Language Documentation and Description

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Akuzipik/Yupik (St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, USA; Chukotka, Russia) - Language Snapshot

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Akuzipik/Yupik (St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, USA; Chukotka, Russia) – Language Snapshot

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Language Name:	Endonyms: *Akuzipik, Yupigestun*; in Chukotka also *Whangkutestun*. Known in English as Yupik, Siberian Yupik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik (the variety spoken on St. Lawrence Island), Chaplinski Yupik (the variety spoken in Chukotka).
Language Family:	Inuit-Yupik-Unangan (otherwise known as Eskimo-Aleut)
ISO 639-3 Code:	ess
Glottolog Code:	cent2128
Population:	about 800-900 fluent first-language (L1) speakers, in an ethnic group of 2,400-2,500 people
Location:	63.362222, -170.267222
Vitality rating:	EGIDS 7

Takestaaghsallghi suumqellghet

Akuzipik (Yupigestun/*Yupik*/*St. Lawrence Island Yupik*/*Siberian Yupik*/*Chaplinski Yupik*) Inuit-Yupik-Unangan-et ulungitneng ayuquq kayalikestalghii. 800-900 yuget whaa maaten ulukaat Sivuqam qiighqaani Quutmillu (de Reuse 1994; Schwartz et al. 2019). Allakutellghik qiighqaghmiitlu akuzilleghqek quutmiitlu sangiighhaaguk, tawatelkutuk (Krauss 1975). Ulunga allangughtaquq anglinghhaghni taghnughhaghni taagegken ima 1950-neng quutmi, enkaam 1990-neng Alaska-mi (Schwartz et al. 2019).

Summary

Akuzipik (Yupigestun/Yupik/St. Lawrence Island Yupik/Siberian Yupik/Chaplinski Yupik) is an endangered language belonging to the Yupik branch of the Inuit-Yupik-Unangan language family. It is currently spoken by 800-900 people in the Bering Strait region, mainly on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska (St. Lawrence Island Yupik), and on the coast of the Chukotka Peninsula, in Russia (Chaplinski Yupik) (de Reuse 1994; Schwartz et al. 2019). The linguistic differences between these two varieties seem to be minor and not affect mutual intelligibility (Krauss 1975). The language has been undergoing a rapid generational shift, beginning in the 1950s in Russia and in the 1990s in Alaska (Schwartz et al. 2019).

Синопсис

Акузипик (Юпигестун/Юпик/Юпик Острова Святого Лаврентия/Сибирский Юпик/Чаплинский) — исчезающий язык юпикской ветви Инуитско-ЮпикУнанганской языковой семьи. В настоящее время на нем говорят 800-900 человек в районе Берингова пролива, главным образом на острове Святого Лаврентия на Аляске (Юпик Острова Святого Лаврентия) и на побережье Чукотского полуострова в России (Чаплинский) (de Reuse 1994; Schwartz et al. 2019). Лингвистические различия между этими двумя разновидностями кажутся незначительными и не влияют на взаимную разборчивость (Krauss 1975). Язык испытывает быструю смену поколений, начиная с 1950-х годов в России и с 1990-х годах на Аляске (Schwartz et al. 2019).

1. Overview

1.1 Language identification and demographics

Akuzipik is one of four mutually unintelligible languages on the Yupik branch of the Inuit-Yupik-Unangan language family. The other three are Sugpiaq (Alutiiq), spoken in south-central Alaska, Central Yup'ik, in western Alaska, and Naukan, in Chukotka. Akuzipik is endangered and currently spoken by 800-900 people in the Bering Strait region, mainly on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, but also on the coast of the Chukotka Peninsula, in Russia. Figure 1 shows the location of Akuzipik-speaking communities. In addition to the other languages in the Yupik branch, the map includes Sirenik (Chukotka, in the same language family), Iñupiaq (northern Alaska, in the Inuit branch of the same family), Unangam Tunuu

(Aleutian Islands in southwest Alaska, constituting the Unangan branch of the same family), and Chukchi (Chukotka, an unrelated neighboring language in the Chukotka-Kamchatkan language family). See also Krauss et al. (2011) and Krupnik & Chlenov (2013).

Figure 1: Language map showing Akuzipik and neighboring languages.

On St. Lawrence Island, the language is called *Akuzipik* or *Yupigestun*; in English, it is referred to as Yupik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, or Siberian Yupik. Speakers in Russia use the same endonyms, as well as *Whangkutestun*. The variety spoken in Russia has been called, in English and Russian, *Chaplinski* (*Yupik*) (de Reuse 1994; Schwartz et al. 2019). The language has also frequently been referred to as 'Central Siberian Yupik' in the English-language literature; this term is inapt as the language is not spoken in Central Siberia, nor is it an otherwise 'central' variety of Yupik. The linguistic differences between the Chukotkan and the St. Lawrence Island varieties seem to be minor and not affect mutual intelligibility (Krauss 1975).
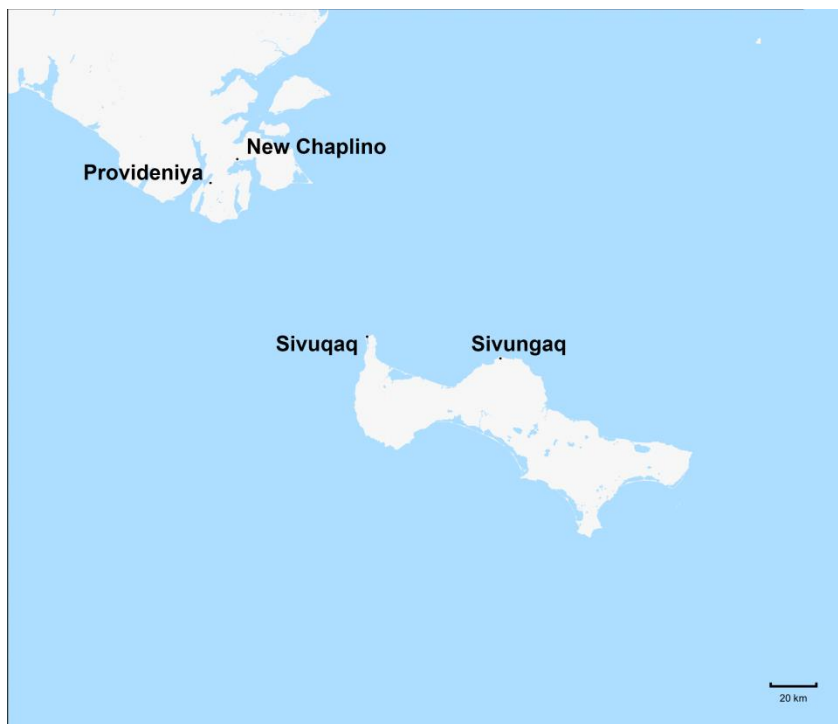
Figure 2: Map showing the traditional territory where Akuzipik is spoken: St. Lawrence Island, Alaska and Chukotka, Russia. Map built with data from OpenStreetMap, ©OpenStreetMap contributors, licensed under an Open Data Commons Open Database License, openstreetmap.org/copyright.

The research of the university-affiliated authors (Schreiner, Soldati, Schwartz, Hunt, Chen, and Park) focuses specifically on the St. Lawrence Island Yupik variety, and most of our fieldwork has taken place in the village of *Sivuqaq* (Gambell), on St. Lawrence Island. Between Sivuqaq and the other village on the island, *Sivungaq* (Savoonga), there are estimated to be about 540 first-language (L1) Akuzipik speakers (Schwartz et al. 2019). While the vast majority of *Yupiget* (Yupik persons) born on the island before 1980 are L1 Akuzipik speakers, most of the islanders born since 1990 are English-dominant with varying levels of Akuzipik proficiency (Schwartz et al. 2019). Here we discuss the situation that obtains on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, specifically in the village of Sivuqaq (the home of the first author), unless otherwise noted.

1.2 Language ecology

As of 2021, in Sivuqaq those born before 1990 primarily speak Akuzipik; younger individuals speak primarily or exclusively English. Some younger people do speak the language; there are, for instance, some families who grew up speaking Akuzipik all the time (at the time of writing, for example, in one family the children 13 years and older at least understand a lot of the language, though their speaking proficiency may be lower).

The first author speaks Akuzipik 50-100% of the time at home, working to increase the fluency of his wife and eight year old daughter, who otherwise speak English. Individuals and families vary as to how frequently Akuzipik versus English is used. In general, those who primarily speak Akuzipik use the language consistently throughout the day with each other or older speakers, and switch to English for younger people, or others who do not speak or understand the language well. Speakers in younger age groups tend to have greater receptive than productive skills. Akuzipik is also sometimes used as a private language or code among adults in households in which the children are less fluent or are non-speakers. The language is sometimes used on social media, particularly Facebook.

Some speakers report differences in the speech of younger people when compared to older ones, e.g., younger speakers use shortened versions of Akuzipik words (such as shortening *igamsiqayugvikamken* 'I am grateful to you/thank you' to *igams(i)* 'thanks'), and pronounce certain consonants more like their English counterparts (for instance, <r> [ɻ]~[ʐ] is pronounced more like American English <r> [ɹ]). It is also common to attribute certain distinctions in use, pronunciation, or spelling to family or clan differences. For example, the morpheme -*llaag*- 'bad N' is reported to be used more often in Sivungaq, while people in Sivuqaq are more likely to use -*rrag*-; the spelling and pronunciation of 'flower' varies between <piitesighaq> [piː.tə.se.ʁaq] and <piitsighaq> [piːt.se.ʁaq] in different families.

The school in Sivuqaq offers non-mandatory instruction in Akuzipik at all levels, as an elective. The first author (as the high school Akuzipik teacher) finds that this leads to students tending to use Akuzipik only in the language classroom, as one might find in foreign language instruction in other schools. Children use English when they play, consume media, and access the internet. At home, where students spend more of their time, the primary language for most students is English. While community members in general talk about the danger of the language being lost, efforts to use Akuzipik in the home are not as wide-spread as they likely need to be to sustain the language.

A revitalization group was formed in Sivuqaq several years ago. The meetings were initially conducted entirely in Akuzipik, as all members were born before the 1980s and were fluent; however, as younger, less fluent (or non-speaker) members joined, meetings began to be conducted in English. The group was meeting regularly, if infrequently, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; it currently does not meet.

2. Research

In addition to a two-volume Russian grammar partially focused on Akuzipik (Menovshchikov 1962, 1967), there is an Akuzipik-Russian dictionary (Rubtsova 1971), a linguistic grammar (de Reuse 1994), a linguistically-oriented pedagogical grammar (Jacobson 2001), a two-volume Akuzipik-English dictionary (Badten, et al. 2009), and a Russian-Chaplinsky dictionary (Radunovich 2016). A number of linguistic and anthropological works also exist in both English and Russian, primarily from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, though several studies have also been published more recently (Bogoraz 1949; Krauss 1975; Krupnik & Chlenov 1979; Emel'janova 1982; Jacobson 1985; Menovshchikov & Vakhtin 1990; Vakhtin 1989, 1995, 2001; Schwalbe 2015, 2017). Most of this work is descriptive in nature, with a few scholars pursuing more formal analysis (for an overview of existing linguistic work, see Schreiner et al. 2019). Instructional materials were also produced in Russia from the 1930s to the 1990s, and in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s (for an overview, see Schwartz et al. 2019).

The academic authors (Schreiner, Soldati, Schwartz, Hunt, Haas, Chen, Park) are currently in the third year of an NSF Documenting Endangered Languages grant,[1] which has three main aims:

- digitization of legacy materials in and about Akuzipik;

- further documentation of the language's syntax, morphology, and phonology; and

- development of computer tools to help speakers use their language in everyday life, and to aid in the study of Akuzipik by scholars.

As of February 2021, 44 of the 56 sets of items filed under *St. Lawrence Island Yupik* in the Alaska Native Language Archive have been digitized, as well as 73 of the bilingual/bicultural curricula that are stored at the school in Sivuqaq (65 comb-bound texts, three elementary short story collections, and five collections of oral narratives). A corpus of these materials is being built (Schwartz et al. 2021), and currently contains 41,060 Akuzipik sentences with 268,299 total words, 87,102 of which are unique. Five fieldtrips to Sivuqaq (2017-2019) have been made to digitize materials and undertake interviews for further documentation of the syntax, semantics, morphology, and phonology of the language (e.g. Schreiner 2021; Hunt & Schreiner to appear a, b). The first detailed phonetic documentation of the language (to our knowledge) has also begun, with data gathered from three speakers, recorded at George Mason University (Hunt et al. 2020, 2021; Masella Soldati et al. 2021). Finally, a number of computer tools have been created to help both speakers and researchers. Both a finite-state morphological analyzer (Chen & Schwartz 2018; Chen et al. 2020) and a preliminary neural net morphological analyzer (Schwartz et al. 2019) help researchers break down Akuzipik words into their component parts, and are the precursors for language technologies of interest to members of the community, such as predictive texting. A spelling and pronunciation tool (Schwartz & Chen 2017) helps researchers learn to pronounce the language, and automates first-pass checking of digitized materials for spelling mistakes due to Optical Character Recognition software. A digitized version of the Badten et al. (2009) dictionary (Hunt et al. 2019) allows speakers (and researchers) to access it via the internet, and integrates the finite state analyzer so that inflected words can be used as search terms even if the root word is not known to the user. E-books have also been created from existing elementary-level primers, with the option for users to have the whole story read out loud, or to click on individual words to hear them pronounced. All materials produced under these grants will be archived at the Alaska Native Languages Archive.

This work will continue beyond the scope of the current grant to add and improve computer tools, and to continue to expand the documentation of Akuzipik (particularly for its phonetic structures, which are currently under-documented). As a group of community members, university academics, and their students, we also hope to work together to move towards a more Akuzipik-centered curriculum at the school.

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