



Revitalization and Fieldwork that Complements Communities: A Case Study with Aleut

Madeline K Snigaroff – The University of Chicago

UCSD Linguistic Fieldwork Working Group

22 May 2023



Overview

1. The situation for Aleut
2. A language revitalization program to fit that situation
3. Linguistics work to fit that program



Anchorage

- Pop.: 2,300 Aleuts; a small minority of the population (<1%)
- Both dialects
- Growing community (Aleut Corp, APIA)



Atka Island

- Pop.: ~60, mostly Aleut ($\geq 80\%$)
- Western dialect
- In decline; school closure in 2022



St. Paul Island

- Pop.: 413, mostly Aleut ($\geq 80\%$)
- Eastern dialect
- Threatened; active school

Timeline of Aleut contact and endangerment

(Jones 1976, Kirtland 1981)

Russian period (1760s-1867)

- 75-90% population decline over 50 years (disease + Russian atrocities)
- Most dialects go extinct
- Relocation
- Most Aleuts bilingual in Russian and Aleut; monolingual Aleuts still exist
- Fairly stable linguistic situation by the end of the period

American period (1867-present)

- WWII internment
 - Japanese invasion of Attu; Attuans captured
 - 850 Aleuts forcibly evacuated to Southeastern Alaska
 - Boarding school system
 - forced removal from parents and home
 - discouraged from speaking Aleut and cultural practices
 - abuse
- half the village dies in camp
remaining Attuans relocated to Atka; Attu I. permanently closed
- old and young die of disease, malnourishment
- loss of cultural knowledge
- psychological trauma, social problems, breakdown of village communities
- generation forgets Aleut or stops speaking it to children

Resulting language situation

- 2018: Fewer than 100 speakers of both dialects combined; all older than 65
- Two surviving dialects (“Eastern” and “Western”; “St. Paul” and “Atkan”; “Qawalangix̄” and “Niiĝuχ̄”)
- Not used daily; no immersion space
- Large degree of idiolectical variation and proficiency
- Limited time (elders aging)

Resulting attitudes

- Elders (speakers): insecure, rusty, or incomplete → prescriptive reliance on documentation sources
- Youth (potential learners): no experience learning language, view Aleut as extremely difficult
- Community: goal of continuing the language, not just preserving it
 - Very few elders are instructors; those who are are not pedagogically trained
 - Lack of time, space, and resources (subsistence, other daily life activities, college)
 - Community breakdown (lack of education, limited interaction between youth and elders, lack of youth leadership/confidence, general socioeconomic problems)



Where Are Your Keys (WAYK)

- A language revitalization organization that primarily works with indigenous languages in the Northwest
- Goal: To create stable, long-term language revitalization programs that can function without outsider help

How WAYK works to solve these problems

- Youth trained to do monolingual elicitation with groups of elders
 - Makes teaching process easier for elders
 - No formal grammar or pedagogical knowledge required
 - No comparison with English
 - Makes learning process easier for youth
 - No knowledge of traditional grammar required
 - Given a framework to control the language
- Youth trained to “teach off” their knowledge to one another
 - Makes much of few speakers
 - Makes much of little time
- ...in a way that promotes community-building
 - Re-connecting elders and creating a space for conversational Aleut
 - Teaching leadership skills to youth
 - Connecting the old and the young

Language “hunting”



*I know “which do you want”
and I know “book”...*

Learner: Which book do
want?

Speaker: I want the **blue**
book.



-gi-

- 3) List 1 List 2 List 3 List 4
- alugiiusal
alugiiisakux
alugiiisakax
- alugiiisagil
alugiiisagiku
alugiiisagilaka
- alugiiilu
karandaasi
- suxtal

An "A" is written in pen on one piece of paper, and in pencil on another piece of paper.

A: Wan tunux alqux suxtal alugiiisagil?

B: Wan tunux alugiiilu suxtal alugiiisagiku.
Tqimmsy

A: Wan tunux alugiiilu suxtal atugiiisagil ::?

B: Aang, tunux alugiiilu suxtal alugiiisagi ku.
Tqimmsn

A: Wan tunux karandaasi suxtal alugiiisagil ::?

B: Nangaa, wan tunux karandaasi suxtal alugiiisagilaka. Wan tunux alugiiilu suxtal alugiiisagiku.

-gi-

Paradigm 2:
to be written
is written
is not written

Set-up

Person A:

What **was** this letter **written** with?

Person B:

This letter **was written** with a pen.

Person A:

Was this letter **written** with a pen?

Person B:

Yes, this letter **was written** with a pen.

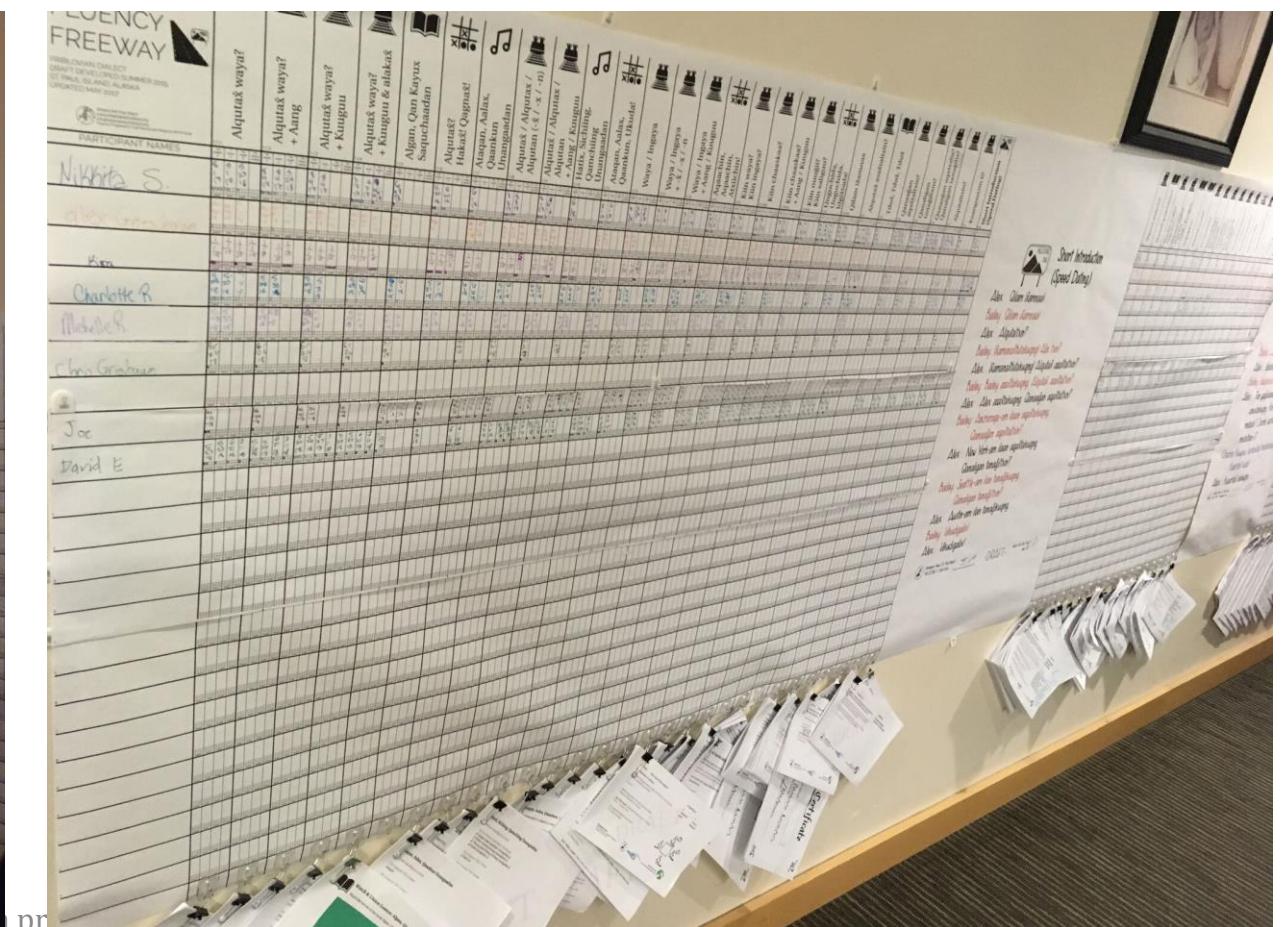
Person A:

Was this letter **written** with a pencil?

Person B:

No, this letter **was not written** with a pencil. This letter **was written** with a pen.

The Fluency Freeway



Solves many of the barriers to revitalization

Monolingual elicitation solves...

- Problems with speaker perceptions of Aleut
- Lack of space for immersion to occur

Simplicity of “set-ups” solves...

- Problems with learner perceptions of Aleut as difficult/impossible to learn
- Lack of resources/time for formal (classroom) language instruction

Making learners the drivers of the process solves...

- Problems with lack of instructors
- The need to create new teachers of Aleut while it is still alive

All in all, creates a program that requires community-building to function: elder-to-elder, elder-to-youth, and youth-to-youth interaction brings together the Aleut community.

Linguistic activities in the WAYK context

- Past: Creating a pedagogical resource for WAYK
 - Present: Pursuing documentation
 - Future: Conducting elicitation for formal work

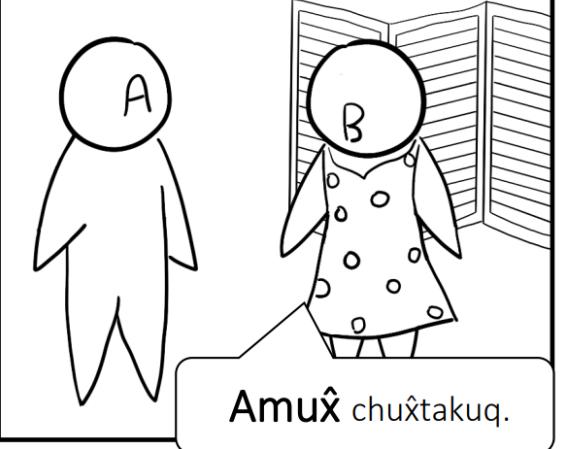
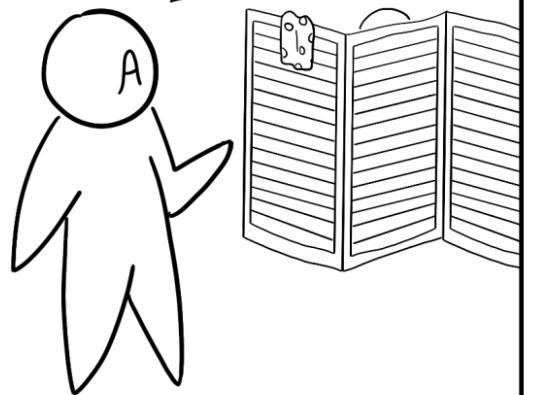


Creating a pedagogical resource for WAYK

Diasporic population? → Pedagogical reference to take home

Revitalization method → *The Niiĝuĝim Tunuu Picture Dictionary*
banning translation?

Alquŷ chuŷtaŷt?



paltuŷ



furaaskiŷ



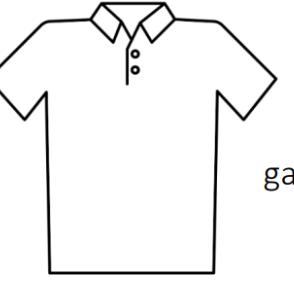
uchxis



chiŷtaliisaŷ



rubaaxaŷ



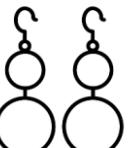
qatxuyaŷ



sviitiraŷ



udgitiŷ

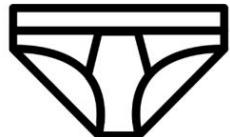


tutusim
suĝdanaasingis

Alquŷ chuŷtaŷt? (cont'd)



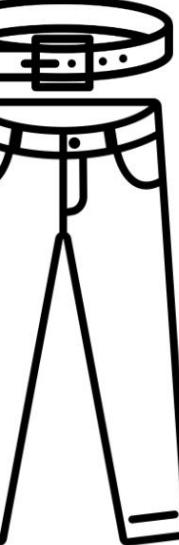
biziiraŷ



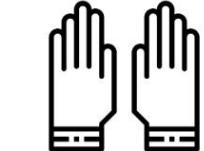
pustaanikas



saŷ



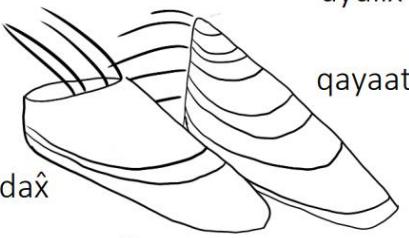
chachxuŷ



lukamachis



bruukiŷ



qayaatxuŷ



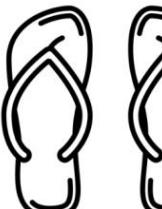
chuulkis



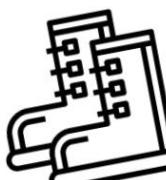
sapuugis



bruudnas

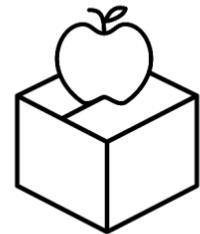


tuuflis

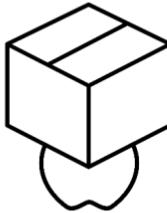




Yaabluka^â qanang al?
 (= Qata yaabluka^â?)



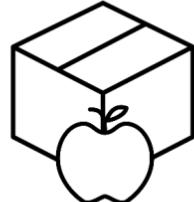
Yaabluka^â yaasikam
kugan aku^â.



Yaabluka^â yaasikam
sitxan aku^â.



Yaabluka^â yaasikam
nagan aku^â.



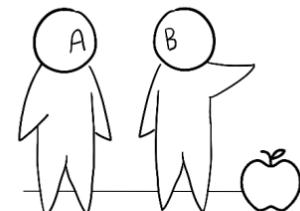
kadan



agalan



chidan



Yaabluka^â
wang aku^â.



Yaabluka^â
hiing aku^â.



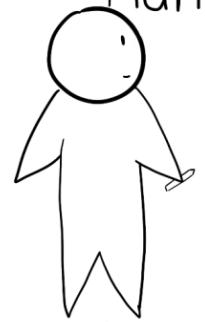
Yaabluka^â
hamang aku^â.

-ĝuta-

Aang

"Aang" alugiisakuq.

Aang



Aang Aang



"Aang" alugiisaagutakuq.

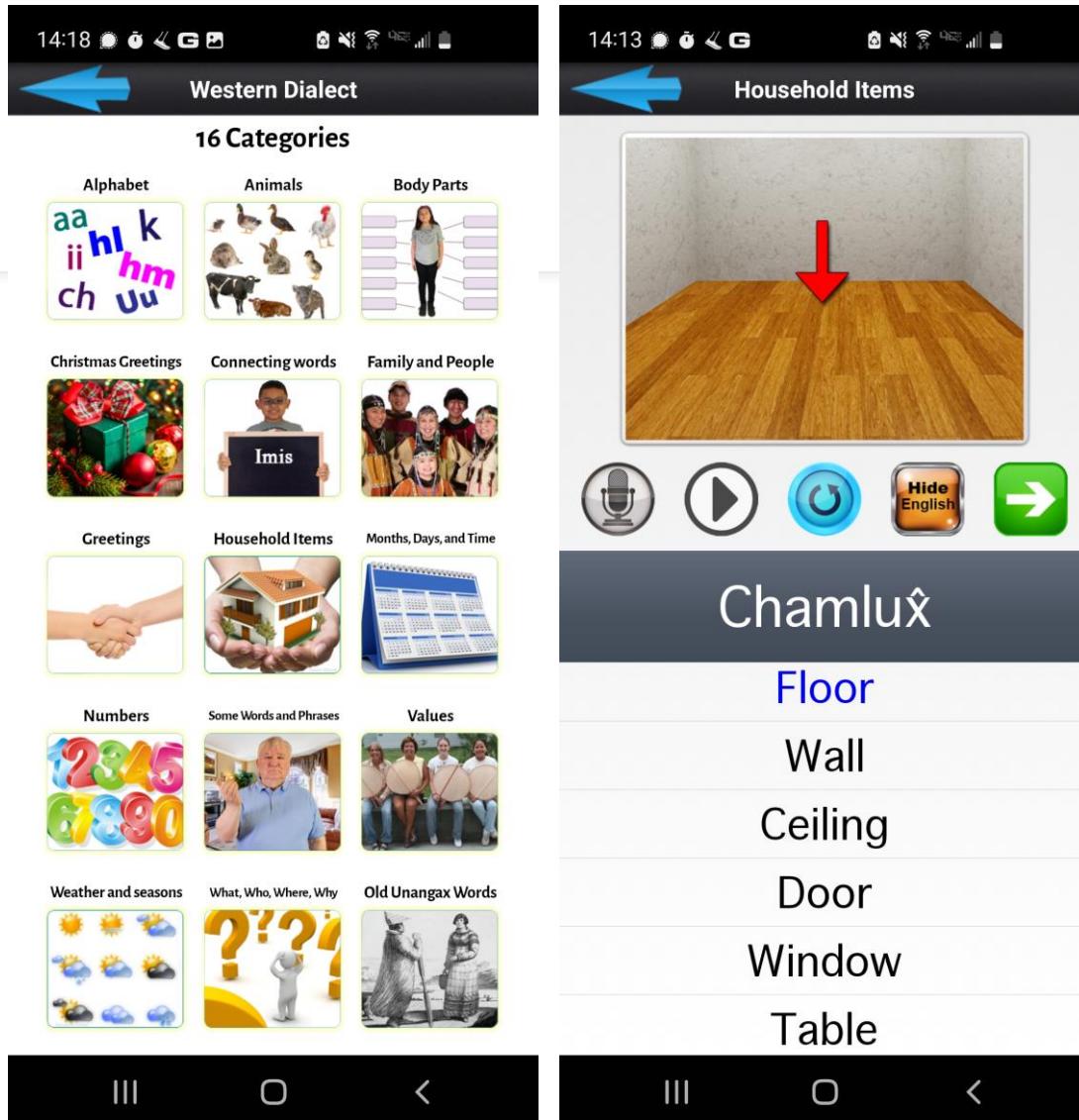


Hmitikuq.



Hmitiiĝutakuq.

The wrong way:



Pursuing documentation

- Bergsland's grammar and dictionary, plus a few (difficult to read) learner grammars (Berge & Dirks 2008, Berge 2016)
- Bergsland & Dirks (1990) transcription of Jochelson's recordings of Aleut narratives (early 1900s)
- Lacking:
 - Modern language
 - Documentation of discourse
- Grant? New project?

Pursuing documentation

- WAYK recordings
 - Culture of recording (consent, routine, collection, organization)
 - Recordings of elicitations, weekly “Conversation Hour”, and spur-of-the-moment language hunts
- Current project (thanks to my undergrad RAs Lars Nordquist, Gabriel Correa Ramos Alves, Sarah Kim, and Reagan Sparks!)
 - Isolating instances of speaker-to-speaker naturalistic conversation
 - Annotation in ELAN
 - Potential outcomes: metalinguistic commentary, idiolectical variation and language change, discourse analysis, naturalistic data for other formal analysis

Conducting formal elicitation

- That is: elicitation for purely theoretic purposes
- Previous elicitations: traditional “field methods”-style
 - Potential for English interference
 - Many speakers already not confident in their linguistic competence; those who are can suffer from prescriptivism
 - Uproots speaker training in WAYK methods/monolingual elicitation

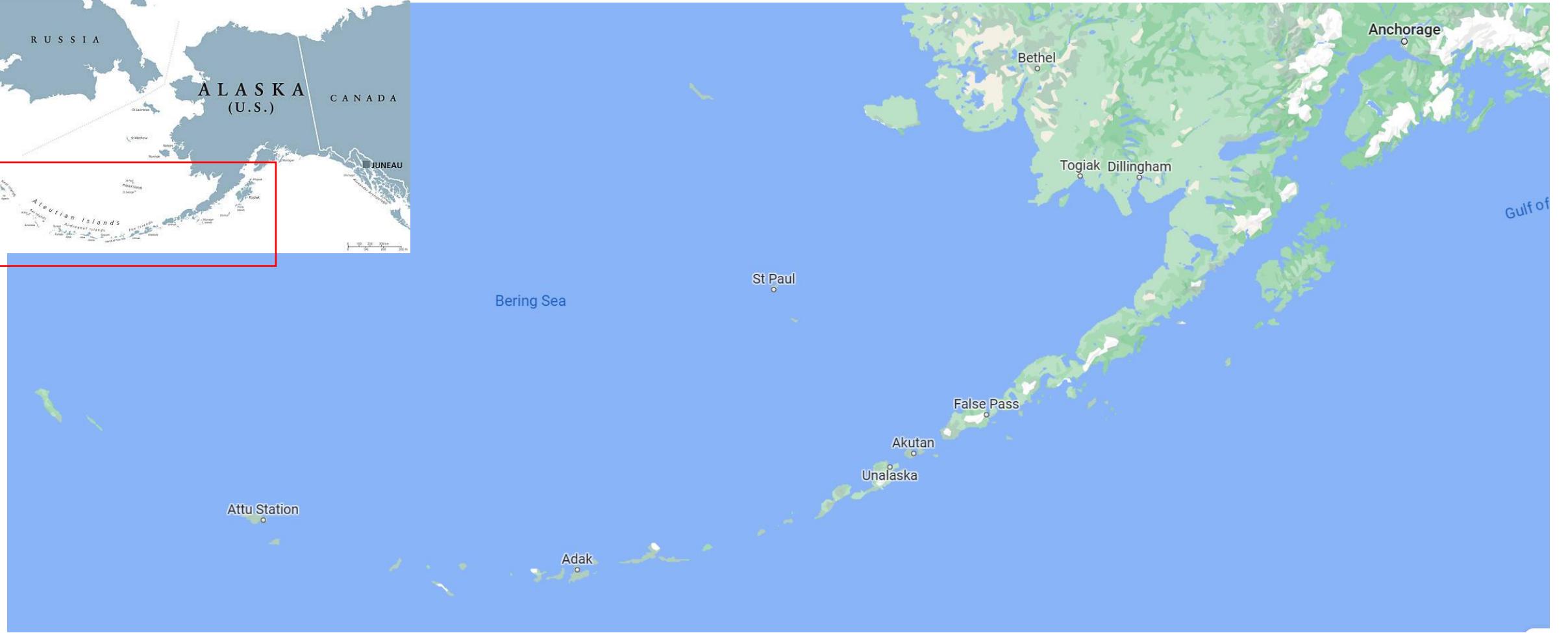
Potential for WAYK-friendly elicitation? For syntax? For *semantics*?



Thank you!

References

- Berge, A. (2016).** *The Way We Talk in the Pribilofs [Pribilof An̄gāgan Tunungin]*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Berge, A. & M. Dirks. (2008).** *How the Atkans talk [Niīgūgis Mataliin Tunūtazangis]: A conversational grammar*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Bergsland, K. (1994).** *Aleut Dictionary [Unangam Tunudgusii]*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Bergsland, K. (1997).** *Aleut Grammar [Unangam Tunuganaan Achixaasīx̄]*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center.
- Bergsland, K. & M. L. Dirks. (Eds.). (1990).** *Aleut Tales and Narratives [Unangam Ungiikangin kayux Tunusangin]*. Collected by W. Jochelson. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Drabek, A. S. (2012).** *Qik'rtarmiut Alutiit'stun Niugneret Kraasiirkii/Color Kodiak Alutiiq Words*. Kodiak, AK: Native Village of Afognak.
- Jones, D. M. (1976).** *Aleuts in Transition*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Kirtland, J. C. (1981).** *The Relocation and Internment of the Aleuts During World War II: A Case in Law and Equity for Compensation*. Anchorage, AK: Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association.
- Krashen, S. (1985).** *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Oxford: Pergamon.



Previous language efforts

(Bergsland 1994, 1997)



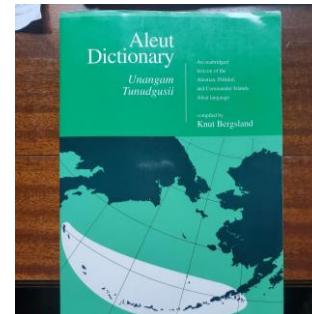
1800s: first documentation, development of a written language, Aleut education



1910s-20s: ethnographer Waldemar Jochelson records narratives and does some documentation work



1970s: Bilingual Education Department of Alaska develops elementary Aleut readers



1990s: Knut Bergsland publishes the *Aleut Dictionary* (1994) and *Aleut Grammar* (1997)



2000s: Some language classes, educational materials produced

Barriers to revitalization

- Perception of Aleut
 - The way elders view their Aleut: rusty, insecure, incomplete or inferior to English
 - The way youth view Aleut: exceptionally difficult
- Pedagogical problems
 - No space for immersion to occur
 - Lack of resources/time for formal (classroom) language instruction
 - Very few elders who are also instructors
- Rapidly decreasing speaker population (little time)
- Diasporic population
- Two dialects

Before a “hunt”

- Learners team up and figure out what piece of language they want to acquire: $i+1$ (Krashen 1985)
- Construction of a “set-up”: context for $i+1$

After a “hunt”

- Set-up and question-and-answer dialogue transcribed
- This transcription becomes a language lesson that can be taught to any new learner