** Atka Spoken Unangan tunuu profiles in 1966 and 1986.

| 1966      |          | 1986       |         | Age group |
|-----------|----------|------------|---------|-----------|
| Age group | Male     | Female     | Male    | Female    |
| 80-       | S        |            |         |           |
| 70-79     | S        |            |         |           |
| 60-69     |          | SS         |         |           |
| 50-59     | SSS      | SSSS       |         |           |
| 40-49     | SSSSSSS  | SS         |         |           |
| 35-39     | SSSS     | SSS        |         |           |
| 30-34     | SSSS     | SS         | S       | S         |
| 25-29     | SS       | SS         | [u]SSSS | S         |
| 20-24     | SSSSS    | uSSSSS     | SSSSS   | SSSSS     |
|           |          |            | S       | [u]       |
| 15-19     | SSSSSSSS | SSSSSSSSS  | SSSSSSS | SSSSS     |
| 10-14     | SSSSSSSS | SSSSSSSSSS | [u]SS   | SSSSu     |
| 5-9       | SSSSSS   | SSSSSS     | [u]SSSS | SS        |
| 0-4       | uSSSS    | suu        | SSS     | S         |
|           |          |            | UUUSSS  | S         |
|           |          |            | U       | ssUUuu    |
|           |          |            | uuUU    | Uuuuuu    |
|           |          |            | u       | Uu        |
|           |          |            | u       | uuuxx     |

**Key to Table 3.** Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated (Y).

|                                            | 1966 | Y  | 1986 | Y  |
|--------------------------------------------|------|----|------|----|
| S = Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker     | 78   | 10 | 34   | 33 |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Sugtestun     | 12   | 5  | 11   | 17 |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English   | 2    | 4  | 8    | 16 |
| s = Speaks with minor flaws, slight accent | 1    | 3  | 1    | 11 |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, grave accent  | 1    | 2  | 2    | 11 |
| U = Understands well                       | 0    | -  | 4    | 9  |
| U = Understands some                       | 0    | -  | 6    | 4  |
| u = Understands a little                   | 2    | 1  | 12   | 2  |
| u = Understands ca. two dozen words        | 0    | -  | 1    | 1  |
| u = Understands at least 5-6 words         | 1    | 0  | 8    | 1  |
| x = Does not understand                    | 0    | -  | 16   | -  |
| [ ] = Non-Unangax                          |      |    |      |    |
| Unangax                                    | 98   |    | 85   |    |
| Non-Unangax                                | 0    |    | 4    |    |
| Total population                           | 98   |    | 89   |    |

**Note.** The lines between the solid lines contain exactly the same absolute age groups, with many of the same individuals.



**Table 4.** Atka Spoken Unangan tunuu profile in 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     | u 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   | S           | 25-29     |
| 20-24     | U U         | S s         | 20-24     |
| 15-19     | u u         | U u u       | 15-19     |
| 10-14     | u U         | U u u u u u | 10-14     |
| 5-9       | u           | U u u u x   | 5-9       |
| 3-4       | x U         | u x         | 3-4       |
| 0-2       | x x U       |             | 0-2       |

**Key to Table 4.** Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated.

|                                                | 1994 | Youngest |
|------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| S = Knowledgeable and eloquent speaker         | 24   | 45       |
| S' = Speaks fluently, prefers Unangam tunuu    | 10   | 28       |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English       | 10   | 24       |
| s = Speaks with difficulty or with minor flaws | 1    | 20       |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, a grave accent    | 0    | —        |
| U = Understands the language well              | 2    | 18       |
| U = Understands some                           | 5    | 9        |
| u = Understands a little                       | 14   | 8        |
| U = Understands ca. two dozen words            | 2    | 2        |
| u = Understands 5-6 words                      | 2    | 3        |
| x = Does not understand                        | 5    |          |
| [ ] = Non-Unangax                              | 0    |          |
| Total population                               | 75   |          |

the time was still known as Umnak Village. It received the name Nikolski in 1957, when a post office came to the village. (Bill Ermeloff, personal communication.)

After the war a long range navigation (Loran) station operated by the Coast Guard was built about 5 miles west of Nikolski in Sandy Beach. The Coast Guard used to come to the village and show movies to the local Unanga and bring them canned beans and brine butter. In the early 1950's the Loran operations were discontinued, but in 1958 the construction of a Distant Early Warning radar station (DEW-line) was begun about a mile away from the village, and at the same time an

air strip was built. The DEW-line in Nikolski stayed in operation until 1973. During that time the Nikolski residents could enjoy movies, dancing and beverages at the radar station. (Bill and Sergie Ermeloff, personal communication.)

The data on Nikolski was collected in late July, 1995. The Unangaꝯ population consisted mostly of elderly people, the younger generations having moved Unalaska, Anchorage and other cities. There were ten active speakers of Unangam tunuu in the village at the time, but the number could shrink to about half of that any time soon, as some of the oldest residents might move to a senior citizen home which is now being built in Unalaska<sup>5</sup>.

It seems unquestionable that a language shift had begun in Nikolski before the population started to thin out. What is not quite clear yet is when the language shift began and what exactly caused it. Berreman's data from 1952 seems to indicate that English had become the language of at least two families at the time, one of them a mixed marriage, and that the younger children were bilingual and the youngest two were learning both Unangam tunuu and English simultaneously. Berreman [BERREMAN 1953: 47] also gives a rather telling account of the role of the BIA teachers in the village:

No school teacher has ever been considered a member of the village. This is because none has stayed long enough nor made a real effort to participate in community affairs, particularly social and economic affairs. Most strikingly, none has accepted Aleut ways, but rather all have tried to live in Nikolski as they did at home and change it to be like home. They have maintained outside interests, contacts, and social relationships to the exclusion of local ones. The most recent teacher condemned or ridiculed nearly all Aleut practices, punished children for using the Aleut language in school, rarely visited the village, and never even learned the names or spelling thereof of some villagers. In other words, teachers have played perfectly the part of white men and so have remained in that status, and in no sense have they been community members.

One must remember, however, that there is one exception to this picture, Jay Ellis Ransom, who taught in Nikolski in 1936-1937 and took the pains of learning Unangam tunuu and even its Cyrillic orthography, and then taught it to the students. Ransom was "the only teacher in the history of the U.S. Indian Office (BIA) who ever did this native language learning, illegally of course... [This] resulted in the Nikolski Aleuts regaining a respect for their native tongue." (Jay Ellis Ransom, personal communication, 1995.)

Taking into account the presence of the Loran station and the activities of the more recent teacher, one may suppose that if the final cause of the language shift was the DEW-line station, at least the ground for a language shift had been laid before it was built in Nikolski.

When looking at the Nikolski 1995 profile I am reminded of what Mr. Lawrence Prokopeuff, the president of the Atꝯam Corporation, said to me on my first day in Atka. 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.

**Table 5.** Nikolski Spoken Unangan tunuu profile in 1995.

| Age group | Male  | Female | Age group |
|-----------|-------|--------|-----------|
| 80-       | S     |        | 80-       |
| 70-79     | SS    | Ss     | 70-79     |
| 60-69     | SS    | S      | 60-69     |
| 50-59     | SSS   | SS     | 50-59     |
| 40-49     | [xx]U | [x]    | 40-49     |
| 35-39     |       | U      | 35-39     |
| 30-34     |       |        | 30-34     |
| 25-29     |       |        | 25-29     |
| 20-24     |       |        | 20-24     |
| 15-19     |       |        | 15-19     |
| 10-14     |       | [xx]   | 10-14     |
| 5-9       | [xx]  |        | 5-9       |
| 3-4       | [x]   |        | 3-4       |
| 0-2       |       | [x]    | 0-2       |

**Key to Table 5.** Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated.

|                                                | 1994 | Youngest |
|------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| S = Knowledgeable and eloquent speaker         | 10   | 52       |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Unangam tunuu     | 0    | —        |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English       | 2    | 57       |
| s = Speaks with difficulty or with minor flaws | 1    | 72       |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, a grave accent    | 0    | —        |
| U = Understands the language well              | 2    | 33       |
| U = Understands some                           | 0    | —        |
| u = Understands a little                       | 0    | —        |
| u = Understands ca. two dozen words            | 0    | —        |
| u = Understands 5-6 words                      | 0    | —        |
| x = Does not understand                        | 9    | —        |
| [ ] = Non-Unangaŋ                              |      |          |
| Unangaŋ                                        | 15   |          |
| Non-Unangaŋ                                    | 9    |          |
| Total population                               | 24   |          |

They don't have a dock, and now it's a dying village." A friend of mine in Anchorage, Dwight Johnson commented on this by saying that not even a dock would have helped Nikolski <sup>6</sup>. 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. Atkam 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-Unanga population, which in the present state of affairs would definitely seal the fate of Unangam tunuu there.

3) Akutan<sup>7)</sup> The village of Akutan is located on an island bearing the same name, about 35 miles east of Unalaska. A sign on the local store wall says: "The Village of Akutan, Alaska, was established in 1878. Aleuts from the surrounding islands of Akun, Avatanak, Rootok and Tigalda moved to Akutan because of the natural harbors, salmon streams and hunting grounds." The fact that Hugh McGlashan established a fur storage and a trading post for the Western Fur and Trading company in the following year [*Aleutian Wind* '86][*Akutan*] might also have contributed to the birth of the village.

White man's influence came to Akutan early in this century in the form of a partly Norwegian owned whaling operation. The station began to operate in 1912 and stayed in operation until 1942, and most Akutan men are said to have worked there. [RENNICK (ed.) 1995: 81], (George McGlashan, personal communication.) In the 1920's and 1930's a sulfur mine was in operation on Akun, the next island to the east, but the venture is said to have been unsuccessful [*Aleutian Wind* '85 & '86]. After World War II crab fishing started in the waters around Akutan. Wakefield Fisheries started its operations in 1947 and ever since then there have been fishing and processing operations going on in the waters around Akutan. Trident Seafoods had floating processors around Akutan until the company built a shore based plant a quarter of a mile away from the village of Akutan in 1980, and today the Trident plant is one of the biggest seafood processors in Alaska, and during peak season it employs about 800 people, most of whom are Filipinos. [RENNICK (ed.) 1995: 82], (George McGlashan and Charles McGlashan, personal communication, July 1995.)

School came to Akutan around 1919 or 1920, judging from a petition that the Akutan people had written to the Commissioner of Education and which is dated September 4, 1919, although a photograph caption on the wall of the Grab-a-Dab, the café of the village, dates the first school to about 1918. Although formal education thus came to Akutan only a few years later than to Atka, the demise of Unangam tunuu must have been very rapid in the years prior to World War II, due to the outside influence in the form of the whaling station, the sulfur mine and the school. Today there are only four fluent speakers of Unangam tunuu in Akutan, and only one of them was born and raised there. The other three have moved to Akutan from Makushin and Kashega, two abandoned villages on Unalaska Island. Akutan illustrates well the general trend in Alaska: wherever the white man came early, there we find the Native languages in a poor condition, irrespective of how early or late the United States school system came to the villages<sup>8)</sup>.

**Table 6.** Akutan Spoken Unangan tunuu profile in 1995.

| Age group | Male       | Female     | Age group |
|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|
| 70-       | SS         | SS         | 70-       |
| 60-69     | ss         | U          | 60-69     |
| 50-59     | [xu]uuU    | UU[ux]     | 50-59     |
| 40-49     | [xx]uUUUUU | UUuu[x]    | 40-49     |
| 35-39     | [uu]uuU    | UUu        | 35-39     |
| 30-34     | [x]uuuuu   | UUUUuu[uu] | 30-34     |
| 25-29     | [u]uuu     | uuu[x]     | 25-29     |
| 20-24     | [x]uu      | u[u]       | 20-24     |
| 15-19     | xu         | uu         | 15-19     |
| 10-14     | xxxxu      | ux         | 10-14     |
| 5-9       | xxxxxuu    | uxxxx      | 5-9       |
| 3-4       |            | xxx        | 3-4       |
| 0-2       |            | xx         | 0-2       |

**Key to Table 6.** Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated.

|                                                   | 1994 | Youngest |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| S = Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker            | 4    | 70       |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Unangam tunuu        | 0    | —        |
| § = Speaks fluently, but prefers to speak English | 0    | —        |
| s = Speaks with difficulty or with minor flaws    | 1    | 68       |
| § = Speaks with major flaws, a grave accent       | 1    | 65       |
| U = Understands the language well                 | 6    | 34       |
| U = Understands some                              | 12   | 31       |
| u = Understands isolated words                    | 40   | 7        |
| x = Does not understand                           | 28   |          |
| [ ] = Non-Unangaŋ                                 |      |          |
| Unangaŋ                                           | 76   |          |
| Non-Unangaŋ                                       | 16   |          |
| Total population                                  | 92   |          |

### 3. FIELDWORK ON SUGTESTUN WITH A NOTE ON YUGCETUN

1) **Nanwalek**<sup>9)</sup> Nanwalek is located in the southern part of the Kenai Peninsula and is accessible by air or skiff from Homer, Seldovia and Paluwik. Distance from Homer is about 30 miles, or about 20 minutes by airplane, 10 miles from Seldovia and 3 miles from neighboring Paluwik. *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 bukhta* was in fact the place



where the village of Paluwik is now located.

In Nanwalek the Russians had a fort called Aleksandrovskii Redoubt, which was established between 1787 and 1791 while Evstratii Delarov was the chief manager of the Shelikhov-Golikov Company in Kodiak [PIERCE 1990: 116] [TIKHMENEV 1978: 25]<sup>10</sup> However, Tikhmenev writes [TIKHMENEV 1978: 174] that already during Governor Murav'ev's time (i.e. 1820-1825) the fort was known to be abandoned. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of the American period the Alaska Commercial Co. had a post at Nanwalek and the history of the community has been more or less continuous since then, only it has been known as English Bay [Aleksandrovsk No. 1: 14]. In 1991 the original Native name Nanwalek was re-adopted by the community. It means 'a place with a lagoon' (from *nanwaq* 'pond, pool, lagoon').

Nanwalek was the first village in which I did sociological fieldwork in Alaska and thus also the place where I had to find out a way to do village surveys. The experience was good and encouraging, partly because I found many people willing to help me, partly because prof. Pekka Sammallahti had given me copies of his 1980 field notes. I taught school during three of the five days I stayed at the village and noted that the younger generation was quite concerned about the fate of their language. In 1993 the main task was to find those who had not been in the village in 1980. When I was at my wits' end, Mrs. Nancy Radtke took me to the store and introduced me to the villagers. And when I was still missing a few more people, she asked her cousin Mr. Kevin Seville to drive me around with his all-terrain-vehicle and help me find the last missing people. During my 1994 and 1995 visits I looked up, little by little, everyone else, too.

The method that evolved was to go to each of the houses and talk to one of the adults in each household. I trusted, as had Sammallahti, 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 can say that the "mistakes" would probably amount to no more than one point on my scale, which should still give quite an adequate picture of what is going on in the village.

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 the Lake and Peninsula School District 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 been asked 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

Quote:  
Kids concerned  
about loss of  
language

Table 7. Nanwalek Spoken Sugtestun profiles in 1980 and 1995.

| 1980      | 1995                 |                                              |           |  |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| Age group | Male   Female        | Male   Female                                | Age group |  |
| 70–       | S                    |                                              |           |  |
| 60–69     | [us]   S             |                                              |           |  |
| 50–59     | SSS   S              |                                              |           |  |
| 40–49     | [x]SSSSS   SSSS      | [u]   S                                      | 70–       |  |
| 35–39     | SSSS   SS            | S                                            | 60–69     |  |
| 30–34     | [x]SS   SSS          | [x]xSSSSSSS   SSs                            | 50–59     |  |
| 25–29     | SSSSSSSS   SSS[u]    | [U]SSSSSSSSS   SSSSSu[u]                     | 40–49     |  |
| 20–24     | sSSS   SSsuu         | SS   SSSsu[u]                                | 35–39     |  |
| 15–19     | uuUUUSSSS   SS       | [uu]uuUUUS   SS[s]U                          | 30–34     |  |
| 10–14     | uUUsS   SSssUuu      | [u]uUUss   SSsuu[u]                          | 25–29     |  |
| 5–9       | uuuuuuU   UUUUUUu    | uuUs   UUUUUUUuu                             | 20–24     |  |
| 0–4       | xuuuuuuuuuu   uuuxxx | uuuuuuUUUUUs   Uuuux                         | 15–19     |  |
|           |                      | uuuuuuuu   uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu             | 10–14     |  |
|           |                      | uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu   uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu | 5–9       |  |
|           |                      | xxxu   uuuuuxx                               | 3–4       |  |
|           |                      | xxxuu   uuxxxxx                              | 0–2       |  |

Key to Table 7. Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated (Y).

|                                            | 1980 | Y  | 1995 | Y  |
|--------------------------------------------|------|----|------|----|
| S = Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker     | 10   | 40 | 4    | 54 |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Sugtestun     | 7    | 33 | 7    | 36 |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English   | 34   | 14 | 24   | 29 |
| s = Speaks with minor flaws, slight accent | 1    | 13 | 1    | 27 |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, grave accent  | 6    | 12 | 7    | 18 |
| U = Understands well                       | 3    | 9  | 3    | 21 |
| U = Understands some                       | 11   | 6  | 19   | 15 |
| u = Understands a little                   | 14   | 4  | 26   | 2  |
| u = Understands ca. two dozen words        | 8    | 2  | 30   | 5  |
| u = Understands at least 5–6 words         | 7    | 2  | 21   | 2  |
| x = Does not understand                    | 6    | –  | 16   | –  |
| [ ] = Non-Sugpiaq                          |      |    |      |    |
| Sugpiaq                                    | 102  |    | 148  |    |
| Non-Sugpiaq                                | 5    |    | 10   |    |
| Total population                           | 107  |    | 158  |    |

know the language at all, and as a consequence made 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.

From the results of my study it appears that the miracle that Pekka



"4  
Last Chance"  
quote

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 generation has been able to acquire 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 "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. Under 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.

**Note.** The 1995 profile was drawn from the 1993 and 1995 field notes. The 1980 profile is an amalgamation of Pekka Sammallahti's field notes with Sally Ash's knowledge of the community. She also checked the 1995 field data. The lines between the solid lines contain the exact same age groups with many of the same individuals. A fairly accurate comparison can therefore be made between the 1980 and 1995 surveys in these age groups. The suggested differentiation between *u*, *u*, and *u* is partially based on an educated guess.

**2) Paluwik<sup>11)</sup>** The village of Paluwik, as was already mentioned, is located about 3 miles east of Nanwalek. As with its neighboring village, access to the village is only by airplane and private boats. The village was founded in 1897 by Russian Orthodox priests, who wanted to consolidate the population in the area. The name of the village, *Paluwik*, 'a place where people are sad' refers to the experiences of the Sugpiat in the newly founded village. [KLEIN 1994: 24][McCLINTOCK 1989]

In the early decades of this century Paluwik attracted many people from the surrounding country due to the fact that a cannery was built in the village in 1911 and started to operate the following year. In 1930 a school was opened in the village [McCLINTOCK 1989]. White man's influence thus came relatively early to Paluwik in the form of employment and a BIA school.

My fieldwork in Paluwik was conducted in early September, 1995. From the results one can infer that a language shift began to take place in the village perhaps in the early 1960's, which means that Paluwik was less than a decade ahead of Nanwalek in this development. This is quite surprising considering the fact that Nanwalek was "spared" the experiences of having a cannery in the village and a school built early during this century.

The villagers seem to put most of the blame for the language loss on the BIA school. "The BIA is what did it!" exclaimed John Moonin, the reader of the local Orthodox church, on my first day in Paluwik. Another local resident described a typical scene in the BIA school as follows: "As soon as we spoke one word, we had to stay after school and write 150 times 'I will not speak my language in the school'." Even physical punishment was not uncommon.

**Table 8.** Paluwik Spoken Sugtestan profile in 1995.

| Age group | Male           | Female       | Age group |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| 80-       | U              | S            | 80-       |
| 70-79     | S              | SSSSS        | 70-79     |
| 60-69     | [xw].SSSSS     | SSSSS        | 60-69     |
| 50-59     | [www]UU.SSSSS  | SSSSSSSS[x]  | 50-59     |
| 40-49     | [www]wUSSSS.SS | SSSSSS[w]    | 40-49     |
| 35-39     | uuUUUUUU.SSS   | SsUUuuuu[wu] | 35-39     |
| 30-34     | wwwUUUU.S      | SUUU[u]      | 30-34     |
| 25-29     | uuUU           | sUU[u]       | 25-29     |
| 20-24     | uuUs           | uw[x]        | 20-24     |
| 15-19     | wwwu           | uuuuuu       | 15-19     |
| 10-14     | wwwuuuuuu      | uuuuuuuu     | 10-14     |
| 5-9       | uuuuuuuuu      | uuuuuuuuu    | 5-9       |
| 3-4       | uuuu           | u            | 3-4       |
| 0-2       | xu             | xx           | 0-2       |

**Key to Table 8.** Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated.

|                                            | 1995 | Youngest |
|--------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| S = Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker     | 12   | 59       |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Sugtestun     | 21   | 43       |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English   | 14   | 32       |
| s = Speaks with minor flaws, slight accent | 6    | 27       |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, grave accent  | 4    | 24       |
| U = Understands well                       | 10   | 33       |
| U = Understands some                       | 13   | 24       |
| u = Understands a little                   | 25   | 6        |
| w = Understands ca. two dozen words        | 39   | 7        |
| u = Understands at least 5-6 words         | 15   | 2        |
| x = Does not understand                    | 6    | -        |
| [ ] = Non-Sugpiaq                          |      |          |

|         |     |
|---------|-----|
| Sugpiaq | 148 |
|---------|-----|

|             |    |
|-------------|----|
| Non-Sugpiaq | 16 |
|-------------|----|

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Total population | 164 |
|------------------|-----|

**Note.** The suggested differentiation between u, w, and u is partially based on an educated guess.

Bilingual education came to Paluwik in the early 1970's and the cannery was closed in 1989 as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in March that year, but the damage had already been done. Today Paluwik has a larger number of fluent



speakers than Nanwalek, but the local bilingual teacher does not have as good a command of the Sugtestun language as her colleague in Nanwalek. This makes the chances for Sugtestun language survival in Paluwik rather meager, though the village leadership is still trying save the language. However, time may be running out in about a decade or so.

**3) Caniqaq**<sup>12)</sup> Old Caniqaq was located on an island bearing the same name on the western side of Prince William Sound. Its location was about 88 miles southeast of Anchorage and 83 miles southwest of Cordova. The old village was completely destroyed by the Good Friday earthquake on March 27, 1964. Only one house and the school remained intact after the quake, and the following *tsunamis* took the lives of 23 villagers—a third of the whole population. The survivors were settled in Taatillaaq, but in time they became scattered in Anchorage, Valdez and Cordova. Some also remained in Taatiillaaq. [RENNICK (ed.) 1993: 56–57, 61]

Judging from my data it seems that through the 1940's children were speaking Sugtestun only in Old Caniqaq, that is, until they went to school. For example, Pete Kompkoff, whose pre-school years date to mid- and late 1940's, says that all he spoke as a child was Sugtestun, and that the same was true of his brother. At the moment it is difficult to say whether the language shift began in Old Caniqaq or whether the present situation is partially a result of the disrupted history of the community—New Caniqaq was established only in 1984, by which time all hope for the restoration of the Sugtestun language there had been lost. If the language shift began in Old Caniqaq, it appears that the principal reason must have been the local school. I am not aware of anything like a cannery or a mine that would have been in operation in Old Caniqaq or in its vicinity, and that would brought a presence of white Americans there.

New Caniqaq is located on Evans Island, less than 15 miles south of the old village. Anchorage is about 100 miles to the northeast and Cordova 85 miles to the northeast. There is at least one scheduled flight to Anchorage each week and three to Cordova. The village is populated by 58 Sugpiat and 5 Non-Sugpiat people (not including the teachers of the school), all of whom I found exceptionally kind and hospitable. Despite the amicable nature of the community, the Sugtestun language appears to be on the verge of extinction there. During the past 12 years, the language has been taught at the school only for two years, and at the present time there is no-one to teach it.

**4) Taatiillaaq**<sup>13)</sup> The village of Taatiillaaq 'Windy Place' is located on the eastern shore of Prince William Sound, on the mainland, 110 miles southeast of Anchorage and 38 miles northwest of Cordova and 25 miles southwest of Valdez. Its original location was about two miles to the north; the present village site was chosen when a copper mine was opened in 1902 at the old location, which is now called Ellamar. The mine was in operation from 1902 to 1929, and was especially prosperous from 1902 to 1906. A cannery was in operation in the old mine buildings later during the years from 1940 to 1954, when a fire destroyed it. [McCLINTOCK 1989.]

From the data I was able to obtain, it appears that in the 1920's children were

**Table 9.** Caniqaq Spoken Sugtestun profile in 1995.

| Age group | Male   Female   | Age group |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| 70-       | S   S           | 70-       |
| 60-69     | s   S           | 60-69     |
| 50-59     | ssSS   SU       | 50-59     |
| 40-49     | uUUU   U[U]uuuu | 40-49     |
| 35-39     | [x]   Uu        | 35-39     |
| 30-34     | [u]uu           | 30-34     |
| 25-29     | uuu   uu[u]     | 25-29     |
| 20-24     | [u]u   uuu      | 20-24     |
| 15-19     | uuu   uu        | 15-19     |
| 10-14     | uuu   u         | 10-14     |
| 5-9       | uuuu   uuux     | 5-9       |
| 3-4       | u   x           | 3-4       |
| 0-2       | xxxxx           | 0-2       |

**Key to Table 9.** Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated.

|                                            | 1995 | Youngest |
|--------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| S = Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker     | 2    | 70       |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Sugtestun     | 1    | 55       |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English   | 3    | 58       |
| s = Speaks with minor flaws, slight accent | 2    | 53       |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, grave accent  | 1    | 66       |
| U = Understands well                       | 1    | 46       |
| U = Understands some                       | 6    | 35       |
| u = Understands a little                   | 3    | 18       |
| u = Understands ca. two dozen words        | 14   | 7        |
| u = Understands at least 5-6 words         | 22   | 3        |
| x = Does not understand                    | 8    | -        |
| [ ] = Non-Sugpiaq                          |      |          |
| Sugpiaq                                    | 58   |          |
| Non-Sugpiaq Alaska Native                  | 3    |          |
| Non-Native                                 | 2    |          |
| Total population                           | 63   |          |

**Note.** The suggested differentiation between u, u, and u is partially based on an educated guess.

still learning Sugtestun as their first language. After that, the language seems to have been on the decline. Taatiillaaq was thus 10-20 years ahead of Caniqaq in its language shift. The above mentioned influences together with the school, which was established as early as 1906 [McCLINTOCK 1989], must have been the main



Table 10. Taatiillaaq Spoken Sugtestun profiles in 1995.

| Age group | Male   | Female     | Age group |
|-----------|--------|------------|-----------|
| 70-       | SSS    |            | 70-       |
| 60-69     | s      | SSss       | 60-69     |
| 50-59     | Uss    | sUu        | 50-59     |
| 40-49u    | uuUUUU | UUu[w]u[u] | 40-49     |
| 35-39     | u      | uuu        | 35-39     |
| 30-34     | [u]uuu | [s]Uuu     | 30-34     |
| 25-29     | uuu    | uuu        | 25-29     |
| 20-24     | [u]uuu | uu         | 20-24     |
| 15-19     | uu     | uuuu[x]    | 15-19     |
| 10-14     | uuuu   | uuuuuu     | 10-14     |
| 5-9       | uuU    | uuuuuuuuuu | 5-9       |
| 3-4       | xuuu   | x          | 3-4       |
| 0-2       | xxu    | xxxx       | 0-2       |

Key to Table 10. Number of individuals in each category, with the age of the youngest representative indicated.

|                                            | 1994 | Youngest |
|--------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| S = Eloquent and knowledgeable speaker     | 2    | 69       |
| S = Speaks fluently, prefers Sugtestun     | 1    | 73       |
| S = Speaks fluently, but prefers English   | 2    | 67       |
| s = Speaks with minor flaws, slight accent | 4    | 56       |
| s = Speaks with major flaws, grave accent  | 3    | [30]     |
| U = Understands well                       | 1    | 50       |
| U = Understands some                       | 9    | 7        |
| u = Understands a little                   | 19   | 9        |
| u = Understands at least two dozen words   | 15   | 6        |
| u = Understands isolated words             | 27   | 2        |
| x = Does not understand                    | 9    | -        |
| [ ] = Non-Sugpiaq                          |      |          |
| Alutiiq                                    | 86   |          |
| Non-Alutiiq                                | 0    |          |
| Alaska Native                              | 4    |          |
| Non-Native                                 | 2    |          |
| Total population                           | 92   |          |

reasons that brought about the shift to English. As in Paluwik, one of the villagers, Mr. Ken Vlasoff named the school as the principal cause for the present situation, a judgement, which most likely carries at least half of the truth. The Sugtestun language is being taught at the school, but chances for success are meager because of the small number of fluent speakers in the village and the fact that the teacher does not belong to them. It is interesting to note, that due to school

instruction the youngsters seem to know more of language than their parents. The same situation was said to obtain in Caniqaq, as well.

**5) Yugcetun.** In late July and early August 1994 I spent about a week in the Yup'ik area where I visited the villages of Kuiggluk, Napaskiaq, Nunapichuar' and Kasigluk. All of these villages were 100% Yugcetun speaking twenty years ago, but now my first impression was alarming. As I was talking to Father Martin Nikolai, 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 Yup'ik 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 Yugcetun I also heard about 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. Six years later she still refused to speak a word of Yugcetun.

In Napaskiaq I was told that there is a language problem mainly in families of mixed marriage, where the language of the home is English. I spent only a few hours in Kasigluk, but I had, nevertheless a chance to speak with the local Yugcetun teacher, Mr. Levi Hooper, who told me that there are problems developing in Kasigluk, too. In all of these three villages I was told that the Yugcetun 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 Yup'ik village, there will be a snowball effect which is very hard to stop, unless the position of the Yugcetun language is strengthened by increasing its prestige, for instance, in the schools.

#### 4. EXPLANATIONS FOR LANGUAGE SHIFT

Based on my experiences in ten villages, and knowing their history, it seems possible to build a hypothesis concerning the reasons for language shifts in Alaska during this century. One can discern three time periods with regard to language shift, and each period seems to have had its own mechanisms that have brought about the shift.

During the first period, from about the beginning of this century (if not from 1884 on), language shifts have been caused by both the school system and a massive intrusion of English speaking people. Language shift in Akutan, Nikolski, and Taatiillaaq seems to have been caused by these factors.

Nanwalek and Atka, the last strongholds of Sugtestun and Unangam tunuu respectively, were safe from the above mentioned influences (save for the school in Atka) until the late 1950's. From about that time the inhabitants of these villages were subjected to an outside influence of another kind, which seems to have



initiated the language shift. The reason why Paluwik was able to resist the influence of the English language for a long time is not clear to me, and neither do I have information concerning the circumstances of village life in Caniqaq before the earthquake of 1964. But for Nanwalek and Atka I attempt to explain the language shift in the following way:

It is evident that the language in the homes in Nanwalek and Atka 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. Although there are domains of language use where English is used almost exclusively, it is the situation in the homes that we should be able to explain.

The first school in Nanwalek was a Russian Orthodox church school that Nicholas Moonin (1878-1972) taught during the first half of this century. In 1952 the BIA hired Sergei Kvasnikoff as "training assistant", whose job was to teach school together with his wife, Juanita. In 1958 the BIA finally built a school building in the village. Children were then taught during the day, and in the evenings night school was offered to those teenagers and adults who were interested in receiving their middle school diplomas. [*Alexandrovsk No. 1*: 18, 21]

Once the school was established, the English-only policy came to Nanwalek, too, but the real blow to the Sugtestun language was dealt by sending youngsters outside the village for high school. Beginning in 1959, teenagers were sent to Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka, to Chemawa, Oregon and as far away as Oklahoma for school. Later, in the 1960's, students from Nanwalek were sent to neighboring Seldovia for high school. For most students the experiences away from home were traumatic, even if they were sent to Seldovia, which is only half an hour's boat ride away from Nanwalek.

At the Seldovia school the Sugpiat children were ridiculed because of their language and the color of their skin, which was much darker than that of the Seldovia children. The teachers also made an effort to keep the Nanwalek children separate from each other, so that they could use their own language as little as possible. These experiences resulted in the fact that the Nanwalek youngsters became somewhat alienated from the use of their own language, and they also wanted to spare their own future children of similar experiences of humiliation. Thus when they got married and began to raise families in the late 1960's and the 1970's, they began to speak English to their children 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:

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<sup>14</sup>. 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.

As mentioned above, older Nanwalek residents first went to evening school in Nanwalek, later they worked their way toward a GED (General Education Diploma, equivalent to a high school diploma). Soon there were few monolingual Sugtestun-only speakers left in Nanwalek. Father Nicholas Moonin, the village patriarch, was one of these, but his influence on the village was not quite what Sammallahiti [SAMMALLAHTI 1981: 184] describes. One of his daughters, Anesia, died in 1975 and was another monolingual Sugtestun speaker. She is mentioned by Sammallahiti as having done 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 babysat only for her own grandchildren. In 1995 there were only two such grandchildren left in Nanwalek who were speakers and who could have learned their Sugtestun from her. Anesia's daughter Nadia, who passed away around Easter 1993, was the last monolingual Sugtestun speaker of Nanwalek. She had no children of her own, but one of her nieces lived with her until she was about 10 years old. At that time the niece was told by a friend about her real parents, and she then decided to move to live with them. This young woman, who was born in 1965, is now the youngest fluent speaker of the Sugtestun language.

When Sugtestun classes finally began in the early 1970's, there were no qualified Native teachers in the village, a situation which still prevails. During the first years, several village members taught the language. The principle was: "You speak, you teach." The result was that sometimes the Native language was taught by individuals who had a very low motivation for the job. When there finally was a permanent teacher, it seems that his teaching methods were a bit too abstract for the children. When Mrs. Sally Ash became the teacher, there seems to have been a turn for the better.

Finally, one must bear 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 the reasons for language shift are 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, the Atka children had to go to high school elsewhere, and beginning from the later 1950's many of them were sent to Mt. Edgecumbe and to Chemawa. In the late

*what is the practical use of the language?*



1960's and during the 1970's Atka children were sent west to Adak for high school, and although the distance from home to school was shorter than earlier, the Atka children were, of course, overwhelmed by English speakers at the Adak Naval Base. It is probable that a message similar to the one in Seldovia went across to the Unanga students in Mt. Edgecumbe, Chemawa and Adak.

Today's Atka is similar to Nanwalek also with respect to the number of monolingual Unangam tunuu speakers, which is 0. Even the oldest person in the village, who was 85 years old in 1994, 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 Unangam tunuu speak English in the city office, and even in the bingo hall all announcements are made in English, even though everybody whom I observed playing were fluent speakers of Unangam tunuu<sup>15</sup>). Among other reasons, there is the fact that subsistence activities, where youngsters could learn more of the language, take place more and more infrequently nowadays.

In addition to 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.

Thus during the second period that I have postulated, language shift was brought about by sending Native children to high school in boarding schools. Of course, children from communities where language shift had already started were also sent to boarding schools, but in their communities it did not have a decisive effect on the language shift.

The third period had its beginnings in the 1960's and culminated on the launching of a state owned satellite, which provided a means for the television to enter the Native villages.

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 to 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. Of course, the issues that resulted in the ANCSA had begun to develop during the 1960's, when they also began to be discussed by the Natives.

The final threat to all Alaska Native languages is posed by the 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 14 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. Michael Krauss is quite right in saying that the battle around the Native languages of Alaska has moved from the classrooms 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 Yup'ik area to learn that the corresponding Jean-Claude van Damme products are totally brainless.

### 5. FUTURE PROSPECTS OF ESKIMO-ALEUT IN ALASKA

The difficulty of the situation in which most of the Eskimo-Aleut languages in Alaska are at the moment is, of course, recognized by many of the 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 [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 it can be seen 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 these elders it would obviously 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 a 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

*learn to listen  
limit English usage*



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 [IUTZI-MITCHELL 1993: 11] has observed.

A summary of all the problems that a Native language teacher in Alaska faces is 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 passage quote above, came up in the workshop of which Leer [LEER 1993] reports. One of the parents in Nanwalek, Mr. Robert Kvasnikoff, had stood up and talked about the possibility to start a Sugtestun-only preschool program. Roy Iutzi-Mitchell [IUTZI-MITCHELL 1992] has also been advocating a similar idea, that of a total language immersion program for such Yup'ik children in Bethel who have not learned the Yugcetun language at home.

So far I have looked at these problems only 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, irrespective of whether it forms 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. What should be attempted is to turn the students into civilized speakers of the Native languages instead of civilized speakers of the English language. 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. It is not much better than having them exterminated in the way once propagated during Sheldon Jackson's time.

Total immersion of the students in the Native languages is, in my opinion, the

*what is the  
goal of the  
total education  
program*

only possible solution to the problems that the Native languages in Alaska face 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 Unangam tunuu, which are very close to the point of no return, but also for Yugcetun and Sivuqaghmiistun, which are being pushed aside by the English language in all spheres of life. My experiences in the Yup'ik villages were enough to convince me of this.

Both the Sugpiat and the Unangaŋ have suffered from most of the calamities and afrocities that Wurm (in this volume) mentions. They have suffered from European exploitation and the diseases the Europeans brought with them, disruption of their culture by the White Man, oppressive and racist educational policies and, in the case of the Unangaŋ, 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 Unangaŋ and Sugpiat children still speaking their native language 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 even the last strongholds of these languages, Nanwalek for Sugtestun and Atka for Unangam tunuu, 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 [SAMMALLAHTI 1981: 199-200] outlined, and which Kaplan [KAPLAN 1990: 157-158] and Wurm (in this volume) also quote, has not been taken heed of in Alaska. For the Sugpiat and the Unangaŋ 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 Paluwik schools, so that the Native languages there could have the best possible support from the educational system. This would also signal to the speech communities concerned the fact that their languages are an important and valuable component of the Alaskan linguistic and cultural heritage and landscape. If, on the other hand, nothing is done, the Unangax and Sugpiat people will simply be forced to think that, no matter whether their languages continue to live or not, it does not really make much difference.

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### NOTES

- 1) The indigenous names of the Eskaleut peoples and languages in Alaska are the following:

| Ethnonym (sg.)      | Ethnonym (pl.)      | Language                               |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <i>Unangaʔ</i>      | <i>Unangas</i>      | <i>Unangam tunuu</i> (Western dialect) |
| <i>Unangaʔ</i>      | <i>Unangan</i>      | <i>Unangam tunuu</i> (Eastern Dialect) |
| <i>Sugpiaq</i>      | <i>Sugpiat</i>      | <i>Sugtestun</i>                       |
| <i>Yup'ik</i>       | <i>Yupiit</i>       | <i>Yugcetun</i>                        |
| <i>Sivuqaghmiit</i> | <i>Sivuqaghmiit</i> | <i>Sivuqaghmiistun</i>                 |
| <i>Inupiaq</i>      | <i>Inupiat</i>      | <i>Inupiatun</i>                       |

One particular problem in naming the Eskimo languages is that there is no expression that would denote just the language itself. All the expressions ending with *-tun*, e.g. *Yugcetun*, mean something like 'in the Yup'ik way'. One can therefore speak or sing or dance *Yugcetun*. Furthermore, it is commonly thought that expressions like *Yup'ik*, *Inupiaq* and *Sugpiaq* mean 'real people', as if other people weren't really human beings. In reality these expressions mean something like 'typical, prototypical or regular people'. I am indebted to Roy Iutzi-Mitchell for insight concerning these terms.

- 2) In Atka I received kind help from Messrs. Simeon Snigaroff, Andrew Zaachney and Alan Zaachney. Mr. Dennis Golodoff ensured the completeness of my data, which was later checked and expanded in Anchorage by Mr. Moses Dirks.
- 3) In Nikolski I was kindly provided accommodation by Mr. Sergie Ermeloff, while his parents Bill and Mae Ermeloff took care of me in other respects. With regard to my research, Mrs. Agrafina Kerr provided very valuable assistance.
- 4) Berreman [BERREMAN 1953: 22-23] says that the first school in Nikolski was established by Frank Cassel in 1922.
- 5) Since my visit to Nikolski two Unangan men, both fluent speakers, have passed away, which leaves the number of the local Unangan at 13 out of whom 11 can speak the language. A teacher with three children has moved in, so that the white population now consists of 12 white Americans and one Finn. (Bill Ermeloff via Irene Reed, p.c., March, 1997).
- 6) Although a white American and residing in Anchorage, Mr. Dwight Johnson has had close ties with Nikolski for about three decades.
- 7) In Akutan I was kindly given accommodation by Mr. Nikolai Borenin and his wife, Mrs. Marie Borenin. I am also grateful to the whole community for superb co-operation

during my stay at the village.

- 8) As can be seen from the profile and its key, I had not arrived at some of the distinctions in my language proficiency scale when I was in Akutan in late July to early August 1995. The fact that Unangam tunuu had recently been taught for two years in the local school thus is unfortunately not reflected in the profile.
- 9) The Nanwalek survey would not have been possible without the help and expertise of Mrs. Sally Ash. In 1993 Mrs. Nancy Radtke and Mr. Kevin Seville also gave decisive help by making sure everyone was included in the survey.
- 10) Some works, e.g. *Aleksandrovska No. 1*, state that the Aleksandrovska fort was established in 1785 and give the credit to Grigorii Shelikhov. However, this is rather unlikely.
- 11) Paluwik is better known as Port Graham, by which name it appears on the map. In Paluwik the chief, Mrs. Elenore McMullen kindly gave me permission for research and accommodated me in the village council apartment. Ms. Pat Brauer gave decisive help in my research, while Mrs. Feona Sawden, Mrs. Lydia Robart and Mrs. Becky Norman helped me by checking and enhancing my data.
- 12) On the maps the name of the old village is Chenega, while the new village appears as Chenega Bay. In Caniqaq the president of the school board, Mr. Peter Selanoff provided accommodation for me at the old school annex. I am also deeply obliged to Mike and Doreen Eleshansky and to their daughter Cheryl and her husband Doug Bruck. They kept me well fed and also invited me to their steam bath during the six days of my stay in Caniqaq.
- 13) On the maps the name is spelled Tatitlek. In Taatiillaaq the chief, Mr. Gary Kompkoff, kindly gave me permission for this study. The principal of the school, Mr. Dennis Moore, provided me with accommodation and nourishment at the school, while Mr. Ed Gregorieff and Mrs. Karen Katelnikoff provided invaluable help with the research. I also enjoyed the hospitality of several villagers, among them Mr. and Mrs. Hayes Jackson, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Kompkoff and Mr. Mike Totemoff.
- 14) This refers to shopping trips to the nearby city of Homer.
- 15) The language of the bingo hall in Kuiggluk, a Yup'ik village on the Kuskokwim River, where the local Eskimo language is still strong, seemed to be the same: all announcements were made in English. It seems therefore, that bingo playing in Atka is very similar to bingo playing in other Native villages in Alaska.

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## APPENDIX 1.

## Scale for the Degree of Linguistic Viability:

The following is a proposal concerning the definition of the degree of viability for a given language in a given community (or the whole linguistic community). The basis of the proposal is the division of the population into the following macrogroups, following mainly the age groups in Michael Krauss (1992). The symbols of viability and the macrogroups that they refer to are as follows, with corresponding subgroups as in my linguistic profiles:

| Symbol  | Macrogroup | Subgroups                         |
|---------|------------|-----------------------------------|
| $a_1 >$ | 0- 9       | 0-2, 3-4, 5-9                     |
| $a_2 >$ | 10-19      | 10-14, 15-19                      |
| $b >$   | 20-49      | 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-49 |
| $c >$   | 50-69      | 50-59, 60-69                      |
| $d >$   | over 70    | 70-79, 80-89, etc.                |

**Definition:** Viability of a given language L in a given community is

- $a_1 =_{\text{def}}$  if the average language proficiency of language L for age group 5-9 is at least 8.5 *and* children below age 5 are appropriately learning the language as their first language.<sup>note)</sup>
- $a_2 =_{\text{def}}$  if in at least one subgroup the average language proficiency of language L is at least 7.5, or if in at least one subgroup the language proficiency of 3/4 the individuals is at least 8, but in macrogroup  $a_1$  the proficiency is less than in the definition above.
- $b =_{\text{def}}$  if in at least one subgroup the average language proficiency of language L is at least 7.5, or if in at least one subgroup the language proficiency of 3/4 the individuals is at least 8, but in macrogroups  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  the proficiency is less than in the definitions above.
- $c =_{\text{def}}$  if in at least one subgroup the average language proficiency of language L is at least 7.5, or if in at least one subgroup the language proficiency of 3/4 the individuals is at least 8, but in macrogroups  $a_1$ ,  $a_2$  and  $b$  the proficiency is less than in the definitions above.
- $d =_{\text{def}}$  if in macrogroups  $a_1$ ,  $a_2$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  language proficiency of language L is less than in the definitions above, but there is at least one individual in macrogroup  $d$  whose language proficiency is at least 7.
- $e_{\text{tr}} =_{\text{def}}$  if there are no individuals left at all whose language proficiency of language L would be at least 7, but there are still individuals whose language proficiency of language L is 5 or 6. The language is in a transitional state, on the way towards final extinction.
- $e_f =_{\text{def}}$  if there are no individuals left whose language proficiency would be at least 5. The language is irreversibly extinct.

The viability of a given language may be given with a single symbol, in which case the viability of the language is its viability in the most viable community. Or the viability may be given as a continuum from one level to another e.g. b-c, or d-e<sub>tr</sub>. It is advisable to restrict the viability e<sub>r</sub> (irreversibly extinct) to cases where the whole language has become extinct, and not include it as the other end of a continuum, even if this would be the logical thing to do.

Note: What exactly constitutes age-appropriate language learning is a matter of some controversy, but I would tentatively propose the following levels to be appropriate:

5-9 years: *S* (9 points): all of the grammar is mastered, vocabulary still developing.

4 years: *s* (7 points): most of the grammar has been learned, but some aspects imperfectly.

3 years: *§* (6 points): the child understands quite well, and is able to produce complete sentences.

2 years: *u* (3 points): the child understands what the parent wants him/her to do.

1 year: *u* (2 points): the child understands a wide variety of expressions.

## APPENDIX 2.

### Exact or estimated viability of Unangam tunuu in Unanga settlements:

| Community  | Population | Viability | Exactness | Source                                                                             |
|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nikol'skoe | ca. 500    | c         | Estimate  | [VAKHTIN 1991], Evgenii Golovko and Simeon Snigaroff (personal communication 1994) |
| Atka       | 75         | b         | Exact     | Field observations 1994-95                                                         |
| Nikolski   | 15         | c         | Exact     | Field observations 1994-95                                                         |
| Unalaska   | 200        | d         | Exact     | Field observations 1994-95                                                         |
| Akutan     | 76         | d         | Exact     | Field observations 1994-95                                                         |
| False Pass | 50         | d         | Estimate  | [BERGLAND 1995]                                                                    |
| King Cove  | 174        | d         | Estimate  | [BERGLAND 1995]                                                                    |
| Sand Point | 350        | d         | Estimate  | [BERGLAND 1995]                                                                    |
| St. Paul   | 510        | c         | Estimate  | [BERGLAND 1995]                                                                    |
| St. George | 150        | c         | Estimate  | [BERGLAND 1995]                                                                    |

### Viability of Sugtestun in Cugacirmiut communities:

| Community   | Population | Viability | Exactness | Source                  |
|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Nanwalek    | 148        | b         | Exact     | Field observations 1995 |
| Paluwik     | 148        | c         | Exact     | Field observations 1995 |
| Canigaq     | 58         | d         | Exact     | Field observations 1995 |
| Taatiillaaq | 86         | d         | Exact     | Field observations 1995 |