

Inuit Language Loss in Nunavut: Analysis, Forecast, and Recommendations

By Ian Martin, Glendon College, York University

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“That’s the whole reason why the land claims took place, because we were losing our language...I think that’s part of the whole land claims process. Once you have the language the culture is strong.”

--Paul Quassa (2003) current Minister of Education, Nunavut.¹

“Language and culture is very important to us. That is the reason that Nunavut was created. Sometimes we forget why Nunavut was created.”

--Eva Aariak (2008) former Premier, Nunavut.²

“The statistics clearly show Inuit language use and transmission is on a continuing decline. Most troubling is Inuit language use in the home dropped by 12% between 1996 and 2006.

--Sandra Inutiq (2016) former Nunavut Languages Commissioner.³

Introduction

Fear of loss of Inuit Language was a central factor in Inuit leaders’ decision to negotiate a land claim with the Canadian government. As statistical trends cited below show, the leaders were right to be concerned: since 1991, the amount of Inuktitut⁴ spoken in Nunavut homes has experienced a serious decline. This summary report is intended to review some of the history and key data, and assess prospects for the Inuit language in Nunavut.

Assessment of Inuit Language Loss

¹ In A. M. Timpson, “Reconciling Indigenous and Settler Language Interests: Language Policy Initiatives in Nunavut,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 161.

² Jim Bell, “In Iqaluit, It’s Seven against One on Oct. 27,” *Nunatsiaq News* (Iqaluit, NU), October 24, 2008,

³ Sandra Inutiq, Nunavut Languages Commissioner, *Address to the United Nations International Expert Group*. New York, January 2016.

⁴ Inuktitut is the term now used to encompass both Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun; in this paper Inuktitut may be referenced in older texts and to describe the Inuktitut of the Eastern Arctic—Kivalliq and Baffin today.

From 1996 to 2011, the number of Inuktitut mother tongue speakers in Nunavut dropped from 88% to 80% . Over the same period, the use of Inuktitut in Inuit homes in Nunavut dropped from 76% in 1996 to a mere 61% in 2011.⁵

At the same time, English spoken mostly in the home has increased from 28.5% in 1991 to 46% in 2011. This steady increase in the percentage of Nunavummiut homes in which English is the most used – means that the percentage today is probably over 50%.

If the home language loss rate of Inuktitut is 12% per decade, then, by 2051, a mere 34 years from now, the Inuit Language will be spoken at home by only 4% of Inuit in Nunavut.

The estimate of 4% of Inuit continuing to use Inuktitut by 2051 may be too generous, however.

Due to “recursion”, a negative feedback loop tends to accompany language loss. That is, the wheel of language loss accelerates as the number of speakers declines and the arenas of Inuit language use inside and outside the home dwindle. For example, as the Inuit language becomes less used in government, schools, and most types of employment, the incentive to sustain Inuktitut is eroded. The latest *Official Languages Annual Report 2015-16*, reports that only 11 of 27 primary schools were able to offer adequate Inuktitut instruction to Grade 3, and only one school used Inuktitut as a language of instruction at Grade 5⁶.

Parallels can be drawn from the French community in Nunavut, who filed a lawsuit in 2015 against the territorial government for insufficient support for a French language school environment. In an interview, Lawyer Doug Garson said that only 40 per cent of the Iqaluit Trois-Soleils Grade 10 to Grade 12 program are offered in French: “If you, as a high school student, want to enjoy a French-language education, you have to be in a totally French environment, where French is spoken in the hallways.”⁷ By way of comparison, zero per cent of the Nunavut high school curriculum is offered in Inuktitut; the percent of Inuktitut spoken in hallways has not been measured, but there is not a single school in Nunavut which would qualify as a “totally Inuktitut environment.”

Inuit Language Decline: The United Nations Assessment

The analysis presented here corresponds, in large measure, with that of UNESCO which regularly surveys the world’s ‘smaller’ languages and assesses their relative potential for survival (“vitality”), to help language communities understand their situation and take appropriate measures if they wish to maintain their language for future generations.

⁵ 2011 National Household Survey "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Focus on Inuit in Nunavut" (Released by Statistics Canada - May 8, 2013); and 2011 Census of Population "Mother Tongue and Language Spoken Most Often at Home" (Released by Statistics Canada - October 24, 2012).

⁶ Office of the Nunavut Languages Commissioner, *2015-16 Annual Report* (2017), pg 182.

⁷ Lawsuit demands more resources for Nunavut’s only French-language school- “Why is it unreasonable to seek and to advance our constitutional rights?” Sarah Rogers, Nunatsiaq News. February 20, 2015.

UNESCO evaluates languages according to six levels of vitality:

SAFE -	the language is used by all generations, including children, in all spheres of community life;
VULNERABLE/UNSAFE –	the language is used by some (not all) children, and older generations, but not in all spheres of community life;
DEFINITELY ENDANGERED –	the language is no longer being used at home by all children; parents are preferring to use another language;
SEVERELY ENDANGERED –	the grandparents’ generation are the youngest users;
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED –	the great-grandparents’ generation are the youngest users;
EXTINCT -	there are no speakers left.

In 2015, UNESCO rated Inuktitut (in Baffin and Kivalliq regions) as ‘vulnerable/unsafe’, with Inuinnaqtun (in Kitikmeot region) as ‘definitely endangered’⁸. This means that there are signs of language loss, although it is true that second-language speakers of Inuktitut, uncounted in the UNESCO levels, may carry the language forward in some respects.

The limited use of Inuktitut in government, the absence of the Inuit Language in schools beyond the earliest grades, the rise in the number of Inuit for whom Inuktitut is not a mother tongue, and the trend to more Inuit homes using English, are among the signs that Inuktitut in Baffin and Kivalliq may be on the road toward Definite Endangerment. This direction is diametrically opposite from the direction intended by the Inuit leadership whose intention in carrying out ‘the Nunavut project’ was to make Inuktitut secure.

The Road Not Taken: Inuit Language of Government

Prior to the creation of Nunavut, Inuit organizations and the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) predicted and planned for a territorial government with public services delivered in the Inuit language. In numerous speeches and negotiations, Inuit leaders expressed concern about the loss of Inuktitut in particular due to the southern-style education system, with its majority staff of monolingual English-

⁸ UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (www.unesco.org/languages-atlas) 2015.

speakers. The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement (1993) identified the Inuit language as a key factor to be considered by government in its hiring (Article 23).

In Volume 2 of my *Aajiiqatigiingniq* 2000 report⁹, called "Sources and Issues", I reviewed Ron Mackay's report, *The Cost of Implementing Inuktitut as an Official Language in Nunavut* (1984). Mackay's work was commissioned by DIAND in response to the Nunavut Constitutional Forum's 1983 *Building Nunavut* report which asserted that "Inuktitut must be fully protected and enhanced by the Nunavut constitution. Perhaps there is no more fundamental goal of a Nunavut government, nor one more essential to guarantee the survival and unique contribution of Inuit in Canada"¹⁰.

The *Cost of Implementing Inuktitut* was one of two research initiatives commissioned by DIAND to prepare for Nunavut. The second was research to prepare a transition plan to divide the NWT, which culminated in a large report for DIAND by Coopers and Lybrand in 1992¹¹.

The Cost of Implementing Inuktitut as an Official Language in Nunavut gives detailed estimates of the staffing and cost implications of creating a government that could function and deliver public services across all departments in the language of the public: Inuktitut. Mackay estimated the staffing increase required to achieve this objective to be approximately 110 PYs across the entire government. He estimated start-up costs across all government departments to total \$21.5 million in 1984 dollars (\$45.4million in 2016), and the ongoing annual operating and maintenance costs to be \$8.4 million (\$17.7million in 2016 dollars).

In 1993, 1997¹², 1998¹³, and 1999, NTI's leadership informed government that Inuktitut as the language of government had always been a key objective in creating Nunavut and thus should be included as an incremental cost of establishing the new territory or as part of its formula-financing. This was in keeping with the 1996 guidelines established by the federally appointed group overseeing set-up of the new territory, the Nunavut Implementation Commission: "In gauging levels of govt programs and services, formula financing arrangements should take full account of any existing deficiencies in the supply of such programs and services...based on factors outside the control of the Nunavut

⁹ *Aajiiqatigiingniq, A Report on Language of Instruction Volume 2: "Sources and Issues"*, (2000) Ian Martin. Published by the Nunavut Department of Education.

¹⁰ Nunavut Constitutional Forum, *Building Nunavut: A working document with a proposal for an Arctic Constitution*, (Nunavut Constitutional Forum, 1983) p. 18.

¹¹ Coopers and Lybrand Consulting Group (1991) *Financial Impact of Division of the Northwest Territories - Phase I Report*; and (1992) *An Estimate of Costs - Creating and Operating the Government of Nunavut*.

¹² Natsiq Alainga-Kango, Secretary-treasurer, NTI letter to John Todd, NWT Minister of Finance, and Jack Anawak, Interim Commissioner (Nov. 6, 1997)

¹³ "Any future plans for implementation of the Nunavut Government must address the crucial issue of using Inuktitut as a working language." Natsiq Alainga-Kango, Secretary-treasurer, NTI letter to Jack Anawak, Interim Commissioner (Jan. 7, 1998)

govt...including costs associated with the delivery of govt programs and services in the Inuit language, as well as Canada's official languages.”¹⁴

In 1998, the senior federal advisor in the Office of the Nunavut Interim Commissioner, Marie-Antoinette Flumian, commissioned an estimate of the cost of Inuktitut as a language of government, and the matter was brought forth to be included in briefing binders for the discussions on the first formula financing for the Nunavut territory led by Finance Minister Paul Martin. However, behind closed doors, senior officials in the Federal Finance Department decided to remove Inuit language of government from discussions and “address these issues at a later date”¹⁵. That “later date” never arrived.

The historical record is recounted here in part to lament the road not taken. Had Canada supported the Inuit language with similar levels of funding as it provides to other provinces for English and French services, perhaps the survival of Inuktitut would not be in question today. Canada might also have avoided running afoul of Section 36 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; which guarantees “essential public services of a reasonable quality” to all Canadians. In 1998, citing S.36, Nunavut's Interim Commissioner, Jack Anawak, warned Finance Minister Paul Martin of “startling disparities”¹⁶ between Nunavut public services and those of other provinces, in part due to the failure of financing negotiations to address the language issue.

On the matter of education, for example, the Nunavut Constitutional Forum had demanded “... that Inuktitut be a language of instruction in the Nunavut schools at all levels as soon as practicable”¹⁷. As a result, *The Cost of Implementing Inuktitut* report focused on federal funding for Inuit teacher training and for Inuktitut curriculum development. Had Mackay's report for DIAND been followed, his 13 year implementation time-line (1985-1998) anticipated the training of an Inuit teaching cohort of 260 Inuit teachers, ready for the new Nunavut school system in 2000, for \$15 million (in 2000 dollars). Mackay also recommended that Canada spend \$10m to build an Inuit teacher training facility in Nunavut. The Inuit curriculum development costs for the same period were estimated to be \$8 million (in 2000 dollars). Updating these figures to 2016 yields Inuit teacher training costs of \$21 million, Inuktitut curriculum development costs of \$9.3 million, and a teacher training facility costing \$21 million. Adding up to approximately \$50 million in current dollars, Mackay's was the first, and apparently, the last, detailed calculation of the federal

¹⁴ Recommendation #9-16 (4), *Footprints 2* (NIC, 1996)

¹⁵ “Finance Canada Question 10: Are there other items for which the determination of funding levels should be left open-for finalization at a later date?... GNWT: Yes. A number of items have been identified which we know will have costs associated with them, but the size of the cost is currently not known. The requirement to make Inuktitut a working language in Nunavut is one example.” Margaret Melhorn NWT Deputy Minister of Finance letter to Barbara Anderson, Dept of Finance Canada (Jan. 8, 1998).

¹⁶ Interim Commissioner Jack Anawak letter to Paul Martin, Minister of Finance, Canada (April 28, 1998).

¹⁷ Nunavut Constitutional Forum, *Building Nunavut: A working document with a proposal for an Arctic Constitution*, (Nunavut Constitutional Forum, 1983) p. 18.

transfer necessary to allow the new territory to implement strong Inuktitut bilingualism throughout its K-12 system.

By not funding the delivery of Nunavut public services in the language of the Nunavut public, the federal government appears to have saved itself cumulatively over \$300 million (2016 dollars, over 18 years); however the costs to the Inuit language and culture may prove to be fatal. Speaking before a Senate Committee in 2009, “Witnesses testified that ... government services are provided mainly in English and that this has the effect of making Inuit Language speakers feel like they are strangers in their own land.”¹⁸

Meeting the Article 23 Target – Urgent Need For A Major IEP Commitment

Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement envisioned a majority Inuit public service functioning in Inuktitut, but, as an APTN investigative report recently discovered¹⁹ – Article 23 of the Land Claim Agreement is largely being ignored. This is particularly noticeable in the Education ministry, where a disproportionate number of (monolingual-English-speaking) non-Inuit are occupying senior administration positions and teaching positions.

There is scant evidence of interest from the Nunavut Department of Education in a comprehensive Inuit Employment Plan—one with timelines and targets and conforming to the NLCA. In 2006, the Department of Education published the *Qalattuq 10 Year Educator Training Strategy*²⁰ – a plan for which no action was ever taken. The *Qalattuq Strategy* envisioned training 304 Inuit educators from 2008 to 2012, and was of sufficient scope and urgency that it deserves revisiting and updating.²¹

It is nothing short of scandalous that no detailed IEP was implemented and funded by the Department at the time of the passage of the 2008 Education Act, since without a funded Inuit Teacher Development Plan, the objectives set out in the Act amounted to little more than ‘legislative dead letters’ and existed only on paper. My personal belief is that the vested interests of non-Inuit teachers and administrators trumped the land claim-mandated rights of Inuit. In the years following 2008 there have been no major efforts to increase the numbers of Inuit teachers; meanwhile the reduction of the use of Inuktitut in the schools and the absence of Inuktitut as a language of instruction has reinforced an English-dominant education system—not a bilingual one. Furthermore, although not all new Inuit teacher graduates are sufficiently strong in their language to teach in Inuktitut, I am not aware of any non-Inuit teachers currently qualified as Inuktitut-bilingual. The only

¹⁸ *Language Rights in Canada's North: Nunavut's New Official Languages Act*, Final Report. Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. June 2009. Pg 19.

¹⁹ Kathleen Martens, “APTN Investigates: Article 23.” *APTN*, February 3, 2017; Holly Moore “Article 23: Inuit teaching students say loss of Inuktitut in the classroom leading to vanishing Inuit culture.” *APTN*, January 31, 2017

²⁰ *Qalattuq 10 Year Educator Training Strategy: 2006-2016*. Nunavut Department of Education. July 2006.

²¹ *Qalattuq 10 Year Educator Training Strategy*; pgs 4, 66-74.

educators teaching in Inuktitut are Inuit. So when the Department of Education recruits a majority of its teachers, principals, and senior staff from outside Nunavut, then it is entrenching an English language bureaucracy.

What would an IEP for education need to consider?

The starting point for an IEP would have to be a definition of the demand – the numbers of Inuit teachers needed to reach the 85% Inuit proportion of the teaching workforce as mandated by Article 23. According to the Department’s current Language of Instruction (LOI) figures²², the total number of Inuktitut-bilingual teachers required is 431. Subtracting the number of Inuktitut-bilingual teachers actually working in classrooms—125, all Inuit—the result is 306. The Nunavut system, then, has a shortfall of 306 Inuktitut-speaking Inuit teachers.

Currently, the only supplier of Inuit teachers is the Nunavut Teacher Education Program. NTEP graduates an average of 12 teachers per year; when calculated with a retention rate of 75%²³, that equals 9 Inuit teachers per year that the Dept of Education retains into employment long term. The majority of these teachers are Inuktitut-bilingual; which is a testament to their individual and family effort, since “Nunavut students could not hope to maintain mature, academic Inuit language proficiency when bilingual education end[s] in grade six.”²⁴

Therefore, at this rate, and if NTEP were to offer intensive Inuktitut upgrading, it would take 34 years ($9 \times 34 = 306$) for the program to produce the 306 additional Inuit teachers necessary to deliver Inuktitut schooling K-12. By the year 2051.

However, with the bulk of the current 125 Inuktitut-speaking teachers reaching retirement age before 2051, the actual date of reaching this target is more likely to be 2071 than 2051. Clearly, a “business as usual” approach will not work. Government must swiftly and properly fund and implement a robust IEP for educators. The Department could draw inspiration from the *Qalattuq Strategy*, recalibrated to respond to today’s needs. Qalattuq aimed to add 304 educators over 4 years, therefore there is already a prototype for adding 300 Inuit educators over a short time frame. As for money to fund such efforts, the 2015 *Settlement Agreement*²⁵ between government and Inuit created a \$50 million fund available for this purpose right now. There is a good argument to be made for the majority of the \$50

²² Nunavut Department of Education, Language of Instruction Presentation. July 2016

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ M. Lynn Aylward, “The Role of Inuit Languages in Nunavut Schooling: Nunavut Teachers Talk about Bilingual Education” *Canadian Journal of Education* 33, 2 (2010): pg. 315. I have been informed that NTEP has had to relax its Inuktitut requirement in order to recruit Inuit, as incoming Inuit teacher trainees coming out of Nunavut high schools have lower quality of Inuktitut than previous generations. If this is true, it should be studied, as it is evidence of recursion, the deteriorating cycle of language loss that I mention on pg 2.

²⁵ *Moving Forward in Nunavut: an Agreement Relating to Settlement of Litigation* (May 4, 2015); Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Government of Canada, Government of Nunavut.
<http://www.tunngavik.com/files/2015/05/FINAL-SETTLEMENT-AGREEMENT-PROOF.pdf>

million to be assigned to Inuit educator IEP and training as the multiplier effect would be felt throughout the public service.

Since the current NTEP supply is far below that required, there must be urgent attention given to different forms of supply. Without rapid increase in funding and training for Inuktitut educators in *all* the various credential streams²⁶, including NTEP, Inuit will never achieve their right to education in their Indigenous language. Without adequate use at school, and without the school interacting with home and community and government (the principal employer) in the Inuit official language, Inuktitut will decline, and be lost. Nunavut schools are contributing substantially to a vicious and accelerating circle of language loss. The schools are essentially acting as engines of assimilation into English.

The Context of Inuktitut Language Maintenance or loss

But even robust Article 23 ‘urgent action’ to increase numbers of Inuit educators, as I have proposed above, will not on their own be enough to counteract the fast-moving forces of linguistic assimilation faced by Inuktitut speakers in the territory.

The most recent statistical analysis done by the Nunavut Languages Commissioner’s office was summarized by former Commissioner Sandra Inuitiq in 2016:

“The statistics clearly show language use and transmission is on a continuing decline. Most troubling is language use in the home dropped by 12% between 1996 and 2006. Our efforts since the creation of the territory have not reversed the huge force of past assimilation policies that continue to have hold. Nunavut needs to make a much more aggressive effort to reverse language loss.”²⁷

Indeed, in 2011²⁸, nearly 9,000 Inuit (about 33% of Nunavut Inuit) reported English as their mother tongue and 14,000 (about 50% of Nunavut Inuit) said that English was the language most often spoken in the home. This data shows that Inuktitut language maintenance is increasingly vulnerable to the pressures from English in homes in the very territory where it is (still) the majority language.

This decline of Inuktitut language use in homes, coupled with the present policy of diminishing the presence of Inuktitut in the schools – makes it all the more urgent that citizens and policy-makers heed the Language Commissioner’s call for a much more aggressive effort to expand the use of Inuktitut in all public services in Nunavut.

The Education System

²⁶ Regulations in the 2008 Education Act provide for a variety of credential streams of shorter duration to bring educator trainees into the schools, where they can be mentored and eventually advanced (“laddered”) into degree-equivalent responsibilities.

²⁷ Sandra Inuitiq, Nunavut Languages Commissioner, *Address to the United Nations International Expert Group*. New York, January 2016.

²⁸ 2011 Census of Population “Mother Tongue and Language Spoken Most Often at Home” (Released by Statistics Canada - October 24, 2012).

The realization of the dream of Nunavut allowed many Inuit to hope that the future of Inuktitut would be secure, and that by using the new instrument of ‘a public government education system’, the language would be transmitted to younger generations. The *Aajiiqatigiigniq* study (2000) found that there was a desire for a strong bilingual education system in the new territory, with Inuit Language spreading beyond Grade 4. Parents were aware of the importance of English, but they wanted additive, not subtractive, bilingualism in Nunavut schools. Parents wanted Inuktitut to be the language of instruction from kindergarten to grade 12, with opportunities along the way to acquire English as a second language – but not at the cost of failing to fully develop their mother tongue. Parents imagined a future in which Nunavut’s high school graduation rates would be comparable to those in the rest of Canada, but with the added ‘bilingual and bicultural advantage’ of these graduates being fluent in both languages in their spoken and written forms, and with both conversational and culturally-grounded academic competency in each.

However, in practice, the Inuit language has been restricted to the lower grades from 1 to 3, after which English is the sole medium of education. Difficult as it may be for outside observers to believe, there has been no increase in presence of Inuktitut in the schools since before Nunavut was created. Even if there were 100% fluent Inuktitut teachers, there is no set of resources and curricula across all subjects and grades in Inuktitut, and no plan to produce one. Inuktitut is taught only as a subject (not as a language of instruction), sporadically, in some higher level courses with Inuit cultural content. For the most part, without any form of supportive transition from Inuktitut in Grade 3 to English in Grade 4, the experience for Inuit students is described by the current Assistant Deputy Minister of Education as “jarring.” This ‘weak form’ of ‘early-exit’ bilingualism contributes to widespread language loss, and to massive school drop-out. 70% of students do not graduate from high school—the worst rate in North America.

New research by UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring project reports a strong correlation between non-mother-tongue schooling and lack of reading proficiency. In countries where children are forced to go to schools that do not operate in their mother tongue, almost 90% fail to pass reading proficiency tests.²⁹ There are obvious parallels for Nunavut: the only jurisdiction in North America where the majority of children are forced to go to school in a language that is not their mother tongue.

Younger Inuit are being denied their birthright: an education in their mother tongue, which is the best foundation for them to acquire advanced levels of English, as a second language.

This is both a personal and a collective tragedy. As Mr Justice Thomas Berger said in his 2006 *Conciliators’ Report*³⁰, having Inuktitut as a language of instruction throughout the education system is essential for future generations of Inuit to develop the advanced

²⁹ <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2017/02/20/multilingual-teaching-does-more-than-just-improve-learning/>

³⁰ Thomas R. Berger. *Conciliator’s Final Report: “The Nunavut. Project”*. (April 6, 2006). The author of this paper served as an advisor on bilingual education for the Berger report.

knowledge of the language necessary to successfully occupy the positions in Nunavut's public service which were promised by Canada in the Nunavut Agreement, and to build a confident new generation of bilingual Nunavut Inuit high school graduates ready to meet the educational and economic challenges of the Canadian Arctic in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, despite passing three important pieces of Inuit language legislation in 2008 (an Official Languages Act, the Inuit Language Protection Act, and the Education Act), the territorial government has made no efforts to develop adequate curriculum across all subjects and grades, nor train Inuit teachers in sufficient numbers, to comply with the legislation. Language investments from Ottawa for Inuit Language education are a mere 10% of the per capita federal government supports for French language schooling in Nunavut³¹: an extreme asymmetry potentially contributing to feelings of discrimination³².

Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada with two official language minorities. Both the Anglophone and Francophone minorities are presumably equally eligible for special funding for school services under Canada's official language minority support program. The Franco-Nunavummiut have done so, but the Nunavut Anglophone population has not exercised this right. The result is that Nunavut's Department of Education has ostensibly decided to fund English-language education for the 'undeclared' Anglophone minority out of a budget that ought to be earmarked for the Inuktitut majority. If the Anglophone minority were defined as an official language minority, and received appropriate dedicated funding, it would permit the repurposing of the majority of Nunavut's education funding to be dedicated to Inuktitut-medium schooling, where it is desperately needed.

However, with all Nunavut schools operating in English after Grade 3 or 4, and with a teaching force composed almost exclusively of English-speaking teachers from southern Canada, there is little incentive for Nunavut Anglophones to self-identify as a minority, since English-speaking students are well-served throughout the territory. English has become the default 'majority' language in all 42 schools in the territory, despite serving fewer than 400 'minority' Anglophone students. It's the 9300 Inuit students who are struggling to find their place and speak their language in what has become a southern-oriented Anglo-dominant Nunavut school system.

With the government's removal of Inuit-run Regional School Boards and the increased marginalization of Inuit Language in schools, the Nunavut public government has allowed previously strong home-school-community relationships to weaken. It is regrettable, but perfectly understandable, that some Inuit parents, seeing the schools limiting Inuktitut to instruction at or close to the level of 'baby talk', to get the message coming from the school that their language has limited value, and increasingly decide to convert their homes into English-speaking homes, so as to conform to the school's Anglo-dominant language model.

³¹ *Language Rights in Canada's North: Nunavut's New Official Languages Act*, Final Report. Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. June 2009. Pg 20.

³² Former Language Commissioner Sandra Inutiq noted this possibility in her January 2016 speech to the United Nations Experts' Meeting.

Of course, in many Inuit homes, the language and culture gap between the home and the school, coupled with the inability of a southern-oriented school system to support young people's emergent Inuit identities, leads to massive rates of school abandonment. Indigenous communities which support language promotion and cultural continuity have lower rates of teen suicide.³³ —a point made by the Prime Minister in a June 2016 APTN interview.

The objective of the Inuit leadership has been consistent over the past four or more decades; they have called for Inuit to have similar rights as those enjoyed by English and French speakers to raise their children in their own language, to have schools offer a full instructional program in their own language, and to allow Inuit to work in and receive public services from a Nunavut government that operates in the majority public language.

"We assert the right to use Inuktitut in all facets of life in Nunavut. ... We insist too that our children have the constitutional right to be educated in Inuktitut."

-- TFN President Paul Quassa (Signing of the Nunavut Agreement-in-Principle with Canada, 1990)

Promoting the Intellectualization of Inuktitut for use "in all facets of life"

"A language is not just a body of vocabulary and a set of grammatical rules; it's a flash of the human spirit, the means by which the soul of a culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed of thought, an ecosystem of social and spiritual possibilities. To lose a language is like dropping a bomb on the Louvre." Ken Hale, eminent linguist.³⁴

The Nunavut project required that such a view of Inuit Language be translated into a territory-wide place-based education system which respected the prime importance of the land as a place for learning, even in sedentarized communities. Language extinction comes about not just due to the death of fluent mother tongue speakers, but also due to the decay of the quality of the language and the decay of the philosophical complexity encoded in the language's concepts, and the lack of opportunity to transmit this quality and complexity to the coming generations.

For Inuktitut to survive in the way intended by Inuit leaders, to be used "in all facets of life" in the new territory, there had to be a commitment to adapting the traditional language to a broad range of traditional and modern domains, including medicine, mental health and wellness, midwifery, technology, ecological economics, psychology, sociology, and of course high school and college level curricula. The collective right to one's language includes the

³³ Michael J. Chandler & Christopher Lalonde, "Cultural Continuity as a Hedge Against Suicide in Canada's First Nations." *Transcultural Psychiatry* (Vol 35, Issue 2, 1998).

³⁴ Obituary for Ken Hale: Davis, Wade "A Dead End for Humanity". *Globe and Mail/Opinion* Dec 28, 2000

collective right to one's ontology and epistemology. In Nunavut, this includes the right of young Inuit to knowledge that has come to be called Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ).

There must be a serious effort undertaken to harness the knowledge and wisdom about these domains from elders and fluent first language speakers, and serious efforts to reform delivery of related services and social functions to incorporate these mother tongue insights and philosophical contributions. Developing such new functional contexts for Inuktitut by drawing upon traditional knowledge and expressions, and ensuring their intergenerational transmission is what will guarantee the relevance and flourishing of the language – “in all facets of life.”

IQ-grounded academic language skills would allow the younger generation to fully participate in conversations with elders and other fluent speakers and thereby acquire the cultural and epistemological ways of thinking available through elder-mentored experience on the land (especially) and apply these ways of thinking in the classroom. This storehouse of conceptual resources is necessary to interpret IQ for the twenty-first century, to enrich modern Inuit identity through traditional conceptual frameworks, so as to be able to manage a modern territorial government, functioning primarily in Inuktitut as the working language of government.

However, 18 years after division, the higher intellectual domains of Inuit language still remain to be developed and deployed in the Nunavut school system, and time is running out. The lack of investment means these fields of Inuit knowledge are dying off with the passing of the last generation of elders capable of transmitting this knowledge. Mr Justice Thomas Berger arrived at this conclusion a decade earlier:

“The Inuit of Nunavut are faced with the erosion of Inuit language, knowledge, and culture. Unless serious measures are taken, there will over time be a gradual extinction of Inuktitut, or at best its retention as a curiosity, imperfectly preserved and irrelevant to the daily life of its speakers.” (The Nunavut Project: Conciliator’s Final Report, 2006.)

A positive development, with the 2008 Inuit Language Protection Act, was the setting up of the Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqit (Inuit Language Authority) to provide authoritative Inuit Language resources for all fields and branches of knowledge, and consequently Inuit Language educators could be supported by a body concerned with ‘intellectualization’.

However, the Authority isn't able to be responsible for intellectualization of Inuktitut on its own. There needs to be a strong research-and-development curriculum body inside the Department of Education, and at Nunavut Arctic College, to translate IQ into prototype instructional units in Inuktitut, which would allow for Inuktitut to be used as a language of instruction throughout the K-12 and college systems. Perhaps the research work could be modelled on the excellent Curriculum and School Services branch under the direction of Shirley Tagalik in Arviat, which flourished in the first decade of the new century. That IQ-practicing unit drew upon the wisdom of elders such as Mark Kalluak, and built upon the

groundbreaking work of the NWT-era Inuuqatigiit Curriculum Project³⁵ as the ethno-epistemological basis for the development of made-in-Nunavut learning materials suitable for grades 4-10. I have every certainty that the majority of Canadian universities would, if asked, accept a Secondary School Certificate of Graduation based on a made-in-Nunavut Secondary School Curriculum, taught through Inuktitut and English as languages of instruction as a pre-requisite to post-secondary studies.³⁶

In this way, 'the Inuktitut stream' would be no less rigorous, academic, and connected to modern fields of knowledge as 'the English stream'. In fact, in a strong 'additive' bilingual system such as the Qulliq model proposed under the 2008 Education Act, the two languages would strengthen each other. Such a commitment to promoting the intellectualization of Inuktitut for educational purposes would require a sustained commitment from the Department of Education to develop both curricular resources and Inuit teachers capable of teaching this curriculum, perhaps along the lines of the successful experience of the Inuit of Greenland or the Sami of Norway.

Recommendations

1. Canada should commit to adequately resourcing and staffing the territorial and federal public services in Nunavut to operate in the Inuit language. The federal bilingualism efforts of the 1970s, reinforced and applied to Indigenous languages by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, provide a template for this type of system-wide effort. The federal government should adjust its formula financing for Nunavut to include clear, predictable, adequate, multi-year funding to permit the territory to operate and deliver its public services in the official language of the public: Inuktitut. The implementing of Inuit language rights are an essential part of Aboriginal rights under Section 35 of the Constitution and are required under TRC Calls to Action 10, 13, 14, 15. As Canadian Senators concluded in 2009: "In our view, in exchange for this surrender of territory, the Government of Canada committed itself to supporting the Inuit's rights as an Aboriginal people, including their cultural and linguistic rights. This commitment must be expressed not only through "fine words," but also by providing adequate and sustained financial resources to the citizens of Nunavut and assisting in their efforts to enhance, promote and protect their linguistic heritage."³⁷

³⁵ *Inuuqatigiit: The Curriculum from the Inuit Perspective*. Northwest Territories. Department of Education, Culture and Employment. 1994

³⁶ In 2006, when I was working in the Curriculum and School Services Branch in Arviat under Shirley Tagalik, the office contacted the admissions officers of the seventeen Canadian universities which receive the majority of Nunavut students with this question related to the Curricular material being developed at the time; and we received a 100% rate of agreement. A bilingual made-in-Nunavut IQ-based curriculum was acceptable to all the admissions officers we contacted at that time; and today, in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Report, I have no doubt that the response would be equally positive.

³⁷ *Language Rights in Canada's North: Nunavut's New Official Languages Act*, Final Report. Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. June 2009. Pg 20.

2. Canada should update the *Cost of Implementing Inuktitut* report and use a modernized planning schedule and cost estimates to deliver adequate equalization payments to allow the public services of the Nunavut government to function in the language of the public: Inuktitut.
3. Canada should recognize the unique 'dual-minority' status of both official minority language groups in Nunavut, and reform its Charter supports accordingly. Canada should identify and separate funding for schooling for the Anglophone minority population in Nunavut, as it does for the Francophone. This would allow for the bulk of the territory's education funding to be devoted to Inuit language schooling.
4. Canada should contribute to the financing required to support Inuktitut as an official language of the territory to a comparable extent with that which it supports the other official languages of Canada. To do so would be in keeping with the *Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report*, which reminds us that Canada spends only \$14 million annually for the preservation and revitalization of (all 90) Aboriginal languages, while the Official Languages Program for English and French cost in the order of \$350 million for the promotion of linguistic duality and the development of official language minority communities across Canada.
5. At the Nunavut territorial level, the three acts of 2008 (the Nunavut Official Languages Act, the Inuit Language Protection Act, and the Education Act) express the need for Inuit language protection activities to be sufficiently funded so that they can be carried out in the way they were intended. If they were properly funded and implemented, they would be the best existing legislation on Indigenous languages anywhere in North America, and arguably in the Western Hemisphere. But the gap between legislative intentions and on-the-ground reality in Nunavut communities is enormous. They can, however, be used as a guide to what is needed.
6. As the largest employer in Nunavut, the territorial government must urgently draft and implement comprehensive Inuit Employment Plans, as detailed in Article 23 of the NLCA, with timelines and targets, and adequate funding levels to achieve their objectives. Specifically, the Department of Education should properly fund and implement a robust IEP for educators. The Department could draw inspiration from the prototype 2006 *Qalattuq Strategy*, which aimed to add 304 educators over 4

years. The difference between 2006 and 2017 is that there is funding available for this purpose right now, namely from the 2015 *Settlement Agreement*.³⁸

7. The Nunavut Department of Education and Nunavut Arctic College, should establish a strong research-and-development curriculum body responsible for intellectualization of Inuktitut, converting IQ into prototype instructional units, and developing teaching resources and curricula in Inuktitut, which would allow for Inuktitut to be used as a language of instruction throughout the K-12 and college systems, and allow the development of intellectually challenging books, resources and curricula for all subject areas and for all school grades.

Conclusion

In the words of former Nunavut Languages Commissioner Sandra Inuitiq, “Nunavut needs to make a much more aggressive effort to reverse language loss.”³⁹ The realization of the dream of Nunavut allowed many Inuit to hope that the future of Inuktitut would be secure. That hope is receding. Inuktitut is in serious decline. Without intensive efforts by the territorial and federal governments, Inuktitut will be ‘definitely endangered’ by 2051.

It is incumbent on Canada to ensure that the Nunavut territory can offer the same level of public services as do other provinces and territories. This requires that Canada enable the Nunavut territory to deliver public services in the language of the public. In Nunavut, the language of the public is Inuktitut.

Author Contact: imartin@glendon.yorku.ca

Ian Martin – Associate Professor, English Department and Linguistics and Language Studies Programme, and Master’s Programme in Public and International Affairs; Glendon College, York University, Toronto.

[Professor Martin](#)

[Professor Martin](#) was author of the 2000 *Aajiqatigiingniq* report on language of instruction in Nunavut schools, a study that contributed to the Nunavut Education Department's first bilingual education strategy 2004-2008. In 2006, he served as a consultant on bilingual education on the Conciliator’s Report on the Nunavut Project, written by Mr. Justice Thomas Berger. In addition to his research, Professor Martin has worked extensively with educators and teachers to train local Inuit researchers on early

³⁸ *Moving Forward in Nunavut: an Agreement Relating to Settlement of Litigation* (May 4, 2015); Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Government of Canada, Government of Nunavut.

<http://www.tunngavik.com/files/2015/05/FINAL-SETTLEMENT-AGREEMENT-PROOF.pdf>

³⁹ Sandra Inuitiq, Nunavut Languages Commissioner, *Address to the United Nations International Expert Group*. New York, January 2016.

childhood language assessment and curriculum. In 2011-12, he was contracted by the Kitikmeot Inuit Association as an applied linguist to work with a team of researchers to develop a KIA Language Revitalization Strategy. In addition to specializing Inuit education and languages, Professor Martin also teaches "Indigenous language policy in the Americas" at York University's Master's program in Public and International Affairs. He is co-author of the Glendon Truth and Reconciliation Declaration on Indigenous Language Policy, a policy paper promoting implementation of the TRC's Calls to Action on language legislation for Canada's Indigenous languages.