



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

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22 May 2023



Overview

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



SIRENIK
CENTRAL SIBERIAN YUPIK
NAUKAN YUPIK

INUPIAQ

YUPIK

ALUTIIO

UNANGAM TUNUU (ALEUT)

INUVIAALUKTUN

KALAALLISUT

INUKTITUT

Anchorage

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



Atka Island

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

St. Paul Island

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



Timeline of Aleut contact and endangerment

(Jones 1976, Kirtland 1981)

Russian period (1760s-1867)

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

American period (1867-present)

- WWII internment
 - Japanese invasion of Attu; Attuans captured
 - 850 Aleuts forcibly evacuated to Southeastern Alaska
- Boarding school system

forced removal from parents and home

discouraged from speaking Aleut and cultural practices
abuse

half the village dies in camp
remaining Attuans relocated to Atka; Attu I. permanently closed

old and young die of disease, malnourishment
loss of cultural knowledge

psychological trauma, social problems, breakdown of village communities

generation forgets Aleut or stops speaking it to children

Resulting language situation

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

Resulting attitudes

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



Where Are Your Keys (WAYK)

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

How WAYK works to solve these problems

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

Language “hunting”



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

Learner: Which book do
want?

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



-gi-

3)

List 1
aluġiisa
aluġiisaku
aluġiisaka

List 2
aluġiisagi
aluġiisagiku
aluġiisagilaka

List 3
aluġiilu
karandaasi

List 4
suġtal

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

A: Wan tunu alqu suġtal aluġiisagi?

B: Wan tunu aluġiilu suġtal aluġiisagiku.
Taimmsy

A: Wan tunu aluġiilu suġtal aluġiisagi i?

B: Aang, tunu aluġiilu suġtal aluġiisagiku.
Taimmsy

A: Wan tunu karandaasi suġtal aluġiisagi i?

B: Nangaa, wan tunu karandaasi suġtal aluġiisagilaka. Wan tunu aluġiilu suġtal aluġiisagiku.

-gi-

Paradigm 2:
to be written
is written
is not written

Set-up

Person A:

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

Person B:

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

Person A:

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

Person B:

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

Person A:

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

Person B:

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

100

[illegible]

Solves many of the barriers to revitalization

Monolingual elicitation solves...

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

Simplicity of “set-ups” solves...

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

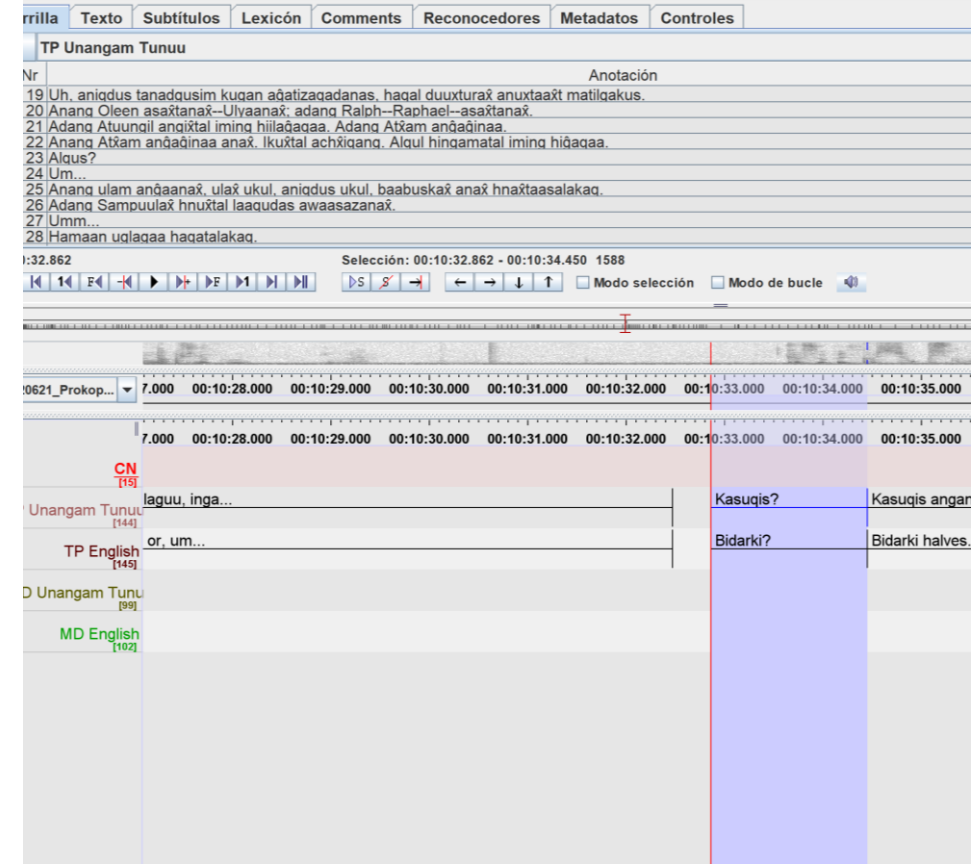
Making learners the drivers of the process solves...

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

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

Linguistic activities in the WAYK context

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

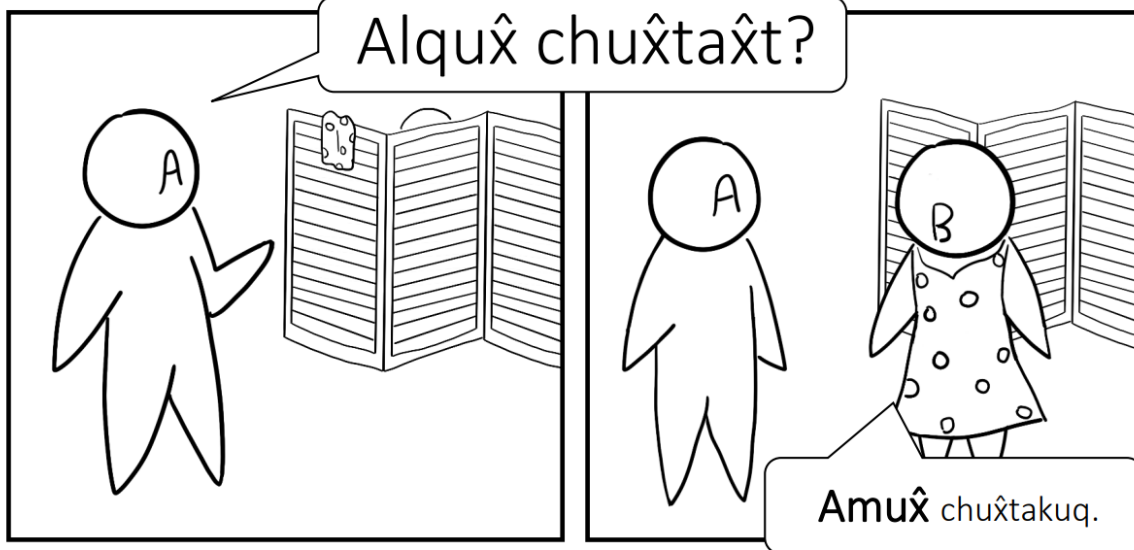


Creating a pedagogical resource for WAYK

Diasporic population? → Pedagogical reference to take home

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

Alqux chuxtaxt?



paltux



furaaskix



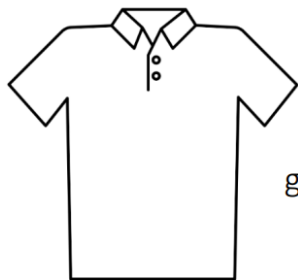
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chixtaliisa



rubaxax



qatxuya



gaalstuka



sviitira



udgitix

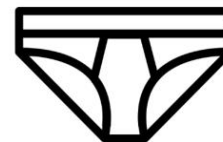


tutusim
sugdanaasingis

Alqux chuxtaxt? (cont'd)



biziira



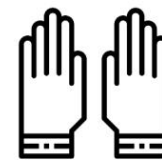
pustaanikas



chachxu



bruuki



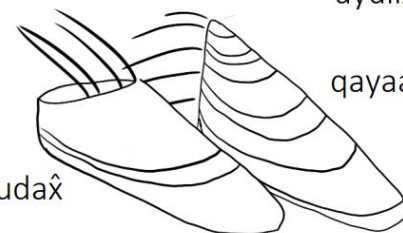
lukamachis



uyuli



sa



qayaatxu

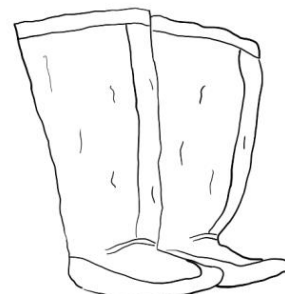
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sapuugis



uliigis



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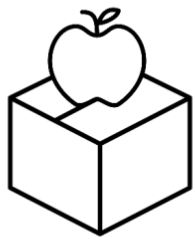
yaablukaŋ

Yaablukaŋ qanang al?

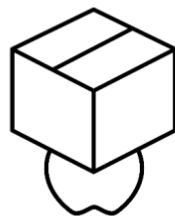
(= Qata yaablukaŋ?)



yaasikaŋ



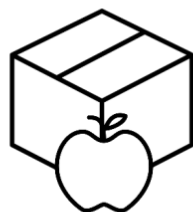
Yaablukaŋ yaasikam
kugan akuŋ.



Yaablukaŋ yaasikam
sitxan akuŋ.



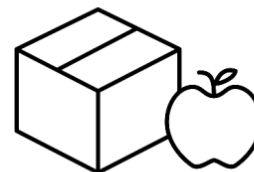
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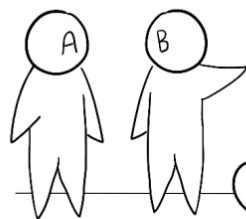
kadan



agalan



chidan



Yaablukaŋ
wang akuŋ.

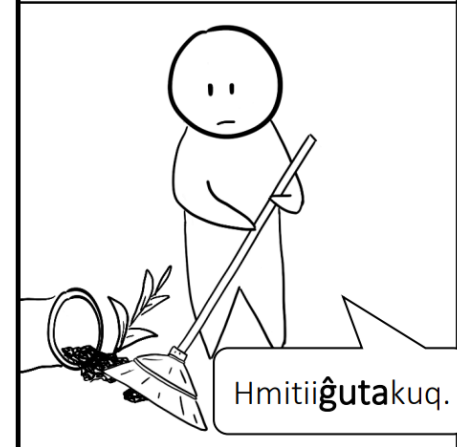
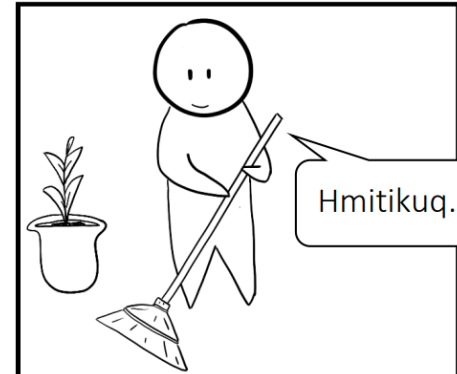
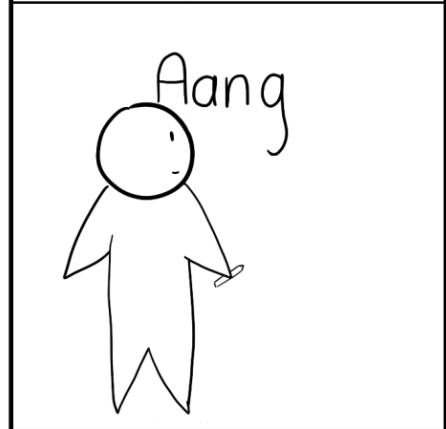


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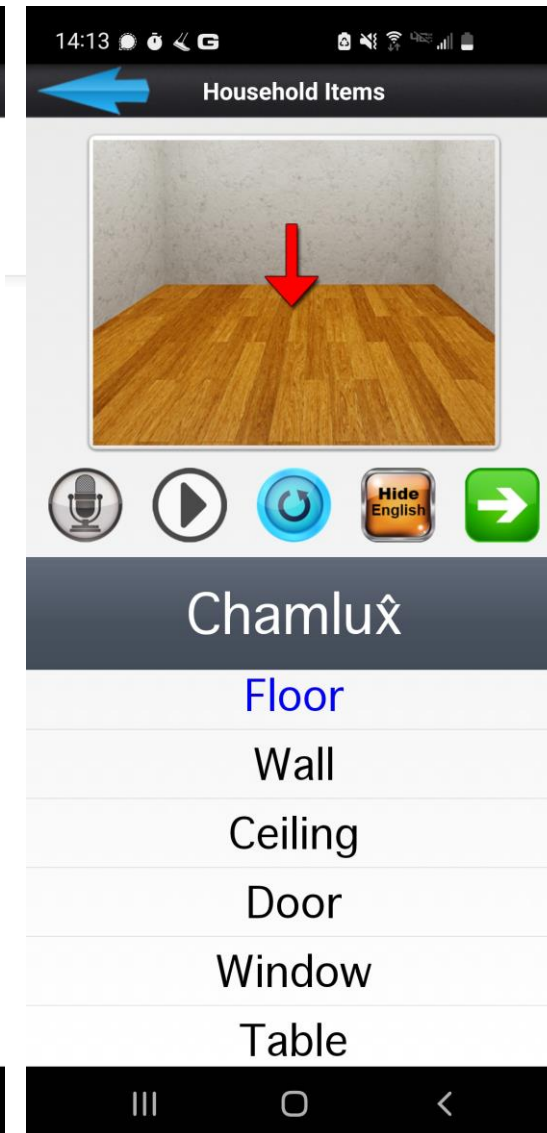


Yaablukaŋ
hamang akuŋ.

-ġuta-



The wrong way:



Pursuing documentation

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

Pursuing documentation

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

Conducting formal elicitation

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

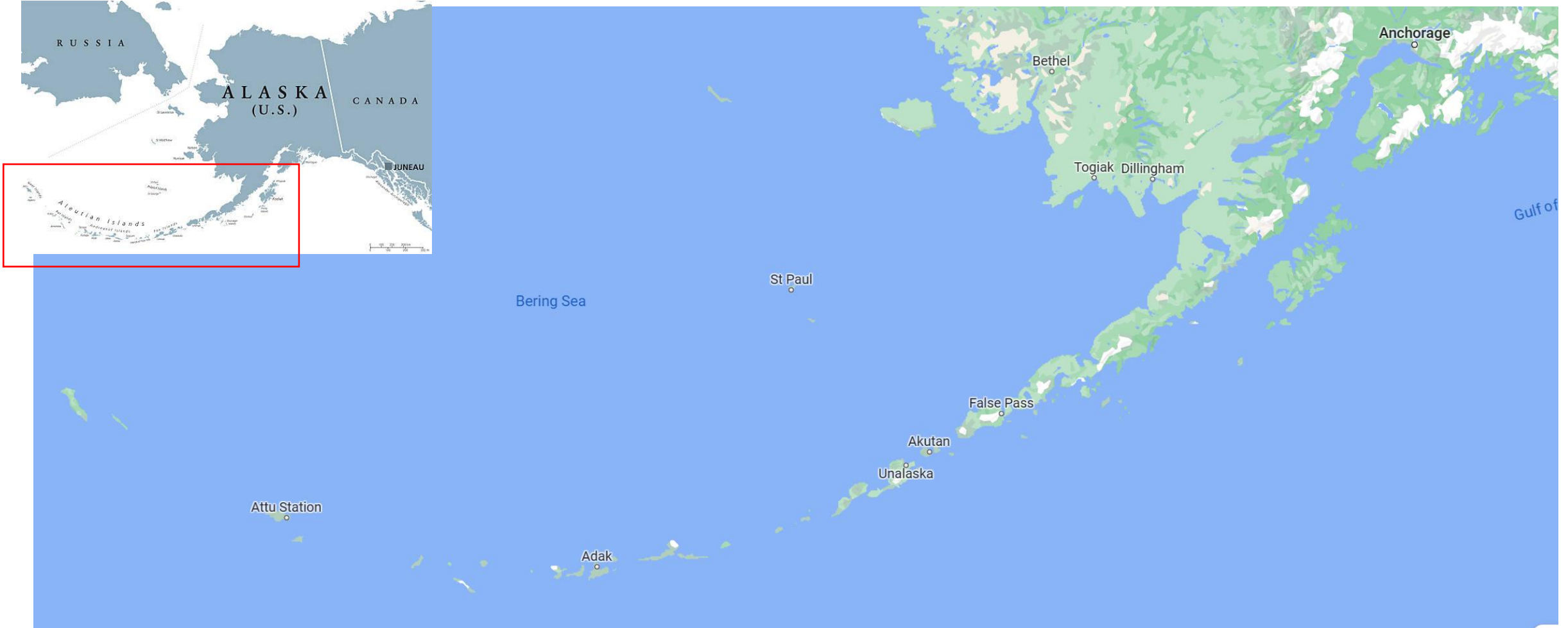
Potential for WAYK-friendly elicitation? For syntax? For *semantics*?



Thank you!

References

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Previous language efforts

(Bergsland 1994, 1997)



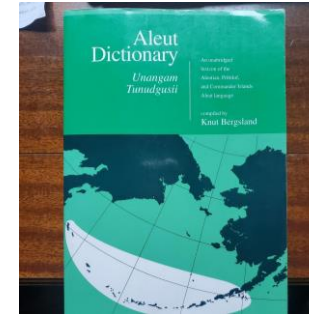
1800s: first documentation, development of a written language, Aleut education



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



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



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



2000s: Some language classes, educational materials produced

Barriers to revitalization

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

Before a “hunt”

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



After a “hunt”

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