

WELCOME

ILAI is a non-statistical, qualitative study that examines the role of Inuvialuktun in the lives of potential and current Inuvialuit learners of Inuvialuktun.

As part of the ongoing efforts of language planners in the NWT, this study hopes to provide communities in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region with feedback on some of the factors that encourage or discourage individuals from learning their heritage language.



Roberta Memogana is a well known Inuvialuit artist from Ulukhaktok. "Hand of Talent" is one of her more recent prints, which depicts the many talents present in her family, many of which she and her sister received from their father. The Hand of Talent is also a wonderful symbol depicting the multiple ways in which Inuit identity is negotiated. While language is one pillar of cultural identity, previous research has shown that there are many ways in which come together to ascertain a distinct cultural identity that persists the changes that have been taking place across the Canadian Arctic.

PARTICIPATE

If you are an Inuvialuit beneficiary and would like to make your voice heard, contribute to this study, or raise a concern, please feel free to contact the researcher or any of the affiliated institutions. We are always looking for feedback from individuals, and seek every opportunity to partner with community members.

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This research is conducted under
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*The study is conducted in partnership with the University of Northern British Columbia, Aurora College, the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and the Beaufort Delta Education Council.

†The study is made possible thanks to the generous financial support of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council - Scholarship via ASU, the University of Northern British Columbia - postgraduate research award, and the Nasivvik Centre for Inuit Health and Changing Environments - Summer student research assistant award.



**Inuvialuit language and identity:
perspectives on the symbolic meaning of
Inuvialuktun in the Canadian Western Arctic**



A qualitative research study
on language & identity

Inuvik, August 4. - December 20. 2011
inuvialuktun.unbc.ca

ABOUT

In the Northwest Territories there exists a shared desire to protect and revitalize Aboriginal languages.

This desire is paralleled by a nationwide statistically observed trend in indigenous individuals acquiring an Aboriginal language as second language, rather than as mother tongue. The Language Plan of the Northwest Territories stresses the importance of protecting heritage languages within the territory because they are “the foundation of northern cultures” (2010).

This research seeks to find out how people 'feel' about their heritage language--whether they speak it or not.

Today there exist different opinions about the role and importance of Aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories. This research does not seek to establish the extent to which Inuvialuktun is spoken. Rather, it desires to find out what young people think about Inuvialuktun today. In fact, "research shows that language planners benefit from a detailed knowledge of how potential learners view their own heritage language."

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Strategic language planning, as engaged by the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre in Inuvik, represents a practical response to the voiced concern over language and heritage loss in the territory. However, reviving a heritage language is a grand task, calling for a network of language specialists. Research in New Zealand and North America has shown that successful language planning and promotion of Aboriginal languages benefits from in-depth knowledge of local language attitudes. It is precisely here that the rationale of this study is anchored.

OBJECTIVES

1. To ask what are contemporary Inuvialuit perceptions of Inuvialuktun and how do these perceptions relate to Inuvialuit identity?
2. To learn about what motivates/discourages current and potential learners of Inuvialuktun to pursue the language (re-) acquisition process?

Learning about the symbolic meaning of Inuvialuktun

More specifically put, one might ask: Do Inuvialuit consider it necessary to maintain their heritage language in order to keep alive their ancestral identity in a social environment that has been permeated by the monolingual use of English in all spheres of public and private life? To obtain insight on these dynamics, this research seeks to study at least two different age groups of Inuvialuit, attending two or more educational institutions in the town of Inuvik.

The study is concerned with finding answers to such questions as: What is the symbolic value of Inuvialuktun in relation to cultural identity? Does language re-acquisition solidify Inuvialuit identity? Do the role of heritage language and its acquisition fluctuate between generations or between life stages? What language attitudes and ideologies are present among Inuvialuit, and what do they tell us about potential obstacles and/or opportunities regarding language learner motivation?

Learning about what motivates students

As evident in the last question, the applied aim of this research is to shed light on the place of Inuvialuktun in the lives of current and potential learners in order to aid local Inuvialuit language planners, such as the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, in identifying potential strategies for language learning and motivation. If the teacher (and the student) know why they want to learn/teach Inuvialuktun, then more attention can be given to these underlying reasons, thereby stimulating both teacher and student motivation.

BENEFITS

The aim of this study is to benefit the community of Inuvik, and by extension all settlements of the ISR.

1. Inuvialuktun Language Planners

Current Inuvialuktun language teaching materials are designed largely around a knowledge of traditional Inuvialuit culture. By learning about traditional Inuvialuit subsistence skills, language is deliberately brought together with a sense of identity that finds its roots in an ancestral heritage closely tied to life on the land. By examining current and potential learners' perspectives of Inuvialuktun, and of themselves as contemporary Inuit, language planners are hoped to be able to better address the needs and interests of the student population based on data collected in this study.

2. Inuvialuktun Language Learners

By participating in discussions, interviews, and questionnaires potential and current Inuvialuit learners of Inuvialuktun are invited to reflect on aspects of identity and self-definition. These are good exercises which enable participants to reflect on existing language ideologies, some of which may not currently encourage language re-acquisition. By reflecting on these dynamics and their impact on individual actions, agency can be built in learners that may stress new language attitudes.

3. All Inuvialuit Beneficiaries

With ancestral language being an important strand in the fabric of cultural identity, all Inuvialuit are expected to benefit from a qualitative assessment of existing language attitudes and ideologies. By contemplating the current role of the ancestral language, members of the community are invited to consider their own position vis-a-vis Inuvialuktun. Here decolonization is a liberating process in which hegemonic patterns are uncovered by the individual, enabling them to address self- and community guided change.