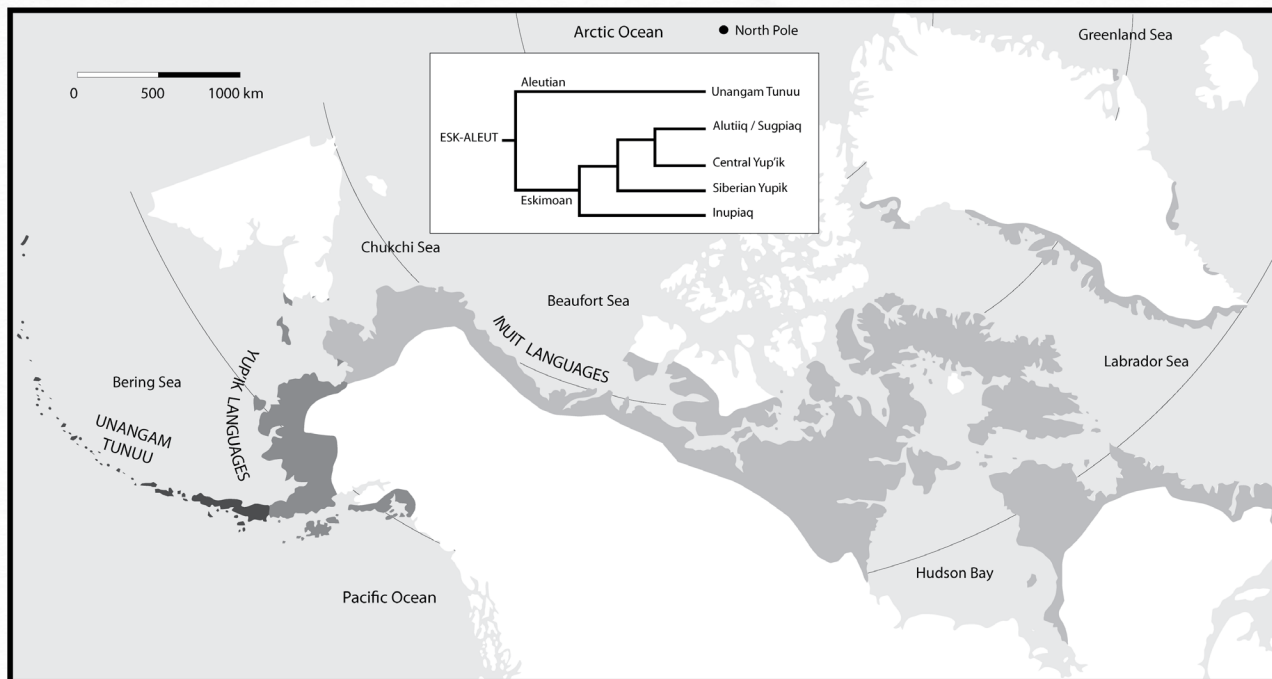


LET'S ALL STUDY ALUTIIQ!

– *Guangkuta litnaurlita Alutiit'stun!*

The Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people speak Sugt'stun, or simply Alutiiq. Some people also refer to the language as *Alutiit'stun*—which means “like an Alutiiq.” This language belongs to the broader Esk-Aleut language family, which has two main branches. The UnangaꝔ people of the Aleutian chain speak Unangam Tunuu. The “Eskimoan” branch is spoken from southern Alaska to Greenland by a variety of different cultures. Speakers of Sugt'stun are found in the Gulf of Alaska, Yup'ik speakers are indigenous to western Alaska and Siberia, and speakers of Inupiaq or Inuit live in northern Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. This diagram shows the relationships between these languages.



Each branch in the diagram above represents a distinctive split between languages, with each language most closely related to its nearest neighbors on the chart. For example, an Alutiiq speaker can communicate easily with a Yup'ik speaker. Their languages are closely related as illustrated by their nearness on the chart. In contrast, Alutiiq and Unangam Tunuu speakers cannot understand each other. Although distantly related, their languages are very different. A comparison of some common Alutiiq, Yup'ik, and Unangam Tunuu words illustrates this situation.

WORD COMPARISONS

ENGLISH	ALUTIIQ	YUP'IK	UNANGAM TUNUU
hair (plural)	nuyat	nuyat	imlin (E) / imlis (W)
person	suk	yuk	anġaġinaġ
ten	qulen	qula	hatiġ
ocean	imaq	imaq	alaġuġ

As a maritime culture, members of classical Alutiiq society were highly mobile, traveling and trading great distance across the Gulf of Alaska. In their travels, the Alutiiq interacted with Unangaġ, Dena'ina, Eyak, and Lingít peoples, who spoke very different languages. Thus, they learned their neighbors' languages to facilitate travel, trade, and intermarriage. Some people also used war captives as translators. It is not surprising that many Alutiiq families became multilingual when young men returned from visits to foreign villages or people from other societies joined Alutiiq families.

Today, there are two major dialects in the Alutiiq language—Koniag Alutiiq and Chugach Alutiiq. While part of the same language, each dialect has differences in accent and vocabulary, much like the difference between American and Australian English. Residents of the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound speak Chugach Alutiiq, while residents of Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula speak Koniag Alutiiq. Each dialect is further broke into sub-dialects and sub-sub-dialects, refelcting smaller variations in Alutiiq speech.

PLURALIZATION

Singular words in Alutiiq usually (but not always) end in *q*. Dual (two) of a noun will end in *k*, and plural (three or more) of a noun will end in *t*. For example, one rock is *yaamaq*, two rocks is *yaamak*, and three or more is *yaamat*.

ALUTIIQ SPEAKERS TODAY

During the period of Western colonization, Alutiiq people learned Russian and English in addition to their own language. Many people became bilingual and some trilingual. In the 20th century, however, American schoolteachers punished Native children for speaking anything but English. In later years, many parents chose not to teach Alutiiq to their children, hoping to protect them from racism. As a result, the number of Alutiiq speakers declined steadily during the 20th century. Today there are just a handful of Alutiiq speakers who learned the language as children.

To many Alutiiq people, reawakening the Alutiiq language is a critical part of preserving Native heritage. Many projects are underway in the Kodiak community to revitalize the language. Through these efforts, the sounds of Alutiiq are returning to Kodiak.



LEARN MORE:

PUBLISHED RESOURCES:

Alutiiq Word of the Week: Fifteen Year Compilation, 2012, by Amy Steffian and April Laktonen Counciller, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Classroom Grammar of Koniag Alutiiq: Kodiak Island Dialect, 1996, by Jeff Leer and Nina Zeedar, University of Alaska, Alaska Native Language Center, Fairbanks.

A Conversational Dictionary of Kodiak Alutiiq, 1978, by Jeff Leer, University of Alaska, Alaska Native Language Center, Fairbanks.

Kodiak Alutiiq Language Conversational Phrasebook with Audio CD, 2006, by April G. Laktonen Counciller, edited by Jeff Leer, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit'stun Niugneret Kraasiirkii: "Color Kodiak Alutiiq Words": An Alutiiq Picture Dictionary, 2012, by Alisha Drabek, Native Village of Afognak and Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Eskimo and Aleut Languages, 1984, by A.C. Woodbury. In *Arctic*, edited by David Damas, *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 5, W.T. Sturtevant gen. ed., Pp. 49-63. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES:

Alutiiq Museum Website
www.alutiiqmuseum.org
Learn the Alutiiq alphabet, study grammar, and browse Alutiiq Word of the Week lessons.

Alutiiq Language Website
www.alutiiqlanguage.org
Learn the Alutiiq language through lessons, videos, and printables, and look up words in the online dictionary.