

Kinkut Alutiit – WHO ARE THE ALUTIIQ?



In the historic era, Russian traders called all of the Native peoples of southwestern Alaska “Aleut” —despite regional differences in language, cultural practices, and history. In the modern era, this has caused confusion. People with distinct cultures are known by the same name. Today, Kodiak’s Native people use a variety of self-designators. There is no one correct term. Many Elders prefer Aleut, a term they were taught as children. Today, others choose Alutiiq or Sugpiaq. What does each of these terms mean?

SUGPIAQ – This is a traditional self-designator of the Native people of Prince William Sound, the outer Kenai Peninsula, the Kodiak Archipelago, and the Alaska Peninsula. It means “real person,” and it is the way Native people described themselves prior to Western contact. Sugpiaq is a popular self-designator on the Kenai Peninsula, and is gaining use on Kodiak.

ALEUT – This word means “coastal dweller,” and it is derived from a Siberian Native language. Russian traders introduced the term, using it to describe the Native people they encountered in the Aleutian Islands, the Alaska Peninsula, and the Kodiak Archipelago. Aleut is still frequently used to refer to the Native people of the Aleutian Islands, although Unangaꔪ is gaining popularity.

ALUTIIQ – “Alutiiq” is the way Sugpiaq people say “Aleut.” It is the Native way of pronouncing the Russian-introduced word “Aleut” in their own language. Alutiiq is a popular self-designator in Kodiak and reflects the region’s complex Russian and Native history. People used this term occasionally in the Russian era. It gained popularity starting in the 1980s.

ALUTIIQ OR ALUTIIT?

ALUTIIQ (singular)

- Noun: to describe one person:
I am an Alutiiq.

- Noun: to describe the language:
They are speaking Alutiiq.

- Adjective: as a modifier:
There are many Alutiiq artists.

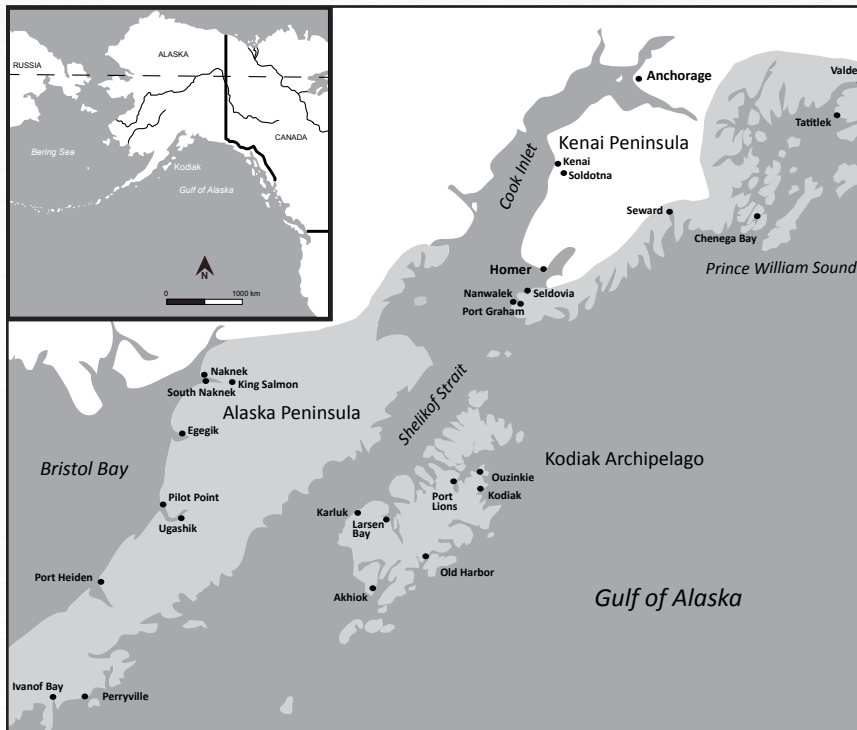
ALUTIIT (plural)

- Noun: to describe more than two:
There are 40 Alutiit living in Karluk.

- Noun: to describe the people or culture collectively: **The ancestors of the Alutiit settled Kodiak Island.**

WHAT ABOUT ESKIMOS? The word Eskimo comes from Montagnais, a Canadian Indian language.

It means “snowshoe netter,” and not, as many think, “eaters of raw meat.” Anthropologists use “Eskimo” to refer to a distinctive set of related cultures in the North American Arctic—from the Gulf of Alaska to Greenland. In Alaska, this includes the Alutiiq, Yup’ik, and Inupiaq peoples. The term Eskimo, however, is not a popular self-designator. Many people feel it is offensive. They prefer to be recognized by their cultural affiliation (e.g., Alutiiq, Yup’ik, or Inupiaq). Similarly, in Canada, Native people prefer the term Inuit.



Contemporary communities in the Alutiiq Nation.

ALUTIIQ / SUGPIAQ NATION

The Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people are one of eight Alaska Native peoples. They have inhabited the coastal environments of Southcentral Alaska for over 7,500 years. Their traditional homelands include Prince William Sound, the outer Kenai Peninsula, the Kodiak Archipelago, and the Alaska Peninsula. Here people lived in coastal communities and hunted sea mammals from skin-covered boats.

Alutiiq people share many cultural practices with the other coastal peoples, particularly the Unangǎ of the Aleutian Chain and the Yup'ik of the Bering Sea coast. Anthropologists believe these cultural similarities reflect a distant but common ancestry.

At the time of European colonization, there were distinct regional groups of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people, each speaking a slightly different dialect of the Alutiiq language.

KONIAG—often used to refer to Kodiak Islanders, due to the Kodiak Island regional Native corporation of the same name. Linguistically, Koniag refers to the major Alutiiq dialect spoken both on Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula. The word Koniag is derived from an Unangǎ (Aleutian Island) word for the people of Kodiak. Some people from Kodiak use the term *Qik'rtarmiut* - meaning “Island People,” to refer to the Alutiit of Kodiak Island, and *Aluuwirmiut*, or “People of Aluuwiiq” (a place name), to refer to the Alutiiq people residing on the Alaska Peninsula.

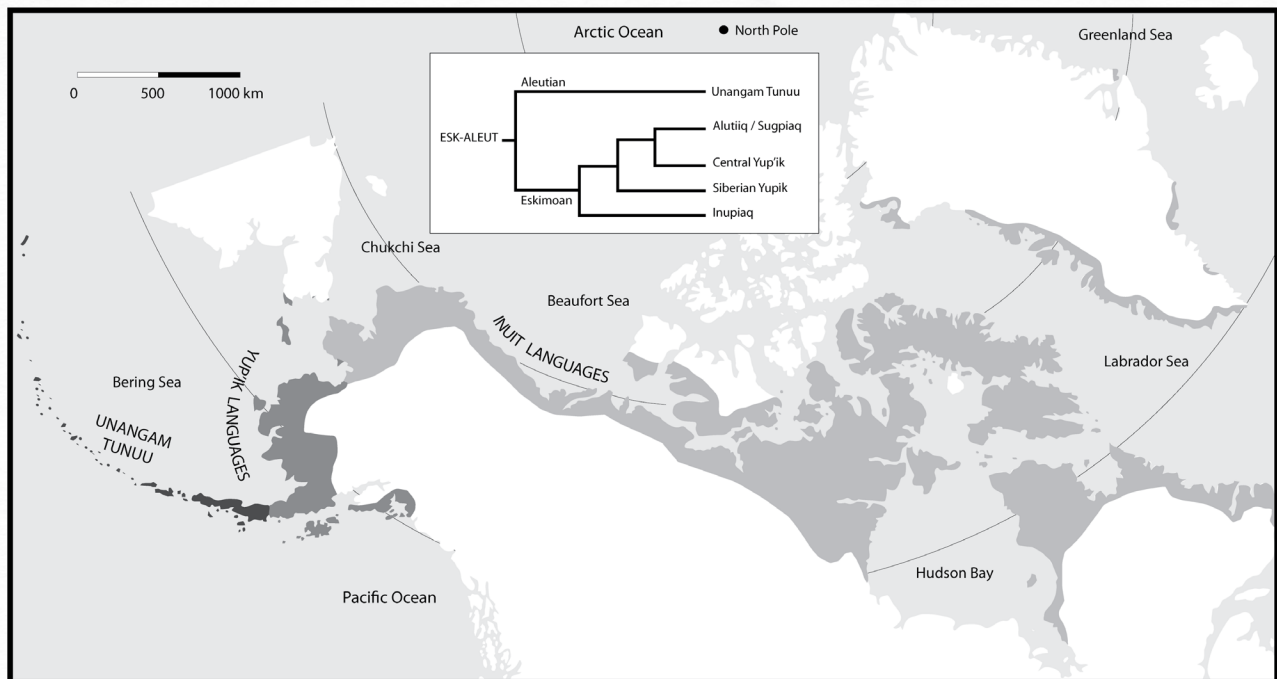
CHUGACH—Alutiiq people residing on the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound. This term commonly refers to the major Alutiiq dialect spoken in this region, and is also the name of the regional Native corporation. The Kenai Peninsula Alutiiq people are known as *Kangiyarmiut*, or “People of the Bay.” The Alutiiq residents of Prince William Sound are called the *Ungalararmiut*, “People of the East.”

Today more than 6,300 Kodiak Alutiiq people live in six rural villages, each of Alaska's major cities, and around the world. There are about 1,800 Alutiiq people in the Kodiak Archipelago. About 38% live in six remote villages: Akhiok, Karluk, Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, and Port Lions. The rest reside in the City of Kodiak. These communities represent a small percentage of the Alutiiq villages once occupied. In the late 1700s there were more than 60 Alutiiq villages in the Archipelago.

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 Unangaꝯ 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	anġaġinaꝯ
ten	qulen	qula	hatiꝯ
ocean	imaq	imaq	alaġuꝯ

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 Unangâ, 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.