

Language Status

The Alutiiq language is spoken by the indigenous people of much of the Gulf of Alaska. On Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula indigenous people speak the Koniag Dialect, and Alutiiq people living in the Kenai Peninsula and the Prince William Sound speak the Chugach Dialect (Leer, 1979). Alutiiq people are also known as *Sugpiat*, which means *real people*. This term was originally used to self-identify as an Alutiiq person (Leer 1979).

I am a learner and teacher of the Koniag dialect of Alutiiq, as my family and my teachers are from Kodiak Island. The Koniag Alutiiq dialect is currently spoken by roughly 30 fluent speakers, with about 12 intermediate to advanced learner-speakers, who are also teachers of the language in many settings (Counciller, Personal Communication). There are two sub-dialects or styles of the Koniag dialect. The villages on the northern side of the island speak the northern style and the southern side of the island speaks the southern style. The style difference is small, but significant to the Elders. Our community has been working to revitalize the language for at least 40 years, and due to many people's consistent and determined work, our community has produced language learning and teaching materials for beginners, especially materials geared toward preschool and primary grades. As more learners achieve the intermediate level proficiency in Alutiiq, there is great need for students to study the language in a highly contextualized way that focuses on communicative goals. We also need more interesting, age-appropriate materials and lessons for adolescents and adults.

The Alutiiq traditional stories, *unigkuat*, are also highly endangered. Drabek explains, traditional stories "...were told to entertain and to teach, as a way of spending time together. Storytelling has served as an educational process for millennia" (2012, p. 24). At this time, in the Kodiak Alutiiq community, there are only a couple of elders who know the traditional stories and

very few children are familiar with the stories of our people. Few adults know the traditional stories and youth are not hearing and learning from them. While Alutiiq storytelling no longer takes place informally in the home or community, stories have been told to youth at culture camps and other enrichment activities in recent years.

Alutiiq language was not a written language until University of Alaska Fairbanks linguist Jeff Leer helped our community design a writing system (Leer, 1979). Our language was traditionally represented with pictographs and a sign language consisting of symbols that told stories (Counciller, and Leer 2012). These characters did not represent sounds of an alphabet, but events and other information that was required to tell the story or share a message. The characters could also represent spiritual presence, legends and specific locations. Our language was orally passed down, and that is still the focus in our teaching today. Although the Alutiiq people have used pictographs, petroglyphs and sign language in the past, we are focusing on oral proficiency because we are creating a new generation of Alutiiq speakers.

As discussed by Alisha Drabek in her dissertation, between 1819 and 1866, toward the end of Russian rule in Alaska, schooling for Alutiiq children was bilingual, and many families were multilingual (2012). When the United States government purchased Alaska and started to force assimilation on the Native people, the schooling for Alutiiq children changed to English-only policies. Many of the Elders who contribute to our language revitalization movement today were part of the boarding school era and English-only schooling and were forced to not speak their language in school or suffer consequences. One of our Elders remembers having to write “I will not speak Alutiiq” on the chalk board many days after school, but she also remembers telling her teacher that she could not make her stop speaking Alutiiq. If it were not for examples like this of linguistic survivance, the elders who teach us would have forgotten their language

long ago. Linguistic survivance is any act that is contrary to dominant culture that re-affirms the language of an individual or group (Vizenor, 2008). Linguistic survivance represents the survival and resistance that the community expressed in an effort to express self-determination and the right to their ancestral language.

The generation of adults that were punished for speaking their language did not teach Alutiiq to their children. All of the elders we have who are speakers had to fight to maintain their language. They hid under tables to listen to it spoken, they abandoned the school idea entirely before learning to write, etc. These are some of the last people on the planet who spoke Alutiiq when they were little children.

The Alutiiq Language revitalization movement started in the 1970s, after the passing of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). During the 1970s the local regional non-profit began and several tribes were established, followed by the founding of the Alutiiq Heritage Foundation, the Alutiiq Museum and Archeological Repository in the 1990s. In the 1970s people started to take back their language and have pride in it again. In the 1990s, Florence Pestrikoff and Philomena Kenecht piloted a class for high school and college students. In the 2000s, learners from the master apprentice program at the Alutiiq Museum started teaching mini lessons on video teleconference to rural school children. In 2010, the Native Village of Afognak was awarded an Administration for Native Americans grant that focused on teacher mentorship and lesson plan development. Over the years many organizations have had a part in the revitalization of the language in some way, by managing grants that supported language teaching and publications with Alutiiq words, sponsoring classes, etc.

In 2012, we invited Evan Gardner of Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) to help us to learn and teach Alutiiq faster, as we could see that we were in a race against time to reawaken our

language. Where Are Your Keys is a model for language teaching that prioritizes training teachers, and moving students out of the novice level of proficiency as fast as possible by always incorporating full sentences and focusing on language necessary for communication. After the introduction of WAYK, a learning and teaching method that incorporates many tested theories and techniques into one method, the community experienced a fluency boom. Many of the learners who had been involved in the movement for years made large jumps in proficiency during this short period of intense language learning. This was assisted by the Native Village of Afognak's Administration of Native Americans Teacher Mentorship grant, which was able to pay learners and elders for their time together learning and teaching the language and developing lesson plans for preschool to adult learners, or writing books and songs. The Kodiak College also played a major role, with its large five-year grant which established an Alutiiq Studies Department on the Kodiak campus. Dr. April Counciller developed an Alutiiq Language Occupational Endorsement Certificate (OEC), and created and advocated for the classes associated with the OEC and the rest of the Alutiiq Studies Department. After the many years that our community has worked on language revitalization, the Kodiak Alutiiq Language now has 12 intermediate to advanced learner-speakers. These categories have been adapted from American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) training material to fit the Alutiiq context. This success is the result of endless hours, education, language planning and research, and this is just a beginning.

Educational Environment

The City of Kodiak is the regional hub of Kodiak Island in the Gulf of Alaska. According to the US Census, the Kodiak Island Borough had a total population of 13,492, which includes the City of Kodiak, the large United States Coast Guard Base, and its six small coastal villages:

Akhiok, Old Harbor, Port Lions, Ouzinkie, Larsen Bay and Karluk. The populations in each of the villages range from about 40 to 220 people, and each site has a predominantly native population (U.S. Census, 2010). Kodiak is home to a large coast guard base, and a large immigrant population of Asians (20.3%) and Hispanic descent (8.4%)(U.S. Census, 2010). Kodiak Island has ten federally recognized tribes serving roughly 2,500 native Alaskans.

The Kodiak Island Borough School District (KIBSD) serves all communities on the island. Kodiak High School is a large institution for Alaska, serving 725 students enrolled in the 2014-15 school year, 15% of which are Alaska Native, 35% Asian Pacific Islander, and 9% Hispanic (unpublished KIBSD document). The School uses [Marzano's Four-point scale](#) for grading purposes.

Alutiiq Language is taught at the Kodiak High School (KHS) since the spring semester of 2011. I started working at the high school as a class aide for Alisha Drabek, who had more experience with the Alutiiq language and a Type M Certificate. As I grew more comfortable in the classroom and in the language, I took on more of a leadership role. I am now lead teacher with a Type M Certification with Michael Bach as my co-teacher. In 2014-15, we had a class of 20 students, half in Alutiiq I and half in Alutiiq II. The Alutiiq class is an optional class open to any student in 9-12th grade. The credit counts as an elective and goes on their transcript as Alutiiq Language I or Alutiiq Language II. The only other world language offered at KHS is Spanish. The KHS class is now a dual credit class, meaning those students who want to attain college credit for taking the high school class may sign up to do so with the college. This helps students thinking about college because they can earn college credit for the class.

Alaska made English the official language of the state in 1998, later amending the Official Language Act in 2014 to add twenty indigenous languages, including Alutiiq, to be co-

official languages of the state. The KIBSD has been supportive of Alutiiq being considered a world language since 2010, when the school board adopted the world language curriculum. As the teacher of the KHS class, I have heard parents and students express concern about the colleges they apply to not accepting their Alutiiq credit. Some students feel that they should take Spanish instead of Alutiiq because they worry that the college they want to go to will not recognize Alutiiq as a world language. The Alutiiq Studies Program offered at Kodiak College, as part of University of Alaska, has helped extinguish this fear. In addition to the class being offered at KHS for dual credit, most higher education institutions will accept Alutiiq 1 transfer credits, which adds an element of legitimacy to the language class.

The Native Language Education Act (NALA) was established in 1990 to create native language curriculum advisory boards, require teachers of native languages to be certified under state law, encourage states to include indigenous languages in their curriculum at all levels, and offer the same academic credit for native languages as they would for a foreign language. This federal statute supports the awarding of academic credit of Alutiiq Language similar to that of other languages (Public Law 101-147). For the Alutiiq language, NALA is a way to get in the door in our district and meet the state standards for world language even in elementary school. As Marlow (2004) points out, this is a federal statute, although it has little or no authority, carries no punishment for failure, nor is any funding provided. School districts may establish a language advisory board, but there is no requirement regarding who makes up the language board, no reporting required, and no funding required. Our state and school district has adopted the idea that indigenous languages do qualify as a world language, and the State of Alaska has developed the Limited Teacher Certification to ensure that Native language and culture teachers are certified.

Alaska State Statute (AS 14.20.022) Limited Teacher Certification (1992) has become useful to teachers in the Alutiiq language revitalization movement. The Type M Certification is available to community members in the areas of Alaska Native language or culture, military science, and vocational study. The applicant must get district support and demonstrate competency in the subject area (State of Alaska Dept. of Education and Early Development). School districts govern the certification's restrictions within the state, meaning they can decide whether to require a certified teacher to be present when the Type M teacher is giving instruction. Alisha Drabek was the first to become Type M Certified in Alaska Native Language and Culture at KIBSD. Alisha Drabek became the teacher of the KHS class with me as her aid. I started teaching the class as primary teacher, and got my Type M Certification in 2013 and became lead teacher of the KHS class with a colleague and friend as a co-teacher. KIBSD has given us teacher autonomy and reasonable pay for the workload. We are trusted to teach the Alutiiq language to the world language standards adopted by our district.

Financial support for our program has been provided by KIBSD through grants and by Indian Education, Title VII funding 2011-2015. The district has been supporting native education via the development of Alutiiq Language curriculum, online materials development, and the Alutiiq language teacher contracts for three years. This year, when all previously awarded grant funding was expended; the program costs for the instructor were absorbed into the district's general fund.

In order for a class to be maintained in the KHS budget and course schedule, 15 students must sign up for the class. Alutiiq 1 usually has about twelve students enroll at the beginning of the year. Over the years, we have determined that the best way to get around this is to have Alutiiq 1 and Alutiiq 2 students sign up for the same class during the same period so that we can

host a class. If we separated them, there would not be enough students to justify hosting either of the Alutiiq classes. The consequence is that we need to have two teachers in the classroom because we are teaching two classes.

The Author

I was born in Kodiak, and raised back and forth between Clarkston, Washington and Kodiak. When I was in the eighth grade, my family moved home to Kodiak, where I completed high school. I went on to get my bachelors degree from the University of Denver with a major in Sociology and a minor in Spanish.

My native ancestry comes from my mother's side of the family. While my mother's family is native, and we spent a lot of time around them when I was young, we did not hear Alutiiq spoken. My great grandmother, the matriarch of the family, no longer spoke Alutiiq. She had been a speaker prior to being left at the Woody Island Orphanage at age five. The English-only policy at the orphanage caused my great grandmother and her siblings to lose their ancestral language and the language of their family of origin.

That is how the Alutiiq language ceased in my family until now. I am learning the language from the elders in Kodiak who are willing to teach me. The other learners of the language are some of my best friends and teachers. While my great grandmother's family is from Old Harbor, on the south end of the Island, I do not discriminate between learning the Northern or Southern sub-dialect or style. I want to be fluent in the Koniag Dialect regardless of style. With so few Alutiiq speakers, I choose to focus on learning as much as I can from the Elders I have available to me.

I started learning Alutiiq in 2010 when I returned home to Kodiak after graduating from college. My first encounter was at Dig Afognak, a summer culture camp run by The Native

Village of Afognak (NVA). During camp I was invited to the Alutiiq Language Club, where community members gather with fluent Elders to practice the language. Later that fall, Alisha Drabek invited me to her house to practice with her and learn lessons from her. Since then she has mentored me not only as a learner of Alutiiq but also in my personal and professional life.

Michael Bach is my co-teacher in the KHS class. Together, we have the ability to teach the class at different levels by separating the groups when necessary and by requiring the more proficient students to do more challenging work. In my own language learning, I still use the Where Are Your Keys techniques. I have not had as much success integrating the WAYK model into the classroom. Our class focuses on conversational ability with some elements of writing and reading. The goal of the high school class is to inspire youth to become Alutiiq language teachers in their families, circles of friends, and on their social media networks.

In addition to the KHS class, I currently work for the Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak as the Alutiiq Heritage Educator, where I will develop cultural classes and programs for the tribe.

Learning my ancestral language has changed my life. Elders and other community leaders have taught me invaluable lessons about life and being a native woman. Their teachings brought me closer to the woman I have always wanted to become. Teaching and learning Alutiiq is one of my favorite things to do. Not only is it challenging and fun, I have developed strong relationships with learners and elders that I would not trade for anything.

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