

Tongue — Uluq

ULUN AN'SGU! – STICK OUT YOUR TONGUE!



Photo: Alutiiq language speakers and learners at a 2015 Language summit in Kodiak.

One difficult step in mastering the Alutiiq language is learning to use distinct sounds. The Alutiiq alphabet is phonetic, meaning each letter has its own sound. While some of these sounds are similar to those found in English, others are unique. For example, the 'n' in the Alutiiq word for tree, *napaq*, has the same sound as the n in the English word nest. However, an Alutiiq k is softer and less explosive than an English k. It sounds more like the k in skirt than the hard k at the beginning of kite.

The position of the tongue is important in learning Alutiiq letter sounds, especially those of consonants. There are twenty-two consonants in the Alutiiq alphabet, and each is made by obstructing the flow of air out of the mouth to some degree. To create consonant sounds, speakers place their tongues in one of five positions inside the mouth—from the lips to the back of the mouth.

For example, Alutiiq q is pronounced by bringing the back of your tongue up to the rear roof of your mouth. and making a q sound. It is a uvular consonant. To some, this may sound like a k, but it is produced further back in the throat.

People who teach the Alutiiq language remind students that it is important to learn the specific sounds of Alutiiq letters. To speak in Alutiiq, you cannot pronounce words with English sounds.