

## An ephemeral anomaly. The metamorphoses of the Eskimo Language School: 1968-1999

## Une anomalie éphémère. Les métamorphoses de l'école de langue esquimaude: 1968-1999

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### Résumé de l'article

On nous présente une histoire non officielle de ce qui est maintenant l'ancienne école de langue esquimaude et de ses successeurs, de 1968 à sa disparition en 1999. Cette institution avait été mise en place par le ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord canadien alors désireux d'offrir des cours d'inuktitut langue seconde aux employés du gouvernement fédéral et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Des étudiants du privé étaient également admis s'il restait des places. Cette initiative peut donc être considérée comme un premier effort en vue d'améliorer les conséquences du transfert linguistique de l'inuktitut à l'anglais, résultat inévitable de l'incursion massive de la bureaucratie du sud dans l'Arctique. L'école avait de plus une autre incidence sur la situation, en ce qu'elle fournissait un apprentissage informel de la linguistique appliquée aux jeunes Inuit, qui y travaillaient à titre d'assistants. Son histoire est également la relation d'une anomalie, une création de la bureaucratie qui a échappé à l'habituelle surveillance institutionnelle abrutissante pendant presque toute son existence. La fin de l'article comporte une brève analyse des problèmes de l'enseignement d'une langue polysynthétique à des locuteurs de langues, comme l'anglais et le français, et des suggestions pour les résoudre.

## An ephemeral anomaly. The metamorphoses of the Eskimo Language School: 1968-1999

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Mick Mallon\*

**Résumé:** Une anomalie éphémère. Les métamorphoses de l'école de langue esquimaude: 1968-1999

On nous présente une histoire non officielle de ce qui est maintenant l'ancienne école de langue esquimaude et de ses successeurs, de 1968 à sa disparition en 1999. Cette institution avait été mise en place par le ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord canadien alors désireux d'offrir des cours d'inuktitut langue seconde aux employés du gouvernement fédéral et des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Des étudiants du privé étaient également admis s'il restait des places. Cette initiative peut donc être considérée comme un premier effort en vue d'améliorer les conséquences du transfert linguistique de l'inuktitut à l'anglais, résultat inévitable de l'incursion massive de la bureaucratie du sud dans l'Arctique. L'école avait de plus une autre incidence sur la situation, en ce qu'elle fournissait un apprentissage informel de la linguistique appliquée aux jeunes Inuit, qui y travaillaient à titre d'assistants. Son histoire est également la relation d'une anomalie, une création de la bureaucratie qui a échappé à l'habituelle surveillance institutionnelle abrutissante pendant presque toute son existence. La fin de l'article comporte une brève analyse des problèmes de l'enseignement d'une langue polysynthétique à des locuteurs de langues, comme l'anglais et le français, et des suggestions pour les résoudre.

**Abstract:** An ephemeral anomaly. The metamorphoses of the Eskimo Language School: 1968-1999

This is an informal history of the now defunct Eskimo Language School and its successors from 1968 to its demise in 1999. The Eskimo Language School was an institution set up by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of the federal government of Canada in order to provide Inuktitut as second language training to federal and North West Territorial employees. Private students were also admitted if there was space. It could therefore be considered an early effort to ameliorate the effects of the language shift from Inuktitut to English that was the inevitable result of the incursion of a massive southern bureaucracy into the Arctic. In addition, the school had a secondary effect on the situation as it provided a casual form of apprenticeship in applied linguistics to the young Inuit who spent time there as instructors. Its story is also that of an anomaly, a creation of the bureaucracy that escaped the usual stultifying institutional control for most of its existence. At the end of the paper there is a brief discussion of

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the problems involved in teaching a polysynthetic language to speakers of languages such as English and French, with suggestions for solutions.

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## Introduction

The theme of this issue is the reversal of language and knowledge shift in the North. The assumption is that the language shift is from the native language to the “colonial” language, and that the knowledge shift is from the traditional knowledge of the native to the “scientific” knowledge of the newcomers. Before I dive into the body of my paper I would like to make a comment on this last point. In Nunavut for the last few years there has been an effort to promote an appreciation of “Inuit traditional knowledge” into the development of departmental policies. The Inuktitut term for this is officially *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. Southern bureaucrats can wax quite eloquent on the extent to which their organizations reflect the virtues of “I.Q.,” a term they find very comforting, not only because of its brevity but also because it avoids the challenge of trying to pronounce *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. We should pause to analyze the word *qaujimajatuqangit* before proceeding, as there is a point I would like to make. The analysis will be less than thorough, but adequate for the purpose:

*qaujima-* is a verb root meaning ‘know’. *-jaq-* is a post-base added to verbs, giving the idea of ‘that which is ...’ *taku + jaq* gives *takujaq* ‘something seen’ or ‘that which is seen.’ *kapi + jaq* gives *kapijaq* ‘someone stabbed,’ or, less brutally, ‘someone injected.’ *qaujimajaq* is therefore ‘that which is known’

*-tuqaq* is an adjectival post-base meaning roughly ‘has existed for a while.’ Therefore, *qaujimajatuqaq* represents one image of ‘traditional knowledge’ in the sense of a fact, or possibly a person, that has been known for a long time.

The post-base *-ngit* is a third person plural marker (e.g., *umiangit* could be ‘his boats’ or ‘their boats’). So there we have *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, ‘the things that Inuit have known for a long time.’

For me this was a perfectly adequate expression, one I was quite proud to have worked out and to be able to pronounce adequately. But a year or so ago, while I was talking with an Inuk, he offered me his preferred alternative: *Inuit qaujimanituqangit*. He had substituted the abstract post-base *-niq-* for the more concrete *-jaq-*. *-niq-*, to use the jargon of the schoolroom, is more of an infinitive or a gerund. *qaujimajaq* is ‘a fact,’ *qaujimanig* is ‘a way of knowing.’

I make this small, possibly over-pedantic point because it will come up in my discussion of the value of teaching Inuktitut as a second language to civil servants in the struggle to reverse *language* and knowledge shift in the north. People often think of learning a second language as a vaguely good thing. In conventional courses on the theory and techniques of the trade there is a lot of lip service to the development of empathy and the appreciation of culture. When I was trying to learn Malay four decades ago I came across a document called "Malay for Memsahibs," a handbook on how to deal with the household servants. One of the first Eskimo texts I studied was full of useful phrases for the Hudson Bay trader, "Lift that case," "Tote that bale" and so on. So a bilingual colonialist could be simply a more efficient instrument of *oppression*. Having said that, I will go on to say that most people's motives for learning, and teaching, Inuktitut are more virtuous. It seems to me that the civil servants who attempted to learn Inuktitut in our classes could be counted on the righteous side in the struggle to reverse language shift. Not only that, but many claimed that the study of the structure of Inuktitut had opened their eyes to a different way of seeing the world around us. An Inuktitut sentence analyzes reality in a radically different manner than its English translation. The Italians are right; "*Tradurre è tradire*" ('Translating is betraying'). These statements are all truisms, but worth repeating.

What I have just said refers to Qallunaat learning a second language, but a much smaller segment of our student body were, arguably, more significant in the longer run. Qallunaat are mostly transient. The more sensitive and committed ones may stay longer, but in the end few of us stay long enough to be buried here, or even to retire here. However we have had a succession of young Inuit students who for various reasons have lost their language, or never learned it fluently. This segment is not only slowly increasing, but so is the commitment and determination to learn. In a very real sense this may be the most vital contribution we have made to reversing the shift.

### ***The Eskimo Language School***

The Eskimo Language School, founded by the federal government of Canada in 1968 was in many ways an anomaly. It was created at a time when most functions were being handed over to the territorial government of the Northwest Territories. But most of all, it was an anomaly because it was a bureaucratic creature that for years escaped the anaconda-like coils of the bureaucracy. Furthermore, as the institution itself changed from language school to curriculum developer to part of a teacher training institution, its original function survived, attached as an anomalous budget item to the civil servant who moved with it. That is why its history is best related personally and in the active voice.

### **The beginning**

It was late spring in 1968. After a three year stint as the principal of the federal day school in Povungnituk, I was finishing off a five year secondment training ESL

teachers in Sarawak, Malaysia. Out of the blue a telegram arrived offering me the job of setting up an Eskimo Language School in the Northwest Territories. The purpose was to provide intensive Inuktitut as Second Language (ISL) classes to federal and territorial civil servants. My qualifications? I had an elementary knowledge of the language, and I was partway through an MA in applied linguistics. But in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king. After a brief and interesting conversation with my wife, I accepted.

Before I start on the history of the school itself I should briefly outline the exotic (to Anglophone minds) nature of Inuktitut, and examine one method of ranking languages in order of difficulty for English speakers. I would also like to mention how the traditional tortuous methods of teaching English grammar have led to its abandonment among English teachers for the last 60 years or so. This has been reflected in the various approaches to second language teaching that have come in and out of favour in North America and Britain.

### **The nature of Inuktitut**

Compared to English, the structure of Inuktitut is much more logical, much more regular, and much more complex. An Anglo student learning French, for example, can rely on sentence patterns that are almost identical, and a vocabulary that contains many familiar items. Even in non-European languages such as Chinese or Malay, where there is no common base of vocabulary, the sentence structures are often comfortably similar. These languages build a string of beads, with a few significant changes in order as you move from one to another. Inuktitut constructs the equivalent of a Swiss watch, with a series of interconnected sub-units. This makes Inuktitut intrinsically more difficult for an Anglophone or a Francophone to learn. How much more difficult? Is Inuktitut harder for us than German, than Russian, than Japanese, than Arabic? There has been an attempt to codify the difficulty of languages for Anglophones. I came across it 36 years ago, and although I have long since lost the original document, its outline remains in my memory.

### **The F.S.I. codification of language difficulties**

In the fall of 1968, I was permitted to visit several institutions involved in the teaching of second languages. One visit was to a school for middle-aged mid-level Anglophone managers in the Canadian federal government, an experience that filled me with pity. A second was to the headquarters of the language division of the Peace Corps, an experience that filled me with terror. The most interesting, however, was my visit to the American Foreign Service Institute in Washington, responsible for training U.S. officials both civil and military, in all the current politically sensitive languages around the globe. There I was given a fascinating document. There were four dimensions to it. The first was a list of languages, ranged from easiest (to an Anglophone) to the hardest. Spanish was the easiest; French was in the next grouping, followed by German. Then we moved on to Russian, Arabic and Chinese. The second

dimension was the target level of competency. The bottom level was the ability to get out of the airport, hire a taxi, find a hotel, eat, drink and find a washroom. From there we moved on to basic on-the-job competency, followed by advanced professional and social competency, and eventually finishing with native-like fluency. The third dimension was the most important. This was the degree of language aptitude of the student. Finally, when you created a grid for the three factors of language difficulty, target level, and student aptitude, you entered the length of time it would take a student to reach the target level of competency in the chosen language. So there you were. The whole system buttoned up nicely. It would take two weeks or less for a student of high aptitude to use taxis, buy train tickets, book into hotels, order dinner and find washrooms in Spain. The same tasks in Moscow would require a month from the same student. Back in Spain it would take a couple of months to operate competently on the job, but it would not be cost effective to try to train a student of low aptitude to become competent on the job in Russia. I remember two exchanges from my conversations with the F.S.I. people all those years ago:

me: Suppose the army wanted you to teach Vietnamese to a master sergeant of low language aptitude so that he could in turn teach the use of the 81mm mortar, what would be your response?

F.S.I.: First we would suggest they assign him to duties in Latin America. If they insisted he go to Vietnam, we would suggest they provide an interpreter.

me: Could you give me a classic example of a student with poor language aptitude?

F.S.I.: A middle-aged agricultural expert from one of the states with lots of vowels.

Of course Inuktitut was missing from this table. Where would it fit in? I assume that Steve Jacobson and Larry Kaplan would agree that Inuktitut is simpler than Yupik, and I would be surprised if you did not agree that it is simpler than the Athapaskan languages. But one of our favourite students, who is a professor of Arabic at the University of Nijmegen, tells us that he considers Inuktitut more challenging than that language. So I think we can agree that Inuktitut would find its place at the more demanding end of the table.

### **The layman's views on language learning**

The Anglophone layman, whether a casual tourist planning a visit to Mexico or a bureaucrat haphazardly appointed to an administrative position controlling second language teaching, has several ingrained principles to operate on. One is that "grammar is a bad thing," a belief inculcated by generations of unilingual educational professionals. A second principle, based on his own experiences during a two week visit to Costa Rica, is that it is possible to "pick up" a language painlessly by focused exposure. The third is that the most practical kind of formal language course is one titled "Conversational." A corollary of point number three is that any course that involves "grammar" (even if disguised as "structure") is unnecessarily academic. I don't need to point out, do I, that these beliefs are counter-productive when dealing



with a language as complex as Inuktitut? Conversational exchanges lead nowhere unless the learner has some understanding of the basic structure.

### **The current approach to second language teaching**

One of the most depressing facets of educational theory in general is the bandwagon syndrome, all too familiar to concerned parents. Whole language is in, grammar is out (and has been for decades). In fact, the complex and irregular subtleties of English grammar have made all Anglophones, professional and lay alike, apparently allergic to the very word. In second language teaching we have had a series of approaches, labeled (to quote a sample) "Grammar Translation, Audio-Visual, Cognitive Code, Functional," and most recently, "Communicative." Each new approach adopts the principle of the "Empty Bathtub Bandwagon": out goes the baby with the bathwater. The current "Communicative Approach," especially in North America, advocates an overwhelming emphasis on communicative situations that force students to expand the little knowledge they start with. In the case of immigrant students exposed to a flood of English stimuli in the environment, and given the comparatively simple sentence structure of basic English, this approach apparently does indeed work well. British practitioners, however, tend to stress the importance of a preliminary period of "Pre-Communicative Activities," which provide the student with a base of structure and vocabulary to build on. I consider that Inuktitut is exotic enough to require a long period of such activities before students are forced into more spontaneous exchanges. With these factors dealt with, we can now move back to the origins of the Eskimo Language School. At that time, the method in vogue was "Pattern Practice." As a true disciple, I applied it over enthusiastically at first. But despite that, and despite its intrinsic defects, it was well suited to preliminary work in Inuktitut.

### **1969: Setting up the program in Rankin Inlet**

After my grand tour I was left on my own to set up a program whose equipment and operating expenses were well-funded. Unfortunately there was no provision for constructing or buying a school building. I set off on a scouting expedition. I found a construction company's bunkhouse in Pangnirtung that would have been suitable, but the Education Department convincingly pleaded for it as an Adult Education Centre. The town manager of Frobisher Bay and I borrowed a crowbar and broke into an unused residence belonging to the hospital, but while I was flying back to Ottawa the Regional Director commandeered it for a staff residence. Finally the ideal situation presented itself. Professor Robert Williamson of the University of Saskatchewan had just created the Arctic Research and Training Centre in Rankin Inlet, a prefabricated trailer unit with accommodation, classrooms, kitchen and lounge area. We leased it. By October of 1969 we were in residence. The first class took place in January 1970. The courses were six weeks long, 8:30 to 4:30 on weekdays, with two evening classes, plus Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons. Our numbers varied. One course had only

one student to start with: I recruited a second one locally, and flew to Chesterfield Inlet in a friend's plane to collect another.

In most cases we had between eight and 18 students, some of them non-governmental. We divided the class each morning into three groups. We found five to be the maximum number for each student to participate fully. The groups would combine for the structural discussions at the end of the day. The methodology was standard for the era: pattern practice with occasional structural explanations, lots of visual aids such as maps, coloured toy airplanes and cars, Lego blocks to create community buildings, a Ken and Barbie doll to discuss marital dramas and so on. I had one full-time Inuk as an assistant. The two of us were the professionals: he (or she) monitored and improved my Inuktitut; I monitored and improved his (or her) teaching skills. Among the people who held this position were Luke Iisaluk, Basil Qiblaqut, Marie Uviluq, Michael Mautaritnaq, Jose Kusugaq (yes, that Jose Kusugaq), and Annie Tattuinniq (now Annie Ford). I should, for various reasons, make special mention of Alexina Kublu, who has spent decades in the frequently frustrating task of correcting my blunders. In addition there was a very generous budget for casual teaching assistants. Some were interested young people, several of whom went on to work in language and culture related careers, in schools, Nunavut Arctic College, CBC (Canadian Broadcast Corporation), ITK (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami), and the justice system. That fact adds another dimension to the importance of the language school in the struggle against language and culture shift.

The most intriguing instructors, however, were older women from the community. Each day they would usually start with me. I would have a carefully selected topic ready to deal with, focussed on some aspect of grammar, but they also frequently arrived with their own agenda, involving a distant memory or a recent incident in the community (preferably scandalous). Often I found it easier, and ultimately more productive, to follow their lead, desperately asking questions to simplify the structures and vocabulary. In later sessions I would leave the ladies alone with their groups, with mixed results. This group included Arnarjuaq Ussak, Imaima, Leonie Kappi, Elisapi Karlik, Qablu, and Tautungie Qabluittuq. This continued from 1970 to 1975. There would be about five courses a year given in Rankin Inlet, and one given at the University of Saskatoon campus in the summer. My Inuktitut gradually improved... somewhat, and our teaching skills improved, more than somewhat. We actually gave a Phase Two course, where we all co-operated in working with our familiar instructors. Meanwhile, in 1970, the headquarters of the territorial government had moved north, and most federal employees had become territorial. The Language School remained federal until 1972, but even after the takeover we retained considerable autonomy. The government supplied the students; I was left alone to create the schedule, organize the courses and provide the instruction.



### **1973: The move to Yellowknife**

In 1973, we transferred the language school to Yellowknife, renaming it Inuktitut Learning Services, for politically correct reasons. This was more of a domestic decision than a professional one, and although we started to run courses in other centres as well as Rankin Inlet, we lost that comfortable sense of integration into one community.

### **1977: The program goes underground**

In 1977, the new Director of Education decided that the money available to the teaching of Inuktitut as a Second Language to transient southern civil servants would be better spent on curriculum development of aboriginal languages in the school system. This was an argument that was impossible to resist. Inuktitut Learning Services ceased to exist; the Linguistic Programs Division took its place. However, the old unbureaucratic autonomy did not disappear completely. When I became chief of the new division I was allowed to run the occasional intensive ISL course, either in Rankin or in Iqaluit. The courses were reduced in length from six weeks to three, and the evening and weekend schedules were less brutal, but in fact our teaching efficiency had increased to the extent that we covered as much ground as before (at the expense of some of the ladies' story-telling.)

### **1980: The move to Iqaluit**

In 1980 another change took place. The Linguistic Program Division had been a little too autonomous to survive embedded in the Yellowknife bureaucracy. It was folded into the Curriculum Division. I took flight, and accepted an offer to look after the newly established Eastern Arctic Teacher Education Program in Iqaluit. Once again, however, I took with me to my new job a budget that included funds to run one or two ISL classes a year at the Nunavut Arctic College. This was the final metamorphosis of the original Eskimo Language School. In Iqaluit we had lost the old ladies, but over the years we developed a cadre of skilled ISL teachers, who were usually able to set themselves free for three weeks a year. By now we had formalized the modular nature of the course. Among our regulars were Louisa Hauilli, Monica Ittusardjuat, Norman Keenainnaq, Alexina Kublu, Papatsi Kublu-Hill, Mary Ekho Wilman, and Seporah Ungalaq. Once again, most of these people have continued to use the knowledge they gained working with us in related fields. One other feature of the course was a deliberate effort to bring new instructors into the program. We had an informal system of apprenticeship, where potential new instructors would act first of all as role models, then as drill masters, and finally as independent teachers. I should confess here that one very negative student evaluation of the course had accused me of mistreating instructors by thrusting them unprepared into demanding teaching suggestions: that shamed me into writing detailed teaching notes, which were useful to some instructors and ignored by others.

I retired from the college in 1986, and for a few years lived in Victoria, coming back annually to take part in intensive courses. By that time McGill University and the college were interested in publishing a textbook based on the course. Funding was a problem, until Dr. David Wilman, then Director of Nunatta Campus, approached the Iqaluit branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, who came through, royally. The book mirrors the modular approach of the course, and was not designed for self-teaching. It was in these final years that we had one of our most rewarding and relaxing courses. It was an intermediate course, a follow-up for a handful of students who had survived Phase One. There were two experienced Inuk instructors, Mary Ekho Wilman and Seporah Ungalaaq, and myself. The balance worked well. The Inuit instructors and the students plunged into their own adventures, and I then explored with them the structures that had popped up.

### **Discussion on the methodology of teaching a polysynthetic language**

One of the anonymous reviewers of the original draft of this paper commented, "What is missing in the article is a more thorough description of the most effective methods of teaching a polysynthetic Inuit language [...] the paper would make a very good contribution if it went into greater depth on the subject of how these structural questions affect language teaching. How do students acquire long words with multiple suffixes in Inuktitut? It must be very different from learning French or English." It must be obvious from the tone of this paper that I am a practitioner rather than an academic researcher. I have often wished that among the annual migration of keen young linguists into the Arctic we could find a psycholinguist interested in the difference between the way learners most efficiently deal with radically different types of languages. I have also waited in vain for a tourist whose profession is teaching Turkish or Finnish as a second language. How do they process the flood of theories and advice based on the teaching of English and French, and Chinese?

At the intermediate and advanced levels, there is probably not much difference. By that stage the communicative approach can flourish. It is in the pre-communicative stage that we polysyntheticians face our challenge, the acquiring of enough basic vocabulary and structure to begin venturing into some form of linguistic creativity. In recent years I have been involved in a number of evening courses or short-term semi-intensive courses, involving only a single instructor. The texts have been the standard dialogue type: more or less realistic conversational exchanges illustrating one or two structures, gradually building in complexity. But the most successful efforts were our now discontinued three-week intensive courses. I'll use them as a model of what seemed to work best with a language like Inuktitut.

There were three groups, three instructors, and three modules, each focussing on a particular set of structures. Module One was called "Possession." It started with a list of body parts, family members and possessable objects such as tents, cars, canoes and so on. The structure developed from the equivalent of 'I have a thumb,' *kubluqaqtunga* through 'Absalom is my son,' *Absalom irinirijara* to the banalities of 'I am happy because I have a daughter,' *quviasuktunga paniqarama* and the complexity of Lady

Astor's exchange with Winston Churchill (paraphrased here to follow the Inuktitut structure): 'If I had you as a husband I would add poison in your coffee.' 'If I had you as a wife I would drink it.' *Uigigupkit tuqunnaqtumik ilasinajaqtunga kaapituqtarnut. Nuliarigupkit imirajaqtara.* Module Two was labelled "Getting There." We started with Inuktitut place names and their meanings. That led to 'I want to go to Igloolik,' *Iglulingmunngaujumajunga* and 'Coming from Pond Inlet the plane will get to Arctic Bay,' *Mittimatalingminngaarluni tingmisuuq Tununirusirmualaaqtuq*, and eventually 'If our boat passes through Kimmirut I will see my son.' *Umiaqput Kimmirukkuuqpat irnira takulaaq tara.* The Third module was "Commands," leading from 'Come in,' *isirit*, through 'I told her to come in,' *isiquqquajara* and 'she came in because I told her to,' *isiquqquajara isiquqquagapku* to 'If I asked you to help what would you do?' *Ikajuqugupkit sunajaqpit?*

You can see that as the separate modules spiral upwards they eventually intersect. This sounds very dry, and my own classes often were, but the Inuit instructors were able to use their natural command of the language, their imagination, and personal experiences to liven things up. Given the complexity (albeit logical complexity) of Inuktitut grammar, the emphasis is on structure rather than vocabulary. "Useful phrases" are an occasional interlude rather than a focus, unless they illustrate a structural point. In fact, I could go further and say the emphasis is on structural "templates." For example, in European language learning texts it is normal to proceed rapidly from singular to plural. In Inuktitut one would proceed from singular to dual and then plural. The three nonspecific endings for "I see, you see, she/he/it sees" would become nine, not six. But the seven specific endings for "I see thee. I see him/her/it, thou seest me/ thou seest him/her/it. She/he/it sees me. She/he/it sees thee, he/she/it sees him/ he/it," become 63. There is another 63 for questions, another 63 for commands, and so on. For the Becausive and Conditional tables we have 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> persons, which have 10 endings in the singular table, we go up to 90 endings for each full set. Of course, there are some duplications, and some repeating patterns, but all in all we stick to singular forms, teach the basic template, and leave the brute memorization for the students to deal with as they move on from our classes.

The phonological adaptations that occur are often connected to the final vowel or consonant of the preceding morpheme, so our vocabulary is chosen with these features in mind, so many items ending in vowels, so many ending in /t/, so many in /k/, so many in /q/. The topics we choose to practise are also based on structural need, not necessarily on usefulness or interest. The module on the ramifications of the Inuktitut verbal units expressing "have" deals with body parts, relatives, possessions and partners, the module dealing with verbal units of movement deals with place names (almost all of which are informational), land features and participles, and so on.

The challenge is not just the complexity of noun and verb endings. It is of course the simple length of single words that express the meaning of six or seven words in English, French, Chinese, or Malay. You could quote German to me, but the longest German word is just a tower of building blocks compared to the Lego-like interconnectivity of the elements in Inuit words. The problem is twofold. First the elements are placed together in a well-defined logical order, but also they change their

forms according to strict rules of sound combinations. You can stumble through a German sentence, breathing heavily to regroup after each tortuously produced word, and finally stagger to the verb, but Inuktitut demands a continued and complete effort. Of course you can start with simple words, making one phonological adjustment per word, if needed: Noun Roots plus noun endings, Verb Roots plus verb endings. Hence:

<i>umiaq + mut:</i>	<i>umiarmut</i>	boat + to
<i>tikit + junga:</i>	<i>tikittunga</i>	arrive + I

Eventually, having introduced several new items, working through the usual repetitive, dully demanding substitution drills singly and in short combinations, you could end up with:

*umiarjuavinirmunngaujumalaurama*  
*umiaq + (r)juaq + viniq + munngau + juma + lauq + gama*  
 boat + large + former + going to + want + past + because I  
 'because I wanted to go to the wrecked ship'

No matter how carefully each separate item has been introduced in smaller more manageable frameworks, the final combination is daunting.

### **1999: The anomaly ends and the bureaucracy takes over**

The last course took place in May, 1999, one month after the creation of Nunavut. The teaching of Inuktitut as a second language to civil servants is now in the hands of the bureaucracy. But that's another story.