

Labrador Inuttitut: Speaking into the future Le futur de l'inuttitut du Labrador

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Article abstract

This paper discusses the issue of language loss in northern Labrador Inuttitut. Like many communities across northern Canada, Labrador is facing the possible complete loss of Inuktut, demonstrated by the fact that almost no children speak it as a first language any longer. In this paper we outline a number of linguistic properties which make Labrador Inuttitut and a related dialect spoken in Rigolet distinct from neighbouring dialects of Inuktut. We also report on a number of initiatives taken up by community organizations, school and individuals in their growing efforts to reverse language shift. These include a language survey, dictionaries, youth camps, a language nest, etc.

Labrador Inuttitut: Speaking into the future

Catharyn Andersen*

Alana Johns**

Résumé: Le futur de l'inuttitut du Labrador

Cet article examine la question de la perte de la langue dans l'inuttitut du nord du Labrador. Comme de nombreuses communautés à travers le Nord canadien, le Labrador est menacé par la perspective d'une perte totale de l'inuktitut, ce que démontre l'absence ou presque d'enfants qui le parlent encore comme première langue. Dans cet article nous exposons brièvement plusieurs propriétés linguistiques qui rendent l'inuttitut du Labrador et un dialecte apparenté que l'on parle à Rigolet, distincts des dialectes inuktitut voisins. Nous rendons compte aussi de plusieurs initiatives prises par les organisations communautaires, les écoles et des individus qui s'activent de plus en plus pour inverser le changement langagier. Ces initiatives incluent un sondage sur l'usage de la langue, des dictionnaires, des camps de jeunes, un programme de renaissance de la langue, etc.

Abstract: Labrador Inuttitut: Speaking into the future

This paper discusses the issue of language loss in northern Labrador Inuttitut. Like many communities across northern Canada, Labrador is facing the possible complete loss of Inuktitut, demonstrated by the fact that almost no children speak it as a first language any longer. In this paper we outline a number of linguistic properties which make Labrador Inuttitut and a related dialect spoken in Rigolet distinct from neighbouring dialects of Inuktitut. We also report on a number of initiatives taken up by community organizations, school and individuals in their growing efforts to reverse language shift. These include a language survey, dictionaries, youth camps, a language nest, etc.

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Introduction

Tamânevugut Labradorimiut uKausinginnik pitjutiKalluta. AsiujiKunata uKausinginnik uKâlausiKaniakKugut. Suli InuKagaluakKuk uKâlasonik Inuktitut amma ippiniavugut inosuttungit taimâk sivuppiatitsisot uKausituKanik¹.

We are here at this meeting to speak about our hope for the future of the language of the Labrador Inuit. There are still many people in Labrador who speak Inuttitut and we hope that Labrador Inuit youth will continue this far into the future.

We spoke these words² during the symposium in honour of linguist Michael Krauss in October 2004, as two individuals who are trying to learn to speak Labrador Inuttitut³. One of us is the daughter of a Labrador Inuk who speaks his language fluently, but who heard Inuttitut only sporadically in her upbringing, due to family circumstances. The other is a linguist who has done research on Inuktitut for over 25 years. Both of us should be able to speak the language but we don't fluently—yet. There are many people like us in Labrador, who sincerely wish to be able to speak more of the language and in this paper we will discuss the efforts of both speakers and non-speakers to maintain and promote Labrador Inuttitut.

Our discussion of the future of Labrador Inuttitut is situated within the perspective of language loss, both real and possible across the arctic regions. The language of the Inuit people is in various stages in different geographical regions. In Kalaallit Nunaat and Nunavik the language is strong. In Nunavut the language is strong in some areas, e.g., Baffin Island, but is much weaker in other areas, e.g., Inuinnaqtun in the Kitikmeot region. In Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake), there is also growing language loss among the youth. We focus here on Labrador, which is within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

¹ Key to Labrador Inuit Standardized Writing System: K=q; e=ii; o=uu; â=aa, where symbols on the left are those used in Labrador and the one on the right are those used generally in other Canadian dialects. In Labrador g is written, but never r, although one sometimes hears the uvular /R/ found in other dialects. The Labrador geminate /ŋŋ/ which is written *nng* in other Canadian dialects is written either *ngg*, *ngng*, or not differentiated in Labrador orthography. An anonymous reviewer expresses admiration for the "thoughtful compromise" which this writing system represents between older and younger generations of speakers. The earlier system needed to be updated because of language change, but initial attempts based on the ICI (Inuit Cultural Institute) standard created social discord (see Jeddore 1979). A community internal solution was reached and implemented. The letters look familiar to the older generation but are being used in a new way, more appropriate to the current sound system. Community debate over orthography issues are found elsewhere in Inuktitut, (e.g., the Inuinnaqtun dialect in Nunavut).

² We are grateful to Sybella Tuglavina for providing these sentences for us to learn to speak.

³ A brief explanation regarding our use of terms for the language. We use *Inuktitut* to refer to all the dialects spoken in Canada, even though many of them do not accept that term, e.g., Inuvialuit prefer to call their language *Inuvialuktun*. The Labrador dialect has been referred to in English as *Labrador Inuttut*, and continues to be called *Inuttut* in the language (a term also used at times in Greenland). A change has occurred in the English terminology of the language however. Based on the prevalence of the term *Inuktitut* overall within Canada, and the Nunavik term *Inuttitut*, many Labrador Inuit now call their language *Inuttitut* (/kt/ clusters are not found in the Labrador dialect outside of Rigolet). We follow this usage in English (see also the Nunatsiavut government website www.nunatsiavut.com). Note also that even though some translators at times spell the language name as *Inuktitut* (see example above), it is never pronounced that way.

Labrador Inuit are at a pivotal time in their history, especially with regard to their language. The majority of fluent speakers of Labrador Inuttitut are over 35. Many younger Labrador Inuit today neither understand nor speak their language and many others understand but do not speak it, *i.e.* are passive bilinguals. The remaining younger speakers are somewhat fragmented in their language use, limited to using it only with older generations and not with their peers. What happens over the next 10 years will determine whether or not Labrador will be a region where Inuttitut continues to live or is instead an area where the language is a cultural memory to be found only in books, video, audiotape, etc. We believe that language reversal is still possible at this juncture. Labrador Inuit have strongly voiced a desire to achieve this, both young and old⁴. What remains is how to implement a reversal attempt. We cannot provide the answer to this question. Our goal instead is to outline two points: 1) that, like other dialects of Inuktitut, Labrador Inuttitut has distinct and fascinating properties which make up the richness of what we call Inuktitut; 2) that language reversal, if it is to succeed in Labrador, must be based on the following central contention: Labrador communities have always been self-reliant and cohesive in a dynamic way. Language maintenance strategies must build upon this central social strength and rise from the bottom up⁵. In addition, they must be adequately funded.

In other words, there are traditional modes of interaction in Labrador society which have sustained the culture through centuries⁶. Only by letting these modes assume the leading role in language reversal can language reversal be effected. Below, we will discuss past and current projects which are Labrador initiatives; however, before doing so, we will outline a number of linguistic properties which characterize Labrador Inuttitut. We do so with the purpose of providing a brief introduction to this dialect to linguists and speakers of other dialects, emphasizing that the differences between Inuktitut dialects are not random, but involve very precise and interesting variations. When it comes to dialect properties, normal is a relative property. Most speakers of any dialect in any language view their own dialects as normal, and other dialects as mysterious and unruly. In fact, dialect differences are fascinating.

The distinctiveness of the Labrador dialects

In this section we outline some linguistic properties of Labrador Inuttitut. Throughout this discussion, it should be kept in mind that Labrador Inuttitut, like all oral languages, is not a single variety⁷ of language but a group of dialects. Speakers of

4 This issue has been central at the Annual General Meeting of the Labrador Inuit Association for many years.

5 Betty Harnum (pers. comm. 2001) pointed out that the best planning strategies find the talented individuals who want to do something, and then structure a program which facilitates their goals. The alternative, where a program is created and then individuals are sought to implement it, is often unsuccessful in less populous areas where human resources are in short supply. An anonymous reviewer suggests we phrase it more bluntly. We offer: Plan upwards based on the strengths of known people who are willing and available to do the work.

6 For a discussion of the role of early missionaries in the language, see Nowak (1999).

7 We use the neutral term "*variety*" in the sociolinguistic sense to refer to a language type with distinct characteristics which distinguish it from other language types, be they different dialects or different languages.

Labrador Inuttitut originally came from Nain, Hebron, Nutak and other areas (Brice-Bennett 1977). These groups have merged together within the current communities⁸, but slight dialect variations remain. For the purpose of this paper we will assume that the language of these groups forms one variety, which we call Labrador Inuttitut. Later we will discuss another Labrador variety which has distinct characteristics—that spoken in the community of Rigolet.

Law of the double consonants

As has been noted by Smith (1978), Labrador Inuttitut has the Law of the Double Consonants or Schneider's Law, a phonological sound rule which requires that any consonant cluster immediately following another consonant cluster be reduced to a single consonant. This can be readily seen in (1), where (1a,b) are Labrador Inuttitut and (1c,d) South Baffin⁹.

- | | | | |
|-------|---------------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1. a. | <i>anguti-tsiak</i> | 'a good man' | [Labrador] |
| b. | <i>anna-siak</i> | 'a good woman' | [Labrador] |
| c. | <i>anguti-tsiaq</i> | 'a good man' | [S. Baffin] |
| d. | <i>arna-tsiaq</i> | 'a good woman' | [S. Baffin] |

In (1a) we see that the postbase *-tsia(k)-* 'good, well' contains a complex onset of consonants (CC – in this case /ts/). In (1b) we see that when the same suffix immediately follows a stem which has a CC cluster (in this case /nn/), the onset of /tsia(k)/ is reduced to /sia(k)/. A comparison with South Baffin in (1c) and (1d) shows that in this and other dialects, the cognate postbase *-tsiaq-* maintains its CC (/ts/) onset no matter what the preceding context. The reduction of neighbouring consonant clusters operates from left to right across the word in Labrador Inuttitut applying wherever its conditions are met.

- | | | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------------|----|----|---|
| 2. a. | CC | C | CC | |
| | <i>ānnia-kau-<u>ngi</u>-langu</i> | | | (Recall that underlined <u>ng</u> is /ŋŋ/- see footnote 1.) |
| | sick-recent.past-neg.-opt.1s. | | | |
| | 'I was not sick (earlier today)' | | | |
| b. | C | CC | C | |
| | <i>nigi-kkau-<u>ngi</u>-langu</i> | | | ¹⁰ |
| | eat-recent.past.-neg.-opt.1s | | | |
| | 'I ate (earlier today)' | | | |

⁸ These are Nain, Makkovik, Hopedale, Postville, Rigolet, Northwest River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. All but Postville, Northwest River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay are communities where Inuttitut was originally the majority language.

⁹ We give the examples in the orthography of each dialect. The ICI values of the Labrador examples are given in footnote 1 above. All the data, unless otherwise specified, comes from fieldwork of Johns.

¹⁰ Recall, the orthographic sequence kK is phonemically /qq/ and phonetically [kx].

In (2a) we see that the geminate cluster in the root *ânnia*- 'to be sick' triggers cluster reduction in the postbase *-kKau-* (/qqau/) 'recent past.' As a consequence of *-kKau-* being reduced from double CC to single consonant C *-Kau-*, the following double /ng/ in the negative *-ngit-* does not undergo reduction.

In contrast, in (2b), the verb stem *nigi* 'to eat' does not contain a CC so the following *-kKau-* postbase is not reduced. As a result, its consonant cluster onset (/qq/) will trigger reduction of the geminate velar nasal on the negative, reducing the /ŋŋ/ to a single consonant, as indicated by lack of underline in the orthography. Thus in dialects with the Law of the Double Consonants, there will never be two adjacent syllables, each with a consonant cluster.

This sound rule is very distinctive compared to dialects which do not have it but is not unique to Labrador Inuttitut. Nunavik (Québec) dialects also have it (Dorais 2003), as well as Inuvialuktun, spoken in Tuktoyaktuk. The details of this sound rule are discussed in Smith (1978), Drescher and Johns (1996), and Dorais (2003). In Inuvialuktun the rule reduces only geminate, or identical consonant clusters, and does not reduce clusters containing mixed or heterogenous consonants. Drescher and Johns (1996) argue that Labrador consonant clusters have undergone assimilation to such a degree that all clusters are effectively geminate, in spite of superficial appearances, e.g., [ts] in (1a) and kK [kx] in (2b).

Stems never end in consonants

Another distinct phonological characteristic of Labrador Inuttitut is that noun and verb roots and the majority of affixes¹¹ (postbases) end only in a vowel. In South Baffin, like other Canadian dialects, verb roots may end in either a vowel (3a) or consonants /t/ (3b), /k/ (3c), or /q/ (3d). In contrast, in Labrador Inuttitut, roots always end in a vowel, as can be seen in (4)¹².

3. a. *niri-junga* 'I am eating'
- b. *tikit-tunga* 'I arrived'
- c. *pisuk-tunga* 'I am walking'
- d. *itiq-tunga* 'I enter'

4. a. *nigi-vunga* 'I am eating'
- b. *tiki-vunga* 'I arrived'
- c. *pisu-vunga* 'I am walking'
- d. *iti-vunga* 'I enter'

This important and distinguishing fact of the dialect is obscured by the Labrador convention of adding a /k/ to any verbal citation form in Inuttitut. This convention is seen below in (5), which shows verb roots cited in isolation as dictionary entries (Jeddore 1976). Note that such forms are not found in natural language, but only in

¹¹ Grammatical inflections may end in vowels, or consonants /t/ or /k/.

¹² This claim is supported by the presence of the form of the indicative found after vowels, i.e. *-vunga*.

metalinguistic or academic discussion. Verb roots or stems in regular speech will always be followed by inflection, as in all the examples above.

5. a. *nigik* 'to eat'
- b. *tikik* 'to arrive'
- c. *pisuk* 'to walk'
- d. *itik* 'to enter'

Singular nouns in absolutive (null case) have also undergone neutralization of morpheme final differences, and are not only found with - /k/ in citation form, but are pronounced with /k/¹³. This can be seen in (6), again from Jeddore (1976). In other Inuktitut dialects, nouns can end with vowels, /k/ or /q/.

6. a. *illuk* 'house' (compare Baffin *iglu*)
- b. *sitsik* 'ground squirrel' (compare Baffin *sitsik*)
- c. *Kuak* 'something frozen' (compare Baffin *quaq*)

Thus -k in nominals is an inflectional case suffix (absolutive singular), rather than part of the nominal stem. It therefore does not interact with the phonological derivation, *i.e.* does not condition morphophonological alternations with other case suffixes, as is found in other dialects. Were we to assume that this /k/ segment was present in the phonology of every single verb root, then we would also have to posit that without exception it is deleted. Consider the examples in (7).

7. a. *sining-niaq-tunga* [S. Baffin]
 sleep-n.fut.-part.1s
 'I will sleep (near future)'
- b. *sini-niak-Kunga* [Labrador]
 sleep-n.fut.-indic.1s
 'I will sleep (near future)'

In other dialects of Inuktitut, the near-future postbase -*niaq*- does not delete the final consonant of stems, so that the stem-final /k/ in (7a) becomes *ng* ([ŋ]) when -*niaq*- follows it. In contrast, in Labrador Inuktitut, the cognate postbase always follows a vowel, as can be seen in (7b). Given the alternatives of i) obligatory deletion of stem final /k/ in all contexts by all postbases and inflections, or ii) positing that /k/ is a suffix added only in a small set of contexts, the simpler solution is to view all noun roots, verb roots and postbases as ending in vowels.

The exceptions that prove the rule are the small set of postbases associated with the expression of tense/aspect, *e.g.*, -*niak*- 'near-future' in (7b) above. These can be viewed as ending in an abstract consonant (-*niakC*-), which will affect the phonological features of the following inflection, *e.g.*, 'I will sleep' *sini-niak-Kunga* sleep-near.future-indicative.1s., or 'He/she will sleep' *sini-niat-tuk* sleep-near.future-

¹³ Certain common or high frequency words ending in vowels will sometimes be found without /k/ in absolutive. Thus these words preserve the older form in the same way English words "man/men" preserve older English plural forms.

participial.3s. In the former example, the near future morpheme triggers the sequence [kK] (/qq/) rather than *Vowel-vunga*, which is normally found in first person singular indicative. In the latter example, the near future morpheme triggers [tt] rather than the usual third person singular participial *Vowel-juk*. These postbases are described as ending in a uvular consonant in Smith (1977), but clearly no property other than consonant need be specified. In fact, one might argue instead that *-kKunga*, *-ttuk*, etc. are morphological allomorphs conditioned by the presence of the few morphemes to which they attach.

Complex mood/person interaction

Another area which makes Labrador Inuttitut distinct from many other dialects of Inuktitut is that it has a complex interaction between mood, person, and meaning, as outlined in Smith (1977) and Johns (1995, 1996). In most Canadian dialects, the choice between using the indicative or participial mood in main clauses, as in the S. Baffin examples in (8), is conditioned by some form of evidentiality (Adams *et al.* 2005), where evidentiality may be broadly defined as differentiation based on how or whether the speaker has evidence for the proposition¹⁴.

8. a. *niri-junga*
eat-part.1s.
'I am eating'
- b. *niri-vunga*
eat-indic.1s.
(said in answer to a question or to make a statement more "vivid")

South Baffin speakers generally state that both (8a) or (8b) are correct, and that either can be used interchangeably with no discernable difference in meaning. In fact, the participial is generally the default; however contexts exist where the indicative is the default. For example, in answering a question, the indicative is more appropriate for some Baffin speakers. In Kalaallisut, on the other hand, only the indicative mood seems to be possible in main clause verbs, as in (9a) (from Dorais 2003: 145-146).

9. a. *tusar-puq*
hear-indic.3s.
'He/she hears'
- b. *tusar-tuq*
hear-part.3s
'He/she, hearing'

Unlike other Inuit dialects, the Kalaallisut participial mood is consistently translated to English by Dorais (2003) as a gerund or relative clause, as in (9b). Sadock

¹⁴ For a discussion of evidentiality, see Friedman (1986). Johns (2000) relates the use of indicative in some dialects to mirativity (see DeLancey 1997 on evidentiality and mirativity).

(2003: 7) describes this mood in Kalaallisut as a dependent mood (in contrast to the indicative which is independent) and gives an illustrative example, *isertutit* translated as 'that you enter.' The participial mood in Kalaallisut clearly holds a different value from many Canadian dialects, where the mood is essentially an unmarked declarative mood (see above).

Labrador Inuttitut falls between S. Baffin and Kalaallisut in the use of indicative vs. participial mood. Labrador Inuttitut main clause verbs with either first or second person intransitive subject, or first or second person object¹⁵, must be in the indicative mood. This is shown in (10a) and (10b).

- | | | | |
|--------|--|----|--|
| 10. a. | <i>nigi-vunga</i>
eat-indic.1s.
'I am eating' | | (* <i>niri-junga</i> [participial]) |
| b. | <i>taku-vânga</i>
see-indic.3s/1s
'He/she sees/saw me' | | (* <i>taku-jânga</i> [participial]) |
| c. | <i>taku-vuk</i>
see-indic.3s
'He/she sees' | OR | <i>taku-juk</i>
see-part.3s
'He/she is seeing' |
| d. | <i>taku-vaga</i>
see-indic.1s/3s
'I see him/her/it!' | OR | <i>taku-jaga</i>
see-part.1s/3s
'I see him/her/it' |

In contrast, third person intransitive subjects and third person objects are like the S. Baffin examples, in that both indicative and participial are possible, and that the choice is determined by subtle semantic differences. This can be seen in (10c) and (10d)¹⁶. Thus the uses of the indicative and participial moods in Labrador Inuttitut exhibit a complex interaction between grammatical person and evidentiality.

The Rigolet dialect

Labrador Inuttitut is not one single dialect. In fact, as in other Inuit communities, there are differences which derive from the diverse geographical origins of different groups which make up Labrador Inuit. Groups moved into, or endured evacuation into settlements at different times, each bringing a slightly different dialect. Once in these settlements, dialects have been slowly merging together but there still exist slight variations in speech.

¹⁵ We are using the term object here in a neutral sense to mean patient of the action. This does not entail that this argument is the syntactic object of a verb.

¹⁶ In Smith (1977) this distinction between the two moods can be seen by the fact that the indicative mood paradigms reflect all persons, while the participial mood paradigms are incomplete, lacking forms for first and second person intransitive subject, as well as forms where the object is first or second person.

One dialect which has quite salient properties is the Rigolet dialect spoken in Rigolet, Labrador (Tikigâksuagusik). This dialect has [h] for K (/q/) and retains a number of conservative consonant clusters usually found only in dialects further to the west, e.g., /ps/, /ks/, /kt/, /ngn/, /kp/, /kʰ/, /gl/, /gv/, etc. (cf. Dorais 1977). This dialect also has the Law of the Double Consonants. Drescher and Johns (1996) discuss the fact that, although this dialect also has both [k] and [q], these are allophones of /k/, rather than separate phonemes. The pronunciation [k] appears after the front vowel /i/, and [q] after /u/ and /a/. As a result, both can be written with the symbol *k*, as in the northern dialect. While this dialect has phonological characteristics which make it sound different from the dialects spoken in northern Labrador, it is still very much a Labrador dialect. The symbols of the northern writing system are sufficient for writing the Rigolet dialect, as long as care is taken to write the consonant clusters and any other differences accurately, e.g., 'bee' in Rigolet is *igupsak* (where the *k* will be pronounced further back in the throat because it follows *a*).

Unlike Labrador Inuttitut as discussed above, Rigolet Inuttitut noun and verb roots do not always end in vowels. Thus the following distinctions exist, parallel to those found in dialects west of Labrador.

11. a. *puiji* 'seal'
- b. *angnak*¹⁷ 'woman'
- c. *tukisimajuk* 'He/she understands'
- d. *saglutuk* 'He/she is telling lies'
- e. *pisuktuk* 'He/she is walking'
- f. *Petalu Maryilu tikikKok* 'Peter and Mary have arrived'

We see in (11a, b) that noun roots can end in either vowels¹⁸ or consonants. Likewise in (11c-f) we see that verbs end in either vowels or consonants. This latter fact is often reflected only through the presence of the participial allomorph which follows consonants. Thus in (11d) the Law of the Double Consonants has deleted the root-final consonant; however the fact that the participial allomorph is *-tuk* rather than *-juk*, as in (11c), shows that it was there. In (11e) we see the verb root 'walk' ending in /k/ is in the norm in more western dialects. Finally in (11f) we see that the root meaning 'arrive' must end in a consonant, since it triggers the allomorph of the indicative which follows consonants, similar to what we observed with certain tense/aspect postbases in Labrador Inuttitut above¹⁹.

Regarding the alternation of indicative and participial mood discussed above for Labrador Inuttitut, Rigolet speakers have a tendency to use the indicative more in the third person when the verb is telic, or bounded. All Inuttitut dialects are sensitive to inherent aspectual properties of verbs. Thus, intransitive verbs can be divided into two groups: i) those where the action of a verb occurs instantaneously, e.g., *tiki(C)-* 'arrive,'

¹⁷ Both *ng* and *k* will be pronounced further back in throat since they follow *a*.

¹⁸ In fact some noun roots which normally end in vowels are heard also with final *-k* in Rigolet also. Further research should investigate whether variation is based on lexical item, position in the sentence or both factors.

¹⁹ Unfortunately we do not have data which show conclusively that roots in Rigolet can end in /t/, but we assume such examples must exist.

which is telic (having an inherent boundedness), and ii) those where the action is necessarily prolonged over a series of movements, *e.g.*, *nigi-* 'eat,' which is atelic (lacking an inherent boundedness). On a verb unmarked for tense, telic verbs are usually translated into English as having just been completed, *i.e.* past. In contrast, the atelic verbs are translated into English as present ongoing, *i.e.* the progressive. In the Rigolet dialect, this distinction is further enhanced by the telic verbs taking the indicative mood, while the atelic verbs use the participial mood.

12. a. *aulla-Kuk* (**aullajuk*)
depart-indic.3s
'He/she has gone'
- b. *me-vuk*
land-indic.3s
'It's landed'
- c. *Kâk-Kuk*
explode-indic.3s.
'It exploded'
- d. *majuak-tuk*
climb-part.3s
'He/she is climbing'

As we can see in (12), the telic verbs in (12a-c) not only are translated as just having happened, but take the indicative mood, where there is allomorphy of /v/ after verb stems ending in vowels and K (/q/) after verb stems ending in consonants (see also 11f above). In contrast, atelic verbs, such as those in (12d), take the participial mood with /j/ after stems ending in vowels and /t/ after stems ending in consonants (see also 11c-e above).

In summary, the Rigolet dialect, like Labrador Inuittitut, has an array of linguistic similarities and differences with other dialects. It is these sorts of facts which enable us understand and appreciate the rich tapestry of dialects we call Inuktitut.

Community-wide concern over language loss

There is growing sense of a need to do something about language loss among Labrador Inuit. In particular language support for the Labrador Inuit youth is the biggest priority²⁰. Young people are aware that they are on the cusp of this potential change and are asking that the community provide them with the means to keep the language alive. Especially those who have a partial knowledge of the language feel a strong need to do something about their Inuittitut.

²⁰ For discussion of Inuit youth and Inuktitut in Nunavut, see Tulloch (2004).

Inosuttodlunga ilauKatauvunga katimanimmi ikajuttaugiaKaKattavunga Inuktitut uKâlaligama. Ilangani tukisiaKattavunga sunanik uKâlamangâta Inuktitut ammalu ilangani tukisiagunnaKattananga. OttugasuammagiKattavunga uKâlagiamik uKausinik, piluattumik ilingajunik inosuttunut. IkajuttigegiaKavugut ilonnatik ikajullugit InoKativut.

I am a youth here attending this conference and I need help sometimes when I speak in Inuktitut. Sometimes I understand what is being said in Inuktitut and sometimes I don't. I try really hard to speak the language and I would like some help. I think it is very important to learn the language, especially for the youth. We all need to work together to help our fellow Inuit (Torngâsok Cultural Centre 2001).

A Language Committee was struck in 1999 to serve as an advisory board and to help initiate language programs. This committee evolved into six separate language committees in Northwest River, Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Rigolet, as well as Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik. There was need for local committees because the situation in each community is slightly different, and the local language committees are able to voice specific needs and coordinate efforts. Eventually, a regional committee was again established—Inuktitut UKâlalautta Society.

Language survey

The Language Committee of the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) initiated a language survey in 1999, which was completed by 2000 (Andersen 2004). The purpose of the survey was to determine language usage and attitude²¹. A questionnaire was developed, probing the topics of linguistic ability (understanding, speaking, reading, writing), use (under which circumstances Inuktitut was used and how often), and attitude (value placed on Inuktitut and personal feelings about it). The survey was distributed to the majority of LIA members in the five communities where they live. Of approximately 5000 members, 2200 answered the survey.

The results of the survey show a serious situation for Inuktitut in Labrador. Only 15% of the respondents claimed Inuktitut as their first language. By contrast, 28% reported that at least one of their grandparents spoke Inuktitut. In particular, regarding usage, the direction of language shift is clear. Only 9.5% claimed to ever use Inuktitut at home, and only 10% used it socially. Among the respondents, 1.6% claimed an understanding of Inuktitut. This figure is probably actually greater, as there are many people in northern Labrador with a passive knowledge of the language. Language loss among this group is an emotionally charged issue, and it is not clear which are the best means of assisting these people to become speakers.

Most alarming is the fact that of the 15% fluent speakers, none are under 10 years of age and very few under 20. This may be an artifact of the survey method, however, it is common knowledge that even in Nain, the location of the largest number of speakers, there are almost no teenagers who are fluent. If the current rate of loss continues, it is certain that Labrador Inuktitut will disappear completely in the near future. In spite of dwindling usage, the attitude towards Inuktitut is very positive and

²¹ For an extensive discussion of language use and attitudes in Nunavut, see Dorais and Sammons (2002).

respondents agreed with a series of statements about the need to preserve the language and their desire for their children to learn the language. As Andersen (2004) notes, there is a need to translate people's intentions into actions.

Inuttitut in the schools

Currently, immersion in Inuttitut (*i.e.* Inuttitut as the language of instruction) is available in Nain up until grade 3. In Hopedale, immersion is available for Kindergarten only. There is no Inuttitut immersion available in other communities, although people have requested it. Inuttitut as a subject is available in Nain and Hopedale up until grade 12. It is also available in Rigolet. A common problem across Canada is lack of appropriate Inuttitut materials for older children and teenagers. Many materials are just translations direct from English, which often result in slightly unnatural Inuttitut. Ideally there would be materials composed originally in Inuttitut, and would include complex discussion of topics central to northern culture, *e.g.*, hunting, travelling and other activities.

For a long time there has been dissatisfaction expressed by the Inuttitut teachers, who feel that shortage of materials at all levels makes their jobs more difficult than those of other teachers (see Torngâsok Cultural Centre 2001). This dissatisfaction is compounded by the fact that there are some members of the communities who feel that the schools have not done enough to teach the children Inuttitut. There are sometimes unrealistic views of what a school can hope to accomplish without wider community support (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the children are generally not speaking Inuttitut. Both the communities as a whole, as well as the schools, need to coordinate and strengthen their efforts in language maintenance and teaching.

Initiatives through community organizations

In response to the persistent demands from the public that some action regarding language shift be undertaken, a number of programs have been initiated. Since April 2001 a language nest called Inuaggualuit has existed in Hopedale, Labrador, based on a partnership between Torngâsok Cultural Centre (through the Aboriginal Languages Initiative of Heritage Canada) and the Labrador Inuit Health Commission (LIHC). The program was inspired by Kōhanga Reo, or Māori Language Nests (King 2001), based on the idea that very young children, who learn languages readily, will easily become fluent speakers of a language after spending a great deal of time in a linguistically rich environment. This was one of the first programs of this nature in Canada.

Like the Māori language nests, the results of this program are mixed²². Normally there are three Inuttitut speaking staff to take care of the children, however it was very difficult to find staff who both speak Inuttitut and have Early Childhood Education

²² The Māori program is much more successful, having 767 centres in 1996 (King 2001), thus producing a large group of Māori speakers.

Certificates. The latter qualification is necessary under provincial law for licensed daycare centres. If members of the community were assured that these jobs were permanent, perhaps more speakers would invest the time necessary to attain the required training. The Labrador Inuit who have these certificates are young and do not speak the language themselves.

Because the daycare is as an unlicensed program under provincial regulations²³, the enrolment is legally limited to no more than three children at a time. This means that the children do not form a sizeable group, and that absences due to illness, etc. significantly affect the language learning environment of the remaining children. One of the goals of the program is to produce a generation who can communicate readily with one another in Inuttitut, so a stable group of children is necessary. As has occurred in the Māori program, staff do not always speak the target language (Inuttitut) to the children, even though they are supposed to. Nevertheless, the children from the Inuaggualuit are clearly understanding and speaking Inuttitut, and the community of Hopedale is very proud of them. Many people make a point of speaking to them in Inuttitut on the road when they see them. Inuaggualuit is bringing back pride in the language within the community. The main problem is both lack of sufficient funding, and stability of funding. Both potential staff and parents need to be confident that this will be a permanent institution within the community and will not disappear in one or two years. In addition, such centres should be also be available in any Labrador community which desires one. Provincial regulations for daycare should facilitate, not hamper, these efforts.

Many adult LIA members are very interested in keeping up, reviving and learning Inuttitut. There is continuing call for adult courses in the language. People are willing to take these courses after work, on weekends etc. Unfortunately there is a lack of speakers with the training and confidence to lead such courses. The Torngâsok Cultural Centre hired one trained teacher, Harriet Lyall, to develop materials to be used across the different communities. Andrea Webb conducted a Train-the-Trainer program for four weeks in 2004. Nine people from Nain, Hopedale, Rigolet, North West River and Goose Bay took part in this course and the expectation is that these people will be available to teach courses within their communities. Again, part of the problem here is that there are no permanent jobs for adult Inuttitut language teachers, such that qualified individuals are not attracted to this career path. There is great demand for such people from the communities both in Labrador and elsewhere in northern Canada, but employment is sporadic and with temporary funding.

There has long been demand for some sort of adult language program in Rigolet and there currently is a group of highly motivated adults who are trying to establish courses which will utilize the language skills of the last few remaining speakers. The Rigolet community has asked for financial and logistical support from LIA and they have subsequently received funding from the Torngâsok Cultural Centre through the Aboriginal Language Initiative. Over the past 10 years there has been one language course offered in the community by both a linguist and speaker, and one set of

²³ A licensed program would require more space and more certified daycare workers (with Inuttitut). Neither is currently available due to funding restrictions and lack of qualified staff.

course offered in the community by both a linguist and speaker, and one set of videotapes made of interviews with speakers. Currently the language group within the community is trying to develop more language courses. People there realize that there is little chance of actually keeping their local dialect alive. They hope instead to bring back some form of Labrador Inuttitut, with a good number of Rigolet words and expressions with local pronunciation, etc.

The Torngâsok Cultural Centre has been organizing youth camps since 1991, and since 2000 has offered them once per year (sometimes two times with different age groups). During these camps, young people go out on the land with Inuit elders. Youth camps have been very popular but are quite expensive. At the camp, activities are oriented around land-based skills, *e.g.*, hunting, fishing, etc., and the Inuttitut lessons revolve around these activities, *e.g.*, providing vocabulary for seal hunting just before the seal hunting activity. The main purpose of the youth camps is the integration of language and culture.

The Torngâsok Cultural Centre has also commissioned a CD-Rom language learning program for Inuttitut through the Rosetta Stone company²⁴. The lessons will involve interactive and visual language materials along with audio, and can be used by individuals on their own and at their own speed. Materials such as these are very expensive, but are necessary given the lack of language teaching materials for teenagers and adults and general lack of courses. The anticipated date of completion for the first of two levels of this project is summer 2006.

Another initiative is that of Inuttitut Speakoffs which are based on the idea that oral competition allows for public display and appreciation of language abilities. The model is similar to that of athletic skills, where sports activities are engaged in by many, and only the top few are celebrated. The idea of oral competition has been used successfully in other countries, *e.g.*, the Welsh Eisteddfod system, where musical and oral arts are extolled in local and national competitions. Musical competitions commonly are very frequent in North America, but language based competitions are less common. Oral competitions are held on French language skills and other oral topics in Newfoundland and Labrador. There have been two Speakoffs held, one by the school in Nain, and the other by the Hopedale school. The Torngâsok Cultural Centre is organizing a community wide Speakoff with significant prizes and different levels for both fluent speakers and learners. It is expected that such events will raise the status and profile of the language within the community, and play a role in efforts to halt language shift.

Initiatives through groups

Labrador Inuit have for a long time been producing dictionaries of their language. Rose Jeddore (Pamack), a Labrador Inuk, first made a Labrador Dictionary in 1976. This was constructed by Rose Jeddore as editor/author/organizer along with a group of very committed Labrador Inuttitut speakers. The dictionary produced is excellent,

²⁴ See <http://www.rosettastone.com/home>.

using roots as entries, followed by numerous colloquial and colourful examples illustrating the use of these roots in a variety of contexts. Drawings in the dictionary were made by the well-known Labrador Inuit artist Gilbert Hay. The main drawback to the dictionary is the fact it uses an orthography which was never accepted by Labrador Inuit. At the time of the dictionary construction, there was a need for an updated orthography²⁵, and the one used in Jeddore's dictionary would have brought Labrador Inuttitut in line with ICI (Inuit Cultural Institute) standards which had just been introduced. The orthography of Jeddore's dictionary, however, was never accepted by the community and later a different one—the Labrador Inuit Standardized Writing System was agreed upon and has gradually become the norm within the community. The end result is that this dictionary is not comprehensible to most Labrador speakers and is out of print. An electronic updated dictionary transliteration by Alana Johns and linguistics graduate student Susana Bejar exists but remains to be edited for typographical mistakes created as a result of scanning.

An extensive Labrador Inuttitut dictionary was made in the 1990s by the late August Andersen and William Kalleo, with editing by Rita Andersen. This dictionary was inspired by that of Schneider (1985). The foreword is written by Beatrice Watts. This dictionary was nearing completion, as the entries had just been edited after having been alphabeticized. Unfortunately a fire devastated a building in Nain in the spring of 2005, which housed the Torngâsok Cultural Centre, the OKâlaKatiget Society (local radio and television station) and other community organizations. The recent editing was lost in the fire and has been recommenced. The dictionary is due to be published in 2006.

On-line information is just beginning. A small number of Labrador Inuttitut words as sound files can be found at Johns and Tuglavina (2004), and some school language materials have been posted by Sarah Townley. An exciting new addition is the sizeable on-line dictionary by Nochasak and Pigott (2005). Zippie Nochasak and Paul Pigott are a married couple dedicated to the maintenance of Labrador Inuttitut and are raising their children as Inuttitut speakers²⁶ in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

In summary, there are many activities both through organizations and through small group initiatives. What is needed is more coordination of these efforts and financial support for those who are willing to take on this important work.

25 The orthography of the time contained a number of symbols which were no longer useful. For example, it used *u* and *o* to distinguish the phoneme /u/ before non-uvulars and uvulars respectively. Given that Labrador Inuttitut no longer has a distinct uvular *K* (/q/) at the end of syllables, it no longer needed the symbol *o* to represent /u/ before uvulars. As a result the symbol was "freed up." It is now used to represent /uu/ (see footnote 1 above).

26 Their daughter Anika Nochasak-Pigott was raised in an Inuttitut speaking home and can listen to her grandfather's stories in Inuttitut. The couple made a conscious decision to raise their daughter this way, even though Zippie's four older daughters were raised in English. As for teaching language in the home, Zippie said: "That's how our language is passed on. The people who are Inuttitut speakers learned it at home from our parents and grandparents" (Nunatsiavut 2005).

Conclusion

The Inuttitut language of Labrador is at a crossroads. There are many Labrador Inuit who wish to keep it both as a language of the past and of the future. The latter will not be easy, as it will mean turning against the strong drift towards English. As individuals work towards this goal and work together the chances for establishing a critical mass are greater. The talent, skills and will are all there:

[...] Their (those working very hard to save languages) determination is firm, and rather that they are in need of realizing that they have much more company than they thought—that many groups around the country and the world share their problems and could share solutions—and there is much to be gained by organization and cooperation (Krauss 1998: 19).

On January 22, 2005 the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA) was signed by all partners—the Labrador Inuit Association, the Government of Canada, and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador²⁷. While the effects of this agreement on the future of Inuttitut are yet to be seen²⁸, the Nunatsiavut Government will have Inuttitut as an official language and all documents will have to be in Inuttitut as well as English. In addition, the President of the Nunatsiavut Government must be a fluent speaker of Inuttitut, thus ensuring that someone with knowledge of and respect for the language will be in a position of strong political influence.

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²⁷ This agreement was approved by the House of Commons in June 2005.

²⁸ Certainly one change will be more money for language initiatives.

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