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Inuit Language

Carl Christian Olsen  
Greenland and Inuit Circumpolar Council

Inuit language comprises two main groups: the western Inuit group and eastern Inuit group. Western Inuit group comprises Chukotka, Southwest Alaska, and Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island. The Eastern spreads from Norton Sound through North Alaskan coastline in the north, including inland areas in Kobuk and Anaktuwuk Pass; northern Canada from Mackenzie delta to include the current land claims settlements areas of Inuvialuit in the Mackenzie Delta and Holman Island, the Nunavut Territory, Nunavik in Northern Québec and Nunatsiavut in Labrador; and Greenland.

The current area populated by Inuit comprises the areas of four nation-states: Russian Federation, United States of America, Canada and Kingdom of Denmark. Within in those areas there are since the 1970-s established self-government and land claims agreements in: Alaska, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Inuvialuit Settlement Agreement in Mackenzie Delta area, Nunavik in Northern Québec and James Bay Agreement, Nunavut Territory and Nunatsiavut Land Claims and Self-government Agreement in Labrador, and Greenland Home Rule. The self-government areas relate directly to the nation-states in which they are attached: United States, Russia, Canada and Denmark and they follow the legislative procedures in those nation-states.

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is an international indigenous people's organization with NGO status at the ECOSOC which represent Inuit in all four nation-states. ICC estimates the whole population of Inuit to be over 160.000. This comprises Inuit in the traditional Inuit settlements and homelands, as well as Inuit settled in urban areas of these four nation-states: Anchorage, Seattle, and Ottawa. Montréal, Denmark (the last survey indicates that there are 18.000 Inuit in Denmark spread over three generations).

Despite the geographical spreading the Inuit culture and language are very uniform both in the cultural base and in the linguistic similarities. The basic vocabulary and the basic grammatical structure is the same. Independent local developments and adaptations to environment have taken place, but the striking reality is that oral traditions and the material culture as well as technological approaches are basically the same. Part from few areas with inland habitations Inuit culture is mostly maritime culture and the archeological evidence also shows that most of the Arctic coastline have been inhabited by the Inuit. During the 6000 to 4.500 years of evidence there have been some adaptations to the shifting environmental situations which in the historical perspective could be characterized as nuances

The cultural changes as part of the influx from outside took place during the European contacts in various periods. The Norse settlement period at around year 1000 A.D.; the whaling period from 1500 and on; and the permanent settlement beginning from 1720s and on, in Greenland, in Labrador, in the Canadian North in Alaska from 1740s and in Chukotka from 1890s especially. In those years trends of permanently fixed settlements began to find place, and trade relations with the Europeans started to be continued by the trend of the missionaries of different denominations; Lutheran, orthodox, Anglican, Moravian, Catholic and others later.

At the same time period other cultural innovative trends also found place in the Arctic. Along with the new religion literacy was gradually introduced. Every denomination introduced at the beginning their own orthographical version of the new Bible. No wonder now that mutual readability of different groups of Inuit language is difficult without linguistic sophistication, even though the concept is readily intelligible.

Some groups of introduced also otlanguage: The art of printing books and teaching other subjects other than the Bible. This took place relating back to the European literary trend of romanticism and introduction of democratic conduct during the period from 1840 to 1860s. This is especially interesting in the context of Greenland Inuit who at the same period also got introduced catechists education, which later was developed to be renamed to teachers' college in Nuuk, Greenland. Some of the presentations were tales and oral traditions of the Inuit of Greenland in script. Later the whole Bible was also translated into Greenlandic.

Greenland Inuit have now institutions of higher education due to the literary tradition established in 1860s along with the orthography which was the standard until 1970s along with development of standard usage of language in script still respecting dialectal variations in the spoken language.

Greenlandic language developed literary traditions in educational materials, in cultural traditions, translations of literary works from other languages, poetry, written novels and music traditions. We have now translations of Jules Verne, Laxness, H.C.Andersen, Ibsen, Runeberg, Camus, Sartre, Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Stefan Zweig and many others. The new trends in Greenlandic literature includes rap in Greenlandic.

Along with the introduction of literature and literacy, gradual participation in democratic process was introduced. At the beginning the conduct was done in oral translations, but later developed to be a translation of the law in Greenlandic Inuit language.

### **Law in Inuit language**

When you look at the Inuit democratic participation there are two instances that could be used as indicators for the active participation: the language and the procedures for implementing the law.

In Chukotka there is no evidence of law being written in the yup'ik language and therefore is introduced to Inuit in oral translation. Despite that there is active participation ever since the Soviet period in the democratic decision making. Today indigenous people's organizations are registered as non-governmental organizations in Chukotka, two of them being Inuit organizations: ICC Chukotka and yup'ik association.

Alaskan Inuit have tradition for participation in the legislative positions and in the indigenous organizations. The law was practiced in English and oral translation was delivered in instances of necessity. The land claims process was initiated from the North Alaskan Inuit in collaboration with other indigenous groups in Alaska. North Slope

Borough and Northwest Arctic Borough are some of the examples of democratic participating on the state level. The presiding chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council is from Alaska.

In Canada the situation varies from one land claims settlement area to another, depending on what kind of ruling tradition there has been. In Nunavik the Kativik School Board and Health initiatives and Makivik Corporation process has developed a process of involving Inuit in the legislative procedures and corporate traditions so that there is an on-going dialogue with the national authorities. Similar tradition is being developed in Inuvialuit settlement area, Nunavut Territory and in Nunatsiavut settlement and self-government area. In fact Nunavut is planning to make Inuit language to be the language of law and legislative procedures in a period of twenty years.

Greenland had the tradition of translated law texts for decades. Through the introduction of Greenland Home Rule the proceeding of Greenland Parliament is in Greenlandic. The law within Greenland administration is decided upon in the Greenlandic version. It is also the Greenlandic version which is used in the cases of interpretation of the law. Greenland Home Rule Charter says that Greenlandic is the main language in Greenland, Danish should be taught on thoroughly and both languages can be used in the administrative practices. In the administrative practices Danish is still predominant. Danish speaking personnel is not available or as long as the administration and the political will it decides to use Greenlandic as the language of the procedures and proceedings. Greenland is now heading for an extension of the self-government, and the signal says that Greenlandic will be the main language, Danish the first supplementary language, and English the second supplementary language. What the language will be on the further education and research is not yet decided upon.

### **Education**

At the early stages of European contact or colonization the intention of the education has been to introduce the Bible in the indigenous languages, translate it into their language and teach on it as the only language. This true for the majority of the experience of the Inuit with the Bible and the literacy attached to it. Every denomination in the Arctic had their own orthographical version of the Bible even though there are great similarities of the Inuit language groups and the mutual intelligibility is extensive. To this the Inuit in Chukotka have the unique experience that they never had on-going missionaries' experience in the Biblical sense. Until the Russian Revolution there was never a mission station in that area staying for a longer period. This practice changed in Greenland in the 1950s when there was separation of the church and education in Greenland. The same happened in Canada in 1950s when Canada for the first time introduced public education different from that of the mission stations. Alaska has had the same experiences with the missionary education and also with the educational policy saying that languages other than the English shall be taught until 1971. This might be part of the explanation for the risk of linguisticide as after effects of this policy.

At the present day all educational avenues are open for the Inuit, mostly in the national languages. It would be a challenge to see whether there is a will to implement Inuit

spoken educational policies in the Inuit areas. The challenge will also be on the side of Greenland which had signaled that Greenlandic will be language of self-governing Greenland, and that challenge includes the higher education and research in the future. Another challenge might be what the language of administration will be in Greenland and in Nunavut since both had the will for language planning.

### **The challenges for the indigenous peoples on treating their languages**

The first challenge for us as the indigenous peoples is to implement the right to use our languages. A language not used in the daily life is in jeopardy. Whether you are in the urban areas or in the bush the indigenous peoples have the right to use their language and any obstruction of that in the societal context will be a violation of this right. Furthermore indigenous peoples promote the use of their language and culture not only as the language of the home but also as the language of the indigenous community. It should be “in” to use the language all the way through from kindergarten level institutions.

It should be possible to develop a language of the political administration in indigenous languages. Religious groups have shown those extensive projects are possible to achieve through their development of orthographies and their translations.

For the indigenous peoples it is also a challenge to have intergenerational dialogue to realize that language is always a dynamic process which changes and adapts to the new circumstances, and for the youth to understand the interaction of knowledge bases is a necessity as a means for the linguistic survival strategy. It is further a challenge for the indigenous peoples to educate the world outside the indigenous one to understand the languages of the indigenous peoples are applicable not only for the cultures of the indigenous peoples but can adapt to express the current situation whether you are in the urban or in the indigenous homeland areas and their knowledge base areas. The realization of the modern society situation of the indigenous peoples is a challenging process for the national authorities.

### **Development of language policy**

The concept of language policy has until few years ago been connected with policy of education and training and tend to be limited to that. It might be narrow-minded to attach the language policy only to the one of education. Even though education embraces enormous mass of resources there are some distinctive features of language policy which have crucial impacts on the members of the community. It might be the nerve of the community which is touched upon when trying to apply language policies. It challenges you to be part of taking the responsibility to develop the cultural base in the current setting. You will have to revisit your own educational and cultural setting to take part in your own identity. This will then affect the process in the rest of the community and the partnership of this community.

Language policies have to be developed in the spirit of collaboration and in compliance with the principles of the human rights and fundamental freedoms. The role of the individual and the collective rights are parts of the challenge in developing the policies for the languages. The applicability of the policy will be another challenge. It might be applicable for the indigenous peoples in their own community – and what it does not apply for the outside for and has no relevance for it.

The talk of the globalization is another challenge for the development of the language policy for the indigenous peoples. Several peoples – including some indigenous peoples - tend to think that in order to achieve globalized situation the prize will be your own indigenous identity. Another view of this might emphasize that compounding your identity through the globalization will benefit the rest of your community instead of being part of the brain drain through it.

Practical applicabilities of language policy might have to include whether there is a need for standardized usage of the language in question or whether it might be limited to oral usage. In being aware of the orthographies are developed for special purposes it might be a relevant question to ask whether the orthographies might be revised for updated versions. In this context it is important to note that orthographies by many are valued the same as markers for the identity as are the flags for the nations. Financial consequences of this should also be part of the considerations.

It should be emphasized that all languages can technically be included in the computational linguistics or in the computer assisted linguistics research and apply technical appliances to ease the usability of servicing the particular languages. For some it might be a quest for serious consideration. Promotion of the usage of the language could be improved and readily available tools could be developed in this context but the community itself has to take a stand on this question.

### **Language committee**

Greenland has together with the Nordic languages an experience with language committee appointed by the parliament or by the government. In principle this committee should be partly responsible to counteract the risk of linguistic by alleviating ways to follow the dynamics of the language. The committee works together governmental institutions to develop normative or a standardized usage of the language in the contexts of education, communication and legislation.

By following the dynamics of the language the committee develops new terminologies in the gains of domain of the language. In order for the committee not to be a local initiative only the decisions of the committee cannot be changed by political bodies. Similar arrangements are also used for geographical names and personal names. The committee is usually used as advisor in some specific task relating to language policy. In cases of ambiguous understanding the attitudes of the committee are implemented.