Alaska's 23 Indigenous Languages

Prepared by D. Roy Mitchell IV for the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council

Although Dr. Michael Krauss' 1974 map, *Native Peoples and Languages of Alaska* (and two updated editions, 1982 and 2011) list 20 Alaska Native languages, research shows that at least 23, distinct, Alaska Native languages must be recognized.

The Wetał language, also called Ts'etsa'ut, was spoken on both sides of the Portland Canal on what is now Southeastern Alaska and British Columbia, from unknown ancient times up until the late 1920s or early 1930s, when the last highly proficient speaker passed away. Ironically, at that time, Wetał was the Dene (Athabaskan) language best-documented by linguists*. It appears that Wetał did not make it onto Krauss' 1974 map simply because it had ceased to be spoken in Alaska when he began working with Alaska Native languages in 1960.
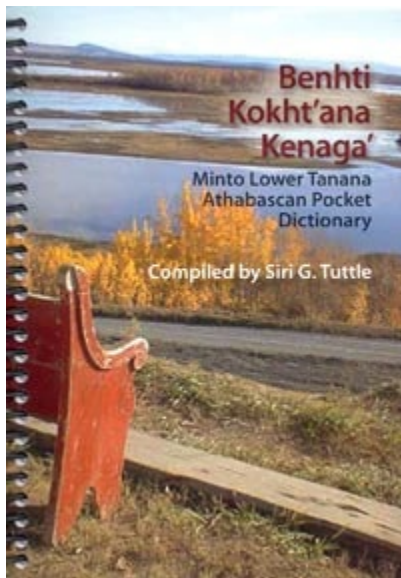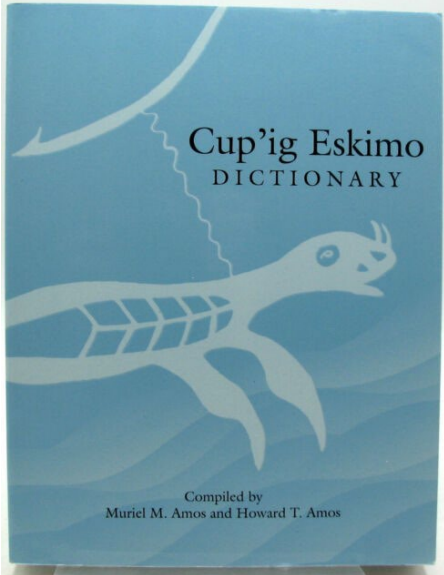
*Franz Boas and Pliny Earle Goddard (1924) "Ts'ets'aut, an Athapascan Language from Portland Canal, British Columbia." *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1-35.
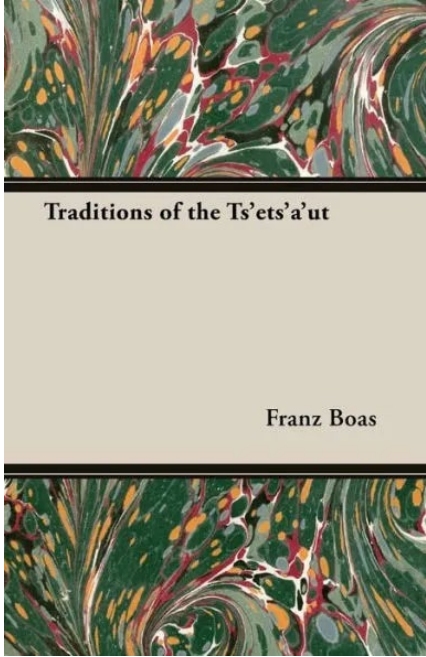
What is shown as "Central Yup'ik" on Krauss' map includes a distinctly different Yupik language, Cup'ig, which requires its own, dictionary distinct from that of Central Yup'ik. The Cup'ig people of Nunivak Island (modern day village of Mikoryak) have considered their language to be distinct all along. Please note that the significantly distinct Cup'ik dialect of Chevak and Hooper Bay is nonetheless a dialect of Central Yup'ik.

What is shown as "Tanana" on Krauss' map includes what local people consider to be two, distinct languages, a view shared by the two linguists who have done the most work with these languages. Thus, "Tanana" as such should be divided into two, distinctly different Dene (Athabaskan) languages, Benhti Kokhwt'ana Kenaga' (Lower Tanana) and Sahcheeg xut'een xneege' (Middle Tanana).

A table appears below, showing a spelling for each Indigenous Alaskan language—in that language— followed by a commonly used English term. There is a growing movement by Alaska Native language speakers and activists to use the traditional names for each language, when possible, rather than just the common English name for each language.

Language Family	Language
Inuit-Unangan	Inupiatun (*Inupiaq*)
	Yupigestun / Akuzipigestun (*St. Lawrence Island Yupik*)
	Yugtun/Cugtun (*Central Alaskan Yup'ik / Cup'ik*)
	Cup'ig (Nunivak Island [Yupik])
	Unangam Tunuu (*UnangaX Aleut*)
	Sugt'stun / Alutiit'stun (*Sugpiaq/Alutiiq [Yupik]*)
Na-Dene	Dena'inaq' (*Dena'ina*)
	Denaakk'e (*Koyukon*)
	Holikachuk
	Deg Xinag
	Dinak'i (*Upper Kuskokwim*)
	Benhti Kokhwt'ana Kenaga' (*Lower Tanana*)
	Sahcheeg xut'een xneege' (*Middle Tanana*)
	Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa (*Gwich'in*)
	Hän
	Dihthaad Xt'een Iin Aandeeg' (*Tanacross*)
	Nee'aanèegn' (*Upper Tanana*)
	Koht'aene kenaege' (*Ahtna*)
	dAxhunhyuuga' (*Eyak*)
	Lingít (*Tlingit*)
	Wetaɫ (*Ts'ets'aut*)
Haida	Xaad Kíl (*Haida*)
Tshimshianic	Sm'algyax (*Tsimshian*)

Cup'ig Eskimo
DICTIONARY

Compiled by
Muriel M. Amos and Howard T. Amos

Benhti
Kokht'ana
Kenaga'
Minto Lower Tanana
Athabascan Pocket
Dictionary

Compiled by Siri G. Tuttle

Traditions of the Ts'ets'a'ut

Franz Boas

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