

Word — Niugneq

MAAMA NIUGNERET AMLESQAT NALLUNITAI. – MY MOTHER KNOWS A LOT OF WORDS.

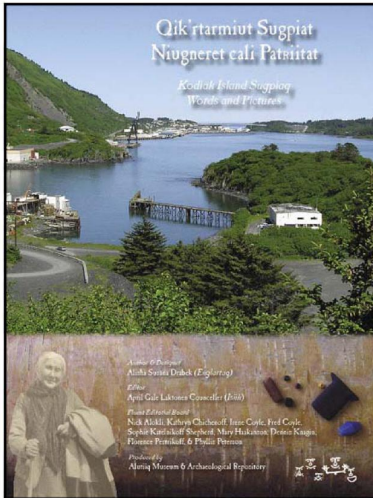


Photo: Cover of the Alutiiq Picture Dictionary.

Anthropologists classify the Alutiiq language as part of the larger Yup'ik language family. It is one of five closely related Native languages spoken on both sides of the Bering Sea, from the Chukchi Peninsula, across Saint Lawrence Island and Western Alaska to the gulf coast of Alaska. These languages form a continuum, with each language most closely related to its nearest neighbor.

There are two regional dialects of the Alutiiq language, one spoken in Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula, and a second spoken in the Kodiak Archipelago and on the Alaska Peninsula. Furthermore, within these dialects are various sub-dialects. In the Kodiak region, for example, there are small but notable differences in the language spoken at each end of the archipelago.

Another example of the language's breadth is the use of a special ritual language by shamans. During performances, shamans would communicate with their helping spirits in a language that the audience could not fully understand and the few surviving shaman's songs cannot be fully translated.