

Aulapkainahuarniq Inuit Uqauhiinnik Nunavunmi

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Preserving Inuit Dialects in Nunavut

RESEARCH REPORT



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## RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared for the

Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut  
Iqaluit, Nunavut

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Chapter One: Research on the Inuit Language Varieties</b> .....  | <b>4</b>  |
| 1.1. History of the Inuit Dialects .....  | 4         |
| 1.2. Division of the Inuit Language into Dialects .....   | 4         |
| 1.3. Vitality of the Dialects .....   | 6         |
| 1.4. Descriptions of the Dialects .....   | 8         |
| 1.4.1. Inuktitut .....  | 8         |
| 1.4.2. Inuktun .....  | 8         |
| 1.5. Material Available in Dialects .....   | 9         |
| 1.6. Language Development and Diffusion .....   | 11        |
| <b>Chapter Two: Theories of Endangered Languages and Dialects</b> .....                                   | <b>12</b> |
| 2.1. Drawing the Line between Languages and Dialects .....  | 12        |
| 2.2. Why Dialects are Valued .....  | 14        |
| 2.3. Why Dialects Are Threatened .....  | 17        |
| 2.4. Language/Dialect Contact and Change .....  | 19        |
| 2.5. Language Standardization .....   | 22        |
| 2.6. Language/Dialect Preservation .....  | 26        |
| <b>Chapter Three: Case Studies of Language and Dialect Preservation</b> .....                             | <b>29</b> |
| 3.1. Studies of Endangered Dialects of Otherwise Thriving Languages .....                                 | 29        |
| 3.1.1. German (Germany) – The Death of East German Dialects .....   | 29        |
| 3.1.2. English (United States) – Preservation of the Ocracoke Brogue .....                                | 31        |
| 3.2. Studies of Endangered Languages that Take into Account Dialects .....                                | 32        |
| 3.2.1. Catalan (Spain) – A Success Story with Some Dialectal Challenges ..                                | 32        |
| 3.2.2. Aranese (Spain) – An “Official” Variety of Occitan in Spain .....                                  | 35        |
| 3.2.3. Basque (Spain) – Standardizing to Survive .....  | 36        |
| 3.2.4. Mayan (Guatemala) – Pursuing Unity .....   | 36        |
| 3.2.5. Innu (Canada) – Can Dialect Preservation Hinder Preservation of the<br>Language Itself? .....      | 40        |
| 3.2.6. Breton (France) – Maintaining One’s “Real” Language .....  | 43        |
| 3.2.7. Maori (New Zealand) – Dialect Preservation a Side-Effect of Grassroots<br>Language Promotion ..... | 44        |
| 3.3. Studies of Endangered Dialects of Endangered Languages .....   | 46        |
| 3.3.1. Scots Gaelic (Scotland) – Death of a Dialect of an Endangered<br>Language .....                    | 46        |
| 3.3.2. Irish (Ireland) – A Success Story of Promoted Dialects of a Promoted<br>Language .....             | 48        |
| <b>Chapter Four: Preserving Inuit Dialects – Applications to Nunavut</b> .....                            | <b>52</b> |

|       |  |           |
|-------|--|-----------|
| 4.1   | Setting Goals: Conservation, Knowledge, Use.....                                     | 52        |
| 4.2   | Immediate Priorities: Community-Based Research and Inuit Researchers.....            | 52        |
| 4.3   | Policy Formulation .....   | 53        |
| 4.3.1 | Mission Statement about Language .....   | 53        |
| 4.3.2 | Philosophy and Value of the Inuit Language .....                                     | 54        |
| 4.3.3 | Official Varieties of the Inuit Language .....                                       | 54        |
| 4.3.4 | Role and Authority of Bodies .....   | 54        |
| 4.3.5 | Prioritized Goals .....  | 55        |
| 4.4   | Strategy and Implementation .....  | 56        |
| 4.4.1 | Human Resources .....  | 56        |
| 4.4.2 | Strategies of Conservation: Material Resources .....                                 | 57        |
| 4.4.3 | Strategies of Knowledge: Transmission .....  | 58        |
| 4.4.4 | Strategies for Use .....   | 59        |
| 4.4.5 | Dialect Awareness/Prestige .....   | 59        |
|       | <b>Conclusion .....</b>  | <b>61</b> |
|       | <b>References .....</b>  | <b>62</b> |
|       | <b>Appendix A: Considerations Regarding Standardization of the Inuit Language ..</b> | <b>71</b> |

## INTRODUCTION

But what about dialects? Which do we believe or expect: that dialect death is an unspectacular, endemic, everyday occurrence, taking place pervasively and beneath the threshold of awareness; or, contrariwise, that there can be no such thing as dialect death by definition? Or does it matter? It is probably no accident that none of the papers assembled here deals with such a situation however remotely...(Hoenigswald 1989:348)

In 1989, Henry Hoenigswald, in his commentary on a collection of articles describing language death around the world, put his finger on a lack of academic concern for dialect death – even its absence as a concept. Although documentation of language death has expanded greatly over the past fifteen years, no one, it seems, has taken up his challenge. In 1995, the American Dialect Society’s annual meeting focussed on dialect death, showing evidence of interest in the issue, but discussion was primarily of English and European languages/dialects (Wolfram 1997). In endangered language research, dialect preservation is still not mentioned in most studies. The Languages Commissioner of Nunavut’s call for a study into dialects of endangered languages, and means to preserve them, reflects a novel regard for dialects in language promotion activities.<sup>1</sup>

Despite little mention of them in endangered language research, all languages have dialects. Some languages ‘just’ have dialects, in that there is no one variety of the language that would be considered a “best” example of the language. Other languages have a standardized form of the language (which is really just a ‘special’ dialect), alongside a multitude of other dialects that speakers use for diverse functions. The case of dialects of the Inuit language<sup>2</sup> is a concern for the Nunavut Government for a few reasons. First, increasing numbers of Inuit speakers are transferring to English as a primary language of use. The unique dialects thus are threatened due to the potential loss of the Inuit language altogether (except in Greenland). Secondly, many Inuit are socially, economically, and geographically mobile in a way that they previously were not. These levels of mobility can lead to the emergence of a new dialect, and the loss of previously distinctive features of other dialects. Thirdly, the Nunavut Government has a political

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<sup>1</sup> My own interest in the question of dialect promotion comes from a more general concern with the promotion of Inuktitut in Nunavut, especially in promotion that reflects the desires of the population. My slant is largely academic, as my understanding of such issues comes primarily from books, from researchers’ reports of language shift in diverse contexts, and their theorising on the subject. My prior research into language promotion in Nunavut, though, took a personal approach, investigating speakers’ feelings, perceptions, attitudes and experiences with regard to the Inuit language and English in their communities. I sought to understand how their desires could provide an impetus for the preservation of the Inuit language in Nunavut. My bias that speakers’ language attitudes should be a starting point for preservation activities, the main point in my thesis, has coloured this study.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, “the Inuit language” is used as a common term to designate all of the Inuit language varieties, which I have otherwise tried to refer to using the names of the respective dialects.

mandate to promote the Inuit language. But such promotion begs the question, “which language”?

The Inuit language is still widely known and spoken in Nunavut. In comparison with other aboriginal languages in Canada, it is in an enviable position of vitality. However, like speakers of other aboriginal languages in Canada, Inuit are facing pressures to adopt English. Into the 1960s, Inuit children who attended residential schools were forced to assimilate to English, and were taught to believe that their native language was ‘wrong’. Even without forced assimilation, though, intense contact with Qallunaat and their language through shared neighbourhoods, intermarriage, education, employment, and mass media, among others, puts pressure on the aboriginal language as speakers have an increased need and/or desire for English. As a minority language within the Canadian context, the Inuit language has, in the past, been marginalized, as have its speakers. The creation of Nunavut was intended, in part, to address these past imbalances and to shape a context in which Inuit ways of being, including their language, could be promoted. The Nunavut Government is now pursuing these goals.

The Nunavut Government is not alone in this initiative. Across Canada, aboriginal groups are reclaiming their languages, making efforts to regain them where they have been lost, and to preserve, protect and promote them where they have been maintained. Knowledge of the ancestral language has been put forth as an inherent right. Like other aboriginal languages, the Inuit language is valued as part of Inuit identity, culture, and tradition. Moreover, shift away from the ancestral language concerns Inuit because it entails the loss of a link to the past, a link between generations, and a whole way of communicating. The language represents belonging and participation in a broader culture that the Inuit cherish and want to promote.

Attempts at strengthening aboriginal languages – and their communities more generally – around Canada have included public awareness campaigns to increase pride in the language, language workshops, developing teaching materials and curricula, and offering translation services. Elders are frequently called on to play a key role as teachers and advisors, as well as people with whom to use the language. Groups have also reached outside their communities, in efforts to secure federal recognition of their languages and funding for initiatives. Such efforts were already well underway in Inuit communities, even prior to Nunavut.

Nunavut’s creation provided specific new opportunities and challenges for the Inuit language, and for the dialects spoken in the Nunavut settlement area. Whereas the Inuit language had been one among nine official languages in the Northwest Territories, with little real governmental obligation to use the language in official contexts, Nunavut made Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun the first official language of Nunavut, alongside English and French, with concrete obligations and measures for ensuring its use in governmental and societal functions. Notably, the Bathurst Mandate (1999) states that “Inuktitut, in all its forms” will be the working language of the Nunavut government by 2020, and that teaching and learning of the language “in all its forms” will be enhanced in the schools. While prior to these obligations, development of the Inuit language was already taking

place, the impetus to establish it in official domains has given rise to debates about *which* variety of the language to use. (These debates are in fact not new; international and interregional meetings of Inuit have instigated prior debates on the subject, including a long-standing proposition from the Inuit Circumpolar Conference to explore the establishment of a standard, international variety of the Inuit language, cf. MacLean 1979).

With Nunavut, though, the need to settle the question has become more urgent, as educational planners are pressed to decide which Inuit language variety(ies) will be used in curriculum materials; translation of government documents also compels the choice of which variety to be used, and so on. In brief, the rise of Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun to full status as a true official language of Nunavut creates the need (or perception of a need) to choose or create a standard form of the language, at least for the territory, to fill these functions.

Common wisdom in language planning theory holds that any language that gains prestige and access to the “higher” societal domains enjoys better chances of survival. Standardization itself is widely held as an index of language vitality (cf. Fishman 1997, among others). Yet planners in Nunavut are now faced with a complex interplay of aspirations and practical realities which call into question the best way to go about implementing the Inuit language in official domains (presumably using an adopted standard, or standards). How can they go about using (and thus promoting) a standard variety of *the language*, while preserving its prized dialectal diversity?

This report addresses the question of the preservation of distinct dialects in Nunavut. The first chapter describes what is known about the Inuit language based on a review of academic literature on the subject. The second chapter discusses theories on the preservation of endangered languages and dialects, providing a conceptual basis for the following chapters. The third chapter presents case studies of the preservation of endangered languages and dialects, and suggests how the theories and case studies may be relevant to the linguistic situation in Nunavut. The fourth and final chapter summarizes the preceding information, making recommendations for the preservation of distinct dialects in Nunavut. Throughout the chapters, sections contain bullet-points which highlight key principles of dialect preservation and suggest areas of action for the consideration of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut.

## CHAPTER ONE

### RESEARCH ON THE INUIT LANGUAGE VARIETIES

The Inuit language, in all its forms, has been well-studied and documented over the past thirty years. An excellent summary of such work can be found in Louis-Jacques Dorais' *Inuit Uqausiqqatigiit/Inuit Language and Dialects* (1990a) and *La Parole Inuit: Langue, Culture et Société dans l'Arctique Nord-Américain* (1996). This chapter gives a brief introduction into the language and its dialects, and the work that has been done to date on these language varieties. As the intended audience of this report is very familiar with the status of the Inuit language, the discussion is condensed, presented for the purposes of establishing a context for further discussion. Readers interested in further details may consult the references cited for further details.

#### 1.1. History of the Inuit Dialects

The Inuit language is one of seven in the Eskaleut language family, which also includes Aleut and the five Yupik languages: Central Alaskan Yupik, Alutiiq, Central Siberian Yupik, Naukanski and Sireniksi. It is the only Eskaleut language spoken in Canada; its usage spans from Alaska, through the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and Labrador, and across to Greenland. Through this great geographical expanse (8000 kilometres across), the Inuit language is divided into sixteen dialects, which can be grouped into four main dialect groups: Alaskan Inupiaq, Western Canadian Inuktun, Eastern Canadian Inuktitut, and Greenlandic Kalaallisut.

The origins of dialectal variation in the Inuit language can be traced back to migrations of the Thule population (ancestors of the modern Inuit) from Alaska approximately 1000 years ago. A first wave of migration travelled through the Mackenzie Delta and what is now the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut, up through Victoria, Devon, and Ellesmere Islands, finally reaching Greenland and eventually travelling south down the eastern and western coasts. Some of the Thule travelled south from the northernmost Canadian islands, into the Igloodik area, before branching off to move down into either the Aivilik or Kivalliq regions, or down the west coast of Baffin Island, some eventually travelling into Arctic Quebec (Nunavik). Another group went down the east coast of Baffin Island, some of whom eventually crossed the Hudson Strait to Labrador. Still another group would have traveled from the Mackenzie delta area inland, directly into the Kivalliq region (for a map of these migrations, see Dorais 1996; see also Fortescue 1998).

#### 1.2. Division of the Inuit Language into Dialects

The modern-day dialects of the Inuit language show traces of these historical movements, as speakers of Western Canadian Inuktun and Greenlandic Kalaallisut varieties, for instance, show certain commonalities in their speech patterns that are not shared by Eastern Canadian Inuktitut speakers. Differences between varieties can also be partly explained by the length of time that certain groups have been separated. Linguists generally agree that despite differences between the dialects (primarily in pronunciation

and vocabulary), they remain mutually comprehensible, if the speakers are willing to put forth an effort to understand each other:

True enough, each Eskimo-Aleut language, or Inuit dialect, possesses its own peculiar characteristics, that make it different from all other related speech forms. But these are rather superficial, and are mainly concerned with phonology. With a minimum of good will and intuition, the speakers of any Inuit dialect can understand most of what is said – or written – in any other Inuit speech form. (Dorais 1990a:180)

The dialect groups, subgroups, dialects, and subdialects of Canadian Inuit are listed in Table 1, below (adapted from Dorais 1990a and 1996). The dialects spoken in Nunavut, of immediate relevance to this report, are Inuinnaqtun and Natsilingmiutut from the Inuktun group, and Kivalliq, Aivilik, North Baffin and South Baffin from the Inuktitut group. The Kivalliq dialect is classified with the Inuktitut dialects, partly because its speakers perceive their dialect as closer to the Eastern Inuktitut forms than to Western Inuktun and partly because of its linguistic affinities to these dialects; however, it shares many features with the western dialects as well, making it a central dialect between the Inuktun and Inuktitut varieties (Dorais 1990a). Otherwise, the dialectal groupings listed in Table One reflect the characteristics of the languages as observed by linguists. Speakers of the dialects often have different perceptions as to where to draw the line between dialects. In fact, most Inuit communities have their own distinctive, recognizable speech forms, to the point that individuals may consider that they speak a “dialect” specific to their home community.

The diversity of the dialects in Nunavut is underscored by the existence of two separate, standardized writing systems, both recognized by the Nunavut government. Inuinnaqtun is written using roman orthography, whereas the Inuktitut dialects and Natsilingmiutut use syllabics. This diversity reflects separate development of the writing systems during early missionary contact (for a history of the development of Inuit writing systems, see Dorais 1996 and Harper 2000). Natsilingmiut are in an interesting position as their dialect is part of the Inuktun group, and attaches them to Inuinnaqtun speakers (as does the political jurisdiction of most Natsilingmiut communities, found in the Kitikmeot region). On the other hand, its writing system, syllabics, attaches them to the Inuktitut dialects of the Kivalliq and Baffin regions. This distinction may lead to some confusion when people speak about the Inuit language in Nunavut as “Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun”.

**Table One: Canadian Inuit Dialects**

| Language | Dialect Group            | Subgroup                   | Dialect         | Subdialect     |                |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Inuit    | Western Canadian Inuktun | Siglitun                   | Siglitun        |                |                |
|          |                          | Eastern Inuktun            | Inuinnaqtun     | Kangiryuaq     |                |
|          |                          |                            |                 | Kugluktuk      |                |
|          |                          |                            |                 | Bathurst Inlet |                |
|          |                          |                            |                 | Cambridge Bay  |                |
|          |                          |                            | Natsilingmiutut | Natsilik       |                |
|          |                          |                            | Arviligjuaq     |                |                |
|          |                          | Utkuhikhalik               |                 |                |                |
|          |                          | Eastern Canadian Inuktitut | Keewatin        | Kivalliq       | Qairnirmiut    |
|          |                          |                            |                 |                | Hauniqtuurmiut |
|          | Paallirmiut              |                            |                 |                |                |
|          | Ahiarmiut                |                            |                 |                |                |
|          | Aivilik                  |                            |                 | Southampton    |                |
|          | Rankin Inlet             |                            |                 |                |                |
|          | Baffin                   |                            | North Baffin    | Iglulingmiut   |                |
|          |                          |                            |                 | Tununirmiut    |                |
|          |                          |                            | South Baffin    | Southeast      |                |
|          |                          |                            |                 | Southwest      |                |
|          | Quebec-Labrador          | Arctic Quebec              | Itivimiut       |                |                |
|          |                          |                            | Tarramiut       |                |                |
| Labrador |                          | North Labrador             |                 |                |                |
|          |                          | Rigolet                    |                 |                |                |

(adapted from Dorais 1996)

### 1.3. Vitality of the Dialects

The Inuit language, overall, is strong, though the vitality of individual dialects varies. Greenland and Alaska provide contrasting, extreme examples. Almost all Greenlandic Inuit learned a variety of the Inuit language as their mother tongue and use this language regularly in most day-to-day activities. In Alaska, very few Inuit under the age of forty still speak an Inuit dialect fluently. Such extensive language shift is also seen in Labrador Inuit communities and among the Inuvialuit of the Mackenzie delta. Within Nunavut, knowledge of an Inuit language variety remains strong, with the exception of a couple of communities. In 1996, (based on earlier data) Dorais estimated that 71% of Inuit in the Kitikmeot region, 95% of Inuit in the Kivalliq region, and 96% of Inuit in the Baffin region spoke an Inuit dialect as their mother tongue. While knowledge of the language may still be strong, daily use of it in the home seems to be decreasing, as seen in data reported more recently by Statistics Canada (2001). Table Two shows the percentage of Inuit fifteen years and older in each Nunavut community who responded that they speak an Aboriginal language “very well or relatively well” and that they use it “all of the time or most of the time at home” in the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey. (Dialect distribution taken from Dorais 1996.)

**Table Two: Vitality of Dialects in Nunavut Communities**

| Dialect Group | Dialect                   | Community                     | Number of Inuit adults (15+yrs) | Speaks the Inuit language “very well or relatively well” (%) | Uses the Inuit language at home “all or most of the time” (%) |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Inuktun       | Inuinnaqtun               | Kugluktuk                     | 700                             | 61   | 27  |
|               |                           | Cambridge Bay                 | 650                             | 68   | 35  |
|               |                           | Taloyoak                      | 390                             | 89   | 34  |
|               | Natsilingmiutut           | Gjoa Haven                    | 540                             | 83   | 38  |
|               |                           | Taloyoak                      | 390                             | 89   | 34  |
|               |                           | Kugaaruk                      | 300                             | 87   | 43  |
| Inuktitut     | Natsilingmiutut/ Aivilik  | Repulse Bay                   | 320                             | 100  | 97  |
|               |                           | Aivilik/Kivalliq              | Chesterfield Inlet              | 190  | 89  |
|               | Aivilik                   | Coral Harbour (also Nunavik)  | 370                             | 97   | 89  |
|               | Kivalliq                  | Baker Lake                    | 850                             | 90   | 51  |
|               | Aivilik/Kivalliq          | Rankin Inlet                  | 990                             | 92   | 63  |
|               | Kivalliq/ Natsilingmiutut | Whale Cove                    | 170                             | 94   | 81  |
|               | Kivalliq                  | Arviat                        | 990                             | 99   | 96  |
|               | North Baffin              | Hall Beach                    | 330                             | 100  | 97  |
|               |                           | Igloolik                      | 670                             | 100  | 96  |
|               |                           | Resolute (also Nunavik)       | -                               | -  | -   |
|               |                           | Grise Fiord (also Nunavik)    | -                               | -  | -   |
|               |                           | Nanisivik (also South Baffin) | -                               | -  | -   |
|               |                           | Arctic Bay                    | 380                             | 100  | 92  |
|               |                           | Pond Inlet                    | 650                             | 98   | 92  |
|               |                           | Clyde River                   | 430                             | 100  | 91  |
|               | South Baffin              | Qikiqtarjuaq                  | 320                             | 97   | 94  |
|               |                           | Pangnirtung                   | 740                             | 97   | 83  |
|               |                           | Iqaluit (also North Baffin)   | 1880                            | 91   | 63  |
|               |                           | Kimmitut                      | 250                             | 96   | 88  |
|               |                           | Cape Dorset                   | 640                             | 98   | 95  |
|               | Nunavik                   | Sanikiluaq                    | 370                             | 92   | 8   |

(Statistics Canada 2001)

## 1.4. Descriptions of Dialects

### 1.4.1. Inuktitut

All of the dialects in Nunavut have now undergone some form of linguistic analysis and description. In the 1970s, Dorais conducted comparative linguistic analysis of the Inuit dialects, and produced descriptions of Southeast Baffin (1975a), Cape Dorset (1975b), Aivilik (1976a) and Igloodik (North Baffin [1978]) dialects, as well as comparative work (cf. Dorais 1990a). The North Baffin dialect has also been described in Harper (1974), Mallon (1996), Ootoova (2000) and Spalding (2003). Dorais reported in 1990 that the Kivalliq dialect “has never been systematically studied” (1990a:170), although elements of it can be found in Thibert (1970), Owingajak (1986) and Dorais (1988). The Aivilik dialect has been described more extensively, including Sammons’ (1985) linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis of Rankin Inlet speech and Spalding’s grammar (1969) and dictionaries (1982, 1998), as well as earlier missionary work (Turquetil 1928). Combined, these materials include word lists, grammars, course manuals, Inuktitut-English dictionaries, and monolingual Inuktitut dictionaries for the Inuktitut dialects.

### 1.4.2. Inuktun

Of the two Western Inuktun dialects in Nunavut, Inuinnaqtun has been most extensively studied. Lowe (2001) produced a dictionary of Holman Island Inuinnaqtun, *Kangiryuarmit Uqauhingita Numiktittidjutingit Basic Kangiryuarmit Eskimo Dictionary* (originally produced for the Committee for Original Peoples Entitlement in 1983) and a basic grammar of the language. Some main points from this work are summarized in Dorais and Lowe (1982). Gwen Ohokak, Margo Kadlun and Betty Harnum (2002) collaborated on an adapted version of Lowe’s dictionary to reflect local Inuinnaqtun variations, produced by the Kitikmeot Heritage Society to facilitate local teaching of the language. Lessons in Inuinnaqtun were developed by Harnum, McGrath and Kadlun (1982). Earlier, vocabulary from Aklavik and Cambridge Bay was collected by Father Métayer (1953), and his manuscripts are accessible at the Alaska Native Language Centre.

In 1990, Dorais identified the Natsilingmiutut dialect as the only Western Inuktun dialect without a published description. Hitch (1994a:1) reiterated, in his *Natsilik Dictionary Pilot Project General Report*, “The Natsilik dialect is probably the least documented of all the dialects in the NWT. There are no grammar or dictionary materials of any type available. ...it can be argued that the need is greatest for Natsilingmiutut.” Collis had collected 8400 entries in word list, and these were checked by Attima Hadlari and Nick Amautinaur for accuracy, but they found many problems ranging from pronunciation, to the definition, to simply unrecognizable words. In the *Technical Report*, Hitch (1994b) goes on to outline some of the technical problems in describing the Natsilingmiutut dialect. His recommendations to the Northwest Territories Government included:

- *Obtain commitment for a dictionary project from senior ECE management in order to ensure coordination of the direct ECE units that may be involved;*
- *Open a dialogue between Natsilik language workers in the schools and the Language Bureau's Inuktitut linguists about the dictionary;*
- *Earmark some ECE funding annually towards a Natsilik dictionary project (from the Language Bureau, College and Continuing Education (as a literacy project), School Curriculum Services, Cultural Affairs, and the Kitikmeot Divisional Board of Education);*
- *Technical problems relating to phonology and orthography need to be resolved before further work can be undertaken;*
- *Suggests long-term funding, scientific input, working with fluent speakers, consulting elders, and the school board in order to document the dialect.*

Also in the 1990s, Omura (1997) produced a preliminary Arviligjuaq dictionary (a copy of the research report is available at the Nunavut Research Institute library, although the dictionary does not appear to have been published). Briggs has recorded elders in Gjoa Haven and Baker Lake and has a database of 28,000 words, including words collected in the 1960s, which she intends to publish in an Utkuhikhalingmiut dictionary (see her 1998 Annual Report in the Nunavut Research Institute library).

In short, descriptive work has been done on all of the Inuit dialects in Nunavut; some of it published in more accessible form than others. Limits to accessibility include (a) some of the work is unpublished, and difficult to obtain; (b) most of the work was produced in English, and some of it in French. (To my knowledge, none of the grammatical descriptions have been translated into Inuktitut.); (c) although some of the materials were deliberately produced with Inuit learners in mind, others are produced for an academic audience and are, in their style, inaccessible to non-linguists.

In order to maximise the potential of linguistic descriptions conducted to date, the Nunavut government may want to consider:

- *Develop an archive of linguistic materials, accessible in Nunavut (on-line and/or in a physical location);*
- *Train Inuit linguists to work with the material that has already been collected;*
- *Support publication of unpublished material;*
- *If speakers desire it, produce community-specific/sub-dialect descriptions to enhance work on each dialect overall.*

### **1.5. Material Available in Dialects**

Oral and written records of the various dialects exist to facilitate further study, if desired. Oral history projects, such as the Igloolik and Kitikmeot endeavours, have tape recorded numerous elders, and have obtained their permission to make these materials available to researchers for the ends of future language preservation activities. Similar endeavours across Nunavut may allow for the conservation of dialect forms, at least on tape and on paper, along with the stories that are recorded.

In fact, audio samples of Inuit speech from most communities have been collected, although not necessarily for the purpose of dialect conservation. Researchers in any number of fields have audio or video recorded local speech in the communities where they conducted their research. Reading through research reports from the past five years, it is evident that Inuit speech has recently been recorded in at least Iqaluit, Cape Dorset, Qikiqtarjuaq, Igloolik, Clyde River, Pond Inlet, Resolute Bay, Repulse Bay, Coral Harbour, Rankin Inlet, Chesterfield Inlet, Baker Lake, Arviat, Gjoa Haven, Pelly Bay, Taloyoak, Kugluktuk, Cambridge Bay, Bathurst Inlet, Bay Chimo, and Sanikiluaq, and probably for other communities as well. These interviews, for the most part, remain in the possession of the researchers. In other words, the speech forms of specific communities have been recorded, although the ethics and logistics of accessing such materials could be problematic. These materials would provide a valuable resource for further studying the intricacies of the dialects, if they were accessible.

Copies of ethnographic interviews conducted with Inuit across Nunavut for *Nuliajuk* and *Diet of Souls* (Triad Film Productions) are held at Saint Mary's University. The intention of this archive, like the oral history projects, is to render these materials accessible to future Inuit researcher, although the ethics and logistics are a concern here, too.

The Alaska Native Language Center is undertaking a project to digitize and, where appropriate, make available all speech samples or oral history that were collected in Native languages in Alaska. A similar project may be of interest to preserve and diffuse information about the Inuit dialects in Nunavut. In order to facilitate such uses of material collected in the future, the Nunavut Research Institute may want to consider having researchers include a clause in their participant consent forms to allow for interviews to be contributed to an archive of Inuit dialects and used in language preservation activities in cases where the interview data they contain is not sensitive.

The oral history collections are the most promising resources for further linguistic analysis of dialects. Some written archives also exist, which may support such research. The archives at the Alaska Native Language Centre hold publications of written Inuktitut back to the 1970s, including archived Nunatsiaq News, books of legends and traditional practices in Inuktitut and English. Nunavut Arctic College's Inuit Studies program has published the stories of Inuit elders in bilingual format, also making their speech accessible in written form.

- *Conservation and research on Inuit dialects may be enhanced by the development of an archive of recorded Inuit speech;*
- *Development of a policy and protocol for rendering speech samples collected for non-linguistic research available for local dialect preservation activities would enhance the database of recorded dialects.*

## 1.6. Language Development and Diffusion

As shown above, materials in the dialects are not lacking. Increasingly, Inuit have linguistic resources and other materials produced in the Inuit language, which contribute to diffusing new words and preserving old ones. New technologies are being explored to develop and increase access to linguistic resources. The Asuilaak/Living Dictionary/Dictionnaire Vivant (Nunavut. Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth 2000) is a multilingual, multidialectal virtual initiative in Nunavut to preserve, document and diffuse terminology. A great deal of effort has been invested to facilitate use of syllabics on personal computers (the work of Multilingual E-Data Solutions is particularly notable in this regard). Although such developments have encountered some problems, most recent computers are able to easily read and display Inuktitut fonts. Such developments create new opportunities for the creation and diffusion of linguistic resources via the Internet. While the loss of old vocabulary is a concern, development of new vocabulary and modernization of the language is an exciting initiative being pursued through language workshops held by the Government of Nunavut. The diffusion of such terms, as they are developed, will contribute to the vitality of the Inuit language overall.

- *Develop web sites in and about the Inuit dialects to increase knowledge and awareness and provide an opportunity for use.*

This chapter has given a very brief introduction to Inuit dialects in Nunavut. The information presented here, far from being exhaustive, shows that the dialects have been studied, in terms of their origin and their relationship to each other, as well as in terms of their phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic properties. Efforts are required in the area of making prior research accessible and useful to the communities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORIES OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

While linguistic research clearly identifies a certain number of dialects of the Inuit language, and puts forth their mutual intelligibility, speakers often resist such classification, and say that they cannot, in fact, understand other dialects. Such contrasts between objective linguistic reality and subjective experiences of language are common. Research into language preservation has shown time and time again that speakers' perceptions and attitudes about all aspects of their language and community will dictate the success of any language planning initiative. This chapter attempts to present some theoretical constructs that linguists use to understand language and its use in society, as they relate to the preservation of endangered dialects. I focus on the conceptualization of "language" versus "dialect, reasons why dialects are specifically valued, as well as why they become endangered. I also discuss processes of dialect contact and change, and approaches to language standardization, concluding with some comments about how dialects, in general, may be preserved.

#### 2.1. Drawing the Line between Languages and Dialects

All languages have some degree of variation, often on multiple levels. This paper focuses on regional varieties of languages, or dialects, but one could also look at social varieties (or sociolects: speech forms characteristics of specific age groups, genders, or socioeconomic status) or contextual varieties (or registers: variation in language use depending on the specific speech situation). Speech varieties may have different, characteristic pronunciations, vocabulary, grammar, expressions; they may even have different social "rules" or "norms" for interacting and interpreting speech (cf. Wolfram, Adger and Christian 1999). Some features are shared across dialects, some are used more frequently in one area, but understood everywhere, while others are geographically limited. While dialects are recognized for sharing certain distinctive features, speech is not homogenous even among speakers of a single dialect. While recognizing variation, similarities cannot be ignored: speakers of divergent dialects will have a great many more commonalities in their speech than differences. Based on these shared forms, speakers can use their languages flexibly, using more or less distinctive dialect features depending on who they are talking to (cf. Jorgensen and Kristensen 1995).

While researchers can generally identify large dialect areas based on shared characteristics, it is harder to nail down a specific number of dialects for any given language, and to establish where the boundaries between dialects objectively lie. Generally speaking, a language is made up of all mutually intelligible speech varieties; and varieties that are not mutually intelligible will be considered separate languages. However, the line between language and dialect is determined as much by social, cultural and political factors as it is by purely linguistic factors. In fact, because dialects exist on a continuum, with neighbouring varieties most easily intercomprehensible and more distant varieties increasingly less so, it becomes difficult even to objectively establish where a "language" begins and ends. For example, among the Inuit, speakers of South Baffin

dialects have relatively little difficulty understanding a North Baffin speaker, although both would have trouble understanding an Inupiaq or Greenlandic speaker. Linguists have decided, though, to classify all Inuit speech varieties from Alaska to Greenland as a single language, partly due to linguistic similarities and intercomprehensibility of neighbouring dialects, but probably also due to the recognition of Inuit as a unified ethnic group. In other cases, lines have been drawn to recognize separate languages, even where immediately contiguous dialects are mutually intelligible. For example, the division of Danish and Swedish into separate languages at the countries' border reflects political as much as linguistic considerations: "The tradition of calling Danish and Swedish "languages," but Jutland Danish and Sealand Danish "geographically correlated varieties of the same language," rests on sociolinguistic rather than linguistic factors" (Jorgensen and Kristensen 1995:153). More extreme examples of recognizing mutually intelligible speech forms as separate languages are not uncommon (see, for example, research on Serbian/Croatian or Hindi/Urdu).

The argument of historical relationship between speech forms is of limited use in dividing languages and dialects. Languages are constantly changing, and many of today's "languages" were once intercomprehensible dialects (English and German, for example, in their earliest forms were dialects of a single language, as were Spanish and French). Nonetheless, historical connections are also applied to argue the unification of dialects into a single language.

The bottom line for Inuit dialects (languages?) is that dialect/language classifications are determined by social, cultural, political, as well as linguistic factors. The debate over whether Inuinaqtun and Inuktitut should be discussed as dialects or as languages is understandable. While linguistic research on the mutual intelligibility of the dialects (languages?) may comfort speakers in their positions, it is unlikely to uncover any overriding linguistic reason to go one way or the other. The choice will really be up to the speech communities: "neither linguistic distance nor intercommunicability are as relevant to RLS [reversing language shift]-efforts as the inside ('emic') view of what constitutes the 'natural [or feasible] language boundaries' to be defended" (Fishman 1997:183). In this way, research into Inuit speakers' *perceptions* of the other dialects/languages may be as pertinent as linguistic analysis of the speech forms.<sup>3</sup>

Mutual intelligibility between dialects is, as well, partially determined by social and attitudinal factors. The status of individuals or regions is often transferred to their speech patterns. One's feelings about the people who use a particular speech form (e.g. considering them of higher or lower socioeconomic status, or more or less like themselves) may affect their ability or willingness to understand that group's dialect. The Iroquois First Nations, for instance, although they speak distinct languages, have historically tended to self-assign to "Iroquoian" as an over-arching category (cf. Dorian

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<sup>3</sup> Muhlhauser (1990, 1996) also develops this idea of how the dialect/language debate is somewhat arbitrary, why it is linguistically difficult to determine boundaries and why objective determination may be of little value anyway.

1989, Hickerson, Turner and Hickerson 1952, Hickerson 2000). In this way, research on language attitudes may also illuminate the ‘Inuktitut-Inuinnaqtun: languages or dialects’ debate.

Finally, discussion of dialect is only relevant to speakers if they are aware of having distinctive speech forms. Puckett (2003:541) shows that if speakers do not have dialectal awareness, the problem of describing and preserving dialects is irrelevant, or at best, of interest only to academics: “Consequently, *Appalachian English* has almost no value, however constituted, among most regional residents because it doesn’t exist in their lexicon.” Nunavut speakers seem to identify with their community’s speech patterns, and to have general awareness that other Inuit speak differently. It is unclear whether their intuitive grouping of dialects corresponds to linguists’ ideas of the language or not. Anecdotally, in my research with 18 to 25 year-old Inuit in Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet and Iqaluit, speakers had difficulty responding to the question, “which dialect do you speak?” If they responded, it was often with the name of their home community. In any case, Inuit’s level of dialectal awareness will affect their priorities, initiatives and outcomes in dialectal preservation, and research into their underlying representations of dialect lines may be helpful in identifying how relevant dialects are to the average Inuit speaker.

*Principles:*

- *Distinctions between languages and dialects are determined by social, cultural and political factors, as well as linguistic factors;*
- *Identification of speech varieties as dialects or separate languages in Nunavut, as well as levels of dialectal awareness will affect priorities, initiatives and outcomes in dialectal preservation.*

*Action:*

- *Research on speakers’ perceptions of the other dialects/languages, underlying representations of dialect lines, and language attitudes, as well as linguistic analysis of Inuit speech forms may help address controversy regarding Inuinnaqtun’s status as a language or a dialect in Nunavut.*

## **2.2. Why Dialects are Valued**

Regardless of whether “which dialect” they speak is significant to Inuit or not, the fact that the Languages Commissioner’s Office is conducting a study on the preservation of distinct dialects in Nunavut is evidence of their importance in the territory. There are various reasons why specific dialects of a language may be valued. These are addressed in this section as the reason for valuing the dialects may also play a role in shaping priorities in their preservation.

At a most basic level, dialects are valued as tools for communication. A speaker can most comfortably and effectively communicate with another who shares common speech characteristics, and norms for using those forms. An emerging focus on linguistic rights would suggest that speakers have a fundamental right to be able to communicate in their native speech form.

On another level, dialects are seen as links to the past. Conservative dialects in particular remind people of their ancestors and where they have come from. Standard Icelandic, for example, is based on the dialect of lower class, rural speakers; its prestige is based on its conservatism, its 'faithfulness to the national spirit' and lack of outside influences. Knowledge of conservative dialects also allows speakers to access and understand recorded stories or oral traditions. When dialects are lost, the full meaning of such stories is lost. As an anecdote to this, I once observed an elder telling the story of Kiviuiq (part of Inuit oral tradition). A few translators were present, and although they spoke the same dialect and were skilled at their profession, they were occasionally stumped when the elder used words that had fallen out of the dialect's vocabulary. The fullness of the story was lost due to lexical attrition. Campbell and Munzell (1989) report a similar phenomenon for (fluent) speakers of Tzeltal dialects, who are unable to translate traditional prayers now, because that form of ritual language has been lost.

While dialects may provide practical and symbolic links to the past, they are also dynamic. If they remain vital, they change along with society, adapting to their speakers' needs, developing vocabulary for new domains, "languages are flexible tools of change, not static media of transmission" (Pennycook 2000:64). It is natural that as certain cultural practices fall out of use, so will the words to describe them. Hinton (2001:9) warns, "People who wish to revitalize their language because of a desire to return to traditional cultural values must be aware that language revitalization does not automatically bring people back to these traditional modes of thought." Her comments about language revitalization are equally valid for dialect preservation. A dialect's connection to the past gives one reason for valuing it and a context in which to use it, but its use will not keep speakers in the past nor bring back cultural practices that have been lost. Furthermore, emphasis on the past forms can lead to the denigration of more innovative, modern forms (characteristic of youth), whose use is essential to the continued vitality of the language.<sup>4</sup>

Dialects, as shared speech forms, also serve an identity function, which is probably the strongest factor in valuing dialects. As is also true for languages, mutual use of particular dialects allows speakers to show that they share similarities, and that they belong to the same group. When dialect and cultural groups overlap, speakers may use the dialect to show solidarity and to resist assimilation. Use of a particular dialect (or language) among outsiders may also be for purposes of showing one's separateness, for identity or political recognition.

This observed link between dialects and regional identities has led many authors to suggest that a focus on dialects can lead to political fragmentation, whereas a common

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<sup>4</sup> Such an attitude can be seen, for instance, in a statement about current usage of the Inuit language in Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.'s (NTI 2004:61) 2002-2003 Annual Report: "[the Elders of Nunavut] are the most sophisticated speakers of the language that is our only tool for expressing a view of the world that is distinctly Inuit – in fact, it is thanks to our Elders that we understand that younger generations have only been able to learn a very basic form of Inuktitut, even if they speak it fluently."

language without emphasis on dialects leads to greater unity and equality among the population. For example, in Mussolini's Italy, dialectal preservation was interpreted as a politically divisive and disempowering strategy: "emphasis was on the promotion of local Italian dialects as an expression of Italian identity (and as a means to rule the country by maintaining diversity)" (Pennycook 2000:59). Revolutionists called for a common speech form in order to unite the population. In a similar way, proposals for a common literary language for all Serbo-Croatian language varieties are interpreted as an attempt to unify South Slavs through linguistic integration (Kalogiera 1985).<sup>5</sup> Similar assumptions surface regularly in discussions of dialect and language preservation. I am not convinced that promoting distinct dialects of the Inuit language will in any way disintegrate the existing territorial, national, or international solidarity between Inuit.<sup>6</sup> Planners should be aware, though, of this potential interpretation of dialectal promotion and should be reminded to consider political and historical contexts when evaluating the applicability of case studies and eventually deciding dialectal issues.

Speakers have many more reasons to value their specific speech forms. From a researcher's point of view, as well, dialects are valuable because their unique structures help linguists to better understand all the possibilities of language structures. Further, maintaining, or at least fully documenting, dialectal diversity is instrumental in accessing the knowledge encoded in the dialects (e.g. traditional ecological, medicinal knowledge, etc.). The impetus for preserving dialects, though, has to come from the speakers. Understanding the reasons why the dialects are valued will help determine the most effective ways to promote and preserve them. If the dialect is valued purely for the information it contains, and for gaining access to stories from the past, recording and documenting the dialect may be a sufficient goal. If the dialect is valued for its function as the preferred speech form of the community, transmitting the language (thus expanding the speech community) may be a priority. In Nunavut, it appears that the dialects are valued as cultural heirlooms, as identity markers, and as functional communicative tools. If this is the case, speakers may well support dialect preservation at multiple levels: documentation, transmission, and promotion of use of the dialects.

- *Reasons for valuing the dialects may also play a role in shaping priorities in their preservation;*
- *If it is true that Inuit dialects are valued as cultural heirlooms, as identity markers, and as functional communicative tools, speakers may support dialect preservation that pursues documentation, transmission, and promotion of use of the dialects;*
- *Conservative dialects may be preferred as links to the past and Inuit traditions, but innovative dialects should not be stigmatized, as they are part of a vital, evolving language.*

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<sup>5</sup> It was presumed that other dialects would be lost as this shared speech form was introduced, but speakers continue to use their native dialects all the same.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph (1984:88) in fact suggests that a "common language" is most needed when unity between dialectal groups is otherwise weak. For the Inuit, who already have a strong sense of unity, such a standard may be less essential.

### 2.3. Why Dialects are Threatened

Distinct dialects emerge and are perpetuated when groups of people are kept separated, by geographical, social, political, cultural, or economic boundaries (cf. Wolfram, Hazen, Schilling-Estes 1999). As the boundaries break down, so too may the distinctive dialectal forms. Dorian (1981:71), for example, reports how the “social separateness” of Old Order Amish and Mennonites in the United States has helped them maintain their distinctive dialect. Cotter (2001:310) observes, “Geographical isolation from speakers of other dialects or languages is a key factor in preservation, as contact and its linguistic and cultural ramifications never even become an issue.” As long as people are able to or are forced to (or simply *do*) keep to themselves (with the positive and negative consequences such ‘independence’ entails), distinctive dialects are safe. However, there is little evidence that Inuit have any desire to keep to themselves or to shut out the outside world, so they must find a way to preserve their dialects in a context of intense contact with other groups.

When circumstances change and speakers become less isolated, their distinct speech may be perceived as threatened. Any number of factors can bring speakers into contact with other languages or dialects: industrialization, urbanization, establishment of heterogeneous neighbourhoods, intermarriage, expanded opportunities for higher education, spread of mass media, improved transportation leading to increased travel, among others (for case studies, see Dorian 1981; Mougeon and Beniak 1989). These kinds of changes have occurred very rapidly in Nunavut communities, accompanied by pressure to adopt English, the dominant contact language. Acquiring and using a second language or dialect does not have to threaten the native dialect,<sup>7</sup> but patterns of language use in Nunavut show that English is taking up increasing space, even as speakers continue to use both languages. Many of the factors which open the door to dialect/language shift are positive for the community overall, so although speakers may want to preserve their speech form, they likely do not want to reverse factors that are bringing them into contact with other speech varieties.

The increased opportunities for members of a speech community may also lead to increased outmigration, which can threaten the dialect. As speakers leave the home dialect area to pursue educational or employment opportunities, the number of remaining dialect speakers dwindles. As such, outmigration can be a factor in dialect death. Schilling-Estes (1997) observed such patterns of dialect loss in Smith Island, Maryland. It is possible that increasing numbers of Inuit youth leaving the smaller communities to pursue jobs or higher education in larger regional centres (e.g. Iqaluit) or in Southern Canada could, in much the same way, threaten the long term vitality Nunavut’s regional dialects (not to mention the language overall).

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<sup>7</sup> Wiley (2000), among others, disputes this common presumption that languages are necessarily in competition.

Contact can also leave room for the stigmatization of a particular dialect, which may also be a factor in speakers adopting another variety or language. Dialects may be stigmatized for linguistic reasons (e.g. being perceived as a less “pure” form of the language, due to innovation, borrowing, or attrition), or for social reasons, based on the status of its speakers: “A group’s extralinguistic vantage is the prime determinant of its dialect’s status” (Joseph 1984:89). For example, Mougeon and Beniak (1989) report that one factor in the shift from Ontario French to English is that dialect’s lack of prestige next to other varieties of French (Quebecois or European), due to changes in the language. Another factor is the minority status of the language and its speakers. Similarly, the Valencian variety of Catalán is denigrated due to its extensive borrowing from (Castilian) Spanish; it is judged “corrupted” by contact (Pradilla 2001). Oklahoman Cayuga speakers (Iroquoian) look down on their own dialect, which has undergone attrition and has few remaining speakers, preferring the Ontario dialect as a “better” or “more correct” form, both because it has more speakers and because it has been more conservative (Mithun 1989:248).

In Nunavut, one sometimes hears disparaging remarks about the Iqaluit dialect of Inuktitut, and about the language use of Inuit youth. It is possible that speakers will appropriate these negative judgements of their dialect, and prefer to shift to English. Carl Christian Olsen (Puju), chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference language commission, warns that the current attitude in Nunavut of absolute respect for the elders’ most conservative speech forms is dangerous (personal communication). He reports that in the 1970s, elders in Greenland were really critical of the Inuit language as spoken by youth and that the youth finally had to stand their ground and fight to have their language, in its innovative form, accepted. He credits this eventual acceptance of language evolution, and a move away from critiquing “new” varieties, as having contributed to the current vitality of the Inuit language in Greenland.

Dorian (1981), reporting on the death of East Sutherland Gaelic in Scotland, states that speakers of this dialect were a double minority: first as speakers of Gaelic in a dominantly English-speaking country, then as speakers of a minority Gaelic dialect. Inuinnaqtun speakers may feel in a similar position, as speakers of a minority dialect of the Inuit language in Nunavut, which is itself a minority language in Canada. Dialect promotion may benefit from fostering positive awareness of minority dialects.

Finally, no one factor on its own threatens a dialect, and speakers do not abandon their dialects overnight. It is generally a combination of factors that leads to the loss of regional variants of a language. Further, even if shift from a dialect to a standard or to another language is sudden, Dorian (1981) suggests that the build up to it will have been long. Speakers may have suffered a “long period of cultural and psychological disfavour which paved the way for that surrender” (Hamp 1989:208). In other words, ongoing circumstances may have predisposed speakers to adopt a speech form that carries greater benefits once boundaries broke down and they had access to it. Turning back to Nunavut, there is strong evidence that the Inuit language is considered prestigious, and that speakers are proud of it. It is also true that Inuit have suffered great inequalities and

injustices in the Canadian system, with detrimental linguistic consequences, the extent of which are unclear.

On a more optimistic note for the future of Inuit dialects, access to other dialects can also have positive outcomes for dialect maintenance. Contact between mutually intelligible varieties of an endangered language can provide reinforcement for remaining speakers of an endangered language, and secure increased opportunities for its use. Galloway (1992) confirms that reinforcement from mutually intelligible varieties was a factor in the survival of the Samish dialect of Straits Salish. Also, contact with outsiders can have a strengthening effect when individuals want to exaggerate or favour differences in their speech forms to mark in-group identification and solidarity. Labov (1963) showed this kind of “dialect concentration” in Martha’s Vineyard, when a tight-knit community was inundated by tourist “outsiders”. Using the dialect features was a way to subtly underline the relationship between insiders and outsiders in the community. These results have been repeated in many subsequent studies. Wolfram (1997:4) reports, “some dialect features may actually intensify in the moribund state of a dialect.” Schilling-Estes (1997:29) also noticed exaggeration of distinctive dialect features (i.e. dialect concentration):

As more and more islanders leave Smith Island in order to seek new ways to make a living in the face of the declining maritime industry, those who remain heighten their dialect distinctiveness. This dialect intensification may be due to an increasing sense of solidarity as fewer and fewer people manage to cling to the traditional Smith Island way of life. Or it may be due to a kind of sociolinguistic selectivity; islanders who value their lifestyle strongly enough to remain on the island despite the obstacles will most likely be those who possess heightened features to begin with.

Although I have no evidence that Inuit use distinctive dialect features among themselves in this way, it is clear that they use the Inuit language around Qallunaat as an “insider” language.

- *Dialect promotion should encourage tolerance and respect of all dialects;*
- *Dialect promotion should take into account the dynamic nature of language and dialects, accepting traditional as well as innovative forms;*
- *Dialect promotion may benefit from fostering positive awareness of minority dialects.*

#### **2.4. Language/Dialect Contact and Change**

The previous section showed how dialects and languages are increasingly in contact and how this, in turn, gives rise to the possibility of dialect loss. Regional variation in a language can be diminished when speakers abandon their dialect, shifting to another variety of the same language, or to another language all together, or when dialects in contact merge, thus losing their distinctive features. In this way, dialect death

can occur through changes to the dialect itself, or through changes to its status and use. Studies of language obsolescence (cf. studies in Dorian 1989) have shown that when languages die, both levels of change often occur at the same time, and the same may be true of dialects.

Languages and dialects change even in isolation, but especially so in contact with other languages. Language change does not necessarily entail loss of dialectal features; in fact, it is contact with other languages that has often led to dialect diversification in the first place. Bradley (1989), for instance, reports the rapid dialect diversification of Ugong in contact with Thai. Certainly, cultural contact in the North has led to lexical innovations for new technologies, which were developed independently in the various communities as long as they remained isolated from each other. What changes in a language, and how much, is a matter of probabilities rather than possibilities. Anything is possible and language attitudes are the wildcard (Thomason 2001). Schilling-Estes (1997), for example, found different processes of language death in Ocracoke and Smith Island, although they were very similar dialects and in similar situations. Generally speaking, the more intense the contact, the greater the possibilities are for change. Dialects that have had more intensive contact, or contact over a longer period of time, may show more evidence of contact-induced change, whether in terms of structural changes, or shift toward preferential use of the dominant language or dialect.

Of particular relevance for the issue of dialect maintenance, one possibility when dialects are in contact is that they will undergo levelling. Kerswill and Williams (2000:1) state this as a matter of course in dialect contact: “that migration should be such a force [in the convergence of language varieties] has long been recognized, since it is clear that contact between speakers leads to short and long-term changes in their speech which in turn have consequences for the language varieties themselves.” The evidence for levelling occurring, though, is mixed. In some cases, researchers have noticed that when dialects come into contact, the most “marked”, or distinctive, or regionally limited, or difficult features fall out of use, whereas the most commonly shared or understood or simple features are maintained (for one example, see Campbell and Munzell’s [1989] discussion of levelling in Pipil). In this way, a common language emerges.

Although distinctive features are lost in the process, some researchers have suggested that convergence can be seen as a positive sign for the language, overall, even if dialectal richness is lost. Cook’s (1995:228) analysis of Chipewyan and Stoney concludes that “convergence is a symptom of vitality rather than decay”. He cites Thompson (1994:78) who says of German dialects in Indiana, “the present situation and trends would suggest that convergence is a more likely possibility than language death”. If speakers are concerned primarily with the survival of their language overall, and dialect maintenance is only a secondary concern, they may want to accept convergence as a natural part of their language’s continued evolution.

Other researchers have found that no or little mixture occurs. Wolfram’s (1997) investigation into the use of African American Vernacular English in Ocracoke found that the dialect had remained quite stable in contact, although there was some mixing in

of Upper Banks English all the same. In Leopold's (1970) study of German dialects in contact, he noticed a preference to switch to Standard German rather than to converse in different native dialects, resulting to abandonment of the dialect, but no mixture.

According to Kerswill and Williams (2000:2), social network theory suggests that the closer a community is, the less likely behaviours will change, as strong networks are associated with strong norms: "the spread of changes occurs more rapidly in socially and geographically mobile groups, especially migrants, than in groups with a strong local base and close-knit networks." To paraphrase, groups of people with a strong solidarity ethic would be expected to maintain distinct varieties, whereas geographically or socially mobile groups would be more likely to adopt new speech forms. In Iqaluit, for instance, we see groups of people that are both distanced from a strong family network (in the case of recent arrivals), and are exposed to other varieties, which theoretically would favour dialect levelling.

Another option, though, when speakers of different dialects come into contact, is that they will switch to a shared speech variety that is neither group's mother tongue. Where a standard form of the language exists (i.e. English speakers in contact, or German speakers in contact), the switch may be to the standard, with speakers eventually shifting to use the standard preferentially in their daily usage and shifting away from their dialect. In the case of minority languages, though, speakers' shared speech form is more frequently the dominant language. In this case, rather than make a sustained effort to understand each other's dialect, speakers may shift to the dominant language, abandoning the language all together. In these ways, shift away from the dialect due to contact can lead to the emergence of a common, "levelled" dialect, strengthening of a standard, or precipitated shift to a dominant language.

It is difficult to predict what will happen with Inuit dialects. With increased mobility of Inuit in Nunavut, dialects are increasingly in contact,<sup>8</sup> most obviously in Iqaluit, but also in the smaller communities as the government decentralizes and individuals move with their jobs. The outcome will be determined more by non-linguistic factors than by linguistic factors. Trying to stop change and fix dialects in their current form is probably not feasible or desirable. However, documenting their current forms, increasing their numbers of speakers, and encouraging their use, in their dynamic and evolving forms, are probably feasible goals for dialect preservation in Nunavut.

- *A common dialect may emerge naturally when speakers of different dialects are in contact; convergence may be accepted as a natural part of a language's evolution;*
- *Speakers of different dialects should be encouraged to persist in the Inuit language, rather than switching to English;*

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, dialect contact is nothing new. Prior to sedentarization, Inuit would have had contacts with other groups, though short-lived. Relocation of Inuit to certain communities and sedentarization of different Inuit groups in the same community has also given rise to long-term dialect contact.

- *Trying to stop change and fix dialects in their current form is probably not feasible or desirable;*
- *Documentation of dialects' current forms, increasing their numbers of speakers, and encouraging their use, in their dynamic and evolving forms, are probably feasible goals for dialect preservation in Nunavut.*

## **2.5. Language Standardization**

The emergence of a common dialect may allow planners to bypass one of the stickiest issues facing those dealing with language issues in Nunavut, which is whether or not to standardize the language, and if so, how. Common wisdom in language preservation has long been that having a standardized, shared form increases the vitality of a language. Standardization is seen as a way to promote literacy and to allow for better communication between groups. A common language is often perceived as a political strength, increasing the unity of the population (cf. Hinton's [2001] discussion of the Campa, an Amazonian tribe in Peru). In the context of Nunavut, the Inuit language seems to require a standard form in order to function effectively in the higher domains in which it is being implemented (education, work, government). And yet, there is a salient fear that standardization will mean the end of dialectal diversity in Nunavut. I don't believe that this is the case, but this section will explore some approaches to balancing speakers' attachment to particular dialects and the practical need for a shared form of the language. Responses to the issues are suggested in Appendix A, although I avoid making concrete recommendations on the subject.

Standardization occurs at multiple levels: development of a standard writing system (i.e. shared conventions for graphically representing speech), establishment of a standard written form of the language (including spelling, vocabulary, grammar, etc.), and finally, if desired or required, proposal of a standard oral language (i.e. promoting common pronunciation among speakers). Development of a writing system, though often controversial, is probably the least contentious of the three levels. In the case of aboriginal writing systems in Canada and the United States, the goal has commonly been to provide an accurate phonetic or phonemic representation of the language (i.e. to write words they way they are pronounced, or perceived to be pronounced). In some cases, these systems have been developed and imposed by outsiders (e.g. missionaries or linguists) and later adopted by the community; in other cases the Aboriginal group has developed their own writing conventions. The "official" Mayan alphabet, for example, was chosen by the Maya with expert input but not control.

In some cases, multiple systems have been developed and standardization requires decisions about which system to favour (or to maintain both), as well as systematizing their use. Although the goal, generally, would be one shared system, the choice to maintain a dual orthography in Nunavut is not unique. Yurok (California) revitalization efforts faced a similar issue, between older users of UNIFON and younger users of the roman script. Planners decided to teach and publish in both, to avoid estranging the two groups, and to avoid making previous publications unreadable to the next generation. The Havasupa and Hualapai (Hinton 2001) provide an example of two tribes that intentionally

developed separate writing systems to show their distinctness, though their oral languages are almost the same. The Hmong (originating in Laos, Thailand, and Southern China, and dispersed to the United States, Australia, and France) provide an example of a group with multiple systems, who desire a common system but have not been able to achieve one (Hinton 2001). Although there are still points of contention with the Inuit writing systems, the standardization and the diffusion of a common way to write the Inuit dialects is a strength of the language.

Beyond a standard writing system, though, a standard variety addresses vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as orthography. Very basically, as Wolfram, Adger and Christian (1999:26) put it, planners have three options: 1/ accommodate all dialects; 2/ insist on the standard only; 3/ find middle ground. The third option is the most commonly adopted. Some cases can be found where strict adherence to the standard is required, but these are the exception. Navajo language education, for instance, sets high standards for accurate use of the written language, applying spelling and writing conventions that have been in place for fifty years. Although some speakers resist, saying that their “way of speaking” or their dialect is being disrespected if they achieve low grades, the outcome of this rigour is highly literate workers, where such skills are required (cf. Slate 2001).

Accommodation of all dialects is ideologically an attractive position, as it recognizes and allows for the fundamental equality of all speakers. However, it makes it impossible to judge any use of the language as “good” or “bad”, as no speaker will be fluent in all dialects. Hinton (2001) points out that, where teachers and students potentially come from different dialect areas, schools cannot teach all variations (it would be confusing and teachers do not know them in any case), so they would need to settle on a particular variety (or varieties). It is not uncommon for a language to have no standard variety, but this may be viewed as detrimental to its long-term survival, in terms of practical use of the language and speakers’ attitudes. Ultra-orthodox Yiddish, Romansch (Switzerland), Ladin and Friulian (Italy) are examples of languages that approach language use community by community. However, Fishman (1997:345) reports that speakers seem to negatively view this ad hoc approach in terms of the “respectability” of their languages and that the absence of a standard can become “the excuse for apathy and defeatism vis-à-vis RLS [Reversing Language Shift] efforts.”

Although there is widespread acceptance of this idea that a language has to have a standard, it is worth asking the question, in Nunavut, is the desire for a standard being imposed or do Inuit really want or need one? Joseph (1984b) points out that the idea of a standard is modeled on the colonizers’ cultures of having a standardized tongue, and is a position that speakers do not need to accept automatically.

If standardization is agreed upon in principle, there are different ways of selecting or developing a standard. An existing dialect can be chosen, as in the case of Greenland, where West Greenlandic is the standard. Numbers and prestige of speakers, centrality, and conservatism of the dialect play a role in the choice. A dialect may be positively perceived by speakers of other dialects due to the status (socio-economic, political,

cultural) of its speakers, or due its conservatism, or due to the fact that it was the first dialect to be written down, among other factors. Mutual intelligibility is a consideration in selection: a dialect that shares the greatest number of traits with other dialects, with few exceptions, may be chosen (cf. Joseph 1984). The promotion of an existing dialect as the standard is most likely to be successful where that dialect is already recognized by speakers of all dialects as a ‘desirable’ form of the language. Speakers of other dialects may otherwise refuse to accept someone else’s dialect as the prestige form.<sup>9</sup>

The advantage of choosing an existing dialect is that it is an existing form that some speakers master already. A disadvantage is that favouring one dialect over another is really favouring its speakers over another group. It has been suggested that the choice of West Greenlandic in Greenland has disadvantaged East Greenlanders, who are forced to be bidialectal in order to have full access to work, government, etc. Recognizing these potential inequalities, planners can counteract some of the imbalances, giving other kinds of advantages (economic, political...) to the regions whose dialect was not selected (cf. Fishman 1997, Joseph 1984).<sup>10</sup>

Another possibility, as pursued for Basque, Breton and Irish, for instance, is to deliberately “standardize” the language, creating an artificial standard based on elements from various dialects. This approach has the benefit of trying to incorporate and reflect all dialect groups. However, it has the disadvantage of promoting a language that is no one’s mother tongue and risks being rejected by all speakers. Speakers accuse such standards of being “stilted”, which of course they are; they are intended for learned functions, not for everyday interaction. In situations where dialect groups are equally thriving, it can be difficult to a) come up with an acceptable standard and b) diffuse the standard to the population, encouraging knowledge and use of it. Some means by which standards have been spread include schools, churches, travel, literature, and government use (cf. Kalogiera 1985).

One way to reassure speakers in face of standardization is to encourage them to view the standard as an addition to their linguistic repertoire, rather than as a replacement of their dialect. A standard language is only required for specific functions (e.g. official documents, literacy), and speakers can be encouraged to maintain their dialect in all other functions. The standard does not have to be seen as in competition with the dialects. In fact, the domains for which it is being developed are new (especially in the case of Nunavut), so dialect use has never been well-established in them: “the standard comes not to displace or replace the dialects, but to complement them in functions which they do not generally discharge and, therefore, in functions that do not compete with their own” (Fishman 1997:344). On the other hand, for oral interactions, where the dialect has always been used, it can continue to be promoted. This approach is successfully observed

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<sup>9</sup> In Innu language development, for example, though no one dialect was chosen as the standard, standard Innu was developed in Quebec, based on the Quebec dialects, and continues to be resisted by Labrador Innu.

<sup>10</sup> The establishment of government offices in communities across Nunavut, for instance, may have had the intention of balancing out preference for specific dialects in government offices.

in Ireland, where their ‘artificial’ standard is used for official documents and second language teaching, but the local varieties are widely used in speech, and somewhat in writing, and the dialects remain the prestige forms (Cotter 2001:345). Even where a standard is chosen or elaborated, it remains one dialect among others; all are linguistically equal and each has its particular roles.

Emphasizing complementarity of domains is one way of finding a compromise between establishing a standard and preserving dialects. Another approach is to have a flexible standard. That is to say, rather than having an exclusive “right” way to use the language, a flexible standard would provide “menu” of options, which would be constantly expanding. Burnaby (1985) suggests this as a seemingly appropriate solution for Aboriginal literacy in Canada. Hinton (2001:15) also takes the position that “tolerance of variation is essential”, partly because variation *exists* (for cultural and historic reasons), and also because, linguistically speaking, there really is not one “right” way to say things, and it is discouraging to speakers to say that there is. This second point is particularly important in contexts of language shift, where numerous cases have documented speakers’ preference to switch to the dominant language rather than be told they are speaking a poor or incorrect form of their mother tongue (cf. Hinton 2001, Thomason 2001; anecdotal evidence of such shifting was also evident in my interviews with Inuit youth, especially in Iqaluit.)

Another “flexible” approach is to develop or recognize multiple standards. The idea of regional standards is common in international languages. American and British English are easily recognized as “equal but different” standards. In this case, national boundaries play a role, but even within countries, one can recognize local regional standards, especially at an informal level (cf. Phillipson 2000, Wolfram *et. al.* 1999). These languages have resources not available to smaller speech communities, but the possibility of a Kitikmeot, Kivalliq, and Baffin “standard”; or of an Inuktun and an Inuktitut standard of the Inuit language remain. In fact, recognition of an Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut standard would seem to be in line with speakers’ existing perceptions of boundaries between the dialects, at least in terms of their naming of them.

This discussion has focused on the option of a standard written variety of the language, i.e. common spelling, vocabulary and grammatical structures for all speakers, at least in the written form. Such a standard does not need to affect the oral language, especially not the pronunciation. Many languages preserve a high degree of variability in pronunciation, which is perhaps the most difficult, and the least necessary, aspect of language to standardize. Pronunciations are also part of what gives dialects their most distinctive flavour (I’m reminded of an Inuinnaqtun speaker who joked with another Inuk, “do you speak ‘*hi hu ha*’ or ‘*si su sa*’?), and the needs for standardization can be realized without affecting this aspect of the language.

Even those who push most strongly for standardization as a requisite for language preservation acknowledge that attempts to impose a standard against community desires can have negative repercussions. Standardization has identity implications, and can be divisive despite unifying intentions, leading to fragmentation, hostility, and opposition.

Arguing about a standard form can distract the community from discussing and promoting increased knowledge and use of the language in all its forms. At the same time, implementation of a standard can have long term benefits on the language even if it is originally resisted. The balance between encouraging use of the language in new domains through standardization and perpetuation of the dialects through respect and tolerance of regional variation is difficult to find. Although this paper can suggest possibilities for the Inuit language, the real solution will lie in the desires and engagement of the speakers. As a bottom line, standardization and dialect preservation are not mutually exclusive goals, and the success of both initiatives will depend on convincing the population of their compatibility as concurrent goals in preserving the Inuit language.

- *A standard form of the Inuit language may facilitate higher levels of literacy;*
- *A standard form may also facilitate use of the Inuit in government documents, etc.;*
- *The concept of an absolute standard, which sets up some usages as “right” and others as “wrong” is not one that speakers’ necessarily have to accept;*
- *Other options include a flexible standard, that puts forth options for use rather than prescriptions for use, or the adoption of multiple (regional or dialectal) standards;*
- *Standardization should focus on the written language; speakers should be encouraged to maintain their dialectal pronunciations;*
- *Speakers should be encouraged to view the standard as an addition to their linguistic repertoire, rather than as a replacement of their dialect;*
- *A standard dialect should be implemented in a limited number of domains, and should not conflict with informal dialectal use;*
- *Standardization and dialect preservation are not mutually exclusive goals.*

## **2.6. Language/Dialect Preservation**

Preserving distinct dialects of the Inuit language is part of a bigger picture of preserving the Inuit language. There are no set strategies for how an endangered language (let alone its dialects) may be preserved. Planners can draw from other experiences around the world. However, the complex interplay of factors that shape the current linguistic situation, and the implication of language in all facets of society, require that each situation be studied in-depth, and that solutions specific to that context be developed.

A widely accepted notion in language planning is that any initiatives have to reflect the desires of the people. Preservation activities that go against what speakers are predisposed to accept need to be preceded by awareness campaigns that sensitize the population to the desirability of the strategy. In this sense, it is advisable for dialect preservation activities to be preceded by research into Nunavut Inuit’s perceptions of their dialects and their desires for their future.

Ideally, the government and the people will work together in order to achieve language preservation goals. The government is in a position to directly affect the

symbolic status of the language, in naming official languages/dialects, for instance, and in making these varieties visible around the communities. It can also provide learning opportunities and set standards for competence in the language/dialect through curriculum development and course offerings. Additionally, it can create new opportunities for use of the language/dialect through its implementation or expansion in government-controlled domains (offices, legislature, services, media, etc.).

While the government can provide motivations and opportunities for acquisition and use, it is the speakers' linguistic behaviour that ultimately determines the fate of a language or dialect, as using a language is the only way to ensure its vitality. Research is increasingly showing the value of grassroots approaches. The government can encourage such initiatives where they arise by providing funding or logistical support.

Goals of language planning can include conservation of the dialect forms, development of the dialects, expansion of the number of speakers of the dialects (first language or second language speakers), integration of the specific dialects (or multiple dialects) in specific societal domains, provision of services in the dialects, among others (cf. Hinton 2001, Moore 2000). The focus may be on the speech forms themselves, or on the speech community. For example, preservation of the Ocracoke Brogue, an endangered dialect of English spoken in North Carolina, focuses on the dialect itself. Goals are to document and promote awareness of the dialect, but go no farther:

[...] work with community members (1) to ensure that the dialect is documented in valid and reliable way, (2) to raise the level of consciousness within and outside the community about the traditional form of the dialect and its changing state, and (3) to engage representative community agents and agencies in an effort to understand the historic and current role of dialect in community life. (Wolfram 1997:6)

Preservation of Karuk in California initially focused on the dialect itself, with recording of the elders a first goal, but had as a second goal to increase the number of speakers and to promote community participation in activities where the language could be used. They also targeted the prestige of the language by educating the community (Hinton 2001). The preservation of Quebecois French provides a contrasting example, where the focus was primarily on increasing the domains in which French was used in Quebec (replacing English), rather than on the language (or especially a particular dialect) *per se*. The valorization and documentation of the Quebec dialect of French has followed rather than preceded promotion efforts.

The goals and priorities set by the community will dictate areas for action and approaches to dialect preservation. In developing strategies to reach these goals, planners must take into account the "needs, rights and resources" (Ager 2001:99) of the speech community. Human resources, in terms of native language specialists (linguists, language teachers, translators, etc.) and organizations to oversee language work may be a necessary first step. Initiatives may target knowledge of the dialect, in terms of

documentation and transmission. Specific areas of competence, such as understanding, speaking, reading or writing may be developed. Schools may be the vehicles of increased competence, especially literacy. The radio, too, may be a tool for diffusing the dialects, giving exposure to them, and thus increasing at least passive familiarity with them. Development of materials about and in the dialects may also be part of a strategy to increase knowledge.

If planners are concerned with increasing use of the dialects, they may want to expand the domains in which the dialect can be used. The government, as an actor, can allow for, encourage, or dictate use of particular speech forms in government institutions and services. This may entail ongoing elaboration of the dialect in order to develop modern vocabulary, and so on, to fill such functions. Implementing the dialects in such domains may increase the dialect's prestige, which, along with dialect awareness, is another potential target of preservation activities. Perhaps most effectively, the government can support and encourage grassroots initiatives which would enhance home and community use of the dialect. Whatever the strategy, planning should involve ongoing evaluation of the strategy's effectiveness at reaching the goals, reassessment of goals, and replanning as necessary (see Hinton 2001 for stages of language planning for endangered languages).

- *Dialect preservation initiatives should be preceded by research into Nunavut Inuit's perceptions of their dialects and their desires for their future;*
- *Government initiatives should reflect the desires of the population;*
- *Government should support grassroots initiatives;*
- *Clear goals will help inform strategies.*

Although academics and fieldworkers have studied issues of endangered language preservation extensively over the past fifteen years, there is still no set framework for understanding how a language can be preserved. Linguists have developed theories around dialectal variation, language/dialect contact, and endangered language preservation, and these phenomena are increasingly well understood, but the social, political, and cultural aspects of speech behaviour make outcomes of contact and shift difficult to predict. This chapter has outlined some of the possibilities of languages and dialects in contact. The following chapter presents a few case studies of disappearing dialects of otherwise thriving languages and studies of endangered languages that take dialect into account. From these studies, and the theoretical considerations of this chapter, we can extrapolate relevant suggestions for the preservation and promotion of distinct dialects of an endangered language such as the Inuit language.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CASE STUDIES OF LANGUAGE AND DIALECT PRESERVATION

In order to better understand possibilities for the preservation of distinct dialects in Nunavut, this chapter presents case studies of how other nations and speech communities have approached the issue of preserving specific dialects of a language, or of preserving endangered languages with dialectal variation. Each example provides a different perspective on how and why a dialect may be maintained or lost. Considerations include both how dialectal variation was identified (or ignored) and dealt with (or neglected) in cases of endangered language maintenance and how specific endangered dialects (whether of endangered or otherwise thriving languages) were preserved, or how they died. This chapter has selected the case studies discussed below either for their close applicability to Nunavut (e.g. Irish) or for the breadth of description available for the preservation efforts (e.g. Ocracoke Brogue). Where all languages have dialectal variation and the majority of the world's languages (not to mention dialects) are endangered, the discussion of case studies could obviously have discussed any number of other contexts, and one may consult the collected volumes listed in the references for further reading (especially Dorian 1989 and Hinton 2001). The purpose of the presentation of case studies is to provide points of comparison and contrast for the linguistic situation in Nunavut in order to suggest probabilities and possibilities for interventions and outcomes. The relevance of case studies is briefly addressed in each instance.

#### **3.1. Studies of Endangered Dialects of Otherwise Thriving Languages**

The most extensive research on dialect endangerment comes from studies of variation within otherwise thriving languages. In these cases, the particular dialect is threatened by another variety of the same language – usually a more prestigious standard – to which speakers are shifting. Such situations are quite different from the situation encountered in Nunavut, in that the Inuit language overall can be considered endangered, and in that Inuit dialects are threatened by transfer to English, not to another variety of Inuktitut. Nonetheless, the discussions in this section highlight processes of dialect shift and attempts to reverse it which may inform language policy and planning for dialect preservation in Nunavut.

##### **3.1.1. German (Germany) – The Death of East German Dialects**

The first case study considers the death of East German dialects after the Second World War, as reported by Leopold (1970). German is a strong, international language, which has (and historically has had) a high degree of regional variation. The stable speech patterns of local areas were disrupted after the War when high levels of migration out of East Germany and into various regions of West Germany brought members of previously isolated dialect speech communities into contact. This upheaval “shattered the traditional structure of their [East Germans’] lives and destroyed the social frame for the survival of their dialects” (Leopold 1970:341-342). The East German dialects were

threatened by contact with other dialects, in a context of political, cultural and social stress.

Leopold, in his research, had expected to find evidence of dialectal mixing as a result of this contact. What he found, instead, was speakers moving toward use of an increasingly entrenched national standard, “High German”, to the detriment of the use of their old dialect. Speech patterns closer to the East German dialect were still used in the home, although these were no longer identical to its old form. Younger individuals and those working outside the home were more susceptible to abandoning their original dialect than were older individuals and those who stayed at home. Teenagers who had fully acquired the old dialect sometimes reverted back to it as the home language as they grew older (and passed their rebellious stage). However, the younger children, growing up in the contact situation, never fully acquired the characteristic forms of the old dialect, thus *could not* perpetuate it as adults.

Attitudinal factors seem to have played a role in the transfer. On the one hand, the old dialect was valued as part of one’s heritage and tradition; it was used “in an understandable desire to preserve the lost values, which were instinctively felt to be linked with the characteristic speech form of the homeland” (Leopold 1970:342). On the other hand, knowledge and use of the standard dialect was necessary to integrate and participate in the “new life”. Children were most strongly influenced by this need to fit in, and did not have the opposing pull back to their home dialect that the elders had:

Young people are most likely to conform to their present environment. They have no strong attachment to the old home, which they remember only dimly and often unfavourably, because their memory reaches back only to the terminal stages of old life, with its insecurity, persecution, and hardships. They do not share the nostalgic longings of their elders. (Leopold 1970:340)

In this way, language attitudes, shaped by geographic, social, cultural, economic and political changes, contributed to the shift from the old East German dialects to standard German.

As isolation of speech communities broke down in Germany, so too did dialectal differences. Between speakers of dialects in contact, standard forms were favoured over dialectally specific forms. Where no standard form existed, terms from both dialects sometimes came to be *understood*, if not *used*, by both groups, but redundant synonymy did not persist. In the oral language, pronunciation and lexicon remain variable, despite the highly standardized written form. For Leopold (1970:348), the move to Standard German entailed “a loss in color, but a gain in unity”.

Despite the differences between the situation facing German dialects post World War II and Inuit dialects today, several applicable underlying principles, possibilities or probabilities of dialect transfer can be identified:

- *Inter-dialectal differences can push speakers to adopt a language variety that is no one's mother tongue (for speakers of diverse German dialects, this was Standard German; for Inuit this could be English);*
- *Attitudes affect dialect shift and/or maintenance;*
- *Children and youth are most susceptible to dialect shift.*

Based on these observations, the following actions might favour the preservation of distinct dialects:

- *Favour activities which lead to mutual intelligibility of dialects;*
- *Favour attitudes that are positive to the home dialect, the people who speak it and the contexts in which it is used;*
- *Target children and youth in dialect preservation activities.*

### **3.1.2. English (United States) – Preservation of the Ocracoke Brogue**

In the German example, the dialects of transplanted East Germans were eventually lost to Standard German. The Ocracoke Brogue, an American English dialect spoken on Ocracoke Island off the North Carolina coast, is gradually giving way to Standard English as increasing numbers of mainland tourists are coming to the island. In this case, too, breakdown in the isolation of the community has opened the door to greater access to Standard English, and at the same time, to the decline in knowledge and use of the local dialect.<sup>11</sup> As long as the islanders had little access with outsiders, their dialect thrived. Now, as geographic and social isolation decrease, so do the characteristic features of their dialect. Here, too, attitudes play a role as the Ocracoke Brogue is, to its advantage, a marker of local, island identity, but to its disadvantage, is perceived as a stigmatized variety of English (such attitudes toward endangered dialects are very common, as seen in other cases below). Speakers are aware that certain of their characteristic speech forms are negatively judged, and are themselves insecure in their speech. Preservation of the dialect, then, needs to counter the pervasive pull of Standard English as the *only* legitimate form of English, overcoming the negative feelings speakers have about the Brogue.

The perspectives of Wolfram, Hazen and Schilling-Estes (1999), who report on this endangered dialect, are those of dialectologists, concerned primarily with describing the dialect itself, rather than those of the language planner, concerned with speakers' knowledge and use of the language. Nonetheless, these researchers have proposed and developed strategies and products for dialect preservation, as outlined below.

#### *Dialect Preservation Products*

- *Archival CDs and audio tapes of Ocracoke speakers 10 to 81 years old; available with full written transcripts in schools and museums;*

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<sup>11</sup> Acquisition of a standard variety does not inevitably lead to dialect loss, though it did in these two cases.

- *Video documentaries about the Brogue, used in the schools and shown in popular public places as well;*
- *A book about the Brogue, including historical perspectives, descriptions of speech forms, and discussion of stereotypes, written for a popular audience and distributed in local tourist shops;*
- *Word lists, distributed in tourist information centres;*
- *T-shirts with “Save the Brogue” on the front and characteristic dialect words on the back;*
- *Curriculum activities to teach about the Brogue in local junior high schools;*
- *All dialect awareness materials endorsed by Ocracoke Preservation Society;*
- *A local museum exhibit on the Brogue and other local varieties, including information on the historic and current state of the dialect with photos and text; characteristic vocabulary; headphones to listen to audio recordings of various speakers with instructions for interpretation; and excerpts from documentaries on a video monitor.<sup>12</sup>*

Overall, people engaged in these initiatives are concerned with documenting the dialect and disseminating quality, reliable information about the dialect to local speakers and the outside community. Having the Ocracoke Preservation Society endorse all dialect awareness materials adds legitimacy to these products, and is a function a language authority in Nunavut may want to exercise. Curriculum in the schools and public awareness campaigns have been successful in engendering interest, tolerance and support for the dialect, within and outside the community. Awareness of dialectal issues favours more positive attitudes toward the Brogue and its speakers, which is advantageous to dialect preservation.

All of these products may be effectively developed and used to raise awareness and disseminate information about Inuit dialects in Nunavut. As Wolfram points out though, purely linguistic initiatives can only go so far. One can document dialects, raise awareness, engage linguists and members of local communities, and produce materials, but “the ultimate fate of dialects rests on social forces well beyond our control” (Wolfram 1997:10). That is, dialect shift is brought on by changes in communities, which cannot be reversed (or which the community may not want to reverse). While promotion may have positive effects, it may not be enough to preserve the distinct dialects, especially as the distinctiveness and isolation of their communities decreases.

### **3.2. Studies of Endangered Languages which Take into Account Dialects**

#### **3.2.1. Catalán (Spain) – A Success Story with Some Dialectal Challenges**

The significance of political climate is clearly seen in the example of Catalán and its dialects. Catalán has had to deal with the issue of dialect survival on two fronts. First, by a process of “dialectalization” during Franco’s dictatorship (ending in the 1970s),

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<sup>12</sup> The Quebec Museum of Civilization also did a major exhibit on the Québécois French in recent years, with similar aims and format.

Catalán was put forth as a “mere” dialect of Spanish (along with other regional languages in Spain), subordinate to Castilian, despite a long, established, prestigious history as a distinct language. Catalán is linguistically distinct from Castilian Spanish, and denying its status as a separate language reflects the ideological position of the dictator.

Since 1978, Catalán has been an official language of the Autonomous Catalán Communities, recognized as a distinct regional language in Spain. Still, for years prior, though the mother tongue of the majority in the region, it had been subordinated to Castilian Spanish, and thus continued to be underused in formal and prestigious domains. Catalán language planners undertook a “normalization” campaign, promoting knowledge and use of Catalán in all domains. Today, Catalán is put forth as a success story in language revitalization movements.

However, much of what is reported on the language’s “normalization” does not take into account the regional linguistic diversity of Catalán. Turell (2001:2), in her introduction to the collected volume *Multilingualism in Spain*, claims that one of the major challenges facing *all* languages in Spain, including Catalán, is speakers’ intolerance of regional linguistic diversity within their own languages, preferring a standard variety and making “clear attempts to make linguistic diversity non-existent.” In light of this, it is somewhat ironic that Pradilla’s (2001:58) chapter on Catalán seems to downplay differences between dialects, “Like all languages, Catalán has regional varieties, even though it is one of most uniform of the Romance languages.” (In fact, more extensive discussion of Catalán dialects in Catalonia comes through in a subsequent chapter on Aranese, a minority language in Catalonia.) Catalán has two main dialect groups – Eastern and Western Catalán – divided into a total of six dialects. Rossellonese, Central, Balearic and Alguerese make up Eastern Catalán, and North-Western and Valencian are the two Western Catalán dialects. Catalán language planners thus faced a challenge of promoting the language while not alienating dialectal groups.

Negotiating the place of regional varieties, based on available literature, has proven most challenging in Valencia, one of the Catalán speaking regions. The Valencian government has moved to have Valencian recognized as a separate language, distinct from Catalán. The claim of Valencian as a separate language is, in part, tied to secessionist movements within the Valencian government. Also, where Valencian is the weakest Catalán dialect, seeming still to be giving way to (Castilian) Spanish, Pradilla (2001:69) suggests that focussing on the tensions between Valencian and Catalán may be a convenient distraction from focusing on the real issue of (Castilian) Spanish’s continued dominance in the region: “an artificial conflict has been created between Catalán and Valencian to hide the real conflict, which is between Valencian and Spanish.” The ambivalent status of Valencian speech forms as a language or a dialect is obvious in discussions that alternate between calling the local speech “Valencian” and “Catalán”.

The Valencian schools are being looked to solve the debate, though it is not clear how they will do so. Official policy in all schools is to accept Valencian as a variety of Catalán, and to include the Valencian variety in education, following the norms set out by

the Valencian Institute of Philology. Policy makers and practitioners are challenged to find the balance between “Catalán”, a regional language of Spain, which ties them in to the other Catalán communities, and “Valencian”, put forward as a language in its own right, a powerful symbol of Valencian political identity. The latter position seems to weaken their case for promotion/normalization of a language other than (Castilian) Spanish. Based on discussions at the Foundation for Endangered Languages Conference in Barcelona in October 2004, these tensions seem to have settled and “Catalán” is being promoted in Valencia, as well as in the other Catalán-speaking communities.

This description of Catalán language politics has immediate parallels with Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun promotion. Some of the principles, possibilities and probabilities that emerge are as follows:

- *Changes in political climate create new opportunities for language/dialect promotion;*
- *The distinction between what are separate languages and what are dialects of the same language may be ideologically driven;*
- *In a minority setting, dialects/languages may be more likely threatened by the majority language than by a neighbouring minority dialect/language;*
- *Focus on the language/dialect distinction in such cases may distract from the more pressing issue of language maintenance;*
- *Naming the speech varieties reflects ideological positions.*

The creation of Nunavut has, indeed, created room for linguistic “normalization” of the kind that took place in Catalonia, where the Inuit language, the majority language of the territory, could be implemented and encouraged in all domains. The need (real or perceived) for standardized language use in some of these domains, including schools and government documents, has raised questions about which variety/varieties will be official. The government recognizes “Inuktitut, in all its forms” as an official language of the territory, yet there are suggestions that “Inuktitut” and “Inuinnaqtun”, in all *their* forms, should rather be recognized side-by-side as co-official (and separate) languages, reminiscent of the Catalán/Valencian debate. There is no evidence that the Inuinnaqtun have any divisive intentions, as did the Valencian government. However, Inuinnaqtun speakers may learn from the Valencian case, and make sure that any push to have Inuinnaqtun recognized as its own language really benefits the vitality of the language and does not, as in the Valencian case, detract attention from promoting the Inuit language overall in the face of an encroaching, dominant language, in this case, English. Further, those naming dialects or languages should be clear about the ideological connotations of their choice. When speakers use *Inuinnaqtun* to refer to that specific dialect, but use *Inuktitut* to refer to the language overall (but never use *Inuinnaqtun* to refer to the language overall), such usage can unintentionally set up Inuktitut dialects as the “norm”, and marginalize the western dialects.<sup>13</sup> This is a particular challenge for a language for which

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<sup>13</sup> I admit that this usage may have slipped into this paper; I am aware of using it myself, unintentionally, and I have never heard it the other way around, with Inuinnaqtun used for the whole language, though this may be because all of my experience in Nunavut is in the Baffin region.

only the dialects are named, and yet using the name of one dialect only to refer to the language can suggest lack of attention to the other dialects in presence. Careful speakers in Nunavut may refer to “Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun”, or to “the Inuit language”.

In summary, suggested points of action that derive from the Catalán example are as follows:

- *Focus attention on expanding knowledge and use of the Inuit language, overall;*
- *Where regions have divergent dialects, these forms may be used in schools;*
- *Use “Inuinnaqtun” and “Inuktitut” to refer to the specific dialects.*
- *Choose a neutral name, such as “the Inuit language” to refer to the language, overall.*

### **3.2.2. Aranese (Spain) – An “Official” Variety of Occitan in Spain**

Other regional languages of Spain provide further illustrations and anecdotes about how endangered languages and dialects may be maintained and promoted. Aranese is a sub-dialect of the Gascon dialect of the Occitan language, the only Occitan dialect spoken in Spain (the others are spoken in Southern France). Speakers in the Aran Valley (population approximately 6000) do not dispute this linguistic hierarchy, as was the case in Valencia, but do name “Aranese” as the official language in their communities, as the “official variety of Occitan in Catalonia” (Suils and Huguet 2001:145). As the official language, Aranese must be taught in the schools, and has “special protection” in civil service activities and the media. Practically speaking, this means that the town council uses it; it is broadcast one hour per day on the radio and one half hour per week on television; a four-page monthly magazine is published in it, as is some literature for schools and the general public. A literary /written norm for the Aranese variety was developed in the 1980s and adopted into schools but this move toward dialect standardization has not reversed or even slowed down shift to (Castilian) Spanish and Catalán.

Because of political boundaries, Aranese is subordinate to Catalán and then to (Castilian) Spanish, not to other dialects of Occitan, which are all spoken on the other side of the border, and largely ignored by the French government. As was the case with the East German and Ocracoke Brogue dialects, Aranese became threatened when its communities became less isolated. Better transportation across the valley and increased popularity of the valley for downhill ski enthusiasts contributed to a thriving economy, but also to increased contact between the local Aranese and incoming Castilian and Catalán-speakers, accompanied by language shift. Although knowledge of Aranese remains high (79% of the population know it [Suils and Huguet 2001:145]), actual use of the language is decreasing, shedding doubt on its long-term viability.

Promotion of Aranese as an “official variety” of Occitan sets an interesting precedent, potentially applicable to the two main varieties of the Inuit language in Nunavut.

- *The Nunavut Government could consider recognizing official varieties of the Inuit language. This could be done by political region (an official variety for each of the Baffin, Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regions) or by dialect group (western Canadian Inuktun [in its local forms] and Eastern Canadian Inuktitut [in its local forms] as the two official varieties).*

The lack of impact of implementing a standard form of literacy in the schools in terms of reversing language shift *may* suggest Inuit should reconsider the fruitfulness of focussing energy in this area, although I would not hazard a recommendation to this regard.

### **3.2.3. Basque (Spain) – Standardizing to Survive**

Basque is another minority language spoken in Spain, and across international boundaries, with regional dialects. I present it here as a case in which language planners chose to favour one standard variety of the language, for the purposes of ‘national’ unity as well as language promotion. The Academy of the Basque Language developed an artificial, overarching “Euskara Batua” (unified Basque) standard based on the central dialects of Basque. Standardization was achieved through legislation; in 1982, the Basic Law on the Standardization of the Basque Language was passed. Although Euskara Batua was, at the time, highly controversial (among other reasons, it is no one’s ‘real’ language), it has gained increased acceptance and use. It is the variety of Basque used for education and official documents, and 80% of Basque books are published in it (Cenoz and Perales 2001).

At the same time, speakers may prefer to speak in their own dialectal varieties (Fishman 1997). While literacy may be pursued in the standard, much of the continued use of Basque is oral (theatre, poetry), and such uses remain highly dialectal. The effect of a superimposed standard on the dialects of Basque is not clear. However, regardless of such effects, it is believed that the creation and diffusion of this standard was necessary for the continued vitality of the Basque language in *any* form. Whereas public opinion in Nunavut seems to favour diversity rather than uniformity in speech, and language planning activities should follow the desires of the speakers, the Basque model might not be desirable for Nunavut at this time. The orality of Inuit culture suggests that, as in the case of Basque, standardization of the Inuit language may have little effect on its most prevalent and prestigious uses, which are oral, and thus favour dialectal use.

- *Development or selection of one, standard variety of a language may contribute to the long-term viability of the language overall.*
- *Where oral traditions are highly valued, regional dialects maintain a privileged context for use regardless of standardization.*

### **3.2.4. Mayan (Guatemala) – Pursuing Unity**

Somewhat similar to the Basque example, Mayan language preservation activities have tended to pursue unity of speech forms and of populations, and have *not* tried to preserve dialectal distinctions. Mayan is a language family, with twenty indigenous

languages spoken in Guatemala and nine in Mexico, all of which have high levels of dialectal diversity. Mayan leaders would like to see less diversity than what actually exists, although a goal of a single unified Mayan language would not be feasible, seeing the high number of already recognized distinct languages (although a few of these languages, it is suggested, could be regrouped into a single language)<sup>14</sup>:

Leaders in the revitalization movement...are universally opposed in principle to the further division of dialects into new languages. They have also expressed dissatisfaction with language classifications that propose new languages or that stress dialectal diversity. The principle of language unification is being used to suggest that wherever differences between languages can be minimized, they should be... (England 1996:190-191)

Dialectal diversity, evidently, is not valued at the political level for Mayan languages. However, at the grassroots level, speakers remain attached to their local speech forms.

Some of the Mayan languages are thriving, while others are endangered. The Mayan focus is on standardization as a tool for preservation. Standardization is taken as a matter of course (as in many other endangered language contexts), primarily to favour literacy. The following points show how the goal of Mayan language standardization is pursued, by Mayan linguists “on the ground”, concluding with evidence of resistance to the process, which may in fact be propitious to dialect preservation.

In terms of standardization, two choices prevail: select an existing dialect to be the standard form, or, as in the Basque case (and also in Breton and Irish, discussed below), creating an artificial standard based on elements from various dialects. When an existing dialect is set up as the standard, this automatically attributes a certain prestige on the variety.<sup>15</sup> However, it is generally due to the variety’s existing prestige that it is chosen in the first place. A dialect may be positively perceived by speakers of other dialects due to the status (socio-economic, political, cultural) of its speakers, or due its conservatism, or due to the fact that it was the first dialect to be written down, among other factors.<sup>16</sup> A second consideration in selecting an existing dialect is mutual intelligibility: more central dialects may be chosen (cf. Joseph 1984).<sup>17</sup> In Guatemala, no one dialect is clearly seen as prestigious. Generally speaking, speakers consider their own

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<sup>14</sup> Similar pursuit of unification by promoting commonalities between closely related languages are reported by Ridge (2000), where a standardized written form has been proposed for closely related African languages as a means of “harmonization”.

<sup>15</sup> In the Innu case, discussed below, though no one dialect was chosen as the standard, standard Innu was developed in Quebec, based on the Quebec dialects, and continues to be resisted by Labrador Innu.

<sup>16</sup> The Igloolik dialect of Inuktitut, for instance, may be considered prestigious because the dialect has conserved some of the older forms, and also because its speakers have preserved Inuit traditions more generally.

<sup>17</sup> Following this principle, the Kivalliq dialect could be chosen as a standard form for all of Nunavut, as a central dialect between the Western Inuktitun and Eastern Inuktitut forms.

dialect the “best” except for places where language shift is already extreme.<sup>18</sup> As a result, Mayan linguists have opted for the second strategy, creating a “standardized” form of their language, though this form is no one’s native speech form and runs the risk of being unacceptable to everyone.

The technical criteria for the standardization process, which aim to respect and incorporate various dialectal forms, are as follows:

- 1. Where different terms for the same concept are found in different places, all of them can be taken to be synonyms and they can be taught as such in the places where they are not used.*
- 2. Where variation in the form of the same term (or rule) exists in different places, it is important to select the forms that give more information and that are more readily understood by the majority. This generally means writing the more complete and more basic forms, and at times it also means writing the more...conservative forms. [...]*
- 3. It is important to avoid localisms; that is, the forms that are restricted to one local variety and that are not found in other varieties.*
- 4. When a decision demonstrates the similarity between one language and another that is closely related to it, it is even better, because there are a number of Mayan languages that are mutually intelligible...*
- 5. It is important to include in the standard form all the possibilities for expression that exist in the language and not reduce it to an incomplete or less rich form. (Oxlajuuj Keej 1993:124, cited in England 1996:187)*

These criteria show that while the Mayan strategy for language preservation focuses on standardization, they envisage a selection process which allows for variation within the standard and preserves the entire language in its richest form.

In theory, this approach has the advantage of not favouring any one dialectal group over the other. In practice, it still can “disadvantage some people whose local variety is more different from the emerging norm than others, which may well set up a prestige hierarchy among spoken dialects where almost none has existed” (England 1996:191). Such a hierarchy could lead to disparagement of one’s own dialect, or, as has been observed, to rejection of the standard.<sup>19</sup> Local dialect loyalty blocks standardization

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<sup>18</sup> Feeling that one’s own dialect is the ‘best’ or ‘most correct’ form is natural in situations where there is no external standard. Where speakers have no one telling them which forms are correct and incorrect, they rely on their internal standards and intuitions, as native speakers, which necessarily correspond to their own dialect (cf. Wolfram 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Ash, Fermino and Hale (2001) report on a dialect hierarchy in Nicaragua, where the Tuahka dialect of Mayanga was particularly endangered because it was subordinate to Panamahka (another Mayangna dialect) on top of being subordinate to Miskitu (the regional lingua franca) and then Spanish. The local bilingual education program only taught in the dominant dialect and left out Tuahka. In this case, Tuahka speakers had to become bidialectal in Panamahka (as well as multilingual in Miskitu and Spanish), although the reverse was not also true. There may need to be particular encouragement for Inuktitut

when speakers resist a standard that is not the way they actually speak. While this is unfortunate for the Mayan goals, it may in fact be positive for the preservation of Mayan dialects if planners can successfully show that the standard is an *additional* speech variety, not a replacement.

Finally, despite the official policy of linguistic unity, Mayan communities have seen disputes that dialects should be recognized as separate languages. Achi is officially a dialect of the K'ichee language, but the community calls it by its own name and considers it a separate language. Their arguments for language recognition centre on their identity as a distinct community. Opponents to language recognition point to the historical link between Achi and K'ichee, to their linguistic similarities, and to the need for Mayan unification to argue Achi's status as a dialect. They also warn that separate recognition will lead to isolation of the community. Similar to the arguments for Valencian/Catalán and Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun, the debate shows that the line between a dialect and a language is determined as much by political and cultural factors as by linguistic considerations.

Principles of dialect/language maintenance that emerge from the Mayan experiences are as follows:

- *Focus on similarities or differences between speech varieties reflects an ideological position;*
- *Standardization may threaten dialect richness if speakers consider the new speech form more prestigious and abandon their own;*
- *Standardization does not have to diminish dialect richness:*
  - *techniques of standardization may be flexible and incorporate dialectal richness of a language;*
  - *the standard may be an additional speech form, not a replacement to dialects;*
  - *dialect loyalty may favour the persistence of dialects regardless of the standard.*

Applications to Nunavut, which planners may want to consider include:

- *Putting forth a standard, where required, that is flexible and incorporates dialect diversity;*
- *Emphasizing that any proposed standard is in addition to the existing dialects, with specific functions, and does not replace the dialects' existing functions;*
- *Avoiding actions or statements that would denigrate existing dialects.*

The key seems to be finding a way to capitalize on local dialect loyalty, without specifically promoting the individual dialects, which could set up false perceptions of extreme differences between them and diminish communication between dialect communities.

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speakers to learn Inuinnaqtun if bidialectalism is to be pursued as a goal in Nunavut in order to avoid a similar hierarchy emerging between Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun.

### 3.2.5. Innu (Canada) – Can Dialect Preservation Hinder Preservation of the Language Itself?

Closer to home, standardization (perceived as necessary for language preservation) and the preservation of local speech forms have sometimes appeared to be conflicting goals among the Innu/Montagnais of Quebec and Labrador. Mailhot (1985) reports four main dialects of Innu-aimun, although each of the twelve communities has its own recognizable speech forms, and multiple sub-dialects. The Montagnais Cultural and Educational Institute (2004) identifies seven dialects in Quebec alone. Neighbouring dialects are mutually comprehensible, but become less so with distance. When the standardization process began, speakers strongly identified with their reserve or village, with local speech an identifying and defining factor of that group (despite loose recognition of a common, shared language), and there was little ethnic, linguistic, or political unity (Mailhot 1985).

Standardization and mutual comprehensibility of dialects, as the key to literacy and to wider communication among groups, was assumed (by intervening linguists) to be a priority in the preservation of Innu-aimun. Linguists proposed a standard orthography, where the same word would be spelled same way in all dialects to promote written mutual comprehensibility. An advantage of the system is that it is easier to learn to read/recognize words when they are always spelled the same way, making literacy more accessible (Drapeau 1985). This system was not intended to affect the spoken language; students would still read/pronounce words as they always had, even if the spelling reflected a slightly different form. Further, the standard was proposed for specific functions that required a shared system, but did not preclude using other systems for creative or expressive purposes. Nonetheless, planners met with reluctance among native speakers to adapt to a system that did not reflect their own dialect. Negative public opinion and lack of a central means of diffusion and implementing the standard hindered its adoption.

At the time, Mailhot lamented (1985:24), “everything takes place at the local level and everything is left to individual initiative,” considering this decentralization of initiatives as detrimental to standardization and thus to language preservation. Her objection is interesting in light of today’s focus on grassroots initiatives. Although Nunavut, in its attempts at language preservation, has territorial and regional bodies that could implement widespread strategies, many language initiatives are still happening locally. These locally driven strategies seem, across various contexts, to be successful in encouraging language use generally, and may, for Nunavut, have the added benefit of preserving dialect forms.

- *Local, grassroots approaches to language preservation favour maintenance of dialect diversity.*

Drapeau (1985) reports on local initiatives in one community, Betsiamites. In 1974, the community rejected the proposed standard, wanting their writing system to

reflect their own pronunciation. By the 1980s, though, teachers had adopted a conservative system very much like the 1974 proposal. Although their own pronunciation was more innovative, Betsiamites Innu chose conservative spellings in the hopes of making their written materials more accessible to readers from other dialects. These developments suggest that, with time, compromises can be found that allow for both standardization and dialect maintenance. Drapeau (1985), reiterated by Burnaby (1985), suggests that one such compromise could be to allow for variable spelling of words, although such a concept may be disturbing to students originally trained in English's prescriptivist orthography, where there is only one "right way" to spell a word.

- *Variability may be an appropriate goal for Aboriginal writing systems.*

Today, standard Innu-aimun is relatively well established in Quebec (where it was developed). The Montagnais Cultural and Educational Institute is actively promoting the language, overall, according to the following three goals (text adapted from the Montagnais Cultural and Educational Institute's [2004] brochure, "Development of the Innu Language"):

- *Supporting and encouraging activities which target development of the Innu language;*
- *Promoting priority usage of the Innu language, oral and written, by Innu;*
- *Favouring the development of Innu linguistics, and diffusing the information.*

In pursuit of these goals, the Institute undertakes to:

- *Develop teaching materials in Innu-aimun, particularly for Kindergarten and Grade One, including a teacher's guide, student manual, spelling workbook, audio cassettes, CDs, and posters;*
- *Build networks (e.g. of Innu-aimun teachers);*
- *Provide training (advanced linguistic training through university collaborations, as well as local language training);*
- *Promote awareness of language issues, through Aboriginal language week activities, language surveys, posters, radio shows, festivals, etc.;*
- *Publish materials in Innu-aimun, including children's books and elders' stories;*
- *Conduct research on Innu-aimun, in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations, including the development of an Innu-aimun language policy;*
- *Offer specialized linguistic services, including information on the standardization on Innu writing, consultation, and some translation.*

While language promotion appears effectively and centrally organized for the Quebec Innu, "standard" Innu-aimun remains a contentious issue in the two Labrador

communities. Labrador Innu “are not always enthusiastic about the standard system... and this has created difficulties [in teaching literacy]” (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:358). These scholars, working on Aboriginal teacher training in Labrador, for Innu and Inuit, advocate a flexible approach to language, which favours mutual comprehensibility while valuing individual dialects. Their key point is that where dialects are mutually comprehensible, even ones that have not been so in the past, language survival is more likely because broader communication and sense of community are possible. At the same time, speakers should be able to use their own, native speech forms and have them respected. This concept of a flexible standard as a compromise when no standard variety can be agreed upon is supported by Fishman’s (1997) theoretical work on reversing language shift.

Radio and television about cultural practices in the Aboriginal language can be an important conduit for enhancing dialect comprehension and maintenance (the use of the radio is discussed in more detail in the Irish case study below). Incorporating dialect awareness in teacher training can enhance knowledge and respect of other dialects. Increased awareness of dialects can help speakers to make the effort to understand when they hear speakers of other dialects, whether in person or on the radio or television, instead of tuning out or switching to English. Improved comprehension may increase use and thus maintenance of the Innu-aimun language as well as its distinct dialects.

- *Mutual intelligibility enhances the dialects’ and the language’s viability and can be achieved through:*
- *Increased exposure to the varieties (using media, etc.);*
- *Explicit teaching about the dialects in teacher training programs.*

In terms of use and respect of distinct dialects, Johns and Mazurkewich (2001:363) emphasize that:

- *Each speaker should know that his or her own dialect is legitimate [and]*
- *Each speaker should be exposed to the value of other dialects.*

The education of Aboriginal teachers should help them to overcome the potential divisiveness of dialectal differences:

- *Teachers should be allowed to adapt materials to their own dialect;*
- *Teacher trainers should make sure that no speakers are left feeling that they speak an incorrect or inadequate form of their language.*

Beyond this:

- *Increased participation in the form of trained language professionals from the various dialect groups is essential to the planning process and policy implementation for the preservation of the language and its dialects.*

Overall, the experiences of linguists working with Innu-aimun have shown that it takes time to implement new strategies. They have also suggested that standardization may not be absolutely necessary as a first goal in language preservation, and that working toward dialect comprehension may be a more effective strategy than attempting to diffuse a standard variety.

- *Dialect comprehension contributes to overall strength of language.*
- *Encouraging/teaching bidialectalism (active or passive) is one way of enhancing communication between dialect groups.*<sup>20</sup>

### **3.2.6. Breton (France) – Maintaining One’s “Real” Language**

Where Innu-aimun speakers have been reluctant to adopt and use Native speech forms other than those traditionally used in their communities, and have insisted on maintaining distinct dialects, speakers of Breton have maintained “authentic” dialectal diversity alongside an artificial, imposed standard. There are four main dialects of Breton, spoken alongside a local French dialect in Brittany, France. Dialects are somewhat mutually intelligible, although there are some problems with interdialectal communication.

As was the case with dialects in the Mayan languages, native Breton speakers have a tendency to feel that their own dialect is the “best” form. In fact, they identify themselves more as speakers of a particular dialect of Breton than as speakers of the language overall (as do Irish speakers, below). In pursuit of language preservation, a standardized form of Breton has been developed for official functions. However, attachment to local varieties remains strong and Breton language planners and educators have attempted to negotiate a place for both the standard and the dialects in their planning.

The local dialects of Breton are valued over the standard, in part, because they are used for solidarity purposes between speakers in their communities, a function that standard Breton is impotent to fill:

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<sup>20</sup> As a side note, the Innu-Montagnais dialects exist on a continuum with Cree, Ojibwe and Naskapi dialects. These dialects/languages have faced similar challenges of standardization and mutual comprehensibility of the dialects. There is little motivation for communities to adopt a standardized writing system, as dialectal differences would keep individuals from other communities from reading the materials, even if there was a common orthography (Burnaby and MacKenzie 1985). Opponents of an international standardized writing system for the Inuit language suggest that, in much the same way, a common standard would be pointless because dialectal differences will keep speakers from reading dialectal work from another country anyway (Kenn Harper, personal communication). Speakers of East Cree have adopted a dual standard, one for Northern dialects and one for Southern dialects, but teachers still reworked materials into the local dialect. There is evidence that the Cree, historically, were multidialectal (MacKenzie 1985), and this tradition of multidialectalism may be a more effective strategy for speakers than attempts to diffuse a single standard.

...those learners [i.e. L2 non-immersion learners, another dialect or the standard] may acquire a “perfect” Breton, but it will be foreign to the native speakers of their home area. Those who learn a standard Breton find themselves in a no-man’s land, speaking a colorless language which to many native speakers might as well be French for all the relation it bears to their own “real” Breton. (Kuter 1989:85)

Even native speakers who move to a different region may feel alienated by the different speech forms. This is particularly a problem for the Breton teachers, who do not necessarily find jobs in their home dialect area, and end up teaching in a different region. To accommodate the importance placed on dialects, teachers are trained to “have an ear” for dialects, although they obviously cannot speak all of them fluently. In their classrooms, one approach is to teach in the standard, as a base form of Breton from which other dialects can be learned, or to “sample” all dialects in courses and materials.

A very recent book on Breton (Press 2004) reports that a flexible standard has now emerged for Breton. Although there is ongoing debate (taken as a sign of the vitality of the language), the concept of a standard that was resisted in the 1980s is increasingly accepted in this “post-standard” period, with speakers are feeling more at ease with variation in the language. As was the case with the Basque language, an artificial standard that was originally rejected by the population may ultimately be contributing to the language’s vitality. Further data on the Inuit in Nunavut is necessary in order to evaluate the applicability of these principles to language preservation in Nunavut. Do they primarily see themselves as speakers of particular dialects, or as speakers of the Inuit language, overall?

- *Although speakers’ attitudes must be respected in language promotion, resistance to a standard does not mean a standard is ultimately impossible.*

### **3.2.7. Maori (New Zealand) – Dialect Preservation a Side-Effect of Grassroots Language Promotion**

As a final example of endangered language preservation that has (perhaps inadvertently) preserved dialectal variation, I discuss the language nest programs among the Maori in New Zealand. The Maori are the only indigenous group in New Zealand, and their language has been endangered for reasons similar to those encountered in Nunavut. Among others, colonial policy forced assimilation to the English language. In 1974, the New Zealand government amended the Maori Affairs Act to recognize and allow for the “encouragement of the learning and use of the Maori language (in its recognized dialects and variants)...” (cited in Fishman 1997:233). This legislative change had no direct, practical outcome on the revitalization of Maori, but it did open the door for Maori grassroots initiatives to teach and promote their own language.

In 1982, Maori community members, concerned about the decline in their languages, initiated “Te Kohanga Reo”, or the language nest program. Through this

program, elders (and younger adults) fluent in the Maori language assume childcare responsibilities, with the participation of parents and other community members. In this way, children are socialized in Maori in a way that parents with weaker language skills were unable to accomplish on their own.<sup>21</sup> The first generation of children to have been “given back” the Maori language is now bringing their own children to the Kohanga Reo.

As a grassroots initiative, developed community by community, by Maori for Maori, the Kohanga Reo have been particularly effective at maintaining dialectal diversity, while promoting the language overall. In evaluating the program, sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1997:239) states:

In addition, as linguists are not slow to point out, the grass-roots nature of the staffing, the day-to-day management and the program-definition of the rural Kohanga Reos sometimes leads to the preservation or even intensification of the rural dialectal diversity of Maori. This tends to counteract the emergence of a national standard Maori (needed later for Maori literacy) and even competes with the emergence of a more inclusive, unified, supra-local Maori self-concept and identity such as that which the primarily urban and dialectally heterogeneous [sic?] Kohanga Reos do tend to foster.

Fishman’s critique betrays his assumption that standardization (and eventually literacy) should be a priority goal of language preservation activities.<sup>22</sup> Further, he makes a not uncommon link between dialectal diversity and identity fragmentation on the one hand and linguistic standardization and cultural/political unity on the other. Nonetheless, his comments point to successful dialect maintenance; although this was not the Kohanga Reo’s goal, it was a side effect of a grassroots movement which transmitted the language in an informal, family-like environment. The Kohanga Reos also had unintended positive effects on community building and fostering health and well-being among Maori children.

- *Grassroots initiatives favour the maintenance of dialectal diversity;*
- *Language transmission in an informal, family-like environment favours dialectal diversity*

Based on the Kohanga Reo model, language promotion initiatives in Nunavut which are driven and staffed at the grassroots level, and which transmit and use the language in an informal, family-like environment, may be successful at preserving the Inuit language in its full dialectal diversity. Hinton’s (2001) Master-Apprentice program

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<sup>21</sup> This model is perhaps most applicable in Iqaluit and Kitikmeot communities where some young parents do not have extensive Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun language skills.

<sup>22</sup> The ‘need’ to standardize has long been considered common wisdom in reversing language shift and is seen in numerous cases. However, the descriptions in this chapter hopefully call into question the necessity of a single, fixed, standard form of Aboriginal languages, suggesting promotion of mutual intelligibility of dialects, or of a flexible standard, or multiple, regional standards, as viable alternatives.

presents similar informal learning opportunities for adults. Such programs may also have positive community-building effects.

### **3.3. Studies of Endangered Dialects of Endangered Languages**

The literature records very few studies on the preservation or loss of specific dialects of an endangered language. Nancy Dorian's (1981) study of the death of East Sutherland Gaelic, a dialect of Scots Gaelic, which is, overall, ceding its place to English is an exception. As one of the classics in the study of language death, I summarize her observations that are specific to dialect death here. The preservation of Irish dialects, as they are closely related to Scottish Gaelic, will also be considered in this final section.

#### **3.3.1. Scots Gaelic (Scotland) – Death of a Dialect of an Endangered Language**

The East Sutherland dialect of Scots Gaelic, like many of the other dialects considered in this chapter, became endangered when the communities became less isolated and entered into more frequent contact with speakers of (and thus had more access to learning) the local variety of English. As long as the fishers lived socially and physically separated from other Scots (““protected” from English [or] “prevented” from it, depending on the point of view” [Dorian 1981:102]), they maintained their distinct language and dialect. However, as contact increased, they started shifting to English. East Sutherland Gaelic (ESG) is doubly stigmatized: first, in Scotland, all Gaelic varieties are perceived as subordinate to English, and this particular dialect is judged as inferior even to the other Gaelic speech forms. Denigration of the speech form reflects the judgements passed on the people who use it; and adopting more prestigious speech forms (in this case, speakers are shifting directly to English and not to another Scots Gaelic dialect) can be a way of appropriating higher esteem. Speakers of Scots Gaelic were, in the past, forced to assimilate to English, abandoning their mother tongue, and subsequent tolerance of Gaelic does not seem to be enough to persuade speakers to continue to transmit it to their children. Without transmission at home, the language, and the ESG dialect specifically, has little chance of survival.

A standard written form of Gaelic exists, which is read with the speaker's local pronunciation. Some efforts have been made to implement it and teach it in the local schools, with apparently little effect on the vitality of the dialect, for better or for worse. On the one hand, some teachers “don't see the point” in teaching in the standard, and continue to use their local speech forms. Other teachers attempt to teach the standard, but the students reportedly persist in speaking with their local dialectal forms, that they have learned at home, and that they use in everyday interactions with their peers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The persistence of dialects even when a standard is being taught can also be observed in studies of African American students in the United States.

Adult classes, which teach the standard, are also available, but speakers resist learning and using the standard; it doesn't "feel right" to them, and they don't want an outside standard:

Most other Brora ESG speakers who have tried classes have given up rather than try to learn to speak a Gaelic which is unnatural to them and "sounds foolish" coming out of their mouths. They recognize the prestige of this kind of Gaelic but do not aspire to speak it. This is, of course, the attitude of many dialect speakers toward a standard form of their language. They can adopt the standard form for play-acting on a short term basis, but would feel uncomfortable with in on any longer-term basis. [...] Solidarity within the community requires that the local speech form be maintained by community members. To abandon the local speech form is an act of linguistic disloyalty with general dissociative socioeconomic overtones. Such behaviour does occur, rather frequently, in fact, but it takes the form of abandoning Gaelic for English rather than abandoning ESG for some more prestigious form of Gaelic. (Dorian 1981:89)

Such dialect loyalty (as seen also among Breton speakers) may be positive for the dialect's short term vitality, but detrimental for the language itself long-term, if speakers shift to English to avoid being criticized for speaking an incorrect form of Gaelic. Teaching a different standard does not, in itself, threaten the dialect, but it may be counterproductive if it alienates speakers from their mother tongue, and further pushes them to switch to English.

According to most linguists, dialects of Scots Gaelic are mutually intelligible, although speakers may disagree.<sup>24</sup> One factor impeding interintelligibility of the dialects is the speakers' attitudes toward the other varieties. Another factor is language attrition in certain dialects, including ESG, which makes it difficult for speakers of the dialects which have lost some of the older speech forms to understand more conservative dialects, although speakers of these dialects can understand the simplified East Sutherland dialect. Dorian (1981:91) also suggests that low literacy may impede mutual comprehension: "Most East Sutherlandshire women have the great handicap of total Gaelic illiteracy, which prevents them from relating the variety of dialect forms in a systematic way to a written model." In other words, she suggests that having a standard literary model to relate spoken forms to would improve one's ability to understand the other dialects. Familiarity with the other dialects, as the East Sutherland speakers have more contact with outsiders, also helps improve mutual comprehensibility of the Gaelic varieties.

Lack of mutual intelligibility is detrimental to the vitality of East Sutherland Gaelic in three ways. Most obviously, the size of the speech community is seriously reduced if it is limited to ESG dialect speakers, reducing opportunities to hear and use the

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<sup>24</sup> Such disagreement between linguists and speakers as to the mutual intelligibility of dialects has also been recorded in the Inuit language by Dorais (1996).

language outside one's immediate community (e.g. Gaelic radio broadcasts are not intelligible to ESG speakers). Along the same lines, Scots Gaelic speakers of different dialects sometimes resort to English, rather than making the effort to decipher the unfamiliar dialect, further reducing their use of ESG. Finally, dialectal differences to the extent that they impede communication may further stigmatize the dialect:

In any event, one result of the relatively low intelligibility of other forms of Gaelic for ESG speakers is that the support value which might derive from the use of Gaelic by prestige sources like the television and radio is limited. The Gaelic heard from such sources is simply too different from ESG to have much reinforcement value for speaker of the local dialect. For some, television and radio use of Gaelic only underscores the limited currency of their own form of Gaelic. For such speakers, "real" Gaelic is to be found in books, in the broadcasting media and in other locations, whereas ESG is "just our Gaelic." (Dorian 1981:93)

In these ways, speakers of East Sutherland Gaelic can be seen as isolated from the broader Scots Gaelic community in that they are aware that others look down on their dialect, they have limited understanding of the other dialects, and they refuse the standard. These factors do nothing to favour their continued use of Gaelic, and, in all evidence, the speakers are ceasing to transmit their mother tongue, and the community as a whole is slowly favouring English.

Attempts to preserve dialects in Nunavut can draw some lessons from the East Sutherland Gaelic experiences:

- *A stigmatized dialect has weaker chances of survival;*
- *Endangered dialects of endangered languages face a greater threat from the dominant language than from another variety of the same language;*
- *A standard form does not necessarily challenge the dialects;*
- *If children are using the mother tongue dialect at home and with their peers, they will likely keep it even if another "standard" variety is taught in school;*
- *Teaching a standard may be counterproductive if it alienates speakers from their mother tongue, and further pushes them to switch to English;*
- *Mutual intelligibility favours dialect survival;*
- *Productions in the language are of little value if they are in a dialect speakers do not understand or cannot relate to.*

### **3.3.2. Irish (Ireland) – A Success Story of Promoted Dialects of a Promoted Language**

Irish is a language with close historical connections to Scots Gaelic, but is promoted as a separate language in Ireland, as a powerful symbol of Irish national identity. As was the case for Scots Gaelic, the Irish language has been losing ground to English and although a significant proportion of Irish people know it, they do not use it widely and frequently. The Irish government has undertaken efforts to promote Irish. An

interesting aspect, as concerns the preservation of endangered dialects, is that activities have included both the elaboration and an implementation of a ‘synthetic’ standard Irish *and* the deliberate promotion of the three main dialect regions – Ulster, Connacht, and Munster – as reflected in modern literature and radio.

Standard Irish, An Caighdeán, is an arbitrary, melded, artificial standard created in the 1950s for education and government functions. It is a “compromise dialect”, made up of historical and modern features from all three dialect areas. Deliberate standardization was required as no dialect group was considered the standard, and none was willing to concede “standard”. An Caighdeán is used in official functions, as intended, and it is the variety learned and used by non-native speakers. However, the prestige forms of the language remain the local dialects:

Interestingly, while An Caighdeán is used and ratified by the society’s institutions, the prestige targets for speakers remain the various dialects of the Gaeltacht (which is contrary to many of the contact situations described in the sociolinguistic literature [...] in which the language of institutions becomes a “high” language with prestige). (Cotter 2001:303)

Speakers’ strong loyalty to their regional dialects has, in some ways, been perceived as detrimental to preservation efforts. Those unfamiliar with the other dialects tended to use English “rather than making the effort to continue to struggle with one another’s comparatively unfamiliar native speech forms” (Watson 1989:46), even if they recognized the speech form as another variety of the Irish language. They would judge learners as “good speakers” if they learned the local dialect, and as “poor” speakers if they learned another. Improving mutual intelligibility and dialectal awareness, then, were goals to be pursued (alongside the standard) in order to encourage use of Irish. Expanding literacy and knowledge of the written norm was one way in which greater dialectal awareness was achieved. Increasing exposure to the other dialects, particular on the radio, was another.

Raidió na Gaeltachta ([RnaG], est. 1972) is a government established and funded radio station that broadcasts entirely in Irish from the three dialect regions. It has an overt policy of “conservation and dialect integrity”. Use of the three dialects and the order of their use rotate on a basis of “scheduled regionalism”. In this way, Irish speakers in geographically distant communities can hear the News (national, international), sports, traditional music, lengthy interviews, current affairs, community notices, obituaries, and Sunday Mass (rotates weeks in each region) in their homes, in their local dialect or in another, depending on when they turn on the radio. Even if people listen primarily in own dialect, the radio is helping speakers get used to hearing the pronunciations of the other regions, thus improving mutually intelligibility. In this way, RnaG is helping to preserve Irish and its dialects through encouraging comprehension and use of the various speech forms: “the result is a sense of the importance of one’s own dialect and its connection to the language overall. Additionally, there is the reported higher incidence of mutual intelligibility among speakers of different dialects” (Cotter 2001:308). At the same time, there is no evidence that the dialects are changing to become more alike, despite

increased exposure to the others, as has been observed in other contexts. RnaG also works toward documentation of the language, recording and archiving everything they do, and enhancing it, by developing vocabulary as needed. Unity between the dialect groups is promoted through shared cultural content.

Another radio station, RnaL, based in Dublin and established in 1993, is also pursuing preservation of the language but has an overt policy of “linguistic innovation”. In other words, it aims to encourage any use of Irish, regardless of the form, and is tolerant of “mistakes” in language use. The station appeals to youth, playing contemporary music and using the Dublin dialect (although this is a low-prestige variety). Irish is the language of work at the station, giving employees a chance to participate in an Irish speech community and practice the language, increasing their linguistic confidence. Overall, the “perspective on language work [at RnaL]...is attuned to language growth and not language preservation” (Cotter 2001:308). In other words, RnaL and its workers are more concerned about enhancing the community of speakers than about the language itself. This different perspective entails different priorities and methods, including broadcasting in the language variety commonly used by its listenership, even if this “new” Irish is not as prestigious as the traditional dialects.<sup>25</sup>

Some Inuit have suggested that radio is playing a similar role in Nunavut to the one documented in Ireland. Although the Inuit communities, and their dialects, remain geographically isolated, they are increasingly hearing each other’s speech forms on the radio, increasing mutual intelligibility. The concern for mutual intelligibility of dialects, and encouraging speakers to persist in their dialects rather than switch to English, is as much a worry for Inuit as it is for the Irish (although this concern seems to be decreasing as Inuit gain in awareness and comprehension of the other dialects). The contrast between RnaG’s and RnaL’s approach is also relevant to Nunavut, as it can be tempting for a nation to focus on *conserving* a language (i.e. “pickling” a language), especially when this language is valued as a link to one’s culture and traditions and is put forth as a symbol of national/ethnic identity. However, for the dialects really to thrive, they must have speakers who are comfortable using them in a wide variety of settings. In this way, the functional approach of RnaL is as relevant and promising for the preservation of dialects as the explicitly preservationist approach of RnaG. Conservation and expansion of use are probably both desirable goals for Nunavut dialect preservation.

- *Use of the radio promises to be an effective means of promoting the language and encouraging dialect use;*
- *Use of multiple dialects can be a way of increasing mutual understanding, encouraging language use and preserving the dialects;*

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<sup>25</sup> Attitudes about Dublin Irish, and the youths’ use of it, remind one of attitudes in Nunavut toward Iqaluit Inuktitut, and young people’s use of it more specifically. Although this paper is focusing on the regional dialects, it is relevant for language planners to consider whether or not they include these new speech forms when they speak of “Inuktitut in all its forms”, or whether they are only speaking of the traditional forms of the language.

- *Increased dialect awareness and mutual comprehension can bypass the need for a shared oral standard;*
- *Dialects may remain the prestigious speech form, even where a standard is introduced;*
- *Archiving all media productions can be a way of conserving particular uses of the dialects.*

In conclusion, although these case studies are not all immediately applicable to Nunavut, they give some idea of the possibilities and probabilities for the preservation of distinct dialects, whether the dialect is a form of an otherwise healthy language, or part of a language that is threatened in all its forms. Some of these aspects, and occasionally action points accompanying them, are listed in bullet form throughout this chapter.

In summary, where the language itself is strong, dialects may be lost as speakers shift to another variety of the language (i.e. a standard variety). But in situations where the language itself is endangered, speakers of endangered dialects shift away from the language altogether, adopting a more dominant or prestigious language. Speakers of endangered languages generally need or want to be at least bilingual. They may also need or want to be bidialectal in varieties of their mother tongue in order to preserve their dialect and the language overall.

An endangered language overall will be stronger if it can be used by a maximal number of people in their daily interactions with each other. Where the speakers have the perception of not having a shared, common language due to dialectal differences, this can be overcome either by standardization or by increasing mutual comprehension of the dialects. As far as the oral language goes (which is, in any case, the primary and traditional use of the Inuit dialects), increased dialect awareness and mutual comprehension may bypass the need for a shared oral standard. If the language is to fill literary functions, including the publication of official documents, books, etc., a standard way of writing and spelling words may be helpful for teaching literacy and fulfilling these functions. Dialects of endangered languages may appear to be threatened by standardization, but they do not need to be, especially if the focus is on a standard written form only.

Attachment to the dialect and to one's language, as well as the vitality of the context in which the varieties are used, are real factors in dialect viability. Promotion of the language overall, taking a grassroots, community-drive approach, which favours oral transmission and use probably most favourable to preserving distinct dialects of an endangered language.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESERVING INUIT DIALECTS – APPLICATIONS TO NUNAVUT

The previous chapter presented a number of cases concerning the preservation of distinct dialects and pulled out some principles with immediate relevance to Nunavut. The studies, and suggestions that derive from them, involved ideological issues, such as why promote a language and/or its dialects and which forms to promote, as well as potential goals of language/dialect preservation and practical strategies for reaching these goals. Principles of preservation as well as concrete actions were put forth. This chapter combines theoretical considerations from Chapter Two and practical outcomes from specific cases from Chapter Three with knowledge about the language situation in Nunavut in order to explore areas of action for preservation of distinct dialects of the Inuit language in Nunavut. There is no ideal model, though, and no single solution. The recommendations put forth here are for the consideration of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut, and, ultimately, the Government of Nunavut. While a more intimate knowledge of the context may make the readers realize that some suggestions put forth here unrealizable or undesirable, it is hoped that the potential for preserving dialects through government initiatives will come through. The specific actions implemented to pursue these goals should also reflect the predispositions, the needs, and the resources of the population.

#### 4.1. Setting Goals – Conservation, Knowledge, Use

As a first step in language/dialect preservation, planners must establish clear goals for their activities. The Languages Commissioner's Office may recommend that the Government of Nunavut establish a three-fold goal for preservation of the Inuit language in all its forms: conservation, competence and confidence. *Conservation* would entail recording and documenting the dialects as they are spoken today, i.e. preserving static forms for future study. *Knowledge* would entail increasing speakers' ability to understand, speak, read and write dialects. *Use* would entail increasing speakers' practice of the dialects, by enhancing opportunities to use the dialect and by encouraging positive attitudes toward it. The current levels of documentation of the dialects, and widespread knowledge and use of them throughout the territory make these highly realizable goals. In fact, these goals reflect a determination to hold on to and enhance what is already underway.

- *Recommend establishment of a three-fold goal for preservation of the Inuit language in all its forms: conservation, knowledge, and use.*

#### 4.2. Immediate Priorities – Community-Based Research and Inuit Researchers

This report takes the position that language planning must take into account and reflect the needs and desires of the population. Initiatives to preserve Inuit dialects are only meaningful if speakers share this preoccupation. Discussion with Inuit from all communities would be helpful in shaping priorities and strategies.

- *Recommend research into the perceptions, attitudes and desires of Inuit in all Nunavut communities with regard to the Inuit language and its dialects.*

The brief summary of the Inuit languages and its dialects identified the Natsilingmiut as an understudied group in terms of language preservation. Their dialect, further, may have particular requirements as it falls in between Inuinnaqtun, written in roman orthography, and Kivalliq, written in syllabics. Research into the needs and desires of Inuit in these communities is most specifically needed in order to address this group's interests.

- *Recommend priority research into all aspects of the linguistic situation among Natsilingmiut.*

Preservation of Inuit dialects requires ongoing research and planning activities in and with Inuit communities. Although Inuit from the communities have in-depth knowledge of the situation, very few are trained in linguistic research techniques.

- *Recommend training of Inuit linguists to conduct research.*

### **4.3. Policy Formulation**

#### **4.3.1. Mission Statement about Language**

Should planners focus on promoting the Inuit language overall or on promoting the distinct dialects? Preservation of Inuit dialects is part of a bigger picture of preserving and promoting the Inuit language, overall. The dialects hold the greatest chance of survival when the language, overall, is thriving. If planners focus on the “Inuit language, in all its forms”, as the government has been doing to date,<sup>26</sup> speakers who value their dialect will naturally apply strategies or initiatives to their own dialect (as long as no counter-initiative is present to discourage them from doing so). The example of Breton in the previous chapter shows speakers maintaining their dialects as preferred speech forms in the context of governmental promotion of the Breton language, overall.

- *Recommend a mission statement of promoting the “Inuit language, in all its forms”.*

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<sup>26</sup> I have slightly altered the government's usual terminology throughout this report, suggesting that “the Inuit language in all its forms” will be perceived as more inclusive than “Inuktitut in all its forms”. Even if it is understood that the Government of Nunavut includes Inuinnaqtun and Natsilingmiutut in “Inuktitut and all its forms”, the concurrent usage of “Inuktitut” to refer specifically to the Eastern dialects could give Western Inuktitun speakers reason to feel left out.

### **4.3.2. Philosophy and Value of the Inuit Language**

Why do speakers want to preserve the Inuit language and its dialects? The Inuit language is valued as a part of and a link to Inuit tradition, but it is also a thriving communication tool for today. Preservation initiatives should build on the values Inuit already attach to their dialects. Promotion also requires that the language is allowed to evolve and fill new functions.

- *Recommend a statement of philosophy and value of the Inuit language that acknowledges both its link to Inuit tradition and its evolution as a tool for communication in modern Inuit communities.*

### **4.3.3. Official Varieties of the Inuit Language**

Are there one or two Inuit languages in Nunavut? Disagreement as to whether Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun should be recognised as dialects of the same language or two different languages are ongoing. Linguists have grouped them together as dialects of a single language, although speakers refute their primary justification that the speech forms are mutually comprehensible. Whether they are or not, classification of speech forms as dialects or languages depends as much on social, cultural, and political factors as it does on linguistic factors. Further research into the mutual intelligibility of the dialects, as well as speakers' perceptions of the dialects may bring out compelling reasons to go one way or the other in the classification of these speech forms. In the meantime, the Government of Nunavut may want to consider recognizing one Inuit language with two official varieties in Nunavut: Inuktitut (syllabics) and Inuinnaqtun (roman orthography). Such a policy would confirm its current commitment to accommodate at least two main dialect groups and two writing systems. Further research is required to establish ways to accommodate speakers of Natsilingmiutut in this context.

- *Recommend (acknowledging speakers' need to ratify such a policy) that the Government of Nunavut recognize one Inuit language, with two official varieties in Nunavut.*

### **4.3.4. Role and Authority of Bodies**

Currently in Nunavut, the Languages Commissioners Office and the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth (CLEY) have authority in the area of language. The Nunavut Social Development Council (NSDC), created by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which undertook to promote the Inuit language in Nunavut, has been subsumed by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI). Ian Martin (2000:9), in his report to the Government of Nunavut regarding Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun language of instruction, identifies as a problem the "lack of research into language-and-dialect issues, in Inuit language" and "recommends the establishment of a Nunavut Inuit Language Commission, which, among other activities, would have the power to propose, and funds to support, research in all areas of importance for the health and promotion of Inuit language in all its forms." Nunavut Tunngavik (2004:37) has also recommended that "the

Government of Nunavut should create an Inuktitut Language Authority to develop legal, political and scientific terminologies in Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun.” I reiterate these calls for the establishment of a group to oversee such issues.

- *Recommend establishment of an Inuit Language Authority.*

#### **4.3.5. Prioritized Goals**

The three basic goals for dialect preservation identified at the beginning of this chapter, conservation, knowledge and use, could entail numerous sub-objectives, some of which are suggested here. These targets are open-ended, and may be specified and prioritized at the territorial, regional, or community level. They reflect possibilities, rather than directives. The ‘knowledge’ and ‘use’ goals in particular will depend on the starting point of each community.

Conservation Goals:

- All dialects are recorded and described;
- Each community’s specific speech forms are recorded and described;
- A database of recorded speech forms is fully indexed (including data on where the interview took place, which date, and where person was from), transcribed, and translated for future research (especially for future research on elders’ dialects);
- An archive of such material is accessible to Inuit, physically in a Northern location, and or virtually on the Internet;
- Trained Inuit linguists are working on existing materials;
- Trained Inuit linguists are collecting new data;
- ...
- *Recommend establishment and development of an Inuit language archive that will house records of Inuit speech from all regions, fully transcribed, translated, indexed and available for consultation.*

Knowledge Goals:<sup>27</sup>

- Descriptions of the dialects available to the population (dictionaries, grammars, etc.);
- Opportunities to enhance one’s knowledge of the local dialect available to all ages and social groups, at all levels of competence, with emphasis on the oral language;
- Parents encouraged and equipped to transmit their local dialect to their children in the home;

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<sup>27</sup> As this report concerns the preservation of Inuit dialects, I only address potential knowledge goals in the Inuit language and its dialects. Full competence in English (without disregard for French) is equally a goal of language planning in Nunavut.

- Schools reinforcing knowledge of the Inuit language, teaching and reflecting dialect tolerance and awareness;
- Language professionals (teachers, translators) from all dialect groups receiving specialized training that takes into account dialect diversity;
- Mutual comprehension of other dialects enhanced through deliberate exposure of speakers to other dialect forms;
- ...
- *Recommend that the Inuit Language Authority (proposed above) develop strategies to promote active knowledge of one's first dialect, with emphasis on strong oral skills, and passive understanding of a second dialect.*

#### Usage Goals:

- The local dialect is being used and valued as the primary language of oral communication in Inuit homes and communities;
- Activities which encourage use of the dialect (community activities; subsistence activities, etc.) are frequent and accessible to the whole population;
- All varieties of the Inuit language are respected;
- Speakers are proud of the variety of the Inuit language that they speak;
- ...
- *Recommend support of development of community-based strategies and activities which promote informal use of the Inuit language in all its forms, on a local level.*

### **4.4. Strategy and Implementation**

There are many different ways in which the above recommendations could be realized. This section suggests some concrete measures that may be feasible, but the list is certainly not exhaustive. Strategies for pursuing the above goals may involve the development of human and material resources, establishment of programs for oral transmission of the dialect where it was not learned as a first language;

#### **4.4.1. Human Resources**

The development of human resources is essential to work on the preservation of dialects: "It is crucial that a critical mass of language professionals exist to provide support for each other and input into language policy" (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:359). To some degree, this need is being filled by the Language and Culture program at Nunavut Arctic College (NAC). With their limited staff and resources, this program is carrying the weight of training language specialists, particularly in the area of

translation and interpretation.<sup>28</sup> It would be desirable to offer further training to Inuit students in linguistic field methods, linguistic analysis, and sociolinguistic theory in order for Inuit to take charge of research on their language and its dialects. Such courses would preferentially be offered in Nunavut, either through existing NAC programs (e.g. Inuit Studies students have, in the past, been trained as primary data collectors in ethnographic research conducted by Dorais and Sammons), or by visiting scholars coming North and teaching the courses, possibly for University credit through institutional agreements.<sup>29</sup> Bursaries could be put in place to specifically fund students who wish to pursue linguistic training in Southern universities. Enhancing access to university-level study to create a generation of Inuit researchers was also one Martin's (2000) recommendations to the Nunavut Government.

- *Repeat Priority Goal: Enhance opportunities for Inuit to train in linguistics.*

Teacher training offered through NAC is also essential, as Nunavut critically needs more teachers who can effectively teach in Inuit dialects. As steps in the preservation of dialects in Nunavut, training of future Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun teachers could incorporate dialect awareness (cf. Johns and Mazurkewich 2001 for further recommendations for training future language teachers to accommodate dialects).

- *Train future teachers who will be able to teach, respect, and accommodate dialects in the classroom.*

Speakers of the dialects are the primary resources in dialect preservation. Although the government cannot dictate private language use, it can support and encourage grassroots initiatives, which likely will be the most effective strategies for maintaining vital dialects in Nunavut.

- *Provide support and encouragement of grassroots initiatives.*

#### **4.4.2. Strategies for Conservation: Material Resources**

The development of material in and about the Inuit dialects will contribute to all three goals of conservation, knowledge and use. Such materials provide a record of how the language was used at the time they were created. (At a basic level, the materials may simply be archived audio or video recordings of the language being used, e.g. on the radio.) They can also be tools for acquiring and enhancing knowledge of the language

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<sup>28</sup> I am not sure what the regional representation is in the student body taking this program, and if students from all dialects are being trained.

<sup>29</sup> Saint Mary's has offered on-site, collaborative courses in ethnographic field methods in Innu communities in Labrador, for instance, that are developed, taught and evaluated with elders as co-instructors. The University of Manitoba has an existing exchange agreement with the Language and Culture program at NAC and may be able to offer such courses. International collaboration between NAC and other Arctic institutions through University of the Arctic may also be a source for training opportunities.

(particularly in terms of dictionaries, course manuals, etc.). Finally, materials in the language, whether literature, web pages, music or oral histories, provide occasions to use the language, in all its forms, in diverse ways. Placing increased value on oral production, such as music, plays, storytelling, speeches, poetry, etc., provides a natural venue for the dialects to be preserved and used. The establishment of a language authority could endorse such materials, especially anything that is being developed by non-Inuit researchers. Hinton (2001) provides many practical suggestions for how materials about and in the language can be effectively maintained and diffused.

- *Recommend the support of initiatives to produce all kinds of materials in the Inuit dialects, especially those that favour or incorporate the spoken language;*
- *Increase accessibility, ensure regional representation and enhance diversity of materials;*
- *Add audio accompaniments (CDROM, etc.) to written materials (whether paper or electronic).*

#### **4.4.3. Strategies for Knowledge: Transmission**

How will they learn if no one teaches them? Transmission of the dialects provides opportunities to learn and to use the dialect. Transmission can be formal or informal, although informal, community-based modes will probably favour freest, and most natural transmission of the dialect forms. The home is the natural place to acquire the dialect, through intergenerational transmission from parents to children. Communities undergoing language shift have attempted various strategies of informal transmission, including immersion opportunities/homestays, summer programs, after school programs, recreation programs in the language, land-based programs, family/individual lessons, the Master-apprentice program, youth-elder pairing in community activities, etc. Many such strategies are outlined in detail in Hinton 2001.

Schools can also reinforce dialectal awareness and encourage tolerance of dialect forms, although formal language use there may eventually have more of a standardizing influence. At the higher levels, students can become producers of knowledge about the dialects, through carrying out community surveys. Wolfram *et al.* 1999 and Hinton 2001 provide other concrete suggestions for incorporating dialects in the classrooms.

Acquisition should be seen as a lifelong endeavour, and speakers should be provided with opportunities to continue expanding their verbal abilities, including acquiring or refining what NTI has referred to as the “inummarit” varieties of the language. Increasing exposure to other dialects may encourage at least passive knowledge of these forms.

- *Encourage intergenerational transmission as the most natural way of transmitting local dialects;*

- *Provide informal, community-based learning opportunities which favour spontaneous language use for all community members, at all levels of competence;*
- *Use media, signage, etc. to increase exposure to and eventually passive knowledge of other dialects.*

#### **4.4.4. Strategies for Use**

Characteristic regional forms of a language have their own natural areas of use, and preservation initiatives can target these areas. Dialects are preserved most naturally in spoken use, which is also where the Inuit language is predominantly used (and valued). The home is the place that dialectal speakers have to go back to; conformity to other dialect speakers outside the home does not have to mean dialect loss if family use reinforces dialect. Participation in subsistence activities and community activities more generally provides an occasion for use and reinforcement of the dialect.

- *Provide support for grassroots initiatives which will favour informal, community use of the dialect.*

#### **4.4.5. Dialect Awareness/Prestige**

It appears that attitudes toward dialectal diversity in Nunavut are positive, with speakers valuing their own dialect. This affective/symbolic factor is possibly the strongest point in favour of the survival of the dialects – if people value them they will continue to speak them. At the same time, an overly strong sense of one’s dialect as unique can lead to feelings that dialects are not mutually comprehensible, and switching to English with other dialect speakers could be the result. If dialectal awareness and prestige is strong (as research into the question could establish), it may not be advisable, nor necessary, to specifically promote the uniqueness of dialects, but rather to promote the *language* overall; in such a case, promotion of the language overall may be taken by each speaker and community as promoting the knowledge and use of their own variety of the language. If dialects are not valued as they appear to be, then government strategies might want to address increasing their prestige (Wolfram 1997, discussed in the previous chapter, provides concrete strategies for doing so). In any case, actions or statements which would diminish the dialects in speakers’ minds should be avoided.

- *Promote the Inuit language in such a way so as to not diminish pride in dialects or use of dialects, while not emphasizing their uniqueness either.*

In all cases, in pursuing the above recommendations in the area of policy development, goal setting, and strategy and implementation, identification of funding sources, including setting up logistics to transfer funding to local, grassroots initiatives, will be necessary. Also necessary is agreement among all key actors as to which goals are being pursued, and how. On an ongoing basis, planners should reevaluate the effectiveness of their strategies in reaching their goals, as well as reassessing their goals.

Planning in the area of dialect preservation will be an ongoing effort, changing to reflect evolutions in Inuit society, especially in the Government of Nunavut's current time of rapid transition and growth.

## CONCLUSION

This paper highlights aspects of the current linguistic situation in Nunavut, theories of language planning and language death, and case studies from around the world to bring out possibilities and probabilities in terms of issues and potential actions and outcomes. Ideas for dialect preservation can be derived from what has happened elsewhere, but ultimately, it is the desires and needs of the population that will prevail, and that should prevail. Also, linguistic issues, and their solutions, are tightly intertwined with broader social, political, cultural, economic issues, and it may well be that action on these latter fronts is needed along with language planning in order to counteract language shift. The preservation of Inuit dialects is seen as part of a bigger picture of the preservation of the Inuit language. Promotion of the Inuit language is part of a bigger picture of preservation and promotion of Inuit ways of being, and negotiating the space where Inuit can choose and act out their ways of being. Nunavut was created specifically for this purpose: for Inuit to be able to shape a society that reflects their own values and aspirations. Nunavut Inuit are in an interesting position to blaze the trail for the preservation of not only their language, but also the dialectal diversity within it. The government's commitment to the Inuit language is clear and it is slowly undertaking to preserve, protect and promote it.

But what about dialects?

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## APPENDIX A

### CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING STANDARDIZATION OF THE INUIT LANGUAGE

I have purposefully avoided making direct recommendations regarding the standardization of Inuktitut in my report. This area, more than any other, is one that must be developed on the ground, by those most closely implicated in the political, social, cultural, economic, as well as linguistic, repercussions of standardization policies. However, I will include some reflections here, a discussion points for those who will make such decisions.

#### **Does there need to be a “standard” form of the two official varieties?**

Many people involved in language planning assume that a standard variety of the language is necessary and desirable. Standardization has evident advantages in terms of mutual comprehension between regions, which increases opportunities to use the language. In order to implement the Inuit language in domains previously dominated by English, and, in particular, in order to provide government documents and to develop curriculum in the Inuit language, there is a perception that a standard variety (standard varieties) must be chosen. One can identify three potential levels:

1. Standardization of the writing system(s);
2. Choice or elaboration of a standard dialect for use in written documents (vocabulary, grammar);
3. Choice/elaboration of a standard dialect for oral use (also pronunciation).

The issue is thorny because people hold to their dialects (which is a positive characteristic in terms of language preservation), and internal strife is detrimental to language preservation activities. Experience has shown that both standardizing and not standardizing can have equally positive and negative outcomes for the future of the language overall, as well as the dialects. It goes without saying that any action which favours the dialect to the detriment of that language will in the long term undermine efforts to preserve the dialect as it is part of the language.

Standardization may set one dialect (and its speakers) up over another, with corresponding social, political, economic, cultural implications. It may alienate speakers if they don't like the standard (if it is perceived as artificial, or a language that they cannot relate to) and refuse to speak it. Standardization could also have negative effects if speakers faced with a differing standard feel that their own variety is substandard or incorrect and become uncomfortable/insecure speaking it.

#### **Standardization of the Writing System(s)**

On the first level, standardization of the writing system, a great deal of progress has already been made. Although the systems may have weaknesses, they have the advantage of being established as clear standards; of having been elaborated and ratified

within the communities; and having enjoyed consistent use for decades. Maintaining stability in the writing system is advantageous for encouraging literary production.

- *Recommend maintaining the ICC standard dual orthography, with Inuinnaqtun written in standard roman orthography and Natsilingmiut and Inuktitut written in standard syllabics.*

### **Choice of a Standard, Written Dialect**

The second level, choice or elaboration of a standard dialect for use in written documents (vocabulary, grammar), is the trickiest to settle. In terms of new developments in the language, the Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth is already doing relevant work, standardizing technical vocabulary by getting together with representatives from each region to decide on the words. These language workshops are effective for establishing shared technical vocabulary which becomes part of the standard, written language to be used in official publications.

As outlined in previous chapters, the Government has a few options in terms of addressing the perceived need for a standard language variety:

1. *Promote active or passive bidialectalism as a way to bypass the need for a standard; OR*
2. *Create a standard, based on features from all dialects; OR*
3. *Choose an existing (prestigious, and/or central, and/or conservative) dialect as the standard variety.*

Even if the government chooses to put forth a standard variety of the language, speakers will be encouraged to become bidialectal in their native dialect and the standard dialect. It should be emphasized that this variety is *in addition* to their existing speech repertoire, and is intended for specific, specialized uses, e.g. official publications. Care should be taken not to denigrate the dialects in any way in the diffusion of a standard.

The lesser degree of dialectal diversity in Inuinnaqtun makes the issue of standardization less contentious there (if it is agreed that Inuinnaqtun will be recognized as an official variety in Nunavut).

Based on personal communication in Nunavut, it appears that speakers in the various Inuktitut-speaking regions are predisposed to accept the North Baffin dialect as a standard to be used in government publications and curriculum development. If this is the case, the North Baffin dialect has the combined advantages of being conservative, prestigious (in that it is spoken in communities where Inuit tradition is particularly well maintained), and accepted outside its immediate area of use. Further, it is probably the best described of the Inuktitut dialects, and a great deal of material is available in it (most notably the Igloolik Oral History project's archives). This is advantageous in that it is ready to be used and would not require the extensive development work that an artificial standard would. The fact that the political (and economic) centre of Nunavut is in South

Baffin, and curriculum development is occurring in the Kivalliq may help off-set the advantages extended to North Baffin dialect if it is used as a standard variety of Inuktitut. Still, any existing variety that is chosen as a standard should be elaborated to reflect and incorporate, where possible, the full richness of regional varieties (e.g. incorporating regional lexical variants as synonyms).

Conceptualizing a flexible standard may be helpful in promoting the maintenance of dialectal diversity and in minimizing resistance to the standard, if one is introduced. Prior research has shown that, with time, even a standard that was highly controversial at the time can be accepted, and that its existence can be beneficial for the language overall. There is no evidence in the literature of speakers of an endangered language shifting from their dialect to a standard variety of the language. Speakers should be encouraged to see the standard as a tool for Inuit communication in new, expanded domains, and not as a threat to their dialects.

### **Choice of a Spoken Standard Language**

On the third level, standardization of the oral language, flexibility and acceptance of variation may be easiest to achieve and maintain. There is little precedent or justification for requiring a standard oral language. This is probably least feasible and desirable area of language to standardize. Informal, spoken interaction is where the dialects are most naturally used, and diversity should be accepted and encouraged at this level. Mutual intelligibility of the spoken forms can be encouraged through exposure to them, on the radio, for example.

- *Recommend acceptance of, and encouragement of awareness of, diversity in dialect pronunciation.*
- *Increase exposure to the oral varieties in order to enhance mutual comprehension.*