

**A Decade of Language Revitalization:
Kodiak Alutiiq on the Brink of Revolution**

by

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Abstract

This article provides an overview and history of Kodiak Alutiiq language revitalization, beginning with status and speaker numbers and a brief history of community-based projects. It details the collaborative efforts of community individuals, organizations, and tribes to drag the Alutiiq language back from the brink of extinction. These efforts have been marked by numerous difficulties – dependence on grant funds, overstretching of human capacity, and concerns over strategy and direction. They have also set a standard for commitment to cooperation, even in the most difficult of contexts, which has enabled the community to continue working toward language survival even in “homogenizing times”(McCarty, 2003).

A Decade of Language Revitalization: Kodiak Alutiiq on the Brink of Revolution

The Alutiiq community of Kodiak, Alaska came together recently to mourn the passing of an honored fluent Elder. Dennis Knagin, born in 1930 in Afognak Village was a lifelong fisherman, community leader, and family man. He was asked frequently to share his traditional knowledge, and served as a language Master and consultant, as well as a teacher and storyteller for a number of Native and tribal projects in recent decades. His humor and wit in his storytelling and everyday life was unforgettable. As one of the fortunate people to have learned from Dennis over the past decade I received numerous comments about the tragedy of losing another speaker, particularly a speaker of the particularly-rare Northern Kodiak style of Alutiiq speech.

As I stood holding my candle during the Russian Orthodox service honoring Dennis's life I thought to myself, the significance of his loss is not about him being a fluent speaker. Of course, as a speaker of Alutiiq, his passing is that much more of a strike against the survival of our language. His true significance to the community, however, was not that he could speak, but was his relationships, presence, and personality. It is the seat Dennis occupied at Alutiiq Language Club just months ago that will never be adequately filled. It is these non-quantifiable measures that have been important to those of us who knew him as a family member, teacher, and friend.

The role of language in a community is not in the speaking of it, just as language revitalization is about more than just the language itself (Amery, 2001; Baldauf, 2006). Our shared language's role is in what it enables – the teaching of traditions, the sustenance of family life, and the perpetuation of the Native community as a separate, surviving culture within the larger Alaskan and American society (Counciller, 2010; Fishman, 1991; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). Crossing Dennis off the list of remaining fluent speakers reduces his contribution to the community into a number. Attributing language status simply to a quantity, percentage, or formula of “intergenerational disruption” limits our understanding of the function language and speakers play in threatened language communities (Fishman, 1991). It is true that decreasing percentages and numbers of speakers, as well as societal contexts of language use are symptoms of language shift, but the experiences of language communities, families, and individuals cannot be abridged. While we learners treasure our Elders, they also appreciate their relationships with the younger generations of community members who work with them.

We learners, our Elders remind us, are the living bridges between them and the future generations of speakers that today's efforts will reach. We allow them to extend the horizon of their contributions to the children who may not even be born yet, but whom they envision will freely speak the words imparted to today's learners. Our Elders believe that learners are the intermediaries between their own knowledge and that of future generations, just as learners express the value of Elders for providing a living connection to the language and knowledge systems of our ancestors (Counciller, 2010; Kawagley, 1995).

The significance of multi-generational relationships in the Alutiiq community was highlighted at Dennis's repast. Waiting for others to arrive from the funeral, I sat next to a distant cousin, Patty Mullan, who talked about why our relationships in the Alutiiq community are so powerful. These relationships are important even when we have known each other as individuals for a relatively short time. He said, "We may have known each other for a few decades, but our parents knew each other in Karluk, and our grandparents were friends in Afognak. When you think about it, we have really known each other for hundreds of years!" His comment helped me understand how our relationships are integral to our survival as a distinct group within the larger society (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). The relationship between fluent Elders and adult learners in Alutiiq language revitalization is more than collaborative – it is symbiotic. Without each other, there is no need to sponsor events, to create new words, or teach what we have learned to schoolchildren. It is in the relationships we maintain with each other that we base our desire to communicate in our heritage language, and upon which we form our Native identity. Without each other, we have no need to speak at all.

A couple of years ago as I asked Dennis about the future of the language movement, he reminded me that his time on Earth, like all of ours, is limited. He told me "You guys are going to have to be the Elders here, pretty soon." At that time I hoped that the moment he predicted would be many years off. As he knew, however, I would not get much time to prepare myself for the changes to come. While I will not be an Elder for many years, I and other semi-fluent speakers are being called on to fulfill a leadership role in the community that is slowly being vacated by the loss of our first language fluent speakers. These learners and myself, unprepared as we might feel, are becoming surrogates for others who wish to reconnect with their heritage language, who do not have easy access within their families to fluent Elder speakers.

Today, in the spring of 2012, the Alutiiq language revitalization community finds itself at the cusp of revolution. While this may seem hyperbolic, recent months have truly indicated that we are at a make-or-break moment in Alutiiq language revitalization. Some of the key Elders who guided the first years of the effort have passed away, and a small handful of learners have reached a level of fluency that establishes the program for the next stage of revitalization activities – efforts that were not possible or even understood a couple of years ago. A growing sense of urgency by these advanced learners has spurred new explorations and anticipation that major change is imminent.

This article provides a snapshot of Kodiak Alutiiq language revitalization, beginning with “quantifiable sociolinguistic variables,” and a brief history of community-based projects (Dwyer, 2011). It details the collaborative efforts of community individuals, organizations, and tribes to drag the Alutiiq language back from the brink of extinction. These efforts have been marked by numerous difficulties – dependence on grant funds, over-stretching of human capacity, and concerns over dialect survival and control. They have also set a standard for commitment to cooperation, even in the most difficult of contexts, which has enabled the community to continue working toward language survival and linguistic/cultural self-determination even in “homogenizing times” (Brayboy, 2006; McCarty, 2003).

Kodiak Language Status

The Alutiiq (also known as Sugpiaq) language is an Eskimo-Aleut language most closely related to Central Yup’ik. It is spoken in Southern Alaska, ranging from the Alaska Peninsula in the West, across Kodiak Island, the lower Kenai Peninsula eastward to Prince William Sound (See Fig. 1). There are two major dialects of Alutiiq. Chugach Alutiiq is spoken on the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound, while Koniag Alutiiq is spoken on the Kodiak Archipelago and the Alaska Peninsula. Kodiak Alutiiq as referred to in this article falls within the Koniag Dialect, and is a subdialect spoken on the Kodiak Archipelago.

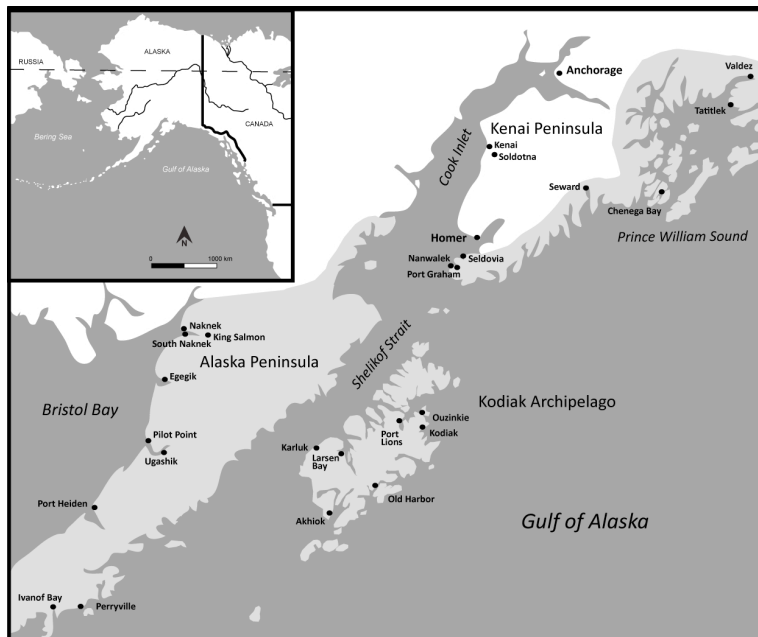


Figure 1: Alutiiq Culture Area, Courtesy Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository, 2012

Summaries or stages of our language status provide a measure but not a sense of language loss. Put bluntly, the status of the Alutiiq language dialect is dire. The Kodiak

Island Alutiiq language is in a stage of severe decline – stage 8 on the GIDS scale (Fishman, 1991). Simultaneously, we are over a decade deep in a concerted collaborative community language revitalization effort. Shrinking speaker numbers and limited arenas of use belie a number of recent accomplishments and unrelenting hope for revitalization in our community.

The exact number of Alutiiq speakers is unknown and virtually immeasurable. As language ability falls on a scale of fluency ranging from novice to advanced or superior ability, it can vary within one person when measuring understanding versus speaking skills (ACTFL, 2012). This makes it difficult to determine a “cut off” line above which the speakers are considered “fluent.” New speakers who have not reached advanced fluency or did not learn their Native language as a first language are often left out of speaker numbers. Therefore, these numbers have limited usefulness besides providing academic shorthand or to heighten the urgency in pleas for grant funding.

Generally, fluent speaker counts only identify those with advanced or higher language ability according to the ACTFL standard (ACTFL, 2012). In threatened languages where no standard method of fluency assessment exists, scholars must sometimes use social rather than scientific tools to measure speaker numbers – such as counting people who are named by other known fluent speakers. The Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository in Kodiak has used phone and small group Elder polling to develop a fluent speakers list that is added to if existing speakers are identified, and updated when a known fluent speaker passes away.

The *Native Peoples and Languages* map, produced in 1982 by the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), identified 900 Alutiiq speakers throughout the entire Alutiiq region of Southcentral Alaska (Krauss, 1982). By 1994, the number of speakers had dropped by half (Krauss, 1994). A 2003 survey only on Kodiak Island identified only 45 semi or fully fluent speakers residing on the archipelago (Hegna, 2004). Later surveys identified additional Elder speakers living outside of Kodiak, in places like Anchorage, Wasilla, and Washington state. Due to the regular passing of fluent speakers, whose ages average in the mid 70s, estimates of speaker numbers have been difficult to obtain and are often inaccurate.

As of Spring 2012, estimated current fluent speakers of the Kodiak Alutiiq sub-dialect are 48, with 33 residing on the archipelago. Use of all Alutiiq dialects show steady decline. Michael Krauss, emeritus of the Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) estimated 200 remaining fluent speakers for all Alutiiq dialects in 2007, and Jeff Leer (also of ANLC) estimated approximately 150 in 2010 (Krauss, 2007; Leer, 2010). It is likely that the total number of remaining Alutiiq Speakers of both the Chugach and Koniag dialects is less than 150 in 2012.

History of Kodiak Community Language Projects

The current Alutiiq language revitalization movement was aided by a series of federal grants to community entities from the Administration for Native Americans beginning in 2002, but the seeds of revitalization began decades earlier. The first linguistic explorations of Alutiiq were led by Irene Reed in the 1960s and Jeff Leer in the 1970s (Leer, 1978). Early community-driven research and education on the Alutiiq language was driven by a few ambitious individuals, who acted with few resources before others in the community shared a high concern for the language. Nina Olsen, a fluent speaker wrote an "Alutiiq Language Corner" article in the Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA)'s Newsletter during the 1980s. KANA also sponsored an adult dance group, made up of dancers from each village on Kodiak Island, and aided by visiting dancers from the Central Yup'ik region. These dancers included Larry Matfay, Mary Haakanson, Irene Coyle, Moses Malutin, Alexandria Knagin Simeonoff, and others (Smith, 1983). This dance group, which documented Alutiiq songs and raised awareness of Alutiiq language use on Kodiak, disbanded by the late 1980s, though a number of the original surviving participants are now involved in language program efforts.

Philomena Hausler Knecht, an archaeologist and Harvard graduate student in the early 1990s, created an Alutiiq language workbook and interactive Hypercard computer program based on her research with local Elders (Hausler Knecht, 1995a, 1995b). These efforts led to two short-lived classes at Kodiak High School and Kodiak College that had Alutiiq language content as well as cultural studies, each lasting one semester (Hegna, 2004). Hausler-Knecht also developed a series of VHS instructional videos with Elder Florence Pestrikoff. However, these efforts ended at the conclusion of grant funding, and the materials developed were created in a writing system that has changed.

The first significant regional cooperative efforts to address Alutiiq language decline occurred in 2000 when the Native Village of Afognak drafted an island-wide language revitalization grant proposal to the Administration for Native Americans (ANA). Although not awarded, this organized effort solidified community interest in language planning and revitalization. A year later, NVA staff developed a one-year Alutiiq language planning project for the Alutiiq Museum (a Native-run non-profit) which was funded by ANA. Between 2002 and 2003, the Museum identified community-specific goals for language revitalization, put together a language-status study, and received resolutions from all Kodiak Archipelago tribes in support of the Alutiiq Museum's continued efforts to preserve and document Alutiiq. The results were compiled in an informally-published report titled "*Yugnet Ang'alluki: To Keep the Words – A Report of the Goals Strategies and Status of the Alutiiq Language*" by Shauna Hegna (2004).

Hegna's report detailed an alarming decline in speakers, but it also documented a high level of support for language revitalization. Twenty percent of the Alutiiq population on Kodiak was surveyed. Ninety-five percent of the 435 survey respondents indicated that it was important for the Alutiiq people to "know their Native language" while 89 percent agreed or strongly agreed that knowing how to speak Alutiiq was an "important

part of being Alutiiq” (Hegna, 2004). This strong desire for language revitalization on Kodiak continues to guide the language movement.

In 2003, the Museum formed the *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit* (Alutiiq People of the Island) Regional Language Advisory Committee (known locally as the “Qik Committee”) comprised of tribal and Native corporation representatives, educational organizations, and interested individuals. This committee continues to meet monthly or bimonthly to guide language efforts. Also in 2003, Hegna and this author became the first Alutiiq language Apprentices, under the teaching of Language Masters, Nick Alokli and Florence Pestrikoff. This first Master-Apprentice team traveled to the Alaska Native Language Center at the university of Alaska, Fairbanks to receive training from Kathy Sikorski on the Master-Apprentice model popularized by Leanne Hinton. The Master-Apprentice method uses learner-guided immersion activities between adult learners and fluent speakers (Hinton, Vera, & Steele, 2002).

In 2004, ANA awarded the Alutiiq Museum a three-year Language Implementation grant for the *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit Master-Apprentice Project*. The primary goals of this project were to teach Alutiiq to a cohort of Apprentices using immersion techniques, create recordings of those lessons for the museum’s archive, and create language-learning materials and lesson plans. The original Language Masters for this project were Nick Alokli (Akhiok), Thayo Brandal (Afognak/Port Lions), Mary Haakanson (Old Harbor), the late “Papa” George Inga, Sr. (Old Harbor), Paul Kahutak (Woody Island/Old Harbor), the late Dennis Knagin (Afognak), Stella Krumrey (Kaguyak/Old Harbor), Florence Pestrikoff (Akhiok/Old Harbor), Phyllis Peterson (Kaguyak/Akhiok), Sophie Katelnikoff Shepherd (Karluk/Larsen Bay), and Christine Von Scheele (Afognak/Port Lions). The number of Apprentices ranged from 10-12 throughout the project, with some dropping out after one or two years, and a few joining the project in the second or third year.

The Kodiak community made some modifications to the methods popularized by Hinton, particularly that teams were formed with multiple masters (Hinton et al., 2002). Some Elders were interested in being language Masters, but were uncomfortable being put “on the spot” by teams of two or three learners after decades of scant speaking opportunities. All teams but one ended up having two Masters. This allowed Masters to model dialogue and aid each other in remembering the words and phrases needed in immersion activities. Having two Masters also helped aid continuity, as often one or another Master missed lessons due to health issues or travel.

The *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit Master-Apprentice Project* created a small group of semi-fluent or intermediate level speakers, and local press coverage drastically increased interest for learning Alutiiq (ACTFL, 2012). Apprentices were asked to share their new Alutiiq skills almost immediately in 2004, in guest lessons in local elementary schools, and via videoconference instruction to rural schools where language instructors were unavailable. Master-Apprentice teams established a routine where Apprentices would

teach while Masters observed, modeled correct pronunciation, and occasionally took more active instructional roles. The local response to the language program raised the profiles of learners and fluent speakers. Fluent Elders expressed surprise to be praised for their language skills after being scorned for the same qualities in their youth (Counciller, 2010).

Advanced learners began to feel the pinch of the high interest in language instruction while having few resources (human or material) to draw on to meet the need. In an effort to address the rising need for instructors, the Alutiiq Museum and other local tribal entities struggled to meet demand by producing a variety of language learning materials and initiating a variety of small outreach endeavors through grant funding. With local demand continuing to increase, but few opportunities to advance learner fluency, leaders struggled to identify the best means of supporting the learning and teaching efforts already underway.

Key local partners in the language revitalization began to emerge. In addition to the Alutiiq Museum, the Native Village of Afognak, a tribal entity, and the Kodiak Island Borough School District (KIBSD) each integrated or enhanced language in their programs and grant projects. Other organizations such as Kodiak College (a branch of the University of Alaska Anchorage), tribal entities, and Native corporations participated in the Qik Committee. The Alutiiq Museum's Master-Apprentice project was deemed successful by ANA, receiving a Commissioner's Award in 2007.

The skills and reputation developed by the Alutiiq Museum's initial ANA language project allowed the Museum and its community partners to qualify and successfully apply for other federal funds, namely National Science Foundation Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) Program funding. While documentary in scope, the Museum and its partners leveraged the research funding under a 2007-2012 DEL grant (*Alutiiq Living Words*, award #0652146) to provide opportunities for continued learning and outreach. Disseminatory efforts were crafted to serve an educational function. Under this project, semi-fluent field researchers (many of them former Apprentices) made recordings with fluent speakers for a language archive. Audio and video selections from this archive were transcribed and translated for an interactive Alutiiq language web portal (<http://alutiiqmuseum.org/portal>). This project has also supported research with the *Nuta'at Niugnelistat* – New Word Makers a new words (terminology development) Council (Kimura & Counciller, 2009).

Coinciding with the beginning of the *Alutiiq Living Words* Project, and aided by the skills gained through project coordination, I entered a doctoral program at UAF, through The Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education (SLATE) project. SLATE was funded through the US Department of Education's Alaska Native Education program (grant #S356A060055), under PI Sabine Siekmann and co-PI Patrick Marlow. My focus of study, Language Planning and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, informed local Kodiak efforts and contributed greatly to my understandings of language acquisition

and revitalization. Additionally I was given the opportunity to collaborate with scholars working in Native communities around Alaska and the nation. Alisha Drabek, another former Apprentice from the Alutiiq community began doctoral studies in 2009 and plans completion of her program in 2012.

The repercussions of the first ANA implementation project continued in other community organizations. The Native Village of Afognak, with staff trained in the first ANA Master-Apprentice project, secured an ANA language implementation project in 2008 to develop curriculum. This project, which partnered with the Alutiiq Museum and the Kodiak Island Borough School District, translated curriculum originally produced by Chugachmiut to develop thematic curriculum and Alutiiq language storybooks for use in Kodiak Island classrooms. The successful completion of this project was clear evidence of the maturing of the language revitalization on Kodiak, but lingering concerns remained.

Chief among the concerns by Alutiiq language learners and supporters was that the small group of intermediate speakers created in the Master-Apprentice project had not progressed to advanced fluency, and few new learners were coming up in proficiency behind them. Development of resources, field research, and the weekly Alutiiq Language Club were simply not enough to launch the language movement to the next level where advanced fluent second-language Alutiiq speakers were available to meet the need for language instruction on the island. Questions existed as to which materials and pedagogical techniques the advanced learners should use to more quickly develop fluency in young children.

There have been various ideas for what action steps are needed to achieve success. In order to keep open communication, the Qik Committee has been a critical avenue for keeping all organizations abreast of each other's activities. It functions to ensure that efforts are not being duplicated, and reduces competition for funding through the formation of collaborative proposals. Monthly or bimonthly Qik meetings have been a venue for continuous language planning, where community members have reinforced the need for sustained advancement of semi-fluent learners, and enhanced opportunities for Elders to gather and converse in the language.

After consecutive Alutiiq Museum project proposals in 2009 and 2010 were unsuccessful in securing funding from ANA, the Museum joined a consortium project proposal written by a former Apprentice and submitted in 2011 by Native Village of Afognak (NVA). This successfully-funded 3-year effort, entitled the *Qik'rtarmiut (Islanders) Kodiak Alutiiq Mentorship Project*, is designed to assist the second language speakers initially formed under the Museum's Master-Apprentice project, as well as other new learners, in advancing their fluency and teaching confidence. This grant leverages other funding secured by NVA by the Afognak Native Corporation to develop a variety of language learning resources and initiate training opportunities. In 2011, the number of local efforts seemed to multiply.

After requests by Alutiiq high school students at the 2010 Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Convention, an Alutiiq language class was started at Kodiak High School, aided by Department of Education grants to KIBSD as well as donations from Kana and Koniag Inc. Led by Alisha Drabek, a former Apprentice under the Museum's ANA Master-Apprentice project, along with new learner Candace Branson of the Kodiak Area Native Association, this truly-grassroots-initiated course is filling an explicit request from Kodiak youth for Alutiiq instruction. In response to the increase in materials development and editing needs, spurred by activities like the high school class, the Alutiiq Museum secured a second NSF grant award (Koniag Alutiiq Orthography Project, award #1153156) in 2012 to develop a book on the Alutiiq writing system with help from recently-retired linguist Jeff Leer.

Another project begun in 2011 is Kodiak College's Title III Department of Education-funded *Alutiiq Studies and Student Support* project (award #P382C110013). Building on the growing presence of language revitalization in the community, and in response to needs identified through the Qik Committee and other community-based research, Kodiak College developed a project to create an Alutiiq Studies Program at the local branch of the University of Alaska. This project will create an opportunity for academic training in Alutiiq language and instructional pedagogy, preparing community members and other interested individuals for jobs in language education as well as other tribal, corporation, and community positions that require knowledge of Alutiiq language and culture.

The first goal of this project is to develop an Alaska Native Studies certificate, endorsement, and associate degree, which all include courses in Alutiiq Language. The second major goal of this project is to create a Native student support program modeled after other successful endeavors such as the Koniag Education Foundation's mentorship model (www.koniageducation.org/) and the Alaska Natives in the Sciences and Engineering Student Success Program (ANSEP, <http://www.ansep.net/university-success.html>). The final goal of the project is to make the campus more welcoming to the Alutiiq community through construction of meeting spaces for new classes and community groups, multilingual signage, and training of faculty and staff in Indigenous education issues.

With the growing number of community-based language projects, it may be surprising that those closely involved with Alutiiq language revitalization have continued to fear the extinction of Alutiiq. With the stakes so high, some have wondered why we have not seen greater success. Those of us who have studied language planning and Indigenous language revitalization have become painfully aware that the odds are stacked against the community. As Paulston (1994) concludes in *Linguistic Minorities in Multilingual Settings*, "the most elegant policies for minority groups are doomed to failure if they go counter to prevailing social forces" (p. 39). I have wondered if the language movement as it exists provides a strong enough countermovement to resist the assimilating pressures of society.

Even if language pedagogy is sound, language cannot survive if only reinforced in the school setting. As other languages have demonstrated, a minority language must exist in the home, community and school to have a chance at success (Fishman, 2000; Paulston, 1994). While various teaching methods have been implemented in Kodiak, they have lacked a multi-arena scope, and have not reached the scale of a powerful social movement. The question now is, “what effort or collective efforts are needed to take Alutiiq to the next stage of language revitalization?” We have been in an “Alutiiq Renaissance” of cultural revitalization since the 1970s or 80s, and a language movement for a decade (Drabek, 2009; Pullar, 1992; Steffian & Counciller, 2012). But what we need to successfully reverse language shift is a level of enthusiasm for the language that is more holistic than a teaching methodology and more sustainable than a federal grant.

In contemplation of our language survival many of the grant-funded projects implemented have done a good job of providing access to the Alutiiq language, but they have not developed advanced fluent speakers. Grantors like ANA are supportive of projects that reach the largest number of community members because such reach is measurable and democratic, despite being weak in actual fluency development. You can count the number of people who receive a phrasebook, download an app, or access a website. You can document the number of classrooms that have copies of a curriculum or audio CD. Counting the number of people who have reached advanced fluency with the support of these tools is a much more difficult task – one that even the most successful of our projects has failed to achieve.

Leaders of the Kodiak language movement agree that language support materials and tools are best used to support the *face-to-face* learning that occurs between adult learners and Elders, or between teachers and students. Even as we develop these materials we acknowledge that pulling learners upwards in their fluency through instruction is the most solid strategy for language survival. Workshops and conference attendance provide techniques for teaching, but learners have sought an approach that would address language planning, and foster the leadership needed to drive the movement. A recent training in Kodiak provided an example of how a new approach can spur action and foster agency among a group primed for change.

On the Eve of a Revolution

I stumbled upon the “Where Are Your Keys?” (WAYK) method in 2011 after browsing the Internet for new instruction ideas. “Techniques for accelerated learning, community building, and language revitalization,” proclaims the site (Gardner, 2012a). While doubtful that the method was significantly different than any of the other types of immersion instruction I had experienced, I and other learners in the community were curious to learn more. With combined sponsorship from Kodiak College, Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak Island Borough School District, and the Alutiiq Museum, and

support from a number of other individuals and organizations, WAYK developer Evan Gardner and Intern April Charlo (Salish and Kootenai) were brought to Kodiak to consult with language programs and lead a two day training in March 2012. The intent of the training was to give Kodiak teacher-learners another tool to use in their language outreach as well as to advance their own learning.

Developed over the past 20 years, Gardner’s WAYK method is a combination of known techniques and methods empirically observed to be effective. It is not explicitly based on a specific theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), but WAYK incorporates Total Physical Response (TPR), sign language as a bridge language, and dozens of tricks and techniques that speed acquisition, reduce anxiety, foster supportive relationships and encourage dialogic feedback loops between teachers and students (both known in WAYK as “players”) (Gardner, 2012a, 2012b).

While WAYK is currently a grassroots method rather than an academic framework for SLA, techniques appear to correlate with certain concepts in SLA, which beg further inquiry. Techniques used in WAYK play have apparent connections to Vygotskian Sociocultural theory – particularly the concepts of *scaffolding* (guidance by a more advanced learner) and the *zone of proximal development* (the zone between what a learner can do independently and with assistance) (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Wertsch, 1985). It will be interesting to follow the development of this “open source” approach in coming years as additional communities adopt and suggest modifications to the assemblage of methods.

Alutiiq learners involved in the recent training said that many techniques weren’t unique, but the implementation of these techniques along with the team building, wellness emphasis, and collaborative spirit inherent to the WAYK method encouraged a feeling of community excitement that was not present at past workshops. Inexplicably, participants began helping each other, taking control of their own learning, and most surprisingly, having fun playing the game. High school students would continue playing on their own after breaks were called. Outside the workshop, learners went home and began teaching their friends and family members. Participants began forming plans to attend additional WAYK trainings to themselves become “Language teacher makers” (Gardner, 2012a).

Having been involved in language revitalization for a decade, I am aware of the peak of excitement caused by new ideas and methods, and that many of these methods are dropped, or simply become one of a multitude of techniques used in language classrooms. The difference felt during recent events, however, was in the amplification of an Alutiiq language social movement – a characteristic that according to research must be present for reversal of language shift (Fishman, 1991, 2000; Paulston, 1994). To succeed in Alutiiq language revitalization, we must instill a revolution – one that WAYK or other promising methods cannot uphold on their own. This revolution will be constructed of young learners in symbiotic relationship with our precious fluent Elders, who are

simultaneous learners and teachers. It will be fostered by an emphasis on relationships and community unity toward a common goal that it is not just our language, but our identity as a separate people at stake (Counciller, 2010).

Conclusion

Throughout the WAYK workshop, I was reminded of the importance of relationships among those in the language movement, and our ties to the wider Alutiiq community. For us learners, Elders are a bridge that connects us to the family that we have already lost, and to the ancestors beyond them who we honor by perpetuating our way of speech. These Elders knew our grandparents and great grandparents who we never met but who may have been the last in our family to speak fluently (Counciller, 2010). They form a living bridge of relationships from the present day into the twilight of our past, and a path to our future selves who will speak our language with confidence to our children.

There is a saying that Alutiiq leaders are not made, they are chosen. It is an honor and a burden to be among those who have been charged with carrying forward the language, but one that we undertake gratefully. I am hopeful that the revolution in Alutiiq language revitalization will become a reality in the coming months and years. Recent events on Kodiak Island, built on a decade of cumulative projects, have instilled a greater hope in language movement leaders that the results of our hard work are imminent. As I think more about Dennis's prediction that we would become the Elders pretty soon, perhaps he was speaking of Elders in terms of their sharing and stewardship of community knowledge. In those terms, we learners are truly taking that role, bearing the language forward for the next generation of speakers.

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