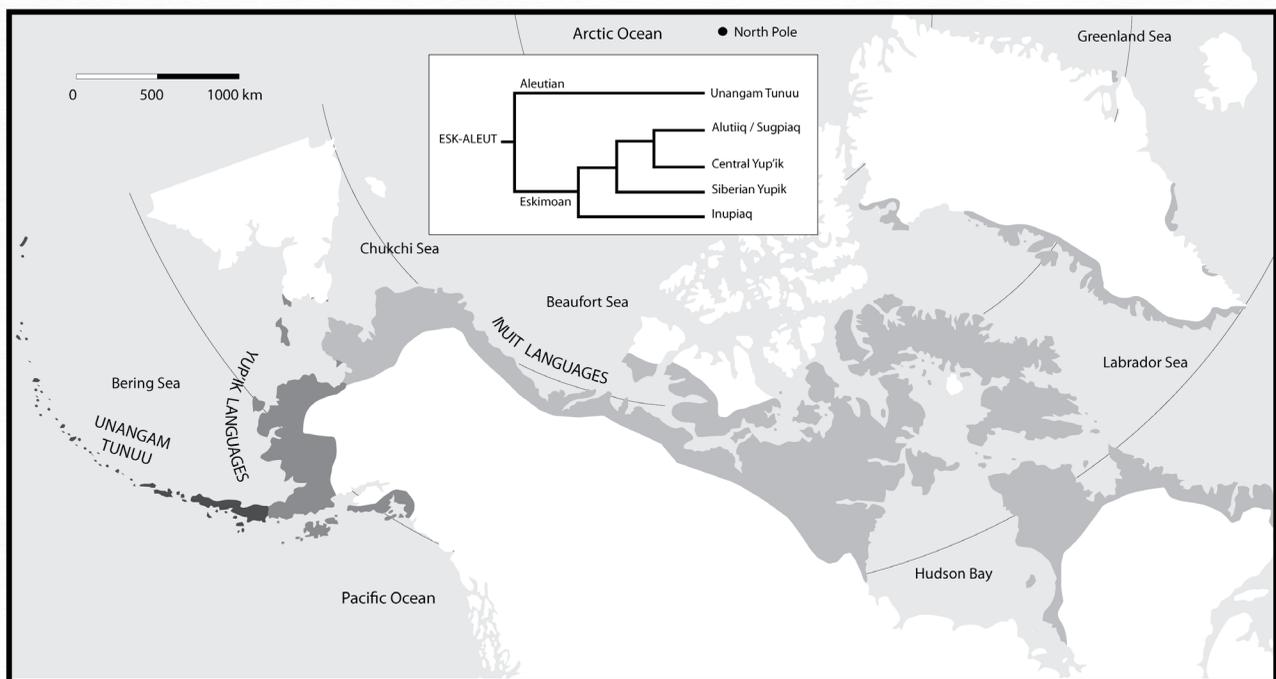


GUANGKUTA LITNAURLITA SUGT'STUN! – Let's all study Alutiiq!

The Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people speak Sugt'stun, or simply Alutiiq. Some people also refer to the language as *Alutii'tstun*—which means “like an Alutiiq.” This language is one of five related languages spoken across the North American Arctic. The Unangā people of the Aleutian chain speak Unangam Tunuu, and belong to the “Aleutian” branch. The remaining languages belong to the second branch. They include Sugt'stun spoken in the Gulf of Alaska, Yugtun and Cugtun spoken in western Alaska, and Iñupiatun/Inuktitut and Kalaallisut spoken across northern Alaska, Canada, and Greenland.



This chart was developed by anthropologists to show the relationships between Alaska languages. It uses the terms Eskimoan and Aleutian, which many Alaska Native people do not use.

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	an̄gāināx̄
ten	qulen	qula	hatīx̄
ocean	imaq	imaq	alāgūx̄

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, dAXunhyuu/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, reflecting 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 and abuse. 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.

Kodiak Alutiiq Language Textbook, 2023, by April Isiik Counciller and Dehrich Isuwiq Chya, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Qik'rtarmiut Alutiiq'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
alutiiqmuseum.org

Learn the Alutiiq alphabet, study grammar, and browse Alutiiq Word of the Week lessons.

Alutiiq Language Website
alutiiqlanguage.org

Learn the Alutiiq language through lessons, videos, and printables, and look up words in the online dictionary.