Louis-Jacques Dorais

A WRITTEN ORALITY

The Canadian Inuit and Their Language

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The Inuit—formerly known as Eskimos ("raw-meat eaters" or "unintelligible strangers" in the Algonquian languages)—are an Arctic indigenous people living in Greenland, Canada, American Alaska, and Russian Chukotka. They speak five closely related languages that belong to the Eskaleut linguistic family, together with Aleut.[1] These languages are polysynthetic. Most words start with a verbal or noun base, optionally followed by a number of affixes, which specify or transform the meaning of the base, and by a compulsory ending denoting the person and mood of the verb or the grammatical function of the noun within the sentence. See for instance:

> ᐃᓪᓗᕈᓗᒻᒥᒃ ᓯᓂᑦᑕᕕᖃᕈᒪᙱᑐᙵ
> Illurulummik sinittaviqarumanngitunga
> I do not want to have a bad little house as
> my regular sleeping place.

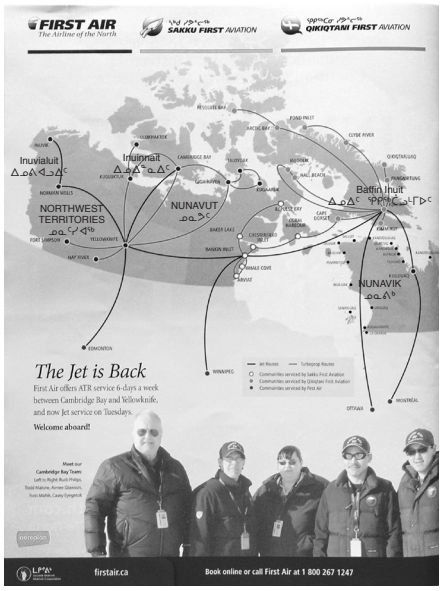
At the threshold of the 21st century, the total number of Inuit was estimated at some 170,000 individuals (Dorais, 2010, 236). Today, this number surely exceeds 200,000. For the vast majority (78%) Inuit is their ancestral language. Spoken from Greenland to central western Alaska, this language can be subdivided into four major groups of mutually intelligible dialects: Greenlandic Kalaallisut, Eastern Canadian Inuktitut, Western Canadian Inuktun, and Alaskan Inupiaq.

The Inuit Language and Canadian Bilingualism

In Canada, according to the 2011 census, 59,700 individuals define themselves as Inuit, 63% of whom still speak their language. With 37,615 speakers, Inuit is the second most widely spoken Canadian indigenous language.[2] It is considered one of only three or four native tongues that may be expected to survive past the year 2050. Yet its vitality varies regionally. The Inuktun dialects, ancestral to the Inuvialuit and Inuinnait populations of the western Canadian Arctic, are spoken by only 20–25% of all Inuit originating from that region, most speakers exceeding 50 years of age. By contrast, Inuktitut, the eastern Canadian form of the language, is still the mother tongue, routinely transmitted to children, of more than 90% of all Inuit living in the eastern part of the Nunavut Territory, and of 99% of the Nunavik (Arctic Quebec) people.[3] A quick glance at history shows that the language has been much better preserved in areas (eastern Nunavut, Nunavik) that remained geographically and administratively remote until the middle of the 20th century, without schools or governmental apparatus, and—in contrast with

1. These languages are: Inuit (Greenland, Canada, Alaska), Alutiiq and Central Alaskan Yup'ik (Alaska), Central Siberian Yupik (Chukotka and Alaska), and Naukanski Yupik (Chukotka).
2. It follows Cree, which has 83,000 speakers.
3. Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador) is the only region where Inuktitut is endangered, with 25% of the population speaking the language.

Labrador and the western Arctic—without non-Inuit individuals settling in from the outside. Moreover, ca. 75% of all Canadian Inuit still live in *Inuit Nunangat* ("Land of the Inuit"), their historical indigenous territory where they account for the vast majority of the population.



Geographical representation of Inuit populated territories, with added regional names. Advertisement from the in-flight magazine of the airline First Air, July/August 2013 edition.

Canada is a bilingual country of 35,800,000 inhabitants (in 2015), whose two official languages are English and French. However, the mere presence of a language like Inuit shows that the linguistic situation is more intricate than it may appear at first. True enough, since Canada became a confederation of self-governing provinces and territories in 1867, bilingualism has, indeed, been compulsory at the federal level. Debates in the Canadian Parliament may use either language, and most official forms and documents—including those on the Internet—are available in both English and French. Moreover, the Official Languages Act of 1969 stipulates that all Anglophones and Francophones are entitled to be addressed in their mother tongue by federal officers, and to be schooled in that tongue wherever they live in Canada.

Yet even if all Canadians are expected to know at least one official language, each provincial and territorial government is allowed to legislate in linguistic matters. In Quebec, with its large majority of Francophones, French is the unique official tongue (with legal provisions for protecting English schools), while in the other provinces—except for officially bilingual New Brunswick—English holds a *de facto* predominance. One consequence is that bilingualism is far from universal. According to the national census of 2011, only 17.5% of all Canadians can hold a conversation in both official languages, this percentage being higher among French-mother-

tongue citizens (who account for 22% of the total population) than among those whose first language is English (58% of the total). Such statistics on bilingualism do not take into account the remaining 20% of the population, whose mother tongue is neither English nor French and who are generally fluent in their first language and at least one official speaking medium.

Most of these so-called allophones are first- or second-generation immigrants. Official federal multiculturalism encourages them to preserve and transmit their ancestral culture and language, provided they also learn English or French. However, a tiny proportion of allophones (0.6% of all Canadians, i.e. 215,000 individuals) speak, in addition to an official tongue, one of some 60 indigenous languages that have been precariously preserved until now, despite explicit attempts at annihilating them. These people reject the multicultural paradigm, considering themselves as belonging to separate nations which possess political, cultural, and linguistic rights of their own. The Inuit constitute one such nation. Even if their language now benefits from some recognition and protection, it might be threatened in the long run. As we shall see in the following pages, the situation of native languages remains problematic because of their intrinsic orality, an orality that survives in a world largely controlled by the written word.

An Oral Language

Traditional Orality

As bearers of a partly nomadic culture based on hunting and gathering, the Inuit—especially those of the eastern Canadian Arctic on whom we shall now be focusing—never felt the need to devise a writing system, nor did they develop elaborate forms of visual art. Besides stone cairns used to mark specific locations (*inuksuk*), their only nonutilitarian visual creations were small carved amulets, precise designs adorning clothing, and linear tattoos. By contrast, the spoken language—Inuktitut in eastern Canada—played a crucial part in expressing their feelings and symbolism.

For the Inuit of old, casual conversation was the only means of socializing and exchanging information. As in most other hunter-gatherer cultures, people were expected to relate what they had seen and heard—visitors were commonly told: *unikkaalaurit!* "Tell something"—thus helping to weave a web of knowledge that informed Inuit society. Knowledge that had accumulated over the years (*qaujimajatuqait*, "things known since long") was transmitted orally to younger generations, although silence was important too. For instance, the learning process relied primarily on silent observation: children asking too many questions were deemed less intelligent, because they were unable to understand by them-

selves what they saw. Besides casual learning, knowledge was also embodied in a rich corpus of myths, tales, and personal songs. Occasional singing duels were contests between two men who had a dispute, the winner being the one whose derisive songs had ridiculed his opponent the most. Language should be used carefully. Speakers were presumed to tell the truth, and lies or ill-founded assertions were considered reprehensible. Words could potentially be imbued with strong powers: through magical songs and formulae shamans were able to enlist their helping spirits, in order to heal people or bring back game animals.

Contemporary Orality

Nowadays, the social role of the spoken language remains crucial. However, as we shall see below, the contemporary way of life that Inuit now fully experience, as well as universal access to the modern devices of communication, have lessened the importance of visiting and face-to-face conversations (which may take place in English rather than Inuktitut) in terms of social activities. The transmission of knowledge has largely become formalized and based on discourse. School education, religious instruction, and the Internet, which all rely primarily on the written word and visuals, have replaced observation and daily conversations as the privileged way of learning. In the wake of these changes, Inuit knowledge has become endangered. Traditional tales, songs and techniques are not transmitted anymore, and shamanism was replaced by Christianity.

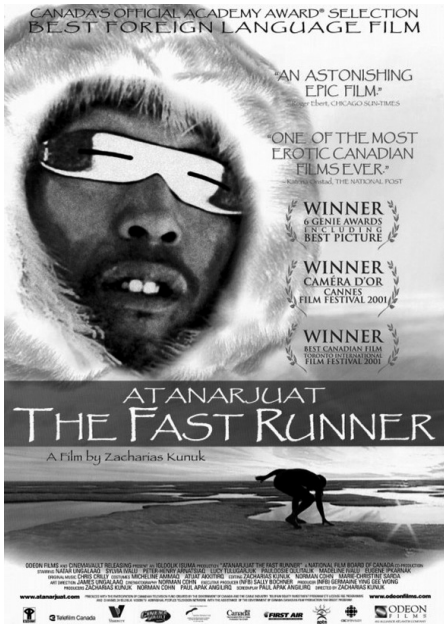
In Nunavik and eastern Nunavut, where Inuit were in contact with fur traders and Christian missionaries since the late 19th century, not until the 1950s and 1960s did people progressively join sedentary communities (Damas, 2002).

Façade of the Evangelical Church, Quaqtaq, 2013. The written information on the sign appears in both Inuktitut (syllabic script) and English (Latin script).

Wooden prefabricated houses imported from southern Canada replaced the tents and snow-houses of seasonal hunting camps, and the new villages harbored a much larger population than the former locations. Wage work and governmental welfare payments

became the main sources of income. Consequently, hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering became secondary economic activities, even if they retained their importance as symbols of Inuit culture. Inuit were now submitted to the same constraints as other Canadians, as they had to follow the schedules set by the school and the workplace.

Trade, Christianity, and sedentary life directly impacted Inuktitut. Linguistic change started to occur at the end of the 19th century, well before the establishment of schools. It was propelled by an influx of newly introduced concepts and material goods that had to be labelled in Inuktitut, and by the emergence of a form of speech characterizing larger residential groups. The system of consonant clusters was simplified, the average number of affixes diminished, and word bases were occasionally elided (Dorais, 1985). This may have led to the impression that people were talking at a faster pace than before.



Poster of 2001 Canadian feature film by Inuit filmmaker Zach Kunuk, directed and acted in Inuktitut. Set in ancient times, the film retells a traditional tale from Igloolik, Nunavut.

The introduction of writing and formal education imposed the notion that the written word—controlled by non-Inuit and usually taught in English—had preeminence over indigenous orality. As already mentioned, this led to the weakening of traditional knowledge. But the spoken word did not disappear. The advent of Evangelical Christianity in the 1970s reinforced preaching as a form of narrative, and over the years, a rich body of bilingual (Inuktitut and English) oral literature has emerged. It mostly consists of songs of various styles (folk, rock, rap, gospel), but it also includes skits for the radio and television as well as a number of feature and documentary films. This new oral corpus tells about life in

contemporary Arctic communities, although elements from Inuit tradition, myths for instance, are also chosen as creative themes.[4]

More generally, the introduction of modern technologies has fostered a tremendous expansion of orality, both spatially and socially. Telephones (1960s), community radio (1970s), regional television (1980s), ubiquitous cell phones (1990s), and general Internet access (1990s–2000s) now enable Inuit to communicate as often as they wish and from any distance. The contents and scope of messages are virtually limitless and sociability thus extends well beyond what face-to-face contacts once made possible. On community radio or television, any individual may speak simultaneously to all his or her co-citizens, while politicians can address their entire constituency. And through the Internet, immensely popular among younger Inuit, writing is put in the service of orality, since written electronic tweets mimic the spoken language.

4. See for instance Zack Kunuk's Atanarjuat "The Fast Runner (2001)." It is unclear to what extent such productions, aimed at the general Canadian (and sometimes international) public, have a real impact on Inuit communities.

Writing Inuktitut

In what is now Canada, writing was first introduced to the Inuit in 1771, when the Moravian Brethren opened a mission in Nain, Nunatsiavut (Labrador). Within three decades, the majority of indigenous Labradorians became literate in their mother tongue, taught in missionary schools. The Moravians made use of an alphabetical transcription of the Inuit language that had first been developed in Greenland.

In Nunavik and eastern Nunavut, literacy was introduced later on and under a different guise. In the middle of the 19th century, Anglican missionaries residing at the Cree trading post of Fort George, on eastern James Bay, adapted to Inuktitut a syllabic writing system devised by the Wesleyans some twenty years earlier for the Ojibway and Cree languages (Harper, 1985). Inuit who traded occasionally at Fort George learned the new script and taught it to their family and neighbors.[5] In 1876, Rev. James E. Peck opened an Anglican mission at Little Whale River on the east coast of Hudson Bay, in Inuit territory, and resorted to syllabics to produce a Nunavik Inuktitut version of the New Testament. Peck moved to Baffin Island around 1895, where he carried on the task of translating the Scriptures and disseminating—along with other Anglican and later also Catholic missionaries—the syllabic script in what was to become Nunavut. By 1925, almost all Nunavik and eastern Nunavut Inuit were literate in Inuktitut, having learned to write by themselves in the total absence of schools.

Syllabics had the advantage of being easy to learn, with rounded or regularly angled symbols denoting whole syllables rather than individual vowels and consonants. Each symbol could take four different positions, according to the vocalic contents of the syllable

5. During the same period, Protestant missionaries introduced nonstandardized alphabetical transcriptions of Inuktun and Inupiaq to western Canada and Alaska.

—Inuktitut has three vowels, *i*, *u*, *a*, plus diphthong *ai* (Fig. 1). Aimed at enabling Inuit to read the Bible and prayer books, the system was rapidly appropriated for private correspondence,[6] as a means of recording family events (births and deaths) and, in a few cases, writing a personal diary. Over the years, people forgot the missionary origin of the syllabic script and started considering it the only genuinely Inuit writing medium. Later projects for devising a standard alphabetical transcription of Inuktitut—spear-headed by federal bureaucrats in the early 1960s and by the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, the national Inuit organization, in 1976—were generally considered as an unwelcome attempt at imposing an alien form of literacy, whose rules were unintelligible to most people.

6. Correspondence in syllabics remained the preferred means of long-distance communication until the 1960s, when governmental authorities had Bell Canada Inc. bring telephone service to the Canadian Arctic.

ᐁ	ai	ᐃ	i	ᐅ	u	ᐊ	a	ᕼ	h
ᐯ	pai	ᐱ	pi	ᐳ	pu	ᐸ	pa	ᑉ	p
ᑌ	tai	ᑎ	ti	ᑐ	tu	ᑕ	ta	ᑦ	t
ᑫ	kai	ᑭ	ki	ᑯ	ku	ᑲ	ka	ᒃ	k
ᒉ	gai	ᒋ	gi	ᒍ	gu	ᒐ	ga	ᒡ	g
ᒣ	mai	ᒥ	mi	ᒧ	mu	ᒪ	ma	ᒻ	m
ᓀ	nai	ᓂ	ni	ᓄ	nu	ᓇ	na	ᓐ	n
ᓭ	sai	ᓯ	si	ᓱ	su	ᓴ	sa	ᔅ	s
ᓓ	lai	ᓕ	li	ᓗ	lu	ᓚ	la	ᓪ	l
ᔦ	jai	ᔨ	ji	ᔪ	ju	ᔭ	ja	ᔾ	j
ᕓ	vai	ᕕ	vi	ᕗ	vu	ᕙ	va	ᕝ	v
ᕃ	rai	ᕆ	ri	ᕈ	ru	ᕋ	ra	ᕐ	r
ᙯ	qai	ᕿ	qi	ᖁ	qu	ᖃ	qa	ᖅ	q
ᙰ	ngai	ᖏ	ngi	ᖑ	ngu	ᖓ	nga	ᖕ	ng

ᐄ, ᐴ, ᑖ... ii, puu, taa...

Fig. 1 The syllabic symbols (Nunavik standard)

In the eastern Canadian Arctic, syllabics thus became a symbol of Inuit identity. Some older Anglicans still consider it a God-given writing system, because of its connection with the Bible. Most public signage (e.g., street names, stop signs, names of buildings) are in Inuktitut syllabics—with or without an English, and sometimes French, translation. Many paper and online documents issued by the federal, Nunavut territorial, or Quebec provincial governments, or from public service institutions, are available in a syllabic version, even if bilingual readers prefer the English original, which is generally much less confusing than the often poorly translated Inuktitut text. For instance, due to the limited number of syllabic symbols, northern telephone directories list hundreds of illegible personal and place names: "Wilfrid Bradley" becomes *Guilvirit Puratli*, and "Stockholm" (in the area codes section) reads as *Sitakhalm*.[7]

This situation evokes the concept of semiotic landscape, as discussed by Adam Jaworski, for example. For him and other authors, letterforms, types, and scripts interplay with spatial locations to form "a historically, culturally, and geographically situated social practice, through which discourses, communities, and identities are mediated and reproduced" (Järlehed and Jaworski, 2015, 117).

7. Inuit authorities, however, consider it essential to produce these quasi-useless syllabic versions, because their mere existence communicates that Inuit are linguistically and graphically different from other

Canadians and underscores indigenous identity. (Dorais, 1996, 264).

One could ask to what extent the syllabic script has now become a significant marker of identity—more due to its visual form than the content it conveys, as with inuksuk cairns, for instance. Actually, syllabics function both ways. True enough, the mere visuality of the script is significant in several contexts: stop signs, for instance, do not need the syllabic inscription *nuqqarit* ("Stop!") to be understood. And for non-Inuit who cannot decipher syllabics, the mere presence of anything written in this script acts as a reminder that the indigenous inhabitants of Nunavut and Nunavik are linguistically—and thus ethnically and perhaps nationally—different.

However, a majority of Inuit do read syllabics—now taught in all Nunavik and eastern Nunavut schools—and they can get the gist of syllabic transcriptions, even if most of them are more at ease with written English (Hot, 2009). This means that people can usually understand the meaning of syllabic signs and texts. For a dwindling minority of older Inuit who are monolingual in their mother tongue as well as for some middle-aged individuals less fluent in English, syllabics is the only available reading medium, or the one easiest to decipher. For this reason, the syllabic writing system still conveys specific information in Inuktitut that goes beyond mere visual symbolism. It thus simultaneously acts as a linguistic tool and a semiotic icon.

Formal Schooling

In Nunavik and eastern Nunavut, syllabics—the default script for transcribing Inuktitut—now coexists with written English and, to a lesser extent, French. Reading and writing are taught in school. Nowadays, every Canadian Inuit community, regardless of its size,[8] possesses its own school, offering a complete elementary and secondary curriculum, from kindergarten to grade 12. Wherever Inuktitut is still spoken by children (i.e. in the vast majority of eastern Arctic villages), it is the only teaching medium from kindergarten through grades two or three. Pupils thus learn to read and write in their first language, primarily in syllabics although they are also taught the alphabet. From grades three or four onward, English becomes the unique medium of teaching, except for occasional courses on Inuit culture sporadically taught in the upper grades.[9] This sudden language shift, coupled with the fact that English offers a much larger range of reading materials than Inuktitut, explains why most Inuit feel more comfortable with written English than with syllabics.

Inspired by a mid 18th-century Greenlandic model, Moravian mission schools were established in Labrador at the end of the 1700s. Teaching was carried out in Inuktitut up to 1949, when Newfoundland (to which Labrador belongs) became a province of

8. The populations of Nunavik and Nunavut villages range between 400 and 3,000 residents. With some 8,000 citizens, the capital of Nunavut, Iqaluit, constitutes an exception in terms of size.

9. In Nunavik, parents may choose between English and French as their children's learning language.

Canada. Missionary institutions were then replaced by government schools, with English as the unique teaching medium. English was also compulsory in the two denominational (Anglican and Catholic) boarding schools for western Canadian Inuit that opened in Aklavik (Northwest Territories) in 1929—schools where children were routinely punished for speaking their mother tongue (Osgood,1983).

In Nunavik and eastern Nunavut, government authorities long declined to offer health, welfare, and education services to the Inuit, because of the remoteness of their territory and the high costs associated with such services. From the 1930s on, missions received meager subsidies for teaching some basic mathematical and syllabic writing skills, but it was only after World War II that the Canadian government decided to become involved in the North, the development of which was now a desirable goal. Between 1950 and 1965, federal administrators were sent to the eastern Arctic, where day schools and nursing stations were progressively established, hastening the advent of sedentary villages. The government explicitly stated that the objective of formal education was to transform Inuit into average Canadians (Dorais, 2010, 194). This is why English became the exclusive teaching medium, with curricula borrowed from southern Canada. In the mid 1970s, however, newly created Inuit organizations insisted on having Inuktitut taught in schools, and the unequally bilingual system described above was progressively put into place.

The Construction of Social Identity

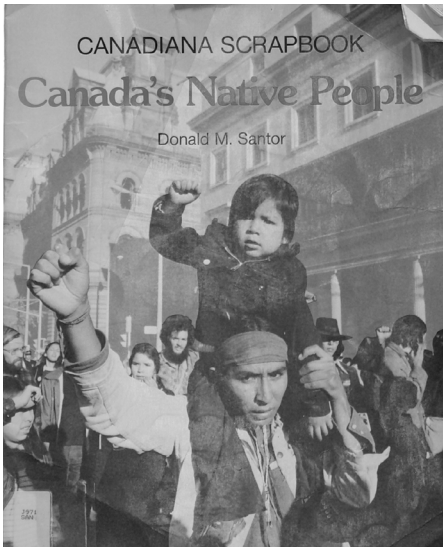
Over the years, formal education led to the partial demise of traditional knowledge—including language in the western Arctic and Labrador—to a loss in mother-tongue writing skills, and to profound changes in intergenerational relations: the young are now socialized in a world dominated by alien rules, where the practices and values of their Inuit forbears have little place. In the eastern Arctic, however, schooling also allowed for the emergence in the late 1960s of a generation of young Inuit who were knowledgeable in the non-Inuit ways and fluent in both Inuktitut and English.

Formal Processes

This new generation emerged during the 1960s, a decade characterized in the Western world by a growing awareness of minority rights and by organized struggles for the recognition of these rights (e.g., feminism, the American Civil Rights Movement, aboriginal land claims). Among Canadian Inuit—as in other First Nations—young indigenous activists developed a critical discourse against internal colonialism,[10] calling for a change in power relations.

This led to a reformulation of Inuit social identity. The activists' first initiative was that they should no longer be called "Eskimos," but "Inuit" ("human persons"), their auto-designation in Inuktitut. A discourse developed, describing Inuit as full-fledged citizens who, because of their indigeneity, possessed inalienable territorial, political, and cultural rights within *Inuit Nunangat*.

10. The anthropologist Robert Paine (1977) defines internal colonialism as the establishment of a social system whereby national, indigenous minorities are dispossessed and dominated by an exogenous national majority.



Cover of Canada's Native People, by Donald M. Santor, published in 1982, featuring a photograph taken during the indigenous people's demonstration on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Ontario, in 1974. Found in the Iqaluit Centennial Library, Youth Section, in 2013.

From 1970 on, the new leaders established a number of organizations and advocacy groups (e.g. Inuit Tapirisat of Canada—now Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami—Northern Quebec Inuit Association, Labrador Inuit Association) which lobbied for Inuit rights and negotiated territorial agreements with the federal and provincial governments. It took three decades to reach satisfactory settlements in all regions of *Inuit Nunangat*, but today collective rights of territorial ownership as well as administrative and quasi-political autonomy have been recognized for Inuit throughout the Canadian Arctic. It led, amongst other things, to the creation of an autonomous Nunavut Territory in 1999, with powers similar to those of a Canadian province.

The official recognition of territorial rights and its embodiment in indigenous governments and administrations was preceded and accompanied by a vigorous development of formal organizations aimed at protecting, transmitting, and developing Inuit culture and language. In the field of education, schools were progressively transferred to Inuit regional authorities (e.g., the Nunavut Department of Education and the Kativik School Board of Nunavik). College programs were established to train Inuktitut-speaking teachers and translators, and school curricula aimed at transmitting indigenous cultural practices and values were devised.

Other official institutions, such as the Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut, the Nunavut government's Department of Culture and Heritage, and Nunavik's Avataq Cultural Institute, encourage and monitor various types of initiatives dealing with culture and language. Private organizations also play an important part in developing and disseminating Inuit culture. Such is the case with radio, television, and cinema producers like Taqramiut Nipingat, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, and Igloolik Isuma Productions. Established in Iqaluit in 2003, the Pirurvik Centre devotes much of its effort to the development of technical terminology in Inuktitut and to the design of various types of software in that language.

Culture and Identity

The aforementioned formal initiatives for defending and implementing indigenous territorial, political, educational, linguistic, and cultural rights in the Canadian Arctic have generally ensured that the Inuit feel quite secure about their collective identity. They know who they are as a people and do not question their specific position within Canadian society. When Nunavut was established, local political leaders emphasized that they were not demanding the creation of a new autonomous territorial entity with an indigenous majority because they wanted to secede from Canada, but rather because Inuit wished to participate fully in the governance and development of the country, on the basis of their own, nonnegotiable social and cultural practices and values. This has now been recognized by official Canadian institutions and is reflected in public opinion. This applies to all regions of *Inuit Nunangat*.

Screenshot from the app Inuit unikkausiliurusingit (How inuit create their stories), a 36-page animated story launched by the Ivujivik graphic designer Thomassie Mangiok, of Pirnoma Technology, in 2014. Both Android and iOS are supported formats.

A question arises: When Inuit leaders and cultural activists mention culture, what do they mean? In English and in most Western languages, the word "culture" has two meanings (apart from a farming context): 1) the creation and consumption of aesthetically

and emotionally touching leisure goods and activities of a more or less formal nature (art, music, film, literature, etc.); and 2) "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1889, 1). In Inuktitut, the word "culture" is translated as *piusiit* or *piqqusiit* ("ways of doing "). This is closer to Tylor's anthropological definition than to the concept of formal culture. In everyday language, these "ways of doing" are most often mentioned in relation to those who make use of them: *inuit piusingit* ("of the Inuit, their ways of doing"; Inuit culture) vs. *qallunaat piusingit* ("of the big-brow [white people], their ways of doing"; the culture[s] of the non-Inuit).

Canadian Inuit have no specific words for designing formal culture. For the vast majority, the mere concept is non-existent. *Inuit piusingit* or *piqqusingit* essentially consists of the informal pre-contact or early-contact way of life of the Inuit, including hunting techniques, traditional knowledge, social relations, values, and beliefs,[11] in addition to Inuktitut as it is spoken by elders and syllabics where they are in use. Contemporary Inuit often say about themselves that nowadays, due to technical and cultural change, they follow *qallunaat piusingit* (the non-Inuit's ways of doing) rather than their own culture. They find this situation deplorable and potentially conducive to a loss of identity because if, at best, *qallunaat piusingit* can provide tools for earning a living through wage employment, at worst, they consist of an ill-defined, alien mix of deleterious practices antithetical to genuine Inuit values. This is why the Nunavut government has given itself the mandate of basing its legislation and working procedures on *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* ("of the Inuit, their long-standing known things"), Inuit traditional knowledge (see for instance "http://www.ch.gov.nu.ca/en/InuitIntro.aspx", consulted February 12, 2016).

The vast majority of Canadian Inuit thus ignore the existence of formal culture. Even if they consume a lot of it under the guise of popular music, Anglophone television and, much more rarely, books and magazines in English, they do not consider the object of their consumption as being "culture," i.e. "ways of doing," because it has nothing to do with Inuit tradition. Western science and humanities are not considered as belonging to culture either. It is through their elders that Inuit learn about their own way of life, language, and environment. Anthropologists and linguists can facilitate the transmission of traditional knowledge by organizing encounters between old people and the young or by summarizing obscure texts describing the old times, while biologists and economists can deliver data with the potential to heal the environment or improve community development. But this is ordinary practice, not culture.

11. Evangelical Christians, now a majority in Nunavut and Nunavik, consider traditional religious beliefs as inspired by the devil. They deem that charismatic Christianity—which resorts to shamanistic techniques such as the public confession of sins and direct contact with spirits—best represents genuine Inuit morality.

Language and Identity

Inuit discourse about a loss of culture due to social change is also applied to language, which is considered contaminated by Inuktitut-English bilingualism. As mentioned above, from grades three or four on, English—or French in some Nunavik classes—becomes the only teaching medium. Young Inuit thus stop learning to read, write, and discuss in Inuktitut at a very early age. As a consequence, their bilingualism is often subtractive, the acquisition of a second language blocking any further development in the knowledge of their mother tongue. This explains why bilingual individuals often prefer to use English or a mixed language when discussing a number of topics (e.g., work, leisure, consumption, administration) related to life in a modern Inuit community. As they never learned how to express such topics in Inuktitut, or are not sure that their interlocutors would understand them, they prefer using English (Dorais and Sammons, 2002).

At the same time, most of these people consider their native tongue as inseparable from their deepest identity. As many word it, you cannot be a genuine Inuk if you do not know Inuktitut. In the eastern Canadian Arctic, this encourages parents to transmit their language to their children, even if they often start addressing the kids in English as soon as they reach grades three or four (ibid.). This strong ideological link between language and identity, coupled with a practical attitude toward actual language use, also explains why Inuktitut (or Inuktun in the western Canadian Arctic) is generally taught as a second language in those communities where it has stopped being transmitted in the home.

Literacy and Orality

In Canada, the language of the Inuit, especially Eastern Canadian Inuktitut, the most widely spoken group of dialects, was originally entirely oral, and this orality still prevails. This dominant orality has been retained, despite a written form of the language having emerged since the 19th century—thanks to two different graphic systems—and despite that Inuktitut has been taught in schools since the 1970s in Nunavik and eastern Nunavut. Teaching in the indigenous language never extended beyond grades two or three, however. This has resulted in a form of subtractive bilingualism whereby, because of compulsory schooling in an alien language, an average person's Inuktitut vocabulary remains limited.[12] This is accompanied by the fact that the preferred system for writing most Inuktitut dialects is syllabic rather than alphabetic, and that materials written in syllabics are sparse and often useless.[13] As a result, most people find it easier to read and write in their second

12. Subtractive bilingualism is understood here as a situation in which learning a second language provokes a more or less severe limitation

or diminution of the learner's skills in his or her mother tongue (Dorais, 2010, 201).

13. Besides technical translations, such as the telephone directory, which, as mentioned, is useless on a practical level, written syllabic materials mostly consist of religious literature and elementary school booklets. Only a handful of fiction works have been published in syllabics.

language. Access to global knowledge and communication thus mostly occurs in English.

In contrast, formal education has had positive effects. It has enabled the first generation of young Inuit schooled in English to acquire an excellent understanding of Canadian society and to redefine the role of their people within Canada. This has led to major social and political developments that entailed the establishment of various organizations and projects devoted to the defense and development of indigenous territory, culture, and language. Contemporary Inuit thus have no problems asserting their specific identity, which they perceive as being grounded in their own *piusiit* (ways of doing) and *qaujimajatuqait* (traditional knowledge). This might partly explain why spoken and basic written Inuktitut are still transmitted to children in Nunavik and eastern Nunavut. School education may increase the use of English, often preferred for discussing some topics, but its influence should not be exaggerated. Between 2007 and 2010, 50% of Nunavut students did not complete high school (Canadian government statistics), with a similar, if not higher, percentage in Nunavik. Young Inuit thus get a good part of their education from the Internet and other media rather than from school.

As suggested by the title of this essay, the language of the Inuit subsists as a mostly oral medium in a world dominated by the written word. It can be put into writing, but its default capacity is a spoken one, the usual writing medium being English—a situation that could be dubbed "written orality." Such a situation, where a community must use two separate languages for expressing itself, one mostly spoken and the other mostly written, has long been defined as "diglossia" (Ferguson, 1959). When the respective functions of each language are not contested, diglossia can endure for centuries, as in Switzerland where spoken Swiss German has always coexisted with written High German.

In contexts of internal colonialism, however, the alien language, imposed by dominant intruders, forms part of a whole system of territorial and cultural dispossession that can lead to the progressive demise of the dominated tongue. In North America, this has been the case with almost all indigenous languages.[14] Many—including some Inuit dialects—have now ceased being transmitted to children, while others usually subsist as a locally spoken medium unfit for communicating with the wider, English-speaking world. In Nunavik and eastern Nunavut, Inuit are experiencing this kind of diglossic situation, in which they must speak and write English in order to be economically and socially functional (Dorais, 2010, 249–259). It remains to be seen, however, if—or when—this might lead to the disappearance of Inuktitut. Despite the overwhelming presence of English, the language is still strong, both as a vehicle of orality and a marker of identity. Even if its presence at school and

14. One example is the Canadian First Nation of the Huron-Wendat, which lost its language and is now trying to revive it (see Dorais, 2014).

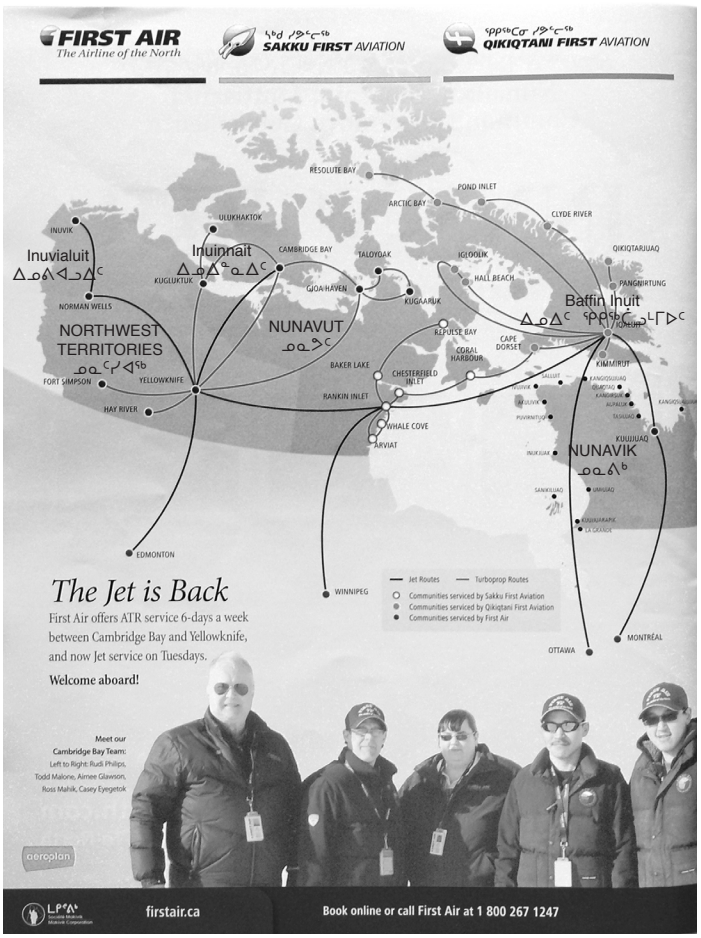
its use as a written medium remain minimal, it is now protected by law and included in various cultural development projects.

In the eastern Canadian Arctic, diglossia is paired with "digraphia". By and large, the alphabet is used for writing English, and syllabics for transcribing Inuktitut.[15] Some educators consider this as detrimental to the preservation of the latter language, and several activists, now backed by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, have proposed that in elementary school curricula, syllabics should be replaced for good by a revised standard alphabetical transcription of Inuktitut, thus putting an end to digraphia (Palluq Cloutier, 2014).

One wonders if this kind of proposition, put forward by younger Inuit educated in southern Canadian universities—and thus influenced by Western research—could be considered an attempt to pave the way for the advent of a formal Inuit culture emerging out of the informal one. Some activists hope that a unified alphabetical writing system would lead to the unification of the spoken language, a situation that might facilitate the dissemination amongst Inuit of books, films, and other cultural products in Inuktitut.[16]

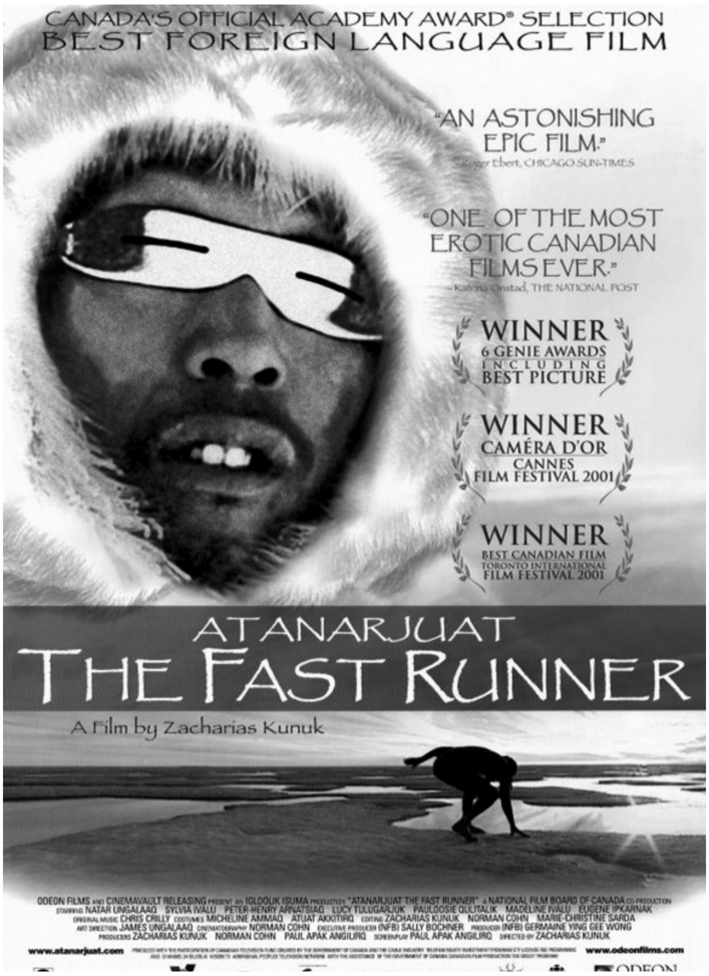
What would the effects of such an initiative be? Syllabics form an integral part of Inuit cultural identity as most speakers of Inuktitut define it. Would they accept losing it? Maybe not. In late 19th century Japan, during the Meiji era, a serious movement arose to replace the digraphic *kana* (syllabic) / *kanji* (ideographic) writing system with only *romaji* (Western alphabet), as a way of becoming more modern and able to compete with the Europeans.[17] This replacement did not occur. It was considered a denial of Japanese culture. Similarly, losing syllabics could be considered a denial of *Inuit piusingit*. It has been observed that in Canada, the areas where the Inuit language is still transmitted to children are precisely those where syllabics are in use (Dorais, 2010, 187). Would alphabetic unification allow Inuit to gain access to global culture in their mother tongue? Nothing is less sure. Given the practical impossibility of displacing English from all its current communicative functions, the best path to ensuring the preservation of the language of the Canadian Inuit may be stable diglossia and digraphia, in which Inuktitut orality—transcribed in syllabics when needed—coexists by necessity with spoken and written English.

15. Syllabics-internal digraphia also entails a distinction between older Inuit, who learned to write by themselves and do not use all standard symbols, and younger individuals who studied syllabics in school. Research on digraphia (see Sebba 2009) shows that the synchronic presence of two writing systems often has social significance: denoting one's mastery, or lack of mastery, of a socially valorized graphic corpus. Some examples include how the Japanese use both kanji Chinese ideograms and kata phonetic characters or how Inuit elders ignore some standard syllabic symbols. Digraphia can also serve as a marker of one's ethnic identity, as with the Taiwanese using traditional Chinese characters instead of mainland China's simplified characters or Inuktitut syllabics becoming a symbol of Canadian Inuit identity. At first glance, the sociolinguistic effects of digraphia do not seem to differ, whether they occur in the context of internal colonialism (the Inuit), postcolonialism (Taiwan), or a noncolonial situation (Japan). But of course, further research is needed.
16. It is interesting to note that, unbeknowst to many Inuit, several indigenous northern artists, such as songwriter Elisapi Isaac and film director Zach Kunuk, have been recognized in mainstream Canadian culture.
17. Dr. Valerie Henitiuk, personal communication, Jan 16, 2016.



Geographical representation of Inuit populated territories, with added regional names. Advertisement from the in-flight magazine of the airline First Air, July/August 2013 edition.

Façade of the Evangelical Church, Quaqtaq, 2013. The written information on the sign appears in both Inuktitut (syllabic script) and English (Latin script).



Poster of 2001 Canadian feature film by Inuit filmmaker Zach Kunuk, directed and acted in Inuktitut. Set in ancient times, the film retells a traditional tale from Igloolik, Nunavut.

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ᐯ	pai	ᐱ	pi	ᐳ	pu	ᐸ	pa	ᑉ	p
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ᑫ	kai	ᑭ	ki	ᑯ	ku	ᑲ	ka	ᒃ	k
ᒉ	gai	ᒋ	gi	ᒍ	gu	ᒐ	ga	ᒡ	g
ᒣ	mai	ᒥ	mi	ᒧ	mu	ᒪ	ma	ᒻ	m
ᓀ	nai	ᓂ	ni	ᓄ	nu	ᓇ	na	ᓐ	n
ᓭ	sai	ᓯ	si	ᓱ	su	ᓴ	sa	ᔅ	s
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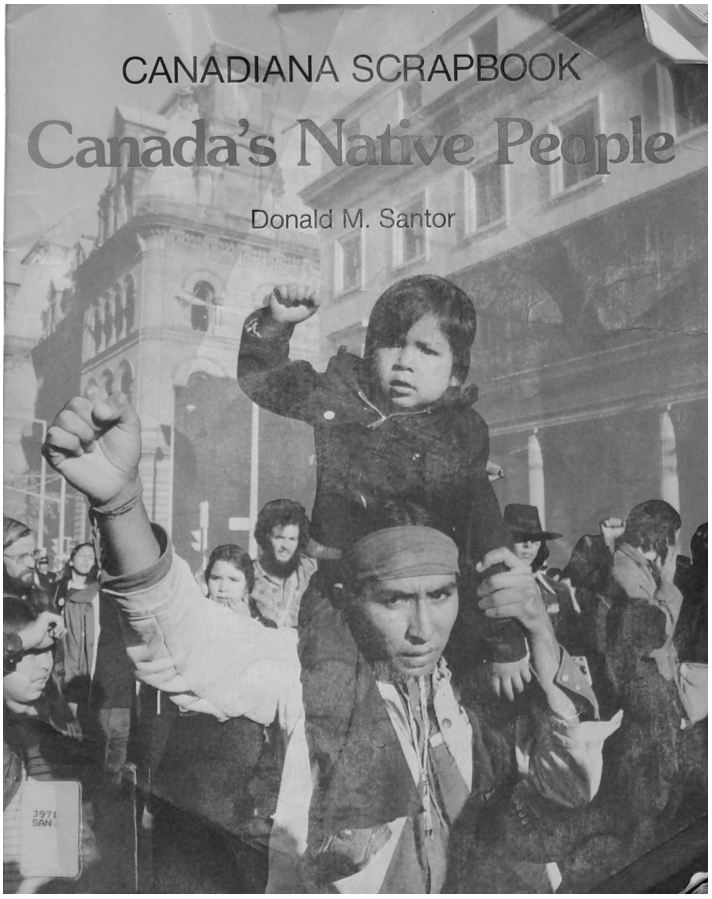
ᔦ	jai	ᔨ	ji	ᔪ	ju	ᔭ	ja	ᔾ	j
ᕓ	vai	ᕕ	vi	ᕗ	vu	ᕙ	va	ᕝ	v
ᕃ	rai	ᕆ	ri	ᕈ	ru	ᕋ	ra	ᕐ	r
ᙯ	qai	ᕿ	qi	ᖁ	qu	ᖃ	qa	ᖅ	q
ᙰ	ngai	ᖏ	ngi	ᖑ	ngu	ᖓ	nga	ᖕ	ng

ᐄ, ᐴ, ᑖ... ii, puu, taa...

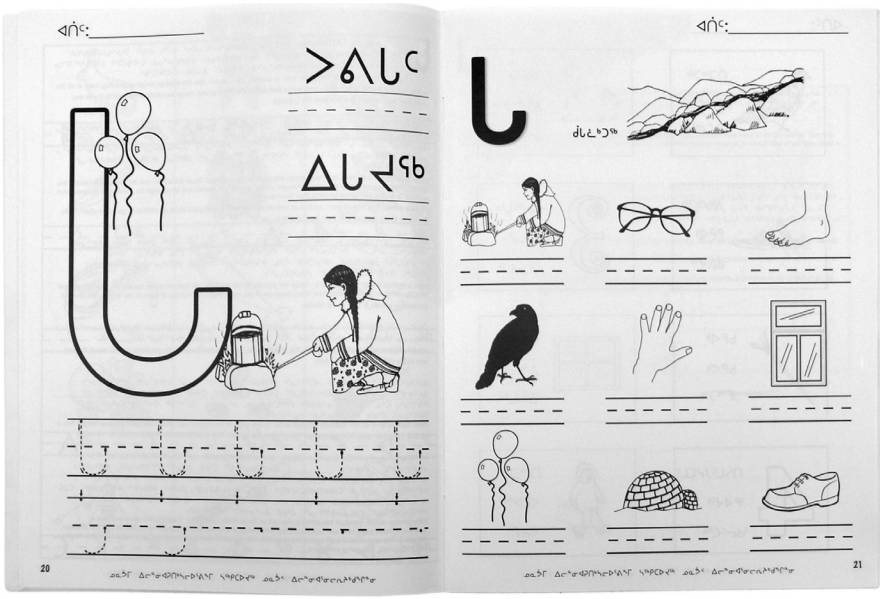
Fig. 1 The syllabic symbols (Nunavik standard)



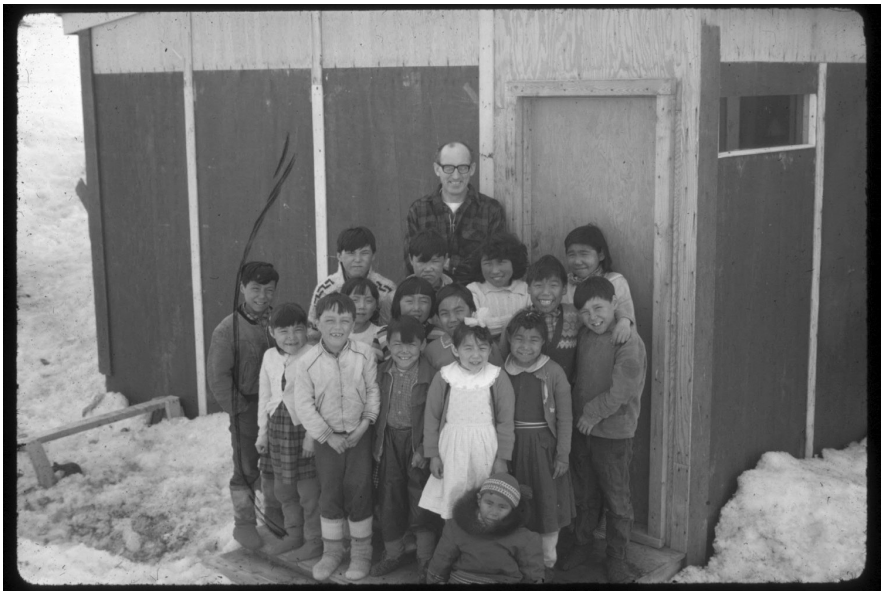
Cover of Canada's Native People, by Donald M. Santor, published in 1982, featuring a photograph taken during the indigenous people's demonstration on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Ontario, in 1974. Found in the Iqaluit Centennial Library, Youth Section, in 2013.

Screenshot from the app Inuit unikkausiliurusingit (How inuit create their stories), a 36-page animated story launched by the Ivujivik graphic designer Thomassie Mangiok, of Pirnoma Technology, in 2014. Both Android and iOS are supported formats. Used in spring 2016.

Note pinned to a wall in a restaurant, Kokubunji Commune, Greater Tokyo, Japan, 2013. It contains trigraphic content, including Chinese kanji ideograms and Hiragana kana syllabics as well as Latin script.

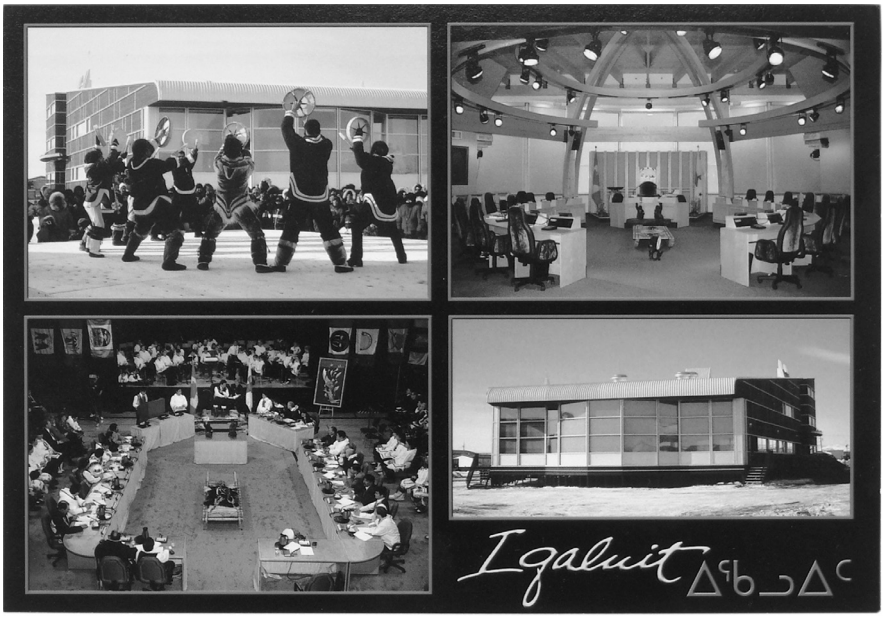


Spread from A PA TA KA. Exercises for Those who are Busy Learning to Read and Write for the First Time, a primer published by the Nunavut Department of Education in 2006.



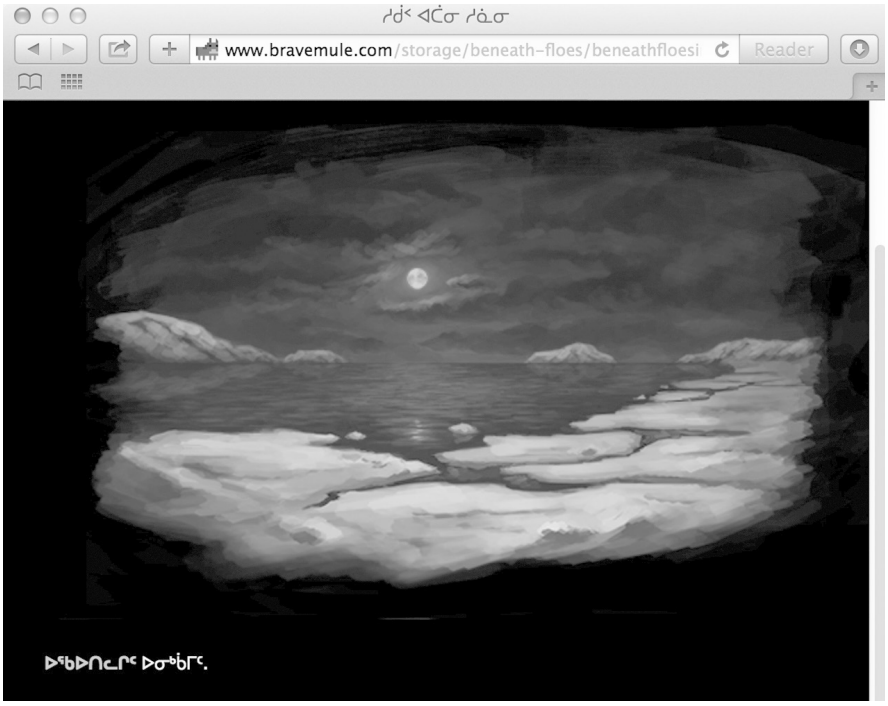
Teacher David Wiebe and his pupils in front of the Quaqtaq School, 1966. This one-room, one-teacher school opened in 1960 and taught an elementary English-only curriculum to the children of this small village.

The Nakasuk Elementary School in Iqaluit, 2013. This modern school offers bilingual primary and secondary classes to ca. 300 children and adolescents.

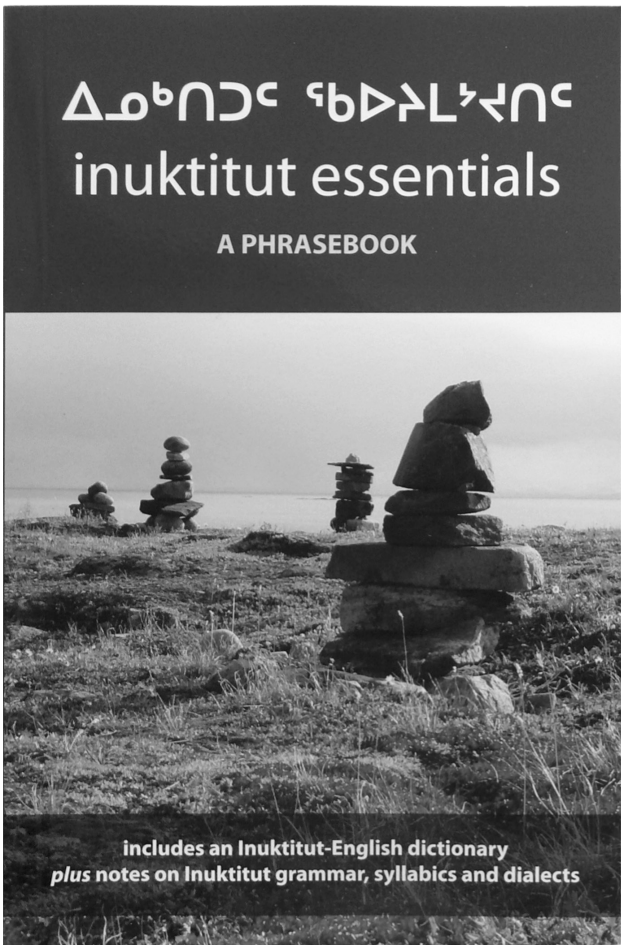


Postcard featuring an image of the Legislative Assembly, Iqaluit, Nunavut, including ceremonies from April 1999. Published by The Postcard Factory, Markham, Ontario. Purchased in Iqaluit summer, 2013.

Parade on Canada Day, 2013, Iqaluit, Nunavut, featuring customized vehicles by members of the local community.



Screenshot from Beneath Floes, a screen-based interactive storytelling format, released in 2015 by Eric Snow and Bravemule in collaboration with Pinnguaq Productions.



Cover of Inuktitut Essentials: A Phrasebook, edited by Chris Douglas, Leena Evic, Myna Ishulutak, Gavin Nesbitt, and Jeela Palluq, published in 2009 by Pirurvik Press in Iqaluit, Nunavut. The book is the first phrasebook in Inuktitut for English speakers.

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Air Inuit

Corporate identity for the Nunavik-based airline Air Inuit, which uses the branding typeface Air Inuit Sans developed by Jean-Baptiste Levée Typography, Paris, in collaboration with Studio FEED, Montreal, 2015.

Bilingual brand logo for The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum and art gallery of New Zealand, located in Wellington. Designed by the London-based advertisement firm Saatchi & Saatchi in 1995—97.

Digraphic sign of the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Urdu Primary School in Pune, Maharashtra, India, 2008, featuring both Devanagari and Perso-Arabic scripts.

Trigraphic signage on the campus of Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria, 2007.

Cover of Swiss German weekly magazine Schweizer Illustrierte from 23 October 2015, featuring a case of media diglossia: the printed use of Standard German and local dialect. The latter is generally oral and varies substantially between Swiss German regions.

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www.avataq.qc.ca

Government of Nunatsiavut (Labrador):
www.nunatsiavut.com

Government of Nunavut:
www.gov.nu.ca

Inuit Broadcasting Corporation:
www.inuitbroadcasting.ca

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (National Inuit Association):
www.itk.ca

Inuvialuit Regional Corporation:
www.irc.inuvialuit.com

Isuma TV:
www.isuma.tv

Kativik Regional Government (Nunavik):
www.krg.ca

Kativik School Board (Nunavik):
www.kativik.qc.ca

Makivik Corporation (Nunavik):
www.makivik.org

Nunatsiaq News (online Nunavut/Nunavik newspaper):
www.nunatsiaqonline.ca

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (Nunavut Land Claims Corporation):
www.tunngavik.com

Office of the Languages Commissioner (Nunavut):
www.langcom.nu.ca

Pirurvik Centre:
www.pirurvik.ca

Tusaalanga (Inuktitut learning website):
http://www.tusaalanga.ca/

It is a truism that globalization, with its totalizing reach, cannot be situated in any specific location. It is everywhere and nowhere, whereby the term itself connotes a place of the highest order of abstraction—the globe. One path leading beyond this empty abstraction is to designate the place of globalization as being "language." This may initially sound like foraying even deeper into the abstract. However, given the fact that language is a pragmatic instrument for differentiating and communicating meaning within and between cultures, the use of language may actually be one of the best available indicators for tracing and situating the processes of globalization. Something—that could be called a culture, or perhaps better a community—is constructed (and destructed) through the use of language as giving meaning to the practices of everyday life as well as to political, economic, and legal processes. It is a viable assertion that the pragmatic history of language, the history of the use of language, underlies the specificity of the relationship between place and a culture/community and its ever-present surroundings: the—global—world.

When the idea of creating an editorial framework focused on the uses of language began to take shape in Stockholm in 2015, we contacted sociolinguist Louis-Jacques Dorais from Quebec City (or, more precisely: Ville de Québec). Dorais, whom we had met two years before, is an authority on Inuit contemporary and traditional culture and Inuktitut. His book *The Language of the Inuit: Syntax, Semantics and Society in the Arctic* from 2010 reflects the knowledge he has garnered from over forty-five years of research and interaction with the Inuit community and many of its individual members. We invited him to share his observations and reflections on the particular linguistic dynamics of Inuktitut with a non-Canadian critical readership based in the realm of arts and culture, a readership that probably has little knowledge about local community building and struggles within the postcolonial reality of the Arctic.

The essay *A Written Orality* was finalized in 2016, and our editorial aim was to make it publicly available in parallel with several other publications—which have been completed since then—related to our overarching editorial framework, as a means of promoting a multiplicity of interlocutors. In the meantime, the presence of works by Inuit and other First Nations contemporary artists and activists in international art biennials as well as in documenta 14 in 2017, have hopefully raised more awareness about the history, perspectives, and activities of communities which are taking control of their future.

In *A Written Orality*, the history of the Inuit languages and Inuktitut spoken in the northern east Arctic Canada is rendered in a clear and factual manner. Its complexity is articulated through descriptions of recurrent interactions between Inuit culture and non-Inuit culture, a process which implies the transformation of an oral culture into a reality in which Inuktitut is codified in writing. This is not the place to recapitulate the content of the essay. However, one aspect deserves to be emphasized: the particular relationship between writing and orality. Dorais states: "The language of the Inuit can be put into writing, but its default capacity is a spoken one, the usual writing medium being English... Such a situation, where a community must use two separate languages for expressing itself, one mostly spoken and the other mostly written, has long been defined as 'diglossia'." In a postcolonial context such as this, the diglossic situation implies a powerful setting in which the largely spoken language might be threatened, along with the forms of culture which it constitutes and shapes.

As Dorais mentions, many contemporary Inuit describe themselves as leading a non-Inuit life, estranged from the ways of doing which consist of "the informal pre-contact or early-contact way of life of the Inuit, including hunting techniques, traditional knowledge, social relations, values, and beliefs, in addition to Inuktitut as it is spoken by elders and syllabics where they are in use." The discrepancy at heart of the diglossic situation is thus cast in a harsh light: The use of these two languages points towards different socioeconomic realities which embody opposite and exclusive positions in history. However, venturing to take a speculative position in looking at this contradictory condition more closely, one could plausibly argue that translations between Inuktitut and English (or French) and their different ways of doing are informally taking place all the time, and that uses of one language are incorporated into the other on several levels. Inuit hip-hop lyrics and performances as well as other Inuit popular music are evidence that this is happening and that it happens in a way far surpassing mere appropriation. Here, the relation between place and community is accentuated through the oral performance of Inuktitut via a non-Inuit musical form, and often involving a mixture of English (or French), as a productive relation to the contemporary world.

Comparable processes are taking place in many other regions across the globe where diglossia is predominant, although under different cultural and politically institutionalized conditions. To offer some examples from a European context, there is Switzerland with its four officially recognized languages and multiple spoken dialects; and Spain, which has been moving from diglossia towards a regionally official bilingual condition for about four decades due to the advocacy of Basque and Catalan speakers; and Sweden, which is confronted with the rising voice of the Sami population, who take issue with the ongoing internal colonization, even though their language is officially protected as minority language. Furthermore, with the usage of English as the dominant medium for professional communication, another facet of diglossia is becoming internationally normalized. Thus, as debates take place about the right to speak in representational terms and self-determination, dominant narratives and terminologies are unpacked and undergo a process of change, even if slow. This is what language use is all about. Identifying similarities and overlaps between contexts offers an alternative decipherment of what present-day globality can mean. The appendix hints in this direction, presenting examples of localized digraphic uses of language as another possible signifier for such processes as unfolding today.

Image Credits

Cover image: illustration based on visual information from the NASA Earth Observatory, dated March 24, 2016

Louis-Jacques Dorais

A Written Orality:
The Canadian Inuit
and Their Language

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