

## ESKIMO LANGUAGE AND ESKIMO SONG IN ALASKA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF DEGLOBALISATION IN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

Across Alaska, the popularity of indigenous forms of dance has risen, particularly in indigenous communities in which English dominates the heritage languages and Native youth have become monolingual English speakers. Some indigenous people say that Native dance accompanied by indigenous song is a way of preserving their endangered languages. With two case studies from Alaskan Eskimo communities, Yupiget on St. Lawrence Island and Iñupiat in Barrow, this article explores how use of endangered languages among Alaskan Eskimos is related to the activity of performing Eskimo dance. I suggest that practice of Eskimo dancing and singing that local people value as an important linguistic resource can be considered as a de-globalised sociolinguistic phenomenon, a process of performance and localisation in which people construct a particular linguistic repertoire withdrawn from globalisable circulation in multilingualism.

**Keywords:** Deglobalisation; Globalisation; 'Truncated multilingualism'; Endangered languages; Dance and song; Eskimo; Alaska.

### 1. Introduction

In her excellent paper, Charlyn Dyers examines the development of multilingual repertoires among township dwellers in the Cape Town area of South Africa (Dyers 2008). While the situation can be seen upon superficial inspection as cases of language shift in South Africa, where speakers of various African languages shift to Afrikaans and to English, Dyers's analysis reveals the emergence of 'truncated multilingualism' (see also Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck 2005; and Blommaert 2010). Township dwellers do not entirely shift from one language to the other; instead, the different ingredients of their emerging multilingual repertoire are functionally developed in and distributed over separate domains of usage. The heritage language is still used, but just in a handful of genres in the intimate and family sphere; public encounters are performed in Afrikaans, and official interactions are conducted in English genres<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use the term, a 'heritage' language, instead of a 'local', 'Native', or 'ancestral' language. In many minority communities, a 'local' language used in daily conversation and a 'native' language for younger generations are often English or other lingua franca. An 'ancestral' language implies that ancestors of the speech community used the language, but it does not exist anymore. In many communities, however, some elders are still fluent in the language, and as this paper argues, people in other generations have sociolinguistic knowledge in one form or another and see the heritage language as a large part of their ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities.

heritage language is ‘shrunk’, so to speak, and it has ceased to be the ‘complete’ instrument for interaction; it now co-exists, in a minimal form, along other equally specialised and ‘shrunk’ linguistic resources in an emerging multilingual repertoire.

According to Dyers, although the minority languages such as the one in Africa can appear to have disappeared, they in fact continue their life in a transformed shape, as ‘minimal’, ‘restricted’ and ‘specialised’ linguistic resources that co-exist with others in a multilingual repertoire. In fact, it is the multilingual repertoire that, paradoxically, allows the minority to survive, given its limitations as a viable tool for communication across the various domains that make up late-modern life. In this paper, I will engage with similar features among Alaskan Eskimo communities, where the heritage languages – Yupik on St. Lawrence Island and Iñupiaq in Barrow on the Northern shore of Alaska – have secured a continued existence in the context of song-and-dance performances.<sup>2</sup> In spite of different micro- and macro-contexts for both cases, and especially in spite of important differences in the degree of language maintenance, Eskimos in both communities have suggested that the teaching of song and dance is an effective way of transmitting the heritage language to the younger generation. The actual language used in such ritualised cultural practices is a highly restricted, minimal set of resources, all of which are connected to perceived essential features of local cultural heritage. It is the withdrawal of language and cultural performance, away from globalisation processes that have moved English in a dominant position, that has created a safe space for the use of the heritage language, be it that in this process the heritage language has been reduced to emblematic forms.

I propose to call such withdrawals ‘deglocalisation’. Deglobalisation is a process in which effects of globalisation processes (such as massive cultural and language shift, or the emergence of heritage tourism and cultural commodification) are being turned into exclusively local resources, deployed for performing strictly local functions. They thus become local resources that co-exist with the global processes which they now complement. In the literature on cultural globalisation, such patterns of co-existence have been captured in terms of a binary dichotomy between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’, leading to halfway concepts such as ‘glocalisation’ (Bauman 2000) or ‘vernacular globalisation’ (Appadurai 1996), each time signifying the ways in which people perform local practices in relation to global flows and developments (such as in the popular saying ‘think global, act local’). Such concepts suggest a set of phenomena that are essentially both global and local, while their enactment is primarily local (local practices that show globalised features or proceed on the basis of globalised formats).

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<sup>2</sup> In Alaska, ‘Eskimo’ is a legal term and commonly used to refer to Iñupiaq, Central Yup’ik, and St. Lawrence Island Yupik peoples, instead of ‘Inuit’. Inuit is not a word in the Yupik languages of Alaska and Siberia, but it refers to Iñupiat of Northern Alaska, Inuvialuit in Western Canada, Inuit in Eastern Canada, and Kalaallit in Greenland. For full explanation of continued use of the term ‘Eskimo’, see the Alaska Native Language Center website (<http://www.uaf.edu/anlc>). Unlike English, which has only singular and plural forms, Eskimo languages have singular/ adjective, dual, and plural (three or more) forms. In the St. Lawrence Island Yupik language, the singular/adjective form is **Yupik**; dual form, **Yupigek**; and plural form, **Yupiget**. In the Iñupiaq language, the singular/adjective form is **Iñupiaq**; dual form, **Iñupiak**; and plural form, **Iñupiat**. In this article, I use the term *Yupik* to denote the singular and adjective form (i.e. He is *Yupik* and speaks the Yupik language). I use the terms *Yupik people* and *Yupiget* to indicate the plural (i.e. They are *Yupiget*). I also use the term *Iñupiaq* to denote the singular and adjective form (i.e. She is *Iñupiaq* and speaks the *Iñupiaq* language). I use the terms *Iñupiaq people* and *Iñupiat* to indicate the plural (They are *Iñupiat*).

The argument underlying my choice of ‘deglocalisation’ as a term is that such phenomena are not unified but stratified, and that they develop simultaneously or in sequence *at different scale levels*, the global and the local. Globalisation and deglocalisation, consequently, co-exist as processes on different scale levels, where deglocalisation refers to circulation, performance and enactment at the local scale level. Consequently, globalised cultural formats such as hip-hop sung in a heritage language can be deglocalised – for instance when artists use their music for articulating strong local senses of belonging – and subsequently or simultaneously re-globalised – as when such artists publish their songs on the internet or perform them at large international festivals. The phase of de-globalisation takes the globalised material out of global flows, converts it into an emblem of local authenticity by means of intense practices of remodelling, discourse work, and the shaping of performances. It can be considered as a kind of ‘hyper-circulation’, an intensive process of circulation among a small community focusing on restricted cultural forms and meanings. In the words of one of my colleagues, ‘If globalisation is about circulation, deglocalisation is perhaps about hyper-circulation, the formation of “black holes” in which people and their discourses are in constant motion but “forever” trapped’ (Karel Arnaut, personal communication, December 15, 2009).

In this paper, I attempt to examine such deglobalised sociolinguistic phenomena by focusing on Eskimo dance practice in St. Lawrence Island Yupik and Iñupiaq speaking communities in Alaska.<sup>3</sup> My point is not simply to compare degrees of language and dance proficiencies between the two speech or dance communities, but rather to analyse how the importance of singing songs in Eskimo dance performance fits in particular linguistic repertoires and how such linguistic and dance resources meet the practitioners’ needs for a continued affirmation of sociolinguistic identity. Eskimo song as a linguistic resource avoids globalisable circulation. Although it exists in globalisation, Eskimo song, which uses only Eskimo languages, are not necessarily interdependent or integrated in the linguistic globalisation dominated by English. I describe how Eskimos’ attitudes toward their heritage languages as a linguistic resource fall under this category of ‘deglocalised’ and ‘hyper-circulated’ sociolinguistic phenomena.

Before engaging with the two cases I elaborate in this paper, I describe general background information on the peoples, their environments, and the scholarly universe in which they could be captured (section 2). I then move on to discuss the case of Yupik language shift on St Lawrence Island and their use of Eskimo song as a linguistic resource (section 3) followed by the case of Iñupiat in Barrow (section 4). In conclusion, I discuss the main points of my analyses as well as their theoretical implications (section 5).

## **2. Contemporary St. Lawrence Island Yupik and Iñupiaq and sociolinguistic theories**

Despite the close environmental, cultural and historical commonalities they once shared, contemporary Yupiget and Iñupiat have experienced socio-economic and political

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<sup>3</sup> Eskimo people proudly distinguish ‘Eskimo dance’ from Western styles of dance, such as ballroom, disco or ballet. Conservatism in styles and forms has resulted in a remarkable continuity with dance practices stretching back to the earliest descriptions from previous generations.

transformation differently, particularly since the late 1960s when oil was discovered on the Alaskan North Slope, followed by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Yupiget on St. Lawrence Island did not participate in the Act and gave up on economic opportunities in favour of greater control over their land and protection of subsistence hunting lifestyle. Iñupiat in Barrow, on the other hand, have made tremendous efforts to balance economic development through oil exploration with protection of subsistence hunting. As a result, four decades later, contemporary Yupiget still seem to see traditional activities that many other Native communities define, such as indigenous language, subsistence hunting, and Eskimo dancing, as part of daily life. For Iñupiat, on the other hand, Eskimo dance has become an important means of demonstrating the coherence and validity of Iñupiaq ethnic identity.

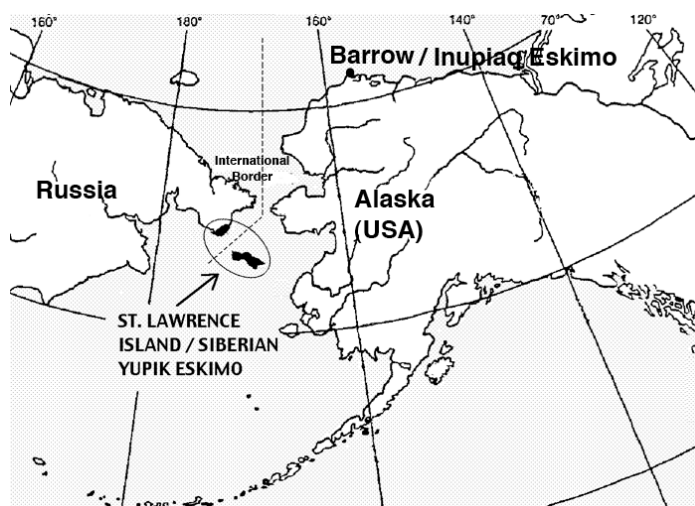


Figure 1 Map of Alaska

Today, the St. Lawrence Island Yupik language is considered to have the highest rate of retention among 20 Alaska Native languages. Yet, an incipient shift from Yupik/English bilingualism to English monolingualism has become apparent in the younger generations. While Yupiget over 25 years old exclusively speak Yupik in daily life, most children speak English as their first language. In contrast to Yupik, the degree of Iñupiaq language shift is more advanced. In Barrow, people under 45 years old are not fluent in Iñupiaq and the language is not used in daily conversation.

Following 24 months of fieldwork, I discovered that contemporary Eskimos perceive indigenous forms of song and dance as activities that portray the past, land, worldview, and subsistence activities, (re)present their traditions and ethnic identity, particularly in speech communities where people do not speak their ancestral language in daily life. Young people who are not fluent in the heritage languages seem to see Eskimo dance as a connection to their heritage and make conscious efforts to preserve the language in Eskimo dance activities. In many communities, dance activities are integrated in bilingual/bicultural education programmes and community activities as part of efforts to maintain heritage languages and educate young people. In 2005, for instance, local schools on St. Lawrence Island began an Eskimo dance programme to stimulate Yupik students' interest in the Yupik language and tradition. Iñupiaq Eskimo parents in Barrow often encourage their children to participate in dance ensembles in order to learn the Iñupiaq language, that is, in order to learn what is now an important

linguistic repertoire in that language. Such sociolinguistic phenomena - non-fluent heritage language speakers value heritage songs as a linguistic repertoire of the language - are well explained in sociolinguistic theories.

The linguistic resources in a speech community are organised in ways of speaking and using the language in particular domains of communicative settings (Hymes 1974). They consist of repertoires, which include 'registers', varieties of a language used in a particular social context (Agha 2007), and 'genres', particular modes and subjects in which the language is used (Blommaert 2008: 42-73). They are specialised in the sense that people select specific forms of language to suit the purposes of the speech event on the basis of the social context and the wider social environment. Part of being a communicatively competent member of a speech community includes having adequate resources for those social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves (Blommaert 2005). Individual speakers always create new linguistic repertoires drawn from their existing ones, and the speech community accepts and spreads such innovations in the linguistic system. In other words, repertoire innovation requires social sanctioning.

As the dominant language shifts from a heritage language to English, the endangered language does not completely disappear but is transformed and assumes specialised micro-functions in minimal genre-specific forms that emerge in particular formulae, such as greetings, kinship terms, and culinary recipes. The particular linguistic resources also emerge when the endangered language is converted into a specialised medium for ceremony or ritual, as in the performance of indigenous forms of dance and song. As the following ethnographic data shows, in some Native American communities, songs sung in indigenous forms of dance performances have become one of the most important linguistic resources of the heritage language, particularly for young people. The heritage languages for them consist of functionally specialised genres as one element in multilingualism.

In the following section, I give a brief review of the current Eskimo language shift on St. Lawrence Island and in Barrow, where similar pattern of language shift have observed but where the degrees of the heritage language retention in contrast. I then examine how variation of language use reflects generational patterns in ways that people dance.

### **3. The case of Yupiget on St. Lawrence Island**

#### ***3.1. St. Lawrence Island Yupik language shift***

In the early 1980s, a group of Yupik bilingual teachers travelled from St. Lawrence Island to Anchorage, the largest city in Alaska, in order to participate in an indigenous language workshop.<sup>4</sup> There, linguist Michael Krauss, the founding director of the Alaska Native Language Center, taught newly formalised Yupik orthographies. During the workshop, Krauss warned that Yupik language retention would dramatically change over the next 20 years, unless Yupiget, not linguists or bureaucrats, undertook tremendous efforts to maintain the language. In response, John Waghiiyi, a young Yupik

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<sup>4</sup> A 'Yupik teacher' here does not necessarily mean certified Yupik teacher but a person who teaches the Yupik language at school. Throughout Yupik history, there has been only one Yupik certified school teacher.

teacher quipped, ‘Are you Nostradamus?’ Waghiyi took serious offense at Krauss’s comments and criticised him for prophesying about an unfavourable Yupik future. The Yupik participants agreed fully and supported Waghiyi’s challenge, based on the assumption that they would never lose their language. In the 1980s, 1,050 of the 1,100 (95.5%) residents on St. Lawrence Island spoke the Yupik language. The rest of the population (50 people or 4.5%) was considered to be non-Yupiget, such as Euro-American teachers, missionaries, and those who married Yupik partners from non-Yupik speaking communities (Alaska Native Language Center 2008). Children still learned it as their first language.

Today, more than 25 years later, Waghiyi and Krauss both remember that day in the workshop. While Waghiyi recounts the story as his introduction to a famous linguist, Krauss thinks the current state of the Yupik language retention sadly proves his prediction. During my field research on St. Lawrence Island in 2006-2007, in fact, many community members were concerned about the decline of the Yupik language use as a first language. Daily conversation among adults over 25 years old was still conducted in Yupik, while most children and adolescents were exclusively speaking English.

The Figure 2 presents language dominance in each generation in the two communities on St. Lawrence Island, Gambell and Savoonga. The data comes from my observation in the field, as well as those of Yupik language specialists on St. Lawrence Island and at the Alaska Native Language Center.

<b>Age</b>	<b>In Gambell</b>	<b>In Savoonga</b>
<b>Over 25</b>	<b>Yupik over English</b>	<b>Yupik over English</b>
<b>25 to 20</b>	<b>English over Yupik</b>	
<b>20 to 10</b>	<b>English over Yupik or</b>	<b>English over Yupik</b>
<b>Under 10</b>	<b>English – monolingual</b>	<b>English over Yupik or</b> <b>English - monolingual</b>

**Figure 2** Age groups and the dominant languages among Yupiget on St. Lawrence Island

‘Yupik over English’, for example, means that use of the Yupik language is preferred over English. In other words, the generation prefers Yupik over English for communication language, which also generally reflects collective language proficiency of each language. In general, the Yupik language for adults is a daily language, which is intensively used both in private and in public domains within the speech community, while language use among many children is ‘transitional’ because they passively understand the language but do not speak it. Code mixing is common in all generations. While fluent Yupik speakers occasionally insert English technical terms, especially nouns such as *computer* or *airplane*, when speaking Yupik, young English-dominant speakers tend to include Yupik words, which are socially and culturally relevant in the speech community in their English sentences.

The language proficiency among children varies. If young generations are exposed to Yupik as their only means of communication, they become fluent Yupik speakers. Yupik children who were adopted or raised by their grandparents, for example, speak Yupik more fluently than those raised by young parents. In Eskimo societies, grandparents often adopt and raise grandchildren as their own (Bodenhorn 1988, 1989; Jolles 2002: 169–171). This is particularly common in cases where the birth parents are still teenagers; some grandparents may adopt their grandchildren to provide a more

stable life for the both young parents and newborn babies. Other reasons may be the belief that a proper family or household should always have children. In other cases, a couple adopts children because they cannot bear their own children or they feel they have not had enough children. In the case of my hosts in Savoonga, Chester (in his mid-70s) and Sally (in her late 60s) Noongwook, who speak predominantly Yupik, adopted their two grandsons to be their sons. The dominant language of the adopted sons, Kenneth in his mid-teens and Collin in his early 20s, is Yupik. They have a much broader range of linguistic repertoires than any of their biological siblings who grew up with their birth parents, currently in their late 40s. Kenneth and Collin not only speak Yupik in daily conversation at home, but also they serve as interpreters for their elderly parents, who ask them to explain in Yupik about Hollywood movies or TV shows that they are watching, and news programmes featuring current events such as the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, or the US Presidential election. They also translate English documents sent by the local school and by the state and federal governments. Such circumstances have trained the brothers to be able to speak various genres of the Yupik language in different circumstances.

Every Yupik person whom I have asked is puzzled by this alarming shift from Yupik bilingualism toward English monolingualism, which began in the mid-1990s. One afternoon, June Koonooka in her mid-50s and I were sitting on the floor in her living room and cutting walrus meat together. June's children, grandchildren, and three nieces were playing around us speaking English. Sophie (2 years old) suddenly began crying, and June scolded Ina (5 years old), who took a balloon from Sophie, in English. After the girls made up, June came back to work and said,

My kids [four offspring between 15 and 34 years old] all speak Yupik. But the young ones [an adopted 5-year-old-daughter and a 2-year-old granddaughter], *they listen better when we speak English to them*. They won't understand if I speak Yupik. (Field Notes, May 28, 2006, emphasis added)

According to June, her young children would not respond her if she spoke to them in Yupik, yet they would understand whatever she said in English. Anders Apassingok Sr. in Gambell, the founding director of the bilingual/bicultural education programme on St. Lawrence Island said, 'It's hard to say when and how it started. Just gradual coming'. In the 1970s and 1980s, when other Alaska Native communities were experiencing language loss, Yupik language retention remained strong. In the past 10 to 15 years, however, something has changed.

Yupik parents offer several possible causes, such as the influence of mass media and the public educational system as well as children's decreasing involvement in subsistence activities. Yupik language shift in is not occurring with the consent of adults or direct pressures by outsiders. On the contrary, the shift is occurring against the expressed desires and wills of adult community members. Satellite television, which became prevalent in Gambell in the early 1990s, is always the primary reason given.<sup>5</sup>

Some parents believe that the current school curriculum pressures the students to be monolingual in English. A mother of five children in her mid-30s, Ramona Tungian in Gambell said, 'My kids used to speak good Yupik before head-start [pre-school]. Once they entered school, they forgot it because of English'. In school, Yupik children

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<sup>5</sup> In Savoonga, during my field work in 2006/2007, many households still did not have off-air or satellite TV reception. Most households had did TVs, which were only used to watch DVDs.

often have great difficulties speaking, reading and writing in ‘standard’ English and spend a considerable amount of time and energy on understanding the language. ‘Standard’ English is considered different from ‘village’ English, particularly by school teachers and linguists who work with Alaska Natives. ‘Village’ underlies discourse patterns in spoken and written English influenced by the grammar of the heritage language and their distinctive perceptions of style and performance (Basham 1999; Kwachka 1992; Kwachka and Basham 1990; Scollon and Scollon 1981). According to the Yupik parents, by the time that children overcome the difficulties of learning English in school, they are presented with having to start learning the complicated Yupik grammar and writing system as a second language, which discourages their interest in St. Lawrence Island Yupik.

Other parents mentioned the lack of a bilingual education programme as a cause of language shift. Bilingual education programmes on St. Lawrence Island began a few decades ago. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of St. Lawrence Island Yupik textbooks were published for the local bilingual programmes by the Alaska Native Language Center, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Material Development of the Bering Strait School District (BSSD) (Koonooka 2005: 252). In the past 15 years, however, due to the shortage of resources, few textbooks have been published. Part of the reason is that the BSSD, which serves 15 isolated Eskimo villages in Western Alaska, comprises a large geographic region with three distinct indigenous language groups, Iñupiaq, St. Lawrence Island Yupik and Central Yup’ik.<sup>6</sup> This means that unique textbooks must be produced for each speech community. To complicate matters further, language retention, local politics and linguistic ideologies vary in each community. Consequently, it is difficult to develop a standardised bilingual education programme or to train local bilingual educators collectively. Currently, Gambell is the only village within the BSSD where the bilingual programme exists as part of the school curriculum. Another 14 Eskimo villages under the BSSD, including Savoonga, gave up on teaching Eskimo languages but do offer *bicultural* programmes, which teach Native arts (e.g. ivory carving, skin sewing and Eskimo dancing).

Changes in daily practices among Yupik youth are considered to be another factor in this language shift, as Yupik is the primary communication language for hunting (men’s work) and gathering (mostly women’s work). While many boys told me that hunting is ‘cool’ and happily follow their elders, girls expressed disinterest in the domestic work associated with subsistence activities. A 13-year-old-girl in Gambell said, ‘Cutting walrus meat, picking greens and berries, doing dishes, baby-sitting, they are all boring!’ Rather, she prefers to hang out with friends, cruise around in an all-terrain vehicle, or watch television at home. According to Yupik elders, the degree of participation in subsistence activities reflects divergent language proficiencies between boys and girls because the former tend to be more fluent in Yupik than the latter. Nevins (2004) argues that Apache speakers follow a linguistic ideology of Apache elders, who believe children learn to speak Apache by doing daily chores with the

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<sup>6</sup> St. Lawrence Island Yupik (Yupik without apostrophe) and Central Yup’ik (Yup’ik with apostrophe between ‘p’ and ‘i’) are two different languages. However, the similarities between the two cause a number of confusions for people who are unfamiliar with the languages and peoples. For example, St. Lawrence Island Yupik is often misspelled Yup’ik, instead of Yupik. Similarly, some people mistakenly refer to YUPIIT (Central Yup’ik/ plural) for YUPIGET (St. Lawrence Island Yupik/ plural). For detailed discussion of the St. Lawrence Island Yupik, see Badton *et al.* (1987) and for those of the Central Yup’ik language, see Jacobson (1984, 1998).



adults, such as chopping wood and hauling water. Similarly, since hunting and gathering are still important parts of Yupik life in the community, participation in activities sustaining life is crucial for children's language acquisition, especially of those linguistic repertoires that are seen as indexing specific cultural practices and values. Yupik elders suggest that children acquire the Yupik language through social interaction with other family members and participation in family and community activities. When children take part together with adults in hunting, gathering, or Eskimo-dancing, which are culturally specific and often lack relevant translation in English, they spend more time listening and speaking Yupik. Such events create important context for mastering and retaining the language. This is the exact reason that Yupik teachers in the bilingual school programme began organising a dance programme every Friday in 2005.

### ***3.2. Practice of Eskimo dancing among Yupiget***

In the school year of 2005/2006, the Gambell school started the 'Eskimo dance programme' every Friday to encourage students to learn Eskimo-dancing, drumming and singing and to spur interest in the Yupik language. Anders Appasingok Sr. in Gambell said that singing in Yupik is one of the best ways to learn the language for Yupik students who prefer to speak English. Many children like Eskimo dancing, and the combination of drum beat and dance motions leaves them with a strong impression of the Yupik lyrics. Anders said, 'Without thinking about grammar or vocabularies, they learn them [the language] from songs as a packet of the language'. His statement echoes comments made by many community members.



**Figure 3 Eskimo Dance Programme at school in Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska.  
Photographed by Hiroko Ikuta, March 2007.**

The popularity of singing Eskimo songs among those who are not fluent Eskimo speakers is a trend among Northern Alaskan Eskimo communities, which Yupiget have followed. Several locals said that even though singers are not fluent in Yupik, it is not hard for them to learn songs if they are familiar with the phonetics of the language. One evening, Christopher Koonooka in Gambell and I discussed the relationship between Yupik language endangerment and the Eskimo dance programme at school. Chris said,

It wouldn't be hard to learn songs, sing songs, even though you don't know what they mean. All these children know how to say all these sounds in Yupik. As long as they can say the sounds, they'll be able to learn whatever songs they want. (Field Notes, August 26, 2006)

Chris's comment that Yupik children on the Island can easily learn Yupik songs also has to do with the linguistic aspects of songs in general as well as with the nature of Eskimo dance songs in particular. Song lyrics are often less complicated than conversational or literary expressions. They are a 'formalised language' whose 'choice of form, of style, of words and of syntax is limited', thus they consist of shorter sentences and offer less complications of tense, aspect and mode (Bloch 1974: 60). In addition, some Eskimo songs have fully developed lyrics while others are filled with syllabic chanting, which makes them more accessible and easy to learn for novices to the language. In summary, with Yupik songs, which are formulated by the nature of poetry and rhythm, novice Yupik speakers can familiarise themselves with Yupik vocabulary, pronunciation and wording.

The Eskimo dance programme began in the beginning of the 2005/2006 school year at the Gambell school and was enthusiastically welcomed by students, bilingual teachers and parents. In May 2006, when I first arrived in Gambell, students danced while five to seven male adults from 30 to 75 years old drummed and sang for them. I did not see any students who participated in drumming and singing, yet most of them seemed to look forward to the weekly dance gatherings. The Yupik bilingual teachers were satisfied with the fact that students seemed to be more interested in Eskimo cultural activities than before. The teachers expressed that their new attempt, which started at the beginning of the school year, was successful.

In the 2006/2007 school year, some changes oriented by the dance programme in the previous year were observed. Chris Kaningok, a high school sophomore student, joined in with the male adults to drum and sing, not only in the school programme but also in community gatherings for Eskimo dancing. According to Anders Apassingok Sr., the high school student just showed up with his drum one day, sat down, and started drumming without a word to anybody. Anders and other drummers did not say anything to Chris, but they were happy that the young man was willing to participate in the cultural activity. Meanwhile, Bobby Ungwiluk, another high school sophomore student, made a video for a student project about Eskimo dance and song. He interviewed elders in Yupik about the meanings and origins of a few Yupik songs and their choreographies. Bobby and the elders collaborated in the process of translation so that the final version of the video includes English captions. His video project won a student award from the school district.

In October of 2007, a group of eight Yupik students from elementary to high school ages, who are mostly monolingual English speakers, performed Eskimo dance at a state-wide indigenous cultural festival in Fairbanks, accompanied by elders singing. In order to accomplish their goal on the big stage, the students practiced motion dance several times a week for two months and developed innovative, more attractive and dramatic choreographies designed for non-Yupik audiences. Yupik teachers in the bilingual programme made fund-raising efforts for their trip and helped to prepare the dancers' uniform regalia. The school trip was a success, as it represented a rare occasion, if not the first time, for the students on the Island to perform Eskimo dance in front of a state-wide audience in the state's second largest city. One student told me that during

this trip, he finally learned to appreciate his unique culture and wanted to learn more about it. Among Alaska Natives, Yupiget are admired for their ‘outlaw’ reputation (Hollowell 2004: 80). Unlike the rest of the Alaska Natives, Yupiget have refused to join the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 in order to protect their sovereignty, subsistence lifestyle and heritage language. However, from the Yupik teenagers’ perspective, their daily life in the village is old fashioned and boring. Through interactions with students from other parts of Alaska, many of which have very limited, if any, knowledge of their heritage languages, the Yupik students seemed to realise the uniqueness of the strong heritage language retention as well as the threat of ongoing language shift and issues of its preservation.

This way of Eskimo-dancing among Yupik youth is comparative with that of Yupik adults. Unlike Yupik children, whose focus is to learn and perform motion dances accompanied by elders drumming and singing, Yupik adults seem to enjoy singing and listening to Eskimo songs, which may be accompanied by invitational dances. Yupik adults do not have a dance ensemble with formal membership or scheduled dance practice. Gatherings for singing among drummers often become gatherings for Eskimo dancing in the community. The social context of Eskimo-dancing among adults is rooted in spontaneous acts of entertaining themselves, rather than organised practice by an institution. The distinct ways of dancing between the Yupik-dominant and English-dominant speakers among Yupiget suggest that the functions and meanings of dancing differ between the two. Hymes suggests that ‘the cognitive significance of a language depends not only on structure, but also on patterns of use’ (Hymes 1966: 116). Similarly, even when dance structures between Yupik adults and children are identical, their repertoires and functions differ. The significance of Eskimo dance depends on the place and pattern of uses.

I now turn to the discussion of the Iñupiaq case of ways of speaking and dancing. As I shall show, the Iñupiaq language and Eskimo dance activities are both more formalised and institutionalised than in the Yupik case.

#### **4. The case of Iñupiat in Barrow**

##### **4.1. *Iñupiaq language shift***

Iñupiaq language retention in Barrow contrasts sharply with the situation of the Yupik on St. Lawrence Island. While a shift in language began to be visible among Yupik speech communities just 15 years ago, language shift among Iñupiaq speech communities took place almost half a century prior to that. By the mid-1990s, only 8% of households in Barrow still spoke Iñupiaq as the primary language (the North Slope Borough Economic Profile and Census Report 1998/1999).<sup>7</sup> Today, most of the elders over 70 years old are bilingual; some prefer Iñupiaq to English as a communication language. Many people in their 50s and 60s are bilingual Iñupiaq and English speakers, but their language of communication is exclusively English. Most people under 45 years old are monolingual English or English-dominant speakers (Figure 4), based on

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<sup>7</sup> It is probable that there has been further language shift since the 1990s, but no comprehensive linguistic survey is available.

my field observation, as well as those of Iñupiaq language specialists in Barrow and at the Alaska Native Language Center.

Age	In Barrow
Over 70	Iñupiaq over English
70 to 45	English over Iñupiaq <i>or</i> English - monolingual
Under 45	English – monolingual

Figure 4 Age groups and the dominant languages in Barrow

In Barrow, part of the reason for the advanced language shift is that the percentage of the non-Iñupiaq population has been steadily increasing since the establishment of permanent whaling and trading posts by Euro-Americans in the early 1890s. Oil production development starting in the 1970s prompted further immigration and assimilation to English. According to the US census in 2000, only 57% of the population in Barrow is Iñupiat. Due to these extensive contacts with monolingual English speakers from outside, the dominant communication language in the village has rapidly become English.

Today, the Iñupiaq language is not used in daily conversations, but has important functions in the context of Iñupiaq cultural and ritual performances. The majority of active Iñupiaq speakers consist of: 1) Iñupiaq bilingual teachers and non-Iñupiaq linguists; 2) community leaders who give speeches at cultural events; and 3) elders who are fluent Iñupiaq speakers and whose life experiences based on the older form of life on the land have become institutionally marked as specialised Iñupiaq knowledge (Meek 2007: 3).

One of the largest differences of Eskimo language use between Yupik and Iñupiaq speech communities is that Yupik is used in both public and private domains targeting Yupik speakers, while Iñupiaq is used mainly in the public sphere, often targeting non-Iñupiaq speakers. For example, both language communities use the Eskimo languages in public meetings. While Yupiget use the Yupik language in meetings only with *insiders*, Iñupiat use the Iñupiaq language in meetings both with *insiders and outsiders*, to publicise the use of the heritage language. Iñupiaq, along with English, is spoken at the openings of conferences, meetings, social gatherings and ceremonies sponsored by Native corporations, tribal councils and the petroleum industry. In national and international conferences, Iñupiaq leaders quite often begin their speeches in Iñupiaq, referring to their Iñupiaq names, instead of English names, and their hometowns, and then switch to English for the rest of the speech. The speakers know that the majority of their audiences would not understand Iñupiaq, yet it is important for them to make the use of the language public. In this way, outsiders, particularly bureaucrats in the Euro-American dominant society, hear the Iñupiaq voice, which stands for a way in which the Iñupiat use specific ways of speaking in order to make themselves understood by others. For the sake of cultural politics surrounding Iñupiat, the fact that they use the Iñupiaq language is more important than what they say. In such a context, the language functions as an emblematic resource of 'Iñupiaq-ness' rather than as a fully developed linguistic resource. This is connected to Iñupiaq ways of Eskimo dancing in Barrow, where dance activities are more institutionalised. Barrow Iñupiat currently have five formally organised dance ensembles. One of the significant

points in Eskimo dance performances among Iñupiat is that they tend to focus on successful stage performance, in order to present Eskimo dance as a vital part of Iñupiaq culture to insiders and outsiders, rather than an entertainment among insiders as is the case with Yupik adults.

Through the community's concerted efforts to maintain the Iñupiaq language, announcements and news in Barrow are broadcast over public radio and television in Iñupiaq as well as in English. There is a programme called the 'Eskimo Channel' which is broadcast on local TV and radio stations. The programme consists of recordings of elders' stories and Eskimo songs sung in dance performances. Except for Bethel, a hub of the Central Yup'ik region, none of the Alaska Native communities can afford to maintain their own mass media.

Literacy is another important linguistic register for the Iñupiat. Today, bilingual programmes in Barrow are an important sphere where children learn an Eskimo language, particularly in the case of Iñupiat. As more than 500 Iñupiaq textbooks have been published since the 1980s, a language of predominantly oral tradition now appears widely in written form, and its bilingual education programmes and documentation projects of traditional knowledge focus quite strongly on literacy (Kaplan with Kingston 2007). The genre of the Iñupiaq language that students learn tends, thus, to be more literacy-oriented. In addition, in the regional cultural festivals held in Barrow, the hosts often distribute pamphlets about the event written in English and Iñupiaq. As is the case with public speech, the Iñupiaq language in those pamphlets serves as an emblem of the Iñupiaq language for both Iñupiaq and non-Iñupiaq speakers.

In this sociolinguistic context of the Iñupiaq language, Iñupiaq speakers in any generation are gaining a certain prestige. For example, Iñupiat who are bilingual in both English and Iñupiaq tend to get higher positions in the tribal government, as successful role models bridging two worlds. As the Iñupiaq language is more institutionalised, a discourse in the Iñupiaq language is perceived to be a discourse about Iñupiaq culture and tradition. The ideology of the Iñupiaq language becomes coterminous with an ideology of cultural preservation in cultural politics surrounding Iñupiat. This is directly related to the way Iñupiat dance, particularly among young generations.

#### ***4.2. Practice of Eskimo dancing among Iñupiat***

In Barrow, currently more than 200 Iñupiat are involved in Eskimo dance activities as members of one of the five formally organised dance ensembles. These dance groups practice three times a week for a few hours each. As is heritage language politics, Eskimo dance among Iñupiat is more formalised and institutionalised than those among Yupiget.



**Figure 5** *Nuvukmiut* ['people from Point Barrow'] Dance Group performing in the World Eskimo Indian Olympics in Fairbanks, Alaska. Photographed by Hiroko Ikuta, July 2002.

One of the most striking comments I repeatedly and explicitly heard from Iñupiat in the younger generations is that singing songs in the Iñupiaq language is a way to learn and preserve their endangered language. In fact, memorising Iñupiaq songs is an activity that occupies considerable time and energy in the life of the young drummers. Among the Barrow Dancers, almost all active members are either teenagers or people in their twenties and many of them told me that developing the ability to sing songs in Iñupiaq is one of the most important means of learning the language. Some of them explained that learning Iñupiaq in school or attending Iñupiaq church service requires great effort. Singing songs in Iñupiaq with their peers, on the other hand, is much more enjoyable. In other words, singing Iñupiaq songs is a less demanding language exposure task, during which particular specialised genres can be acquired and during which, thus, a form of language proficiency can be constructed in Iñupiaq.

Members of the Barrow Dancers have developed a number of strategies for the language learning required of them for dance performance. In my interview with him, Fred Elavgak, the lead singer of the Barrow Dancers said, 'Iñupiaq is easy for some people and difficult for others. Right now, that's what they have been working on as a group. Learn our language'. Fred is in his early 30s, but because he was raised by his elderly grandparents, he understands Iñupiaq well. Among various strategies for language acquisition, or more correctly, learning Iñupiaq lyrics, several dancers listen to tapes of Iñupiaq songs whenever they drive their cars around town. Some carry flash cards of Iñupiaq lyrics around and look through them whenever they have spare time. Occasionally, Iñupiaq speakers transliterate the words of songs for less competent speakers. Baxter Hopson in his late 30s said,

Herman helps me a lot. He writes down the words for the songs. I learned a lot from Herman, all the words. Lots of songs from Tommy Akpik. He gave me tapes to listen to. That's how I learned songs. Some of the songs are hard to learn. After they write down the words, it's easier. I'm still learning how to put sentence together. Eskimo dance and drumming help me to learn how to talk more. (Field Notes, February 13, 2007)

While adult singers in various dance groups make the tremendous effort to memorise Iñupiaq lyrics, many parents encourage their young children to dance in order to learn the language. For example, a young couple in their early 30s, Vernon and Isabell Elavgak in Barrow, are accomplished dancers. While they are not fluent Iñupiaq speakers, they strongly encourage their young boys (ages two and five) to participate in

the practice sessions of the Barrow Dancers. At home, the boys watch Eskimo dance videos and listen to Iñupiaq song tapes while they are playing. The parents tell the children, 'Look, you know this song. Show me [your dance]'. The older boy proudly sings Iñupiaq song and dances for the parents, accompanied by his younger brother. The children have already begun to memorise the dance movements, lyrics of a variety of songs in Iñupiaq, and become familiar with the faces and names of dancers inside and outside of the community through videos. Isabell Elavgak said,

I have taken them to our practices [a few times a week in the dance group] since they were babies. My youngest, I brought him to the practice when he was only five days old.... They find all kinds of toys to use as drums. Anything they can find, they make it. Now they know how to sing [in Iñupiaq]. (Field Notes, February 14, 2007)

Following the popularity of Eskimo dance videos, members of the Barrow Dancers and their families often devote considerable time to recording videos of the group performances and practices and enjoy watching them later. Occasionally, more than ten people gather in a house and spend many hours (I have witnessed an eight-hour video marathon) watching old dance videos performed by Iñupiat in Barrow from the 1970s to the 1980s. During these long hours, children mimic the dancers' movements and sing songs in Iñupiaq, while adults talk in English about the youthful appearances of the elders. They also use the videos to figure out the lyrics and dance motions of old songs. Everybody appears to enjoy mistakes made by dancers and occasionally rewind the scenes to joke and laugh about them. In such interactions, however, English remains the dominant language. Even when the Iñupiaq language is brought to the fore in value and importance, it is still only used as a linguistic repertoire of song.

This situation indicates that young Iñupiat have mastered the skills required for singing Iñupiaq songs and have memorised a few sentences identifying themselves in Iñupiaq when such occasions arise during a dance performance. Yet this does not mean that they are actively acquiring the Iñupiaq language to such an extent that it could be used in daily conversation. In fact, young people generally do not speak Iñupiaq to elders, and elders speak only English to their offspring and grandchildren, based on the assumption that they do not understand Iñupiaq and cannot communicate in the language. Efforts to memorise the lyrics of old Iñupiaq songs result more in the creation of a ritual 'ancient' Iñupiaq language. It is a particular linguistic repertoire strongly indexed on dancing and singing practices, than actually advancing the cause of active 'complete' language learning (Bloch 1974, 1976). I use the term 'ancient' Iñupiaq to indicate that the songs sung by contemporary Iñupiat are often old songs composed by fluent Iñupiaq speakers many decades ago. Due to the general decline of the Iñupiaq language, contemporary Iñupiat do not actively compose new songs in Iñupiaq, nor do they compose songs in English. Thus, the lyrics of Eskimo songs remain in an older form of the Iñupiaq language. As a result, many songs contain archaic Iñupiaq words or phrases which contemporary Iñupiat, including elders, do not understand. For young Iñupiat, singing Iñupiaq songs has become an exercise in memorisation. It is what Moore calls 'the creation of a permanent record of the language for posterity' (Moore 2006: 298).

The ceremonial repertoire of the Iñupiaq language has, then, become one of the most important Iñupiaq linguistic resources, an emblematic source of ethnic pride for monolingual English speakers (Kaplan 2001). It also provides performers with

ethnolinguistic identity, which refers to ‘an identity expressed through belonging to a particular language community’ (Blommaert 2005b: 214). In the case of Alaskan Eskimos, an ethnolinguistic identity is related to a sense of belonging to a language community as well as to an ethnic community.

## 5. Conclusion

Needless to say, contemporary Alaskan Eskimo communities are members of the globalised world. In fact, the decline of Alaskan Eskimo language use in the postcolonial period is directly related to the fact, English as a global language, which is used in local, regional, and national scales of contemporary Eskimo lives. English is used not only at home, in school, and in mass media, but also in negotiation of subsistence hunting right, land claims, natural resource management with the state and federal government agencies. Eskimos also need to be skilled English-speaking negotiators with multinational corporations that manage gas and oil exploration in the Arctic. In such a globalised context, the existence of the Eskimo language politicises Eskimo people and culture. Visibility of the language is an important political tool for Eskimos to fight back to the globalised mainstream.

Today, the majority of young Eskimos are monolingual English speakers, who feel ‘guilty’ about their lack of heritage language proficiencies. In general, both insiders and outsiders assume that ‘if you are Eskimo, you must be able to speak Eskimo’. Eskimo songs sung by English-dominant speaking Eskimo youth provide the audience with tangible evidence of the maintenance of the language and a sense of cultural continuity. Generally, learning a language takes time and effort. Its progress is not easily recognisable to people, especially those who are unfamiliar with the language. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) observed similar phenomena in Tlingit Indian communities in the Southwest Alaska, where few people speak the heritage language. They suggest that utterance of the heritage language by young generation while brandishing traditional regalia evokes linguistic continuity to the performers and audiences in an immediate way – something that a long, formal process of language acquisition cannot meet (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 67-68). In the endangered language speech community, the community and linguists often expect children to master the language to a level where they are able to teach it to future generations. It is a different expectation from that of many non-Native students who are expected to master only basic vocabulary and grammar of a second language in school.

The popularity of Eskimo dance and the decline of daily conversations in Eskimo languages among young Yupigiet and Iñupiat suggest the linguistic repertoires related to dance activities has become an important linguistic resource for young generations. Some Eskimo teachers and students from both St. Lawrence Island and Barrow told me that learning the Eskimo language in school requires great effort, while singing songs is easier and more enjoyable. It implies that learning songs is not an easy task, but more accessible than tackling the memorisation of a static vocabulary and grammar with a long-term commitment to learning, development and use. For both Yupik and Iñupiaq youth, singing Eskimo songs in dance performance has become an important means of maintaining the Eskimo languages.

Eskimo song as a linguistic resource is employed to reproduce indexicality of the Eskimo language and culture on various scales. Blommaert (2005: 11) suggests that



we acknowledge the importance of indexicality because 'apart from referential meaning, acts of communication produce *indexical* meaning: Social meaning, interpretive leads between what is said and the social occasion in which it is being produced' (original emphasis). What Eskimo dance indexes are positive images and feelings of Eskimo life, culture and language. Even in today's globalised world, Yupiget and Iñupiat never insert English words in their Eskimo songs, but they sing them exclusively in Eskimo. People neither make Eskimo songs in English nor English songs in Eskimo. Media of presenting the Eskimo language is in Eskimo framework (e.g. Eskimo dance), not in frameworks of the dominant society (e.g. hiphop in Eskimo, radio or TV shows in Eskimo). It is different from so called 'localisation' of the language because the Eskimo languages in Eskimo songs have not changed. Rather, social linguistic dynamics surrounding contemporary Eskimo have changed. Thus, its use and value have transformed and appear to be in a deglobalised form.

Contemporary Eskimo language and song are not just a means of communication or entertainment, but an important part of ethnolinguistic identity. Eskimo languages used in Eskimo dance performance are a powerful symbol of Eskimo culture. They have been extended to represent 'Eskimo-ness', especially among younger generations who are English-dominant speakers. For young people, particularly in the Iñupiaq case, singing songs in an Eskimo language functions more as a symbolic resource than as a linguistic resource. It suggests that Eskimo dance has become a social and psychological alternative for speaking the Eskimo languages as a full social tool. The Eskimo language in Eskimo dance performance operates as an emblem of belonging and identity, and thus serves important functions other than those of a verbal and written communication tool. Deglobalisation is a nonlinear and flexible process, and it may not be something that many linguists identify as language maintenance or preservation. But such process can be a starting point to consider deglobalised linguistic phenomena in the globalised world.

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