

Sophisticated Cultural Languages of the Inuit in Nunavut

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Abstract

This reflection on the loss of sophisticated Inuit oral language is written from my personal experiences while becoming a bilingual Inuk and then making a career as a Nunavut educator. I worked as an Inuktitut teacher, teaching Inuktitut language arts from Kindergarten to the college level (Nunavut Teacher Education Program). The orality of Inuit, especially in Inuktitut language arts, remained rich from generation to generation. Traditional stories have been passed by Inuit from grandparents to their grandchildren. The erosion of Inuktitut has been felt from early missionaries to today's modern working world. Within our transitional society, we are experiencing and living with a transitional language. Changes in families, in schools, in technology, and in culture are leading to the loss of our sophisticated Inuit languages. Language in all areas and fields has a purpose, and there were many specific purposes for Inuktitut that no longer exist. Our students in Nunavut need to graduate from high school with pride and a stronger Inuit identity. My goal as an educator and language instructor is to add the more traditional ways of using the oral literature of the Inuit languages into the school system so that we may more effectively teach Inuktitut in Nunavut.

Key Words: Inuktitut, Inuit, language, oral language, loss of language, identity

Introduction

Languages mean life to all humans. Even in the animal kingdom, specific ways of communicating mark danger or are used for hunting prey or attracting a mate. Human languages, through articulation, are understood basically for socializing and life skills. Since time immemorial our ancestors, the Inuit, spoke using sophisticated languages, for this meant survival. With no written language, our Inuit ancestors survived in a harsh environment relying on orality. Today, our rich oral Inuktitut is eroding.

The sophisticated orality within our traditional cultural languages began to be ignored three generations ago, though the powerful language of our elders is still there, despite our transitional culture. When Inuit, so used to being mobile, were settled in towns, we became basically immobile, and our languages became stale, and most of all dispirited. We Inuit are now fighting to survive both culturally and linguistically. Our sophisticated Inuit language speakers are fighting to survive, and we are fighting to keep the richest forms of our elders' oral language.

Languages are alive within the movements of each of our daily lives. Our cultures and languages change, yet we wish to learn in order to carry on the most sophisticated richness of our language through each generation. Our sophisticated language is flowing with spiritual life. Our language is also changing as we name items we encounter from other cultures and incorporate them into our own language. Our language is eroding as we no longer practice the culture in which Inuktitut thrived, and as we allow another language to take its place. We know humans have the ability to comprehend and speak any of the sophisticated languages in our world. We wish to keep Inuktitut in its richest forms.

Speaking from Experience

My place in this loss of sophisticated language is rare. I grew up within a unilingual Inuktitut-speaking family. The family group who raised me lived well on the land right into their adulthood. They practiced kinship terms strongly among family members, young or old. Our father spoke to my siblings and I in the sophisticated language his grandparents had passed on to him. He acted as a grandparent to us, as we were not living amongst extended family anymore.

When we moved into a settlement, we were given wooden homes. Each family was given a home; this separated families altogether. I went to Kindergarten in my “new” hometown of Baker Lake, Nunavut. I had to travel out of my community at the age of 15 in order to further my education according to the standards of western society and in order to obtain a Grade 12 diploma. My parents supported this further schooling. They knew that in order to have a job their children needed to complete their education, as we were never going back to live a traditional Inuit life.

I have now been a teacher for 28 years. I am a teacher displaced in both language worlds – not fully at home in English or in the sophisticated cultural Inuktitut of our elders. The transitional setting for me after I finished my teacher education program was similar to that of the other children: we were taken by both worlds and placed into public service jobs before knowing the adult language terminology of either language. I, for one, taught an Inuktitut stream class in 1985 by translating all documents, worksheets, and basic necessities of any classroom from English into Inuktitut and vice versa. If I knew then what I know now, those young adults would be speaking more sophisticated Inuktitut and English today. While I kept working in the school system as a translator and an interpreter without ever knowing it, I was getting overworked. The transition of languages and items into the new technologies could not keep up

with the demands of Inuit. I was wearing thin from translating and interpreting for the staff, students, and the community. I now know that we need to take action in order to promote the sophisticated languages while we can still hear them.

Baker Lake Community Survey on Inuit Language

I have long known something was missing as we try to become a bilingual society in Nunavut. I have attended many workshops and meetings on language and teaching, but still I felt something was not properly studied. In addition to my reflection on the loss of sophisticated oral languages, I wanted to find out more about language use at home, in the community, and at school in Baker Lake, where I live and work. After receiving the necessary approvals from the Nunavut Research Institute and the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) Research Ethics Board, I set up a community meeting on January 7, 2013 at the Nunavut Arctic College in Baker Lake in the NTEP classroom. I introduced myself to the members of the group as a UPEI student with a language survey I was inviting them to complete. I had approached the residents of Baker Lake through a radio announcement and also through Facebook under the “Baker Lake Community Announcements.” I asked the volunteer participants about the languages spoken at home, in school, and in public places. I asked these questions through a typed questionnaire and restated them during the face-to-face meeting. As only a small number of participants came to the community meeting, I continued the research through Facebook. I took pictures of the questionnaire and volunteers who grew up in Baker Lake answered them accordingly. A total of seventeen people responded, including those who came to the initial meeting. My respondents ranged from teenagers struggling in school to elders. Fifteen were fully bilingual speakers with unilingual parents, all of whom attended school in the community as children. Three people were under twenty years old (high school and college upgrading students); five people were aged 21-

35 (three full time workers, one in college and one a seasonal employee); three people were aged 36-50 (one taking Early Childhood Education, and two employed full-time); and five people were aged 51-65 (four working full-time and one unemployed). The community survey did not involve a sufficient number of Inuit participants to provide definitive answers to my own pursuit of the questions I raised as I started writing this paper. Nevertheless, it was helpful to speak with members of my community, and I was startled by some of their comments and responses.

The Erosion of Sophisticated Inuktitut

Berger (2009), in his research into Inuktitut instruction in Nunavut schools, has noted:

Thirty years ago Brody (1975) wrote that sometimes younger Inuit could not understand older people's sophisticated language. He distinguished between *inuttitummarik*, correct

Inuktitut with a wide vocabulary, and *inumarittitut*, sophisticated language related to

wisdom and knowledge of the land (51, 52). At least some of the loss...may be loss of

the latter kind of language, a reflection of the change from camp to settlement life. (p. 10)

During the transition from a traditional, nomadic era to a western, immobile life, many Inuit worked hard to understand the western society way of life. In the new modern setting, whether they were vulnerable or not, life seemed easier. As Inuit cultural practices changed, so did the sophistication of a cultural language. Inuit felt the first signs of spiritual languages erosion:

“Now we can shoot caribou everywhere with our guns and the result is that we have lived ourselves out of the old customs. We forgot our magic words, and we scarcely use amulets now”

(Mamnguqsualuk, 1986, p. 15). Today, compared to the hunting culture even twenty years ago,

we hardly ever see the snowmobile lights heading home in the dark on our lake. Hunting is a

skill few people are being taught, and we are lucky to have a hunter in a family within Nunavut.

The loss of our sophisticated language(s) as Inuit has been extended to a point where today we

only hear hunting forms of language when we ask. In order for this ancient language to survive, we must have access to it each day and in every way, not only when we ask about themes or incidents. This is our identity, our history, and our birthright: to know and use our sophisticated Inuktitut. “Indigenous knowledge is...communicated in stories, events, dances, songs and dreams...The very premise underpinning Inuit Indigenous Knowledge is that it must be shared: otherwise it will no longer be knowledge...” (Kuptana, 2005, p. 43).

The cultural language shift is still felt even after three generations in my hometown. Many of us Inuit today were those children who no longer heard the sophisticated languages all of the time. We were no longer immersed in the language of our grandparents, no longer included in their daily duties. The traditional way to comprehend the sophistication of a cultural language was through inclusion of duties, “Language was used in stories, in tasks and in the skills of our elders to keep children grounded in who they are and how they were expected to behave” (Louis Angalik, personal communication, October 12, 2012). Such everyday contact is eroding. Many Inuit were housed in separate family units, whereas extended families used to live together. Being moved permanently into a community made each family have separate dwellings, so that the dialogue between families ended. This change occurred without Inuit having the time to absorb the fact that separation of extended families was diminishing our sophisticated languages. The confusion was not pinpointed by many Inuit, as they had no voice in a whole different culture that was administering and gathering many Inuit groups into one community.

When the Canadian government wanted to include Inuit in the education system they provided “help” in a negative way. Children were taken from fall camps without the consent of parents and elders. For instance, my father tells of his paternal nephew who at the time was about

ten years old, who was carrying a caribou that had just been caught. Next thing he knew, he was suddenly on a float plane, carried away to residential school in Baker Lake in what was then the Northwest Territories.

Residential school history was a long and life-changing journey for Inuit and First Nations across Canada. Children of First Nations and Inuit were taken away from their lands and families to institutions which aimed to strip their language and culture. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to the families and friends of all residential school victims: "The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language."

Children with unilingual Inuit parents were taken away to religious residential schools, federal day schools, then to vocational schools, territorial schools, and lastly to regional high schools. Parents began to move to the settlements in order to be with their children. Children started to be in school all day long, sitting and pushing paper in a language they did not understand. The education system did try to properly supply the sophistication of Inuktitut through translators/interpreters within the introduction of a formal education system in the communities. Instead, with an assimilationist mandate, education was delivered in English. However, the classroom translators/interpreters who had come back from residential schooling had limited acquisition of sophisticated Inuktitut themselves, having spent so much time away from family and the land. As formal education is still relatively new to Inuit, the Inuktitut taught to us in school was (and largely is still) a "residential school" Inuktitut based on translating English school discourse, rather than using Inuit orality and sophisticated languages. The

resulting limited knowledge of sophisticated languages is reflected in the Inuktitut spoken now, as it has been eroding through three and four generations.

Even though early education is now in Inuktitut, the oppression of those early school experiences persists in Inuit minds. According to my language survey comments, Inuit now believe that primary Inuktitut-stream classes are making the Inuit students fail in high school. The Inuktitut stream may not be as strong as it could be; it is not teaching the true Inuit oral literature. The Inuktitut streams are still translating documents which do not ring true to our Inuit identity. It may still be the residential school-style Inuktitut which is being taught today in Nunavut schools.

Baker Lake Case Study

There is some evidence that Inuktitut is eroding but is still alive. The table below shows the numbers of Inuktitut speakers in my home community of Baker Lake, Nunavut. The total population of Baker Lake is 1872, mainly Inuit. Three major dialects are spoken in the community. In the most recent census, 1170 people (610 male, 550 female) in Baker Lake listed Inuktitut as their “mother tongue” and 525 people (285 male, 240 female) said that Inuktitut was the language they most often used at home (Statistics Canada, 2012).

Inuktitut Speakers Male		Inuktitut Speakers Female	
Mother Tongue	610	Mother Tongue	550
Spoken at Home	285	Spoken at Home	240

Table 1: Inuktitut speakers in Baker Lake, Nunavut (Statistics Canada, 2012)

It is heartening to see that so many people still use Inuktitut in the community, but discouraging to see only 525 use it most often at home. When asked what is causing the Inuktitut language loss in Baker Lake, Nunavut, respondents to my survey agreed that the main reason for

it is: “Not enough Inuktitut spoken at home” (13 respondents out of 17). The use of home language Inuktitut needs to be investigated through linguistic research. The Inuit men still have hunting cultural language skills, which have been passed down from their fathers and their fathers’ fathers, and successful hunting certainly helps to subsidize food in the north. The local radio is operated bilingually. This does not mean that the sophisticated Inuit languages are used. The Inuktitut used during the local radio is mainly announcements from businesses about deadlines and policies for public awareness. This is an old European type of business culture within a business realm translated into a newly formed Inuit language in each community.

There are a couple of reasons why Inuit cultural languages today are still not up to par with the sophisticated languages of Inuktitut used traditionally. First of all, the transitional life, beginning with my parents’ generation, has caused our sophisticated Inuit languages to erode exceedingly quickly in some regions. Secondly, many children do not communicate with their grandparents. I was surprised in my survey to see that five people answered that people don’t care for Inuktitut in their community. This created an emotional turmoil for me. The erosion of an irreplaceable strong cultural language is still felt.

Considered Fully Bilingual

I am considered fully bilingual in Inuktitut and English. However, deep within my spirit, I continue to wonder about just how bilingual I am. Am I fully capable in speaking our traditional culturally-based Inuktitut? How bilingual am I in English discourse at an academic level? I know many sophisticated terms in Inuktitut for Inuit cultural items. However, with the English terms I must often go to unilingual English speakers to ask for the correct word for a specialized item. How truly bilingual can we be in a sophisticated Inuit language within Nunavut

if we are taught to study only English literature classes in high school, and when attending the Nunavut Teacher Education Program we are not taught Inuit oral literature?

Our culture is in transition, and so are our languages. Little did we know that we were going to see many aspects of a transitioned language life erode more deeply with each generation. Cultural transition has resulted in a loss of tradition: “Women worked side by side with men and traditional family life was in a desperate transition. The old ways seemed impossible to implement when women were doing the work of men and children were an interruption to economic development” (Connell, 2009, p. 78). Many issues stem from that “desperate transition” and some Inuit have never seen equality for our sophisticated Inuit languages being shared, spoken, and learned, especially in our schools. Some Nunavummiut within our generation grew up in a transitional period from camp life to a Federal Day School system completely immersed in a primary school level of an English language. As soon as our older siblings, cousins, and friends were able to speak English, they were our parents’ translators in the public service. Many are leaders today, but the languages they use, both Inuktitut and English, lack linguistic sophistication, and this has impacted the level of discourse in both languages.

Many public sector workers in Nunavut today are seen as fully bilingual speakers. However, we are not learning the full sophisticated language of our elders’ stories, nor of the English authors we read. Jose Kusugak (1979) expressed this dilemma when he stated:

My own children went to school to obtain higher education. I was led to believe that, if they completed this education, that they would have little trouble finding work. They are faced with other shortcomings as well. They are familiar with both English and Inuktitut

languages, but are not “at home” with either...I feel sorry for today’s young people in such a state. For this reason I don’t want my two younger boys to attend school. (p. 9)

Differences in Inuit Sophisticated Cultural Languages

The circumpolar regions have Inuit cultural languages that share one basic survival cultural language that can still be traced in each country. The languages began to erode at different times depending on early contact with the missionaries who came to the Arctic to save souls. Even if missionaries in some ways contributed to the development of the languages, through the written form (Dorais, 2010), they also contributed to the loss of specialized spiritual languages. Missionaries forbade shamanism, associated speech, stories, songs and chants, and drum dancing, strongly curbing an entire generation so severely that many Inuit families had to hide in order to keep their sophisticated languages alive. Much of the ancient oral literature is hidden away in museums and in the knowledge of our elders in Nunavut. We, as public servant workers must start to record, list, and comprehend the terminology for the survival of our sophisticated Inuit traditional cultural knowledge terms. Many topics and stories have been recorded. We must categorize and digitally archive these precious texts in order to use them for the educational system today and in the future.

Words regarding environment are basically the same within the circumpolar region:

ice	water	land	snow	sky	woman’s knife	seal	fish
<i>siku/hiku</i>	<i>imiq</i>	<i>muna</i>	<i>aputi</i>	<i>qilak</i>	<i>ulu</i>	<i>natsiq/nattiqiqaluk</i>	<i>iqaluk</i>

Cultural terms are encoded in the Inuit languages which are now spoken only by our unilingual elders today. I present the term “languages,” as the mother tongue is different in each region and communities. Terms such as *maqai*, *angunahuk*, and *asivaq* all mean hunting, but are used in different regions. Another example is *arnarvik*, *anaanaksaq*, and *ayak*, which all mean

maternal aunt. There are, however, more family terms that are so different from one community to the next, and even in one community.

Preserving Sophistication through Change

The societal transformation was a positive change for some Inuit and for the federal government. However, it also took over our cultural language by force. The sophisticated language terms were and continue to be ignored even by our own communities today. We turn a blind eye, as if we were the children of the western society which has shaped us into its own bilingual, but mainly English-speaking workers. In retrospect, we needed to maintain the highest levels of use of our own languages as sophisticated bilingual speakers. We have paid a high price for social change and bilingualism. That price is irreversible to some. Others of us will reverse it by healing, by recording, by sharing, and by coming together as Inuit groups in four circumpolar countries. We must see all of our collective Inuit knowledge in encyclopaedias, in textbooks, and in exams in the future. While the sophistication of this language may not be seen by many Inuit, it is still heard. In order to take steps towards language documentation, we must see a categorized sophisticated literature program for Inuktitut written in the best form possible within this vast territory called Nunavut.

Even while the education system was eroding our languages, our mothers were the language experts in our homes. When television was introduced with 100% English programming, and with only one channel (CBC), it further eroded our rich language in our Inuit homes. Our language has gone into survival mode. Imagine using a survival mode of Inuktitut and English languages while manoeuvring constantly in transition from one generation to the next within a public government, all the while the English language is dominating language, discourse, and text.

We Nunavummiut are in a transition from being colonized peoples to actually decolonizing ourselves within our strong Inuit culture, which in the past we both consciously and unconsciously ignored within the paternalistic dominant culture. This will be a slow process, as we see and feel the change as many Inuit become decolonized. The Inuit culture is strong, as we are always told by others. We live in it. We practice it. So, we never really know the degree of strength that resides in our own culture and language. We are still caught in that uneven transition stage when decolonization will arrive almost too late for many communities today.

Our own Inuit culture is forever being studied and recorded by others. It is time we as Inuit started recording our culture, documenting how we live it and how we understand ourselves. It is now time that we learned to live by researching our own issues. This is so that we may be able to teach our future generations to carry what they value of our sophisticated languages and culture into the next generation. This is for us who are proud of our rightful voice, in our languages, and are proud to articulate our own identity to others around us without any spiritual flaws while speaking.

The genres of our ancestral sophisticated languages are still there, ready to be learned in order to teach them to our own people. Although many of us have not been taught the sophisticated chants and tongue twisters, it is time to hear our elders who are the experts of the language. While learning together from our elders, for our future and with the support of our educational language legislation and policies, we will keep the language strong and even strengthen it for generations to come. We owe this sowing and re-seeding of our sophisticated languages to our ancestors and to our fellow Inuit.

We need to ensure that we as Nunavummiut gain an understanding of our values and attitudes, which allow us to live with respect for the Inuit languages and equally for other

languages in our ever-changing cultural world. I am a bilingual bridge from our elders to our youth. With all my knowledge I need your help, the help of readers and of Inuit educators and language advocates, to make this work. I appreciate our living culture now as we use many items, such as the *amauti* (baby carrying parka) and the hunting tools, today as we survive the biggest transition anyone could ever encounter from the nomadic, hunting way of life.

Our environment is forever changing. As we used to learn other Inuktitut languages through interaction, we need to see elders, adults, and youth interacting more today. Whereas in the past, the younger generations used to learn from the elders, now elders and youth are not connecting as easily or as much as they were once doing. The Nunavut Government is trying to connect elders and youth through meetings and workshops, which is not the traditional Inuit way. The Inuit way is to be with each other as much as we are able to, as family. We kept the languages alive while learning and teaching from our siblings, cousins, and friends. Therefore, we must learn to practice the languages, especially the traditional songs and the art of storytelling. To be together as family makes the ties of languages strong and stronger is yet to come. In order to comprehend and grasp the sophisticated languages of the Inuit traditional cultures, we must make time for family. This is for our culture today and the future of our children.

I have high hopes that my reflective research guides the future with a reawakening knowledge of sophisticated languages within the Inuit of the circumpolar regions. By presenting this paper I want my colleagues to comprehend the transitional issues, as well as the misuse and the ignorance of Inuit sophisticated languages that has inadvertently come through our educational system. This awareness will enable Inuit to begin to share oral stories among each other and build a stronger identity, so their voice will be carried side by side with any other cultural languages around the world.

Sophisticated Cultural Languages

The sophisticated Inuit languages are partly being lost with each elder who passes away and with Inuit adapting to a different cultural life each generation. When I completed my survey we had fifty-five unilingual elders living in Baker Lake, Nunavut, and now we only have fifty-four. The elders' precise spiritual knowledge leaves us with each elder, contributing to language erosion. Language has a purpose for each living being. For Inuit, this meant everything in order for our ancestors to survive. For us today, language also means survival. This new type of survival involves the revitalization of identity, life skills, and story-telling within our own living history. We all know that traditionally Inuit had no written history. However, that does not mean that Inuktitut languages are considered lower than others. It meant our language was articulated orally, with sophistication, and it was taught while being practiced within hardships and through ceremonial gatherings. We are a small population in number, compared to the rest of Canada. This surely means that we need to listen carefully now and to speak in every structural form available within our knowledge expertise. Doctors and lawyers have their specialized language. Speakers of the sophisticated Inuit cultural languages need to grasp their expertise now in order to save the languages of the Inuit.

Dorais (2010) has documented the sophistication of Inuktitut grammar, and many Inuktitut speakers know it as well. Inuktitut has semantics and adverbs, adjectives, and nouns which need to be recorded in language textbooks. We have first person, second person, third person and environmental subjective ways of grammar: *Inuk*, one being, *Inuuk*, two beings, *Inuit*, more than two beings. One example of our language's richness is the precise distinctions between demonstratives: we distinguish whether the person is over there (*avani*), up there (*takpaani*) or down there (*unani*), across us (*akiptingni*), behind an object or on the side of an

object or being (*haniani*), among others. These need to be said now and practiced daily. Even one single letter makes a difference in a meaning of the topic/subject and situational nouns and situational verbs are specific. This is the sophistication which is being lost.

Here are structural forms which I will use as an example for everyone to see and feel.

Uvam – nik = I to myself (the next word will be situational in any subject time or space)

Uvam – nit = from myself to (the next word will be subjective, positional, theoretical)

Uvam – nut = to myself/ by that person directed to me again; it must be situational, subjective and in the form of first second third person or an environmental survival topic.

There are five topics spoken in everyday Inuktitut in Nunavut. There are situations, objects, and numbers, as well as first, second, or third person terms, which are being lost by not being practiced. We know these forms of grammar from my unilingual parents. Our question is, how much do my children know, and how much will my grandchildren know about proper grammar? What amount is being spoken today and or taught of this sophisticated language we and they call their own? This needs to be carefully researched. Technology has helped many people today, and it will help us even more because we are in need now to keep our sophisticated languages alive within each generational culture. The land environment, the bilingual adults, the youth, and our future will hold true to the sophisticated languages of the Inuit.

There are some indications that the Canadian government, for instance through the Harper Apology and the Truth and Reconciliation process, has finally started listening to the concerns of Inuit and First Nations regarding past trauma and the future of aboriginal education. The damage done is irreversible for some communities and some families, but we have hopes and dreams to work to our utmost ability to regain what is almost lost. “This is the sad reality.

There is no school in Nunavut that offers K-12 education in the Inuit language, the mother tongue spoken by 75% of Inuit” (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 67).

The Nunavut Government needs to carefully put to use the purpose of languages for the Inuktitut Language Arts program, with strong Inuktitut reading materials and textbooks within our day cares and our borrowed school system. In my Baker Lake survey, twelve out of seventeen people surveyed answered that stronger Inuktitut is needed in the schools. Complex language programs with activities and challenging work sheets need to be developed with the page by page guidance of unilingual language experts, such as our elders. This is taking place at the Department of Education in Arviat, but there need to be more sites where this work is taking place. Educators in Nunavut have been saying this for forty years. Where is the level of support that is desperately needed to take on this work? We as Inuit educators need to stop carrying this load alone. We must walk hand in hand with all Inuit organizations and other departments: they all have their purposes with respect to the language, and we have ours.

We need to share language skills more than ever in order to articulate with precision, in order to pass on and use our sophisticated languages for the future identity of all Inuit. We must stop hiding these strong words of identity; we must bring out our stories and have pride in spoken Inuit language. The only time we seem to share these stories is for events presented to higher-level politicians and at widely recognized celebrations. We must stop romanticizing the languages and start using them in our daily lives to share our realities. This is for our ancestors in the past and for our children and grandchildren in the present and future.

Survival stories within Inuit culture are shared across generations and countries. Alaska carries traditional stories from beginning to end, while Canadian Inuit have bits of legends and stories using sophisticated Inuit languages. The commonality of stories across the Arctic is seen

in modern publications, such as the book *Keeveeok! Awake!: Mamnguqsualuk and the Rebirth of Legend at Baker Lake*. (Mamnguqsualuk, 1986), which depicts incidents from *Kiviuq's* many adventures. Greenland teaches in one dialect at the university level, then the educated go back to work using the skills they learned in their area of studies. This works well because the Inuit in that country are respectfully supported by their government with an established education system entrenched in law and funds are provided for a full support staff. The sophisticated language is understood using the main oral literature by the older Inuit of these countries. They understand more easily than we do, as they share the base of the Inuit languages, which is the cultural environment. A sophisticated language is more than just paper and writing. There is a huge amount of spirit which needs to come out of the closets in many Inuit communities. These areas of sophisticated languages are at the brink of being lost in Nunavut. We must find the languages that are preserved and are not yet lost in order to claim them for our elders and for our future.

European Terms in the Inuktitut Languages

The Inuit language differences which do not match amongst regions or families are terms introduced for European cultural items. The Inuktitut languages were and are divided with this new vocabulary. Implements for everyday usage, which were brought to the Arctic from the whalers and explorers, have been given different names across communities. For example, *tiiturvik*, *imnguhiq*, *irngusiq*, and *qallun* all translate tea cup, and there are more. In fact, each community has a different term for many European implements, except for tea and coffee. So too, words for the days of the week, the clock, and the calendar months are all termed differently from each region and community. Along with the sophisticated language being eroded within an evolving English/Inuktitut blend, there are also the new and different terms today. Our unilingual

elders hold the true sophisticated language. They hold their language with a spirit. We must find that spirit through healing within families and not only through work.

Children's Oral Literature in Sophisticated Languages

As Europeans graduate with more than two languages, let us learn other Inuit regional mother tongues, as well. Inuit today must be aware of the full potential of bilingualism. We must be able to express ourselves fully in Inuktitut without mixing languages in order to get to the finer points of the discourse. This area of language use needs to be assessed further in order for Inuit to grasp sophisticated orality to move on and stay focused as a language group. We must learn to comprehend the sophisticated languages of Nunavut now, as we are not fully speakers of an English sophisticated language and neither is our Inuktitut language spoken with sophistication. Let us not expect a degradation of our ancestors' language any more than we have experienced up to today. Once the sophisticated Inuit languages are learned and articulated by the Inuit, they in turn must pass this knowledge on by spoken words in order to be proud of the stories behind each genre of the oral literature. I want all stakeholders of our languages within the Inuit communities to understand that there is time to regain the sophistication. These oral literature stories took hold of the imagination and carried a strong culture forward for millennia. Nunavut culture is still very strong today, and our languages must be just as strong to reflect dignity. Stories and legends must not be ignored anymore. They must be strong, if not stronger than ever before. This truly means our drum dances with poetic songs, our chants and children's tongue twisters need to be practiced by all education stakeholders within the community, within the schools, and within the education system. For some Nunavut communities the spoken Inuktitut languages are being eroded too quickly. Our elders are disappearing at a fast pace and their languages need to be recorded, not only from their level of language knowledge but at the

level of school children and people in a community alike. These targets of languages need to be planned and assessed while the elders are still around. There are no set criteria, no set high school textbook equal to the sophisticated languages of our ancestors.

Categorizing Sophisticated Inuktitut within the Education System

The importance of the use of a sophisticated language is needed to be seen and heard now. This will help our future, whether the language is Inuinnaqtun or Inuktitut. Inuktitut, as a true language of sophistication over all Inuit Nunangat, has been minimized and misused for too many years within each generational culture. I hope to engage Nunavummiut now and to work with them to go forward into a richer use of a sophisticated Inuit language. There are recorded stories from Inuit organizations, recorded songs and chants from other Inuit who are passionate about saving the sophisticated and spiritual language of the Inuit as a whole. Hot's (2010) compilation of resources in Inuktitut demonstrates the breadth of Inuit literature. However, the sophisticated Inuit languages are understood by genre; we must categorize these now by using the literature guides of many other languages. We will soar with the world once the sophisticated languages of the Inuit are categorized by our elders with the help of our organized educational team. The following table shows how Inuit literature could be classified.

Poetry/ <i>Uqaluraugait</i>	Prose/ <i>Uqauhiq</i>			
	Fiction/ <i>Unipkaaqtuat</i>			Non Fiction
Nursery Rhymes <i>Uqqarikhautit</i>	Fantasy <i>Taimatuurniq</i>	Modern Fantasy <i>Ublumimut taimatuurniq</i>	Realistic Fiction <i>Hulijutitut Unipkaaqtuat</i>	Informational Books <i>Qaujivallirutit Uqalimaagait</i>
Lyric Poems <i>Ingiuqtut/ imngiqitut uqaluraugait</i>	Traditional Literature <i>Itsalgait</i>	Modern Folktale <i>Ublumi Inuit Unipkaaqtuangit</i>		
Narrative Poems <i>Atulaukkami'nik uqaluraugait</i>	Myths <i>Ukpirijaat Uqau'jugait Aullarjuaqtuviniit</i>	Animal Fantasy <i>Nirjutit Taimatuurningit</i>		
	Legends and Stories <i>Unipkaat/ Unipkaaqtuallu Inuit Unipkaaqtuangit Pinngurningit uumajut Ilinniarutiit Ilippaalirutiit Inuit Ukpirninginnut Unipkaaqtuat</i>	Personified toys and objects <i>Pinnguat/ Pigtutiilu Inunnguuliqtiq-simajut</i>		

Table 2: Genres and Topics of Children's Literature (Adapted from Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, & Short, 2011, p. 47)

Inuit of Nunavut need to categorize the genre of the Inuktitut sophisticated language. Our Inuktitut classes were very limited when I was in school. The language being taught was abstract and not at all a land-based cultural language. I had a cultural language of full learning, however, this was only in the summer when time was spent with family out on the land. An education system which was so new to the Inuit, our parents, and their parents, was too fast in coming. Our own system which was to help us obtain jobs and to serve our territory is failing many Inuit.

The Inuktitut language was taught by former residential school students who translated English nursery rhymes into Inuktitut such as:

Ublu ubluu ubluriaq takuranniqtukuluk / Takpaanialukqilangmi /

Ubluubluubluriaqtakuranniqtukuluuk

[Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky. Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are.]

In contrast, the sophisticated language needed to come from our unilingual Inuit speakers. An example would be the book *The Arctic Sky: Inuit astronomy, star lore, and legend* from Inuit elders who were interviewed with the Nunavut Research Institute based in Igloolik, Nunavut. Elder Ulayuruluk tells the story:

I became curious about this star...called *Nuuttuittuq*...So, on the lee side of our *uquutaq* (a snow windbreak) I positioned a harpoon pointing directly at this particular star to see if it would move. In the morning I checked it and discovered that the *Tukturjuut* (Ursa Major) had changed their position completely but the harpoon still pointed at this star...I had discovered the stationary star –*Nuuttuittuq*! (as cited in MacDonald, 1998, p. 61)

Inuktitut Assessment within the Education System

How is Inuktitut as a subject assessed in Nunavut schools today? The Nunavut Department of Education has a *Guide for Teaching Inuktitut Language Arts from Kindergarten to Grade 6* (Nunavut Department of Education, Baffin Divisional Board, 1999). Though somewhat dated, it is an excellent guide for teaching technical skills in the Inuit language. However, we cannot save a language by being technical. Inuit must be exposed to learning the purpose of the Inuit language. The breathing spirit of a sophisticated Inuktitut must be recorded in order to be seen as a strong basis to begin learning another language. The data will come naturally once the genres for the sophisticated Inuktitut are fully categorized by our unilingual elders who must work side by side with educators in Nunavut. This is for a thriving future, that

can create a rich and deep Inuktitut Language Arts curriculum for our Nunavut schools, a curriculum written by Inuit and for Inuit.

The Nunavut Teacher Education Program, which was labeled “the Harvard of Nunavut” (Yumimi, 2008), is the only program that studies the origins of Inuit languages. The program offers courses in writing Inuktitut stories about today’s, as well as past culture. Within it are the structures of written languages, within which we must really be teaching the genres of rich Inuit orality in order to understand and grasp now the purpose and structure of our original languages.

Within the education system today, the Inuit stories, which are vast, must be presented to the high schools of Nunavut. Just as English students study classics, such as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Inuit must study the oral literature of our original sophisticated languages. We must plan now to prepare the language of Inuktitut structural exams for a sophisticated Inuit language(s) literature. For example, we need to learn the words for the parts of implements and tools, use the implements, and give departmental exams in the specialty of an individual. We must develop ways to recognize and accredit skills in our sophisticated languages and cultures.

Conclusion

We must heal as communities. Regions and schools must feel that healing. We as a territory need to learn to feel the spirits of our ancestors, to hold them and then pass the spirits of sophisticated languages along with great pride. This is for our Inuit survival to be recognized around the world. We need to learn the basics, the truth and the life of sophisticated Inuit languages to have a healthy society in Nunavut.

We as bilingual speakers are tired of being the only caregivers through a career, through a generation of lost peoples - our elders and our youth. Bilingual Inuit are stretching themselves too thin. We must gather our inner strength in order to give that strength to the future of the

languages within the circumpolar regions and within territorial regions. With our ever-changing culture, Inuit languages deserve a solid foundation from the bilingual speakers now.

Several cultural languages are heard which deserve to be recorded and practiced especially with the world technology today. There are no more excuses for any one of us to simply think about our dying languages: we must act to save them today, “You can’t slap a price tag on a language, no matter how small and obscure. The price of that loss is beyond estimation” (Abley, 2004, p. 4). Abley’s quote hits me quite deeply, as the loss is felt from my parents to my children and grandchildren. We all feel the loss from our ancestors. Through their spirit, we feel it within the Inuit of the circumpolar regions today, as it shows through anger, violence, regret, and shame.

I am presenting this reflection in order to guide Nunavummiut to bring forth a solid sophisticated guide for Inuit languages. This knowledge base will and must support transitional Inuit languages in order for Nunavummiut to succeed at school, at work or at home within our communities. I am reflecting from my experiences from being taught oral literature stories at home and knowing there was much more to Inuktitut than the programs we were taught in our schools. I write in hopes that Nunavummiut will understand that the sophisticated Inuktitut within our cultures has been lost and ignored far too long now. Programs such as the Nunavut Masters of Education program pave a way deeply, emotionally, and academically for us to grasp the knowledge we carry from our elders. The time is now for us as leaders to work and to give time, energy, and expertise in order to retain Inuktitut languages at the best levels used by our elders today. I hope to bring forward the language to become stronger than ever. The spoken-by-few sophisticated languages of Inuktitut are in great danger of being lost today. I say cultures and languages because of our regional and generational differences in knowledge and uses of

languages. Let us continue to respect the spirits our forefathers and learn each other's sophisticated mother tongues. This way our differences amongst Inuit languages will be accepted within our fellow Inuit and within the world. We are Inuit with survival tools, implements, and skills which need to be articulated through the sophisticated Inuit language.

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