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RÊVER LA CULTURE

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Cet homme me sortit de ma déprime

Definers of a pan-Yup'ik ethnicity: Yup'ik cultural authorities across regional groups

Roy D. Iutzi-Mitchell*

Résumé: Définir une ethnicité pan-yupik: les leaders culturels yupik et les groupes régionaux.

Les groupes régionaux yupik du 19^e siècle constituaient l'univers de référence pour l'identité socio-politique et l'ethnicité. Ces sociétés autochtones ont encore une certaine pertinence à la fin du 20^e siècle mais ne forment plus la base de l'identité ethnique. L'utilisation d'un authentique mot *yugcetun*, *yupik*, avec le sens d'ethnonyme que lui ont donné linguistes et anthropologues, fut suivie d'une opérationnalisation autochtone de cette catégorie qui désigne de plus en plus un groupe social étendu. Des entrevues avec cinq professionnels yupik, tous actifs dans l'enseignement de la langue et de la culture yupik, permettent de voir ce qui arrive lorsque des leaders yupik, issus d'un groupe régional particulier, ont pour fonction de transmettre le savoir culturel à des Yupiit d'autres régions. Il en résulte, entre autres, le renforcement et la définition d'une nouvelle identité, pan-yupik.

Abstract: Definers of a pan-Yup'ik ethnicity: Yup'ik cultural authorities across regional groups.

Yup'ik Eskimo regional groups of the 19th century served as focal points of sociopolitical identity and ethnicity. These indigenous societies, while continuing to have an existence in limited contexts at the end of the 20th century, are in many cases being superseded in their rôle as locus of ethnic identity. The appropriation of an authentic *Yugcetun* word, *Yup'ik*, and its invented use as an ethnic appellation by 20th century linguists and anthropologists has been followed by an indigenous operationalization of that category, beginning now to function in some senses as an extended social group. Based on interviews with five Yup'ik professionals, all involved with the formal teaching or interpreting of Yup'ik language and culture, perspectives are presented here on what happens when Yupiit of one regional group are authoritatively presiding over the transfer of cultural knowledge to Yupiit of other regional groups. One outcome appears to be a reinforcement and a defining of a new, pan-Yup'ik identity.

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Introduction

The Eskimos of southwestern Alaska, commonly called *Yup'ik* (sg.) Eskimos or *Yupiiit* (pl.), inhabit the coasts, inland tundra and lower regions of the major rivers of southwestern Alaska from Norton Sound in the North to Bristol Bay in the South (see map). Currently numbering approximately 21 000, they are the largest category of Alaska Natives as defined by which traditional Native language is spoken. Their language, *Yugcetun* (or *Yup'ik* or Central Alaskan *Yup'ik*, the latter also spelled without the apostrophe as Central Alaskan *Yupik*), is also the Alaska Native language with the greatest number of speakers today (around 10 000; estimates of total population and number of speakers from Michael E. Krauss, personal communication, 23 June 1994). Along with the related *Yupigestun* of Saint Lawrence Island, *Yugcetun* is one of only two Native languages still spoken as the first language by all generations in entire communities in Alaska today (16 villages for *Yugcetun*, two for *Yupigestun*, this author's research).

The neighbors of the *Yupiiit* to the north are the *Iñupiat*, speakers of western varieties of the Inuit dialect chain. On the east, the *Yupiiit* are in contact with Athabaskan Indians, traditional speakers of three different languages. To the south of *Yupiiit* territory are speakers of *Sugtestun* (*Alutiit*), a very closely related *Yupik* language.

The *Yupiiit* form a coherent cultural area (VanStone 1984: 207-208) but have not before had a unified existence of a political or ethnic nature. In the past, *Yupiiit* identified themselves by more local names. It is illustrative to see how Zagoskin portrays *Yup'ik* peoples' responses in the 1840s to enquiries about their ethnic affiliations:

To the traveler in an unknown country the first concern is to discover what kind of people he has to deal with, but to satisfy his curiosity he has no one to whom to turn except to the local inhabitants. It was in this way that I first approached the natives about me.

"Who are you?" was my first question.

"*Yuggyt* — people", they answered.

"Is that so; but from where?"

"I am *Tachigmyut*, I *Pashtolygmyut*, I *Akhvigmyut*", and so forth — each one spoke of his *zhilo* [village or domicile] or settlement.

"Fine, but what do you call yourselves?"

"*Chnagmyut* — coastal people".

"Splendid". I understood then that "*Chnagmyut*" was their local or regional name".

"But those who live next to you, what are these people called?"

"Toward midnight from us live the *Maleygmyut*, or, by another name, the *Naleygmüt* — their nickname; toward noon from us are the *Kvikhlyuagmyut*, *Magmyut*, *Agulmyut*, *Kuskokwigmyut*, all local names; the *Akhugmyut*".

"Fine, fine, and what do you think, are these people all related to each other?"

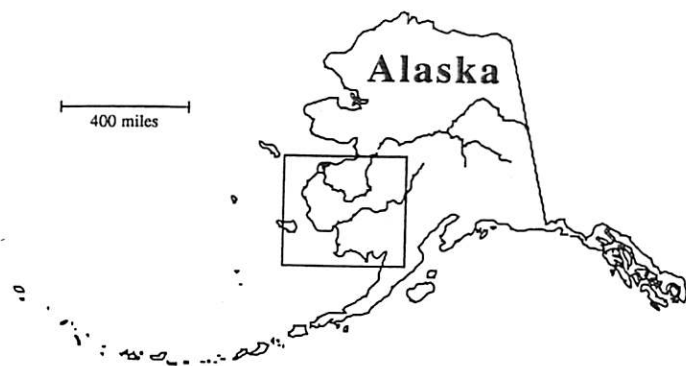
"Well, look at your interpreter; he speaks the same language we do, the shape of his face, his eyes, his hair — are all ours. And look at that one (pointing to a *Tungus* who had joined the expedition), and that *brunette* (a citizen of *Tyumen*, one of the staff at the fort), those are all our people too, they have just forgotten their language" (Zagoskin 1967:103; emphasis in original).

Traditional ethnic identities among Alaskan Eskimos have arisen from their memberships in regional groups and were named using the *postbase-miut* (the people or things of a place). The nature of these regional groups, or societies, is not the subject of this paper; for overviews of that important topic, see Townsend (1980: 124-129), Burch (1975: 10-12 and 1980: 258-262), Fienup-Riordan (1984: 64-65), Shinkwin & Pete (1984: 95-101) and Oswald (1990: 227).

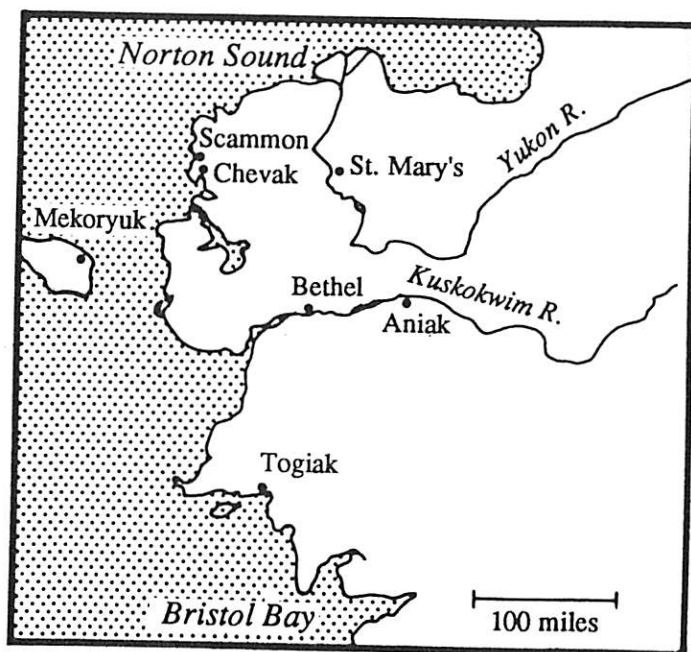
Over the course of European and Euro-American colonialization of *Yupiiit* territory, beginning with Russian-American forts and trading posts in the early 1800s, the Native seasonal round has been shaped in part by the economic needs of this interaction with outsiders and by the ever-increasing control wielded by the outside political and economic institutions, particularly by the United States in the 20th century (see Oswald 1990 for an overview). Mandatory education, starting in the 1950s, led to the destruction of much of *Yupiiit* traditional mobility, whose annual cycle has been transformed into near year-round residence in villages. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 further linked each Alaska Native with a particular village corporation and a federally-defined regional corporation.

Clearly, in whatever sense it can be said that there is a *Yup'ik* society or *Yup'ik* societies at present, many structural features are being transformed by current political economic forces of government agencies and wage labor opportunities and the *choices* *Yupiiit* make in their responses to these forces. Here I do not try to define the social structure of neo-*Yup'ik* societies. Rather, I focus on the rôle of individual *Yupiiit* in forging a *Yup'ik* ethnic identity in the modern world.

The use of the label "*Yupik*" to refer to these people dates to the work of Morris Swadesh (1951-52) who defined the distinction between "*Inupik*" and "*Yupik*" Eskimo languages. More recent linguistic research sets the number of Eskimo languages at six, although the most fundamental division is still between the Inuit/*Iñupiaq* language and the five *Yupik* languages (Woodbury 1984). Anthropologists followed suit in the 1960s, such that now *Yupik* or *Yup'ik* is the near universal ethnonym applied to these people by linguists and anthropologists and generally by government agencies in southwestern Alaska.



Bethel and selected villages



The interviews

I interviewed five Yup'it, all living in Bethel and all having moved here from regional groups outside the Bethel area. Each is a product of the boarding school system and each is employed now as a teacher or interpreter of Yup'ik language and culture. Some of the names of the five have been changed, though actual village names are given throughout.

All interviews were audio tape recorded, and relevant portions were transcribed using many of the conventions of Conversation Analysis. In the extended quotes punctuation indicates how the words were spoken rather than indicating grammatical information. Commas indicate short pauses with a flat or falling tone, periods indicate longer pauses with a flat or falling tone, question marks indicate pauses with a rising tone, and SMALL CAPITALS indicate words spoken with emphasis or stress. It is important to note that a phrase can be spoken with a rising tone (and hence marked with "?") and not be a question; likewise, what grammatically is a question may be asked with a flat or falling tone (hence marked here with a period). A "false start" is indicated by a hyphen at the end of the word or word fragment. Quotes presented here have been lightly edited for readability; some original words have been removed, but any additions are in square brackets.

I have been an observer or participant-observer with all five of these Yup'it in their official capacities as Yup'ik culture and language authorities, either taking their classes, observing their classes, sitting in on their workshops, or listening to their translating public events over the radio.

Bethel itself is a town of over 4 500 people on the shores of the Kuskokwim River. It is the regional hub for the 100 000 square mile Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, the center for transportation and government services and the largest town in Alaska not on the highway or ferry systems. It was established in 1885 as a mission of the Moravian Church and from its inception has drawn Yup'it (and some Athabaskans) from across the region. It continues to attract Yup'it from regional villages, just as it draws non-Natives from outside the region and outside the state, largely to seek and fill jobs in the government, local agencies and businesses, and in some cases to pursue differences of religious practice not available in their home villages.

Eleanor

Eleanor is an associate professor at the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska, teaching courses in Alaska Native studies, anthropology, and education. Born in 1944 of the *Qissunarmiut* regional group, she spent her early years in her home village of Chevak where she attended grade school. After high school at St. Mary's boarding school, she earned her bachelor's and later her master's degree in education. Eleanor's first teaching job was in the public schools of Anchorage; there she hoped to test in an urban setting the ideas she had been taught in her teacher education program.

The dialect of Yugcetun Eleanor speaks, in her own language variety pronounced *Cugcetun* [which builds on the same root for "human being"] which she and others from Chevak pronounce *Cuk*, hence the words *Cup'ik* and *Cupiit* which are cognate with *Yup'ik* and *Yupiit* of most other dialects. (The letter *c* in the standard orthography resembles the English *ch* as in the word *choose*.) Hers is indeed one of the more divergent dialects of Yugcetun when compared with most others; but this phonological difference, appearing as it does in the now-current ethnonym *Yup'ik/Cup'ik*, makes the difference seem greater than it actually is. Ironically, Chevak forms a close dialect cluster with the nearby village of Hooper Bay where the word for human is pronounced *Yuk*. Although the Hooper Bay-Chevak variety clearly is part of the Yugcetun language, mutual intelligibility can at first be somewhat low when speakers of this dialect first interact with someone from the Lower Kuskokwim dialect at Bethel if neither is experienced with the other's way of speaking.

When the opportunity arose, Eleanor took a teaching job in her home village of Chevak. After moving to Bethel, she was hired by Kuskokwim Community College (now Kuskokwim Campus) as a Yugcetun language specialist and then moved into teaching cross-cultural communications and anthropology courses on Alaskan Iñupiat and Yupiit Eskimos where her classes typically number 15, mostly *Yup'ik*, students.

In addition to standard classroom instruction, Eleanor is also involved with a variety of workshops and training in other settings. When called upon to give workshops to audiences of *Yup'ik* elders, Eleanor is in a awkward position since she is both a female and younger. From a traditional perspective, she should be quiet; yet her rôle with the College requires her to tell the elders information, even what to do. She has dealt with this first by speaking humbly about how little she knew, second by trying not to look in their faces, and third,

I told them the information I was going to present to them they already knew, that I was just going to just put them [the pieces of knowledge] to the surface so they can remember them. I told them "You already know all these things that I'm going to be talking about. These are the things that I learned from my parents and my grandparents. Like my aunts and uncle, my other [Yup'ik-reckoned] grandparents". That's how you're supposed to: these aren't mine, these are. And then, I started, all in *Cup'ik*. I told them if they didn't understand some of my *Cup'ik* words, to let me know so I could tell them, if I know the Kuskokwim and the Yukon [term]. These were mostly Kuskokwim. And during discussion times they were SO EAGER to talk about, you know, some of the stuff I let [them understand]. And that was the time, after the workshop was over, all these old men started coming up to me and hugging me. Several of them called me Grandma.

Eleanor's overt reference to dialectal differences, which largely reflect traditional regional group boundaries, creates a legitimate ground for respecting differences between groups while at the same time transcending them. Her careful use of *Yup'ik* social interactional styles allows her to break traditional values at one level while simultaneously reinforcing them on another. This syncretic approach to Native culture is characteristic of the *Yup'ik* language and culture experts interviewed for this study.

With her college classes on campus, Eleanor commonly has younger *Yup'ik* students from different regions. With students coming from different regional backgrounds, I asked her if anyone ever challenged her accuracy.

It's not really a challenge. Before I say it in the classroom, if I'm in doubt I usually check it out with an older person, and just in everyday conversation, like a conversation type, I don't go to the elder and go "Could you tell me", that's not the way it's supposed to be. When I was curious about that four days for women and five days for men? Where you can't touch subsistence foods? I was going to present it and I was in Anchorage. And, I didn't know if it was done in other villages, so I asked this [elder]. (He just died recently.) We were just sitting there talking, and I brought into the conversation about the numbers four and five. I said "In my village we do four days for women and five days for men". And when I paused he said, "You know we do it the opposite in the Yukon way five days for women and four days for men". And I said "Yaa, how did that happen". He didn't know, he just said "That's the way we've always done it".

So in the classroom I usually say "In my village we do it four days for women and five days for [men] but in other villages, they do it five days for women four days for men". And [if] anybody else has different, you know usually I do [say] it "Anybody else has different?" And when I say stuff, that are different in their villages, they usually say, especially after about a week or two maybe they're comfortable enough to say it but not like CHALLENGE kind of. It's like, additional, I don't like challenges. (Laughter.) That answer your question?

Eleanor said that it is very important nowadays for young adults to be knowledgeable about *other* *Yup'ik* areas. When I asked her why, she replied,

Because everybody's mixing up. You know long time ago I thought Chevak was the center of the world? And when I found out there was a Hooper Bay and a Scammon Bay? So we learned, my dad used to tell me, "This is how we do it in Chevak and this is how they do it in Hooper, and this is how they do it in Scammon". And so when other people from other villages come and do something different the excuse is, *Cev'armiungunritut*. "They're not from Chevak", so their action or what they say is excused. But we, in that society, we're supposed to do it *Cev'aq* way. And then when you go to another village and you do something that's different, in that village they excuse you and they say, *Naparyarmiungunrituq*, "she's not from Hooper Bay". And right now today, you could one day be in Chevak and next hour be in *Imangaq* [Emmonak]. And be at *Imangaq* and two hours later you can be in Dillingham. And so you need to know more, even Indian countries. When people know, and do what they're supposed to do in their village? They seem really happy.

Here, Eleanor is building upon a traditional value, too: that of being knowledgeable of neighbors' ways of doing things. This social skill, so necessary to getting along with others in a face-to-face society, is highly valued (Mary Pete, personal communication).

The more you know, the better you're looked on especially if it's your own culture and language. The older people, they'd praise you more readily for that, than if you know technol[ogy, such as] computers. You get what I mean? That's it.

Joe

Joe also is of the *Qissunarmiut*, born in 1950 and raised in Chevak. With experience in a wide variety of jobs, including that of public school teaching, Joe has until this year also taught Yup'ik dancing and drumming to classes of 10 to 20 students as a part-time instructor for Kuskokwim Campus in Bethel. Three critical aspects of his teaching are very important to Joe and also relevant to our discussion here: pedagogical innovations, ideas on the relationship between Eskimo dancing and both the traditional Eskimo and Christian religions, and the rôle of modern Eskimo dance in developing the self-image of young Yupiit.

As Joe teaches Yup'ik dance (also called motion dance), he presents subcomponents of the routine one at a time. He says that this is an innovation of his in the way of teaching the dance. The traditional pedagogy involves students observing dance routines in their entirety then trying to follow along with more knowledgeable dancers. By way of contrast, Joe breaks the dance down into subroutines, classifies hand motions and body directions into formal categories, and pre-teaches each component before teaching the entire dance. This formulaic approach likely derives from his Western education as a school teacher, but he applies it to his own understanding of how Yup'ik dance should be taught. (Mary Pete also reports seeing elders compartmentalize dance instruction when teaching kindergartners in a formal school context; personal communication.)

Moravian missionaries, along with Yup'ik Moravian leaders, vehemently discouraged Yup'ik dance and ceremonialism beginning in the late 1800s. Indeed, the role of Yupiit Moravian helpers in missionizing and transforming the cultures of other Yupiit is particularly relevant for the theme of this volume, although I do not deal with it here; readers are directed to Henkelman and Vitt (1985) and Fienup-Riordan (1988) for early history of the Moravian Church in southwestern Alaska.

Joe is acutely aware of the mixture of positive and negative views held by modern Yupiit in regard to Eskimo dancing. He distinguishes between songs of traditional religious nature (related to shamanism) and songs of purely secular nature. He argues first that the secular songs should offend no one's religious sensibilities. (Interestingly, he also holds that dance has an important place in his Christian fundamentalism) In his college courses, Joe has taken pains to emphasize to his students that the songs he teaches are purely secular, having no relationship with shamanistic songs. As he explains,

I talked to them about what dances I am teaching, and where they originate from. And I would say that they are the songs that I have come up with, and put together, from my own spirit. From my own experiences, from, hunting, from good times, or everyday observations from our culture, like [the] "Making funny face to the baby" dance, that one there ... from my own experience of watching other people. Like coming up with that kind of dances. What ... evil do you find in THAT? You're just telling a story in motion and song about what you see. And ... people would see that, and say, "Wow, that's something that we can do! We can tell stories".

This last idea of Joe's – that motion dancing and singing can invigorate young Yupiit in a positive way – is to him the chief reason for teaching the dances. In his college classes he constantly relates how components of particular dances depict important aspects of Yup'ik life, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious. These classes enroll predominantly young Yupiit, but older Yupiit and non-Natives also participate. The verbal instruction is approximately half Yugcetun and half English. By teaching Chevak style dancing to Yup'ik students from throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and by organizing them into the Kuskokwim Campus Dancers which perform in the regional Camai Festival, Joe is, I contend, orchestrating a significant portion of the formation of the new pan-Yup'ik identity.

Loddy

From the village of Scammon Bay, Loddy was born in 1947 as a member of the *Marayaarmiut* regional group. The Yukon dialect of Yugcetun differs both in lexicon and phonology from the Lower Kuskokwim but interferes only moderately with mutual comprehension for someone not accustomed to the other variety. Loddy first attended school in her home village then St. Mary's boarding school for junior and senior high school. After obtaining her teaching certificate, Loddy could not find a teaching position back home but did get hired in Bethel. There she taught kindergarten for 18 years; subsequently, she has been teaching Yugcetun language in one of Bethel's elementary schools.

Loddy talks about Bethel having two different groupings of half-day kindergarten when she first started. Morning children were taught in English. The afternoon session was called the bilingual kindergarten and was to have been all in Yup'ik except for one half hour of English. Parents chose which group to put their children into, and it was not necessarily based upon children's language proficiency. For that time period, she does not recall parents having said either positive or negative things about her being a Yukon dialect speaker teaching in a Lower Kuskokwim dialect area.

I asked Loddy how she decides when to speak English and when Yugcetun in the school. She replied

[Loddy:] With non-native speakers in the school, I have to speak English. But in this room [Yugcetun language teachers' preparation room], well we have a lot of fun speaking Yup'ik.

[Roy:] When you're in the hallways here and you run into another Yup'ik speaker on the faculty or staff, are you likely to speak Yup'ik to them in the hall, or English?

[Loddy:] Yup'ik. Yup'ik.

[Roy:] Do you feel comfortable with that?

[Loddy:] There was a time when I felt I was timid. I just didn't want to express myself louder than just a whisper [in Yup'ik]. Now, I'm not afraid to speak in Yup'ik. I'm just beginning to realize that my language is important and the kids need to hear it.

[Roy:] Yes. Do you feel that's primarily a change in you and how you understand it, or do you think that it's been a change over the years among both Yup'iks and Kass'aqs ["Europeans/Euro-Americans" in 20th century usage] here that they feel ...

[Loddy:] You know there's becoming an awareness, even in young people, that, hey, you know, your language is important. If it dies, then you're to blame, because you didn't want to learn it.

I subsequently inquired how dialectal differences between her and the students' homes affected her teaching.

[Loddy:] It was only after I started with teaching bilingual education, ... - Yup'ik as a second language here - that I started finding out which parents ... have that pride but they're not going to teach their own children their dialect.

It's kind of hard to explain, but anyway, I'm from Scammon Bay, and I'm teaching in Bethel, which is ... a different dialect from where I was raised. But then Bethel is also the center for all the other villages. The people start[ed] moving here, so there's a different variety of dialects, just within the town. And so many times, I get a call from a parent, or a note, saying "We don't say that, we say such and such a thing". And that kind of bothers me because if parents are really proud of their own dialect, why don't they teach their own children Yup'ik so that the kids can have that? Because I have to do some kind of a standard [dialect] in the school.

[Roy:] How do you deal with the dialect variation issue, and your own dialect versus Kuskokwim?

[Loddy:] I really have a hard time, thinking about this, because I sure hate to confuse kids. A lot of times I explain to the kids that the word I'm using is my own dialect, but in Bethel - for Bethel area - this is what they say. So sometimes I have the kids choose which one's easier to pronounce; that's just mainly how I work. A lot of kids will recognize their own dialect word ...; it's cute. I had a new student move into Bethel schools, when was it, a couple years ago. So I [was] just welcoming the student, I said, "Do you have a Yup'ik name because we go by Yup'ik names in here". That student just turn and say "I don't have a Yup'ik name; I have a CUP'IK name". And you know where that student was from, eh?

[Roy:] How about a situation like the Chevak dialect which is not a Yukon dialect and not a Kuskokwim dialect. It's pretty different - in fact it's probably more different from Kuskokwim than Yukon is from Kuskokwim.

[Loddy:] You know I normally try to tell the kids - even the dialect from Mekoryuk [the most divergent dialect of all] - "There's other people out in the villages and their dialects, Chevak and Mekoryuk are a lot different from what we speak". So, I think it's better to tell the kids that, you know, not one dialect but a lot. And you know, maybe to

try to instill the pride that your dialect is your own. It's what your mom and dad were raised speaking.

Loddy later told me of how two children had told her that their parents identified her as coming from Scammon Bay, she presumes from the way that she had pronounced a particular word. This was presented as a positive identification. As for negative reactions from parents, Loddy recalls,

There's one person who keeps coming after me, [saying] that I'm not naming certain things right: the name of this fish is supposed to be THAT one. But you know, I think he's kind of ethnocentric, feeling that his way's better. I don't think he realized that other villages have different names for certain things. And that's the only thing that I've been finding.

[Roy:] Is he from this area, or ...

[Loddy:] From another area.

[Roy:] Now how about your own perspective on it? What would you say, ideally in your own mind, should be your rôle as someone who can speak another dialect?

[Loddy:] I should explain to the kids that there are more than one dialect that, you know, whatever dialect that their PARENTS were raised with, they should, you know, have pride in that, and then accept the fact that there are other dialects that they should RESPECT, you know, what the other people have.

I think it is clear from her own statements that Loddy feels that dialectal differences are important and are to be respected and encouraged. All students are allowed their own dialectal interpretations of what it means to speak Yugcetun, and Loddy validates that diversity in her classroom, as I have observed. Indeed, the fact that Loddy's own speech variety is quite distinct from that of the Lower Kuskokwim makes it imperative that she show the positive value of dialectal diversity and the worth of each dialect within the Yugcetun way of speaking.

Sam

Born in 1953, Sam is one of the *Tuyuryarmiut* regional group, raised in Togiak. His Bristol Bay dialect is close to that of the Lower Kuskokwim, but differences in his speech are readily apparent - and draw comment when speaking with his wife's relatives from Eek. After marrying into this region, he worked for a number of years with the local health corporation but gradually saw a new "calling" for himself after repeatedly observing instances of poor interpretation between Yugcetun and English. He now operates his own translating and interpreting business and finds his skills in demand for health and legal services and in meetings where he provides simultaneous translations.

For Sam, one of the greatest attractions of interpreting is the challenge of finding just the right choice of words to portray subtle shades of meaning, going from Yugcetun into English or from English into Yugcetun. But there is another dimension to interpreting which Sam says requires just as much diligence:

And there are times when, you know, you gotta use these words to interpret the right way so you can get across, between you and another person, and come out with what you want. And that's been very interesting with me, because, as I go around, especially to the different communities, who are different dialects, that has been a real challenge for me. So I often introduce myself, saying I'm from such-and-such an area, and what I'm gonna interp- how I'm gonna interpret, is, [and asking] will they understand me. And you know, I pick up a few pointers, ... the use of the dialectal differences for each region. I pick up a few pointers and start using that, applied to how I interpret such an article or an issue. And so, therefore, you know as I go along I'm learning on my own, of the differences. But the people accept, the Yup'ik people accept each other, and try to help out each other as much as they can when there's a difference. They don't raise an issue, they don't start fighting over it. They accept it and try to make adaptations to it, maybe because of the upbringing that a lot of people had to adapt to the environment, whether it's cold, or harsh, or wet, they learn how to adapt, not only in this livelihood but also in their relationships. Because when we grew up one of the key things we were instructed in was not to have anything against another, whether regardless of race, whether it's white or black or Indian or another Yup'ik, my upbringing was like that, to treat everyone the way I want to be treated. If they're hungry, feed them. If they need something and if I have more than enough, give it to them without asking for repaying. And those things are very, very, very VALUABLE, especially in this time where people are, there's a lot of differences. And when I grew up, people helped each other. They helped each other.

I asked Sam if he could think of any specific instances where dialect differences have had an impact on the way Yupiit interacted with each other. Sam responded:

[Sam:] One of the things that I think [is] the highlight of the answer to that question is ... the benefit that we got from each other. It's a learning process. We learn how to sacrifice our time to find out what WE really mean, and what THEY mean, and we go from there. And we begin to understand each other. And every time that we come to that term, if we are in their region, we use that term, and if they are in our region, they use that term.

[Roy:] They use the term, up here?

[Sam:] No, I mean, for instance, if I'm from Bristol Bay, I sacrifice my dialect to use their term. And when they're over there, they use THAT term to make us understand. And even though they use our term, they never lose their dialect. When they come back they're back to normal.

[Roy:] So a Kuskokwim person, down in Togiak or Bristol Bay, might choose to use the word *palayaq* [boat] if they knew that word.

[Sam:] Yes. But if they don't, they still use their *angyaq* [boat], but we have enough, you know, we've been exposed enough to their language, to their dialect, that even if they say *angyaq*, we still understand them.

[Roy:] Can you help me understand, I mean, I have my own ideas but, to your way of understanding, why do you think people try to use the dialect of the area where they are? For example, if people from here go to Togiak and they know the people there already know what *angyaq* means, why do people from here bother using *palayaq*? What does it mean when people use the local host people's ...

[Sam:] Out of respect. One of the things [is] that Yup'ik people respect each other. And that's one of the teachings that's been handed down from generation to generation is to respect any person regardless.

For Sam, then, learning and using cross-dialectal differences in lexicon is not simply an aid to communicating factually but furthermore builds up and reinforces the social bonds among Yupiit of different regions. There is no Yugcetun "standard"; but as he uses dialectal differences in his work, he is reinforcing the unity of a multi-polar Yugcetun language.

Bob

The Middle Kuskokwim dialect of Yugcetun has significant differences from the Lower Kuskokwim, both in phonology and lexicon, although not to the extent that it impedes mutual intelligibility; it differs from the Lower Kuskokwim perhaps as much as does the Yukon dialect. Although born near the Yukon in 1935, Bob was raised a member of the Middle Kuskokwim *Qaugkumiut* regional group in Aniak. Involuntarily moved from his village to a Catholic boarding home at the age of nine, Bob developed and held strong animosities toward those he felt to be at fault for his cultural disruption: the non-Natives. Much of this animosity he played out in self-destructive behavior. As part of his efforts at re-discovering his own identity, Bob and his late wife Dorothy developed a set of workshops on the Yup'ik lifecycle and family systems. Bob's workshops are presented to largely Native audiences, usually sponsored by a Native-run agency or local government. It was in his capacity as a Yup'ik lifecycle and family systems trainer and facilitator that I interviewed Bob, who told me:

Well, I started doing workshops, not as a facilitator, but as a presenter. As far as going to villages, I started working for YKHC [the regional health corporation] in 1971, and the work I was initially hired to do was health education. So I had to travel to 24 villages. My first village I went to was Sheldon's Point. And I had to deliver a presentation to the parents and grandparents, teachers, health aides, all Yup'ik-speaking people. Well, I went in there, and the first thing I asked them was if everybody understood me [speaking Yugcetun]. And I apologized for my [being from a different dialect area] And here I am from the Middle Kuskokwim, and there I was on the very lowest piece of the Yukon River on the South Mouth.

Bob said he quickly learned that, while some of the things he was saying would have been spoken differently in the local dialect, people were extremely happy to have had the workshop run in Yugcetun at all. He asked someone afterwards how his workshop had been received and was told "They really loved you, because there was somebody here that

they could understand"; later that day he was told, "Now we have a welcome stranger", because he spoke to them in their own language, albeit of a differing dialect.

For Bob, there is a profound difference between being a presenter who tells his audience what is what and being a facilitator who works with his audience to help them discover what they already knew but no longer could recall.

And generally what I've learned over the years is that I can give a general presentation about any particular topic that I want to talk about, like heritage, or culture, or identity, which is my big thing these days. Learning, understanding, maintaining, practicing, and appreciating [our] identity, [our] self-esteem, and our whole Yup'ik education. Nowadays especially, our young people need that. So what I do, I come into a community, I give a general statement, I say, "I don't KNOW what you people here, do. But I have resources. The same resources that you have, I brought with me. These are your old elders in this community".

And so, I try to do general instruction, or general information giving. I let the elders take over, and anybody else who is willing, and able, to give the message to the young people or to the other adults, or to other elders. What I'm talking about basically is that community's knowledge and their practice. I don't go in there like I know it all, because I don't. I know a drop in the bucket compared to what they know about things. And what I get out of it is I learn so much more by listening, following the rules that all children are expected to [follow]: sit down, be quiet, and listen. Sit down, be quiet, and listen. Now this is a universal Yup'ik rule, that you have no interference (no paper, no pencils), and preferably everyone's in a circle, side by side — not ahead of or behind someone — so that you're equal.

Bob's notion of being a facilitator is crucial to his understanding of how individual Yup'ik communities should foster their own cultural development; this development in turn is nourished by the exchange of ideas among regional groups. Says Bob:

I have a friend, Paul Beebe, down at Quinhagak. He and I sat together for four hours one afternoon and talked about our grandmothers. And in the end I said, "Here, I was raised up in Aniak, you were raised in Quinhagak, our two grandmothers came together today. And after our two grandmothers came together this afternoon, one mind, one message, to go to two different lands, different places". And it makes you wonder how communication was, from one area to another, and one generation to another, and still [the culture] maintain[ed] its integrity. You know, it's fantastic.

Again, there's always differences in dialect. When you say something in this dialect, you have to say it differently in a different dialect. But it's still the same. And so, what I've discovered is that I've been able to use the elders to redefine for THEIR people what I'm saying, and still get the message across. The elders are travelled, they're not stationary, they're dynamic people. Going up and down the river, and across the land, the ocean, and over to the other rivers, was their lifestyle. They absorbed — well not absorbed, but they retained — a lot of the information that was given to them by their parents and grandparents of THEIR travels, and the comparison of the different dialects.

What Bob is able to do for his audiences, typically of mixed-age Yupiit, is to elucidate his own understanding of traditional respect for elders in a way that young

people feel a part of it. By appealing to this traditional authority he is able to link his message — traditional family systems and life cycle — to his common theme that these are universal features of the Yupiit experience and, more broadly, of the human experience. Entreating his audience to know who they are as Yupiit, urging them to go back to their own elders as their source of self-knowledge, Bob is sending a message across boundaries of Yugcetun dialects and Yupiit regional groups that, with the help of the elders, young people can find themselves as Yupiit of the modern world.

Interpretations

Up until the mid-20th century, Yup'ik ethnicity was grounded in individuals' memberships in particular regional groups. The use by linguists and anthropologists of the categories "Yuk Eskimo" or "Yupik Eskimo" has become widely adopted by agents of federal, state and local governments, including the school systems. This has contributed to a new self-conceptualization of "what kind" of Native the people are, that of the Yup'iks or Yupiit as a distinct group, those who speak Yup'ik or Yugcetun as a first or heritage language. This has happened as traditional societal functions have been appropriated in large part by the nation-state, while simultaneously the linguists' and anthropologists' view of "who is who" is promulgated in the school system and by other governmental agencies.

These five Yup'ik professional interpreters of Yup'ik culture and language play a key rôle in defining that new sense of pan-Yup'ik ethnicity. I do not mean to say that they define Yup'ik culture by decree, but by their actions they play a focal part in people's creating a self-identity as "Yupiit". They do not dictate a pan-Yup'ik standard culture or language. Rather, in their emphasis on the legitimacy of regional diversity they identify commonalities, referencing the knowledge and speech styles of local elders, and thus are acting with their audiences to define a newer, broader sense in which they share identity as Yupiit.

At the level of political organization, the Yupiit Nation movement which began in 1983 in three Lower Kuskokwim villages upriver from Bethel now involves almost two dozen Yupiit villages acting to reassert their authority, both at the village level and in confederation, particularly to control their own systems of schooling, of land and resource management and of tribal sovereignty (see Fienup-Riordan 1990: 192-205, 228, Kasayulie 1992).

That a new pan-Yup'ik ethnicity is evolving certainly is not a thesis without its complications. At the local level, traditional regional groups continue to have a limited type of existence at present. Conversely, there are times at which an "Alaska Native" or "Native American" identity is called into existence, one example being the move for land claims which led to the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. In general, however, the self-identified ethnicity which middle-aged and young Yupiit provide nowadays when asked in English is that they are Yup'iks or Yupiit.

Nevertheless, professional "outsider" experts (the anthropologists and linguists) and professional "insider" experts (Yup'ik teachers of culture and language) need to keep in mind the relatively recent reality of "the Yupiit" as a distinctive social group and of "Yugcetun" as a distinctive, bounded language. The etic categories have partially evolved into the emic categories, and this process is itself worthy of the attention of all of us who care about increasing our understanding of what it means to be Yup'ik.

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