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SUMMARY REPORT

Pre-Summit Workshop on Inuktut Language

Writing Systems Standardization

March 25-26, 2014 Marriot Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario

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National Centre for Inuit Education
Kanatami Inuit Ilinniarniliringat
Centre national de scolarisation des Inuits



Aboriginal Affairs and
Northern Development Canada

Affaires autochtones et
Développement du Nord Canada

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Amaujaq National Centre for Inuit Education is pleased to receive support from the following organizations for this event; The Counselling Foundation of Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

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OVERVIEW

There were twenty-five people in attendance, with delegates from the four Inuit regions in Canada, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's (ITK) staff and support contractors, as well as Atausiq Inuktitut Titirauisq Task Group members. Over the two day pre-summit the National Inuit Language Coordinator for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Jeela Palluq-Cloutier, led the group through six round table discussions. In addition to these lively and productive round table discussions, the National Committee on Inuit Education Chairperson, Mary Simon, delivered an inspiring keynote address on the importance and urgency of a standardized writing system in the context of Inuit education and wellbeing. As well, a linguist from Carleton University presented the group with a history of Inuit writing systems in Canada and each Inuit region presented on their respective current practices and issues in writing.

The Inuktitut Language Writing Systems Standardization pre-summit was productive in the following ways:

- Regional language experts have had extensive discussions in their respective regions already and were able to share and compare their challenges and successes;
- A working group relationship and network was established through the round table discussions, towards intensive regional dialogues;
- Planning to coordinate activities, events and materials began with the National Inuit Language Coordinator; and
- A desired approach to the proposed community consultations was defined by the group as requiring: sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and inclusivity, as well as being informative, responsive and flexible.



Mary Simon, delivered an inspiring keynote address on the importance and urgency of a standardized writing system in the context of Inuit education and wellbeing.



The Atausiq Inuktut Titiraisiq Task Group members being introduced to the language writing system meeting participants from across Inuit Nunangat.

AIT TASK GROUP MEMBERS

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Christine Nochasak Makkovik, Nunatsiavut

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

To follow are summaries of each round table session, including the questions asked and the general responses.

SESSION ONE

- A) Do you agree with one writing system for all Inuit in Canada? If so, which system?
- B) What questions can be used in community consultations on this topic – towards the 2015 Summit. What do we need to inquire about with the people?



Nunavut delegates discuss the Inuit Language Writing System Meeting Topics.

There is a general understanding and acceptance that Roman orthography would unite the Inuit inter-regionally as is not now possible, and that the two regions that use syllabics both recognize the technical and aesthetic limitations of the syllabic writing system over Roman orthographies – technically, pedagogically and in practice. Whatever writing system is developed should accommodate the range of diversity within Inuit regions to be practical and acceptable.

Questions to ask the people in the communities:

Would you like to keep your language? If so, why and how?

Is the written language important to you?

Ask parents **“Do you want your children to learn the language?”**

Ask youth **“Do you want to learn more Inuktitut?”**

Approach the consultations in such a way so as to find out what questions the communities have about this work. We can bring our questions, but be open and sensitive to their own questions.



Inuvialuit delegates and Carleton University Linguist discussing the feasibility of one Inuit language writing system.

SESSION TWO

How to best carry out community consultations?

What is the best way to consult with the people?

Each region has slightly different circumstances and have various previous initiatives to build upon. However, the general consensus about how to approach community consultations in general involved the following features:

- i) It is important for the consultations to be empowering because so much about language, especially in written form has been dictated by the Church with foreign language worldview and influences;
- ii) We need to respectfully educate people about the issues and options – devise a non-threatening educational approach including materials that can be spread through a wide range of venues (media, schools, community groups, key elders);
- iii) We need to gather opinions from each community;
- iv) Inquire about how the writing systems are used on a daily basis (work and personal)?
- v) The preparations need to reflect the full range of issues. People need as much information as possible about what standardization is about.
- vi) FAQ sheets should be readily available for the community consultations;
- vii) Address the full spectrum of age ranges – remembering that the youth are not only the future but are a great present day asset;
- viii) Amajuaq National Centre for Inuit Education hold a preparatory workshop to build up the consultation facilitators and educators about language issues so they can effectively deal with oppositions and family stress in meetings; and
- ix) Secure backing of key elders in each community – we know who they are.

SESSION THREE

Where do we start with the consultations and when?



Nunatsiavut delegates - consultation options in their regions.

Launch - A nation-wide launch (Options: August 9th, International Indigenous day, November 7th International Inuit day, June 21 National Aboriginal Day, March 30, National Aboriginal Language day with PSA's, radio and TV announcements, Facebook, then community consultations in this order:

- i) Nunavik - has already completed their consultations and just need now to ask if a unified writing system is desirable. They can start anytime summer to fall.
- ii) Nunatsiavut - fall (September) is best to start because of the school cycle.
- iii) Nunakput - December 2014 when the ice roads are ready.
- iv) Nunavut - fall is best in Nunavut to start the education process - start advertising. Then consult in the winter through round tables and phone-in's.

SESSION FOUR

How can we be non-threatening in opening up the need to talk about standardization?

The word “standard” (etymology) is from the French word for the warring flag, bearing the authority of the king. This implies standards as a forced measure. Some Inuit view “standardization” as a form of assimilation.

An important point made by a Nunavik delegate was that the word “standardization”, while possibly intimidating to community members, in fact when advocating to government and southern forces for the right to use Inuktitut it is a strong word which has an appropriate meaning - being strong to save ones language, fighting for it, enforcing standards. But for inside the community, it is a harsh word and other kinds of communication are required - new words to resonate with people. It is as if standardization as a concept, a term and a discussion is a coin with two sides.

Tables were mixed with a minimum of one person from each region at each table to discuss the question of optional wording to talk about a new standard writing system for Inuit.

Inuktitut concepts relating to process, practice, intent and outcome of a unified writing system:

pikkunautiit, inummariutiit, ikurrautivut, ikurriuti, allagusivut, atausiuqaitigiilirutit, inulimaanuangajuq, titiraqatigiit, illirijavut, tapiriit, ivaluk, tunngavik, tusaumannarutit

ilitarijaugutit, tukisiqatigiiguti (kangiqli-/kangiqli-), inuktitut allagusiq (aglagusiq, aglatat, titirausiq), inuit tapiriit allagusinga.

English word options:

consistency, excellence, normalization, harmonization, unified/unification

“auxiliary writing system” (used by Edna McLean and Jose Kusugak)

SESSION FIVE

What would you propose as a sample writing system?



Nunavik delegates considering the question on a standard Inuit Language Writing System.

There is a strong case for Roman orthography to be the circumpolar standard – though it requires Nunavik and Nunavut syllabics regions to agree with this. In syllabics regions, start syllabics only in grade eight. Use Roman orthography exclusively in early grades.

Generally, when promoting the idea of a unified writing system, and eventually teaching it, emphasize the letters that Inuktitut dialects have in common – for example the three vowels I,U,A and the many of the consonants. Show regional dialectal differences.

For a unified writing system, possibly use all of the characters and just teach the sounds to the children so they recognize scripts from other places.

When comparing consonants there may be compromises to be made that need to be acceptable to all regions. This will require a lot of work.

SESSION SIX

What ways do you propose to inform the public of upcoming consultations?

What is the message we want to convey? Who should come to the Summit 2015?

Where should the Summit take place? How do we spark the debate?

What ways do you propose to inform the public of upcoming consultations?

- i) Develop savvy and thoughtful background information and educational tools – posters, infomercials on radio and TV, FAQs;
- ii) Utilize the media – print, radio, TV, and social media;
- iii) Disseminate via Hamlets, school boards, schools, local organizations, individuals, meetings.

What is the message we want to convey?

- We want people to think towards a solution that would unite Inuit but respect variations.
- Inspire debate towards what would work.

Who should come to the Summit 2015?

- Translators, interpreters, language consultants, teachers, DEA's, elders, youth
- People that will be on board with us/support help
- Government MLA's
- Inuit organizations
- Inuvialuit Minister of Language, other language officials

Questions to consider:

- How to convey the information and promotional materials to the regions for a meaningful Summit.
- Will there be a task for participants to take to the communities?
- What tasks will the participants be preparing for in their respective regions?

Where should the Summit take place?

Somewhere in the middle, accessible, has accommodations, and can support a large meeting. Mentioned were: Nunatsiavut, Arviat and Taloyoak, Nunavut. Note that Taloyoak is not easily accessible although it is in the middle. No consensus was made, as there are too many practical and financial considerations to know about first.

How do we spark the debate?

- tikivviulaarassi atuinnaujunnaqqisi?
(prepare for consultation travels by making sure people are available);
- nipiliuqsimajunik tusautinik tujurlugit **(send people audio recordings to reflect upon);**
- nijjaatitaujutsanik naalautikkut **(prepare PSA's for the radio);**
- nunalinni pulaariaqtitsiqattarmata qaujigitigummallugit sunanik pijuqarnialirmangaat saqqiijuqarniarmangaat
(prepare people for sharing their ideas with anticipation of the upcoming community consultations);
- matuinngaarlutik niuqtatsaqarlutik tamuajatsanilu
(have informal, welcoming open houses with food and drink);
- sunanik isumaqarmangaata titiraqtilugit **(have people write their thoughts out);**
- qaujisaivallialuta kinatuinnaq akiliqtauniataruni upanniusatuinnarmat
(be careful about unengaged participants motivated by remuneration);
- ICC-kkut katimatillugit Julaimi
(utilize the opportunity available through the ICC meeting this coming July);
- inuit qallunaat nunangani nunaliit **(engage urban Inuit)**
- inunnut ikajuqtauviusuut qaluunaat nunangani **(Inuit centers in the south)**
- qarasaujakkut **(use computer and social media)**
- qarasaujakkut apirijaulutik - **(on-line survey)**



CONCLUSION

Key considerations for future work needs to include:

- Adequate funding for the work as intended (sensitive, thoughtful, informed, and inclusive);
- Timelines and strategic planning are critical;
- Ongoing national and inter-regional level support for people involved in the community consultations;
- Expertly developed educational tools including a wide range of media; and
- While offering writing standard samples, be mindful not to promote a specific standard, but to emphasize the essential and urgent need for standards generally.

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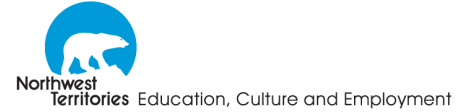
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