

**SB**

**103**

# FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1999 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. Senate Bill 103

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction)	Dept. Affected	Education
Title <u>An Act relating to a curriculum for</u>	BRU	Teaching and Learning Support
Native language education	Component	
Sponsor <u>Senators Lincoln, Ellis</u>		
Requester <u>Senate HESS</u>	Component Serial No.	

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005
Personal Services						
Travel						
Contractual						
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>						
-----------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>						
-------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF						
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type)						
<b>TOTAL</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Estimate of any current year (FY99) cost: 0.0

**POSITIONS**

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)

\* While there is no fiscal impact for the department, related to Senate Bill 103, there may be some fiscal impact on school districts required to establish a local Native language curriculum advisory board.

Prepared by	Barbara Thompson	Phone	465-8727
Division	Teaching and Learning Support	Date/Time	4/26/99 3:00 PM
Approved by Commissioner:	Richard S. Cross	Date	4/23/99
Agency	Department of Education		

**PREPARER TO PROVIDE ALL DISTRIBUTION COPIES TO GOVERNOR'S LEGISLATIVE OFFICE**

For further distribution information, call the Governor's Legislative Office



**SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT**  
**First Committee of Referral**

DATE: 3/13/99

FURTHER: Finance

Date of 5-Day Notice: 4/22/99  
 (in accordance with Uniform Rule 23)

DATE TURNED  
 IN TO OFFICE: 4/26/99

Health, Education and Social Services Committee considered

SENATE BILL NO. 103

"An Act relating to a curriculum for Native language education; and providing for an effective date."

and recommends:

- be replaced with \_\_\_\_\_ CS \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_)
- adopt previous \_\_\_\_\_ CS \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_)
- attached amendment(s)
- adopt Letter of Intent by \_\_\_\_\_ Committee
- further referral to the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee

- Senate Bill:**
- same title
  - new title
- House Bill:**
- same title
  - technical title
  - new: SCR# \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNING <u>DO</u> PASS	DP	OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	NR	DNP	AM
<i>[Signature]</i>	✓	<i>[Signature]</i>	✓		
<i>[Signature]</i>	✓	<i>[Signature]</i>	✓		
CHAIR: <i>[Signature]</i>	✓	CHAIR:			

**NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):**

Department                      Date              Zero              Fiscal

<i>Education</i>		✓	

**PREVIOUS FISCAL NOTE(S):\***

Department                      Date              Zero              Fiscal


APPROPRIATION -- no fiscal note

\*include fiscal notes accompanying Governor's bill

04/26/99  
13:35:49

LEGISLATIVE TELECONFERENCE NETWORK SYSTEM  
PARTICIPANT LIST (TESTIFIERS ONLY)  
TCN:90667 SCHEDULED FOR:04/26/99 13:30 TO 15:00  
PUBLIC HEARING SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVIC

LTN1150  
BY:JNU  
FOR:BAR

LOCATION:BARROW

SB 103

MR.

JAMES M.

NAGEAK

NSLOPE BSD

TESTIFY

OFFNET

KOYUKUK

SB103

MS. ELIZA.

JONES

Richard and Nora Dauenhauer  
3740 North Douglas Highway  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Telephone: (907) 586-4708  
e-mail: jfrld@uas.alaska.edu

April 26, 1999

Testimony in Support of SB 103

We're sorry we cannot be present to testify in person, but we have previously scheduled commitments. We submit these written comments for the record.

My name is Richard Dauenhauer. Languages have been a central part of my life since junior high school. My academic training is in Germanic and Slavic languages, and in comparative literature. Since coming to Alaska in 1969 I have worked with applied linguistics and applied folklore, helping with materials development and teacher training for Alaska Native languages, and working for recognition of Alaska Native languages as deserving of a place in the classroom and curriculum. I have personally worked with about half of the Native languages in Alaska, but my major focus has been in partnership with my wife, Nora Marks Dauenhauer, working on Tlingit, which is her first language.

SB 103 gives explicit, positive moral support to the effort for the survival of Alaska Native languages by recognizing these languages as a legitimate, "canonical" part of the school curriculum where desired by the local community and the local school board. SB 103 recognizes Alaska Native languages along with those more traditionally taught, such as French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Japanese. SB 103 notes the academic and social benefits associated with the presence of Alaska Native languages in the schools in legitimately recognized, non-tokenized ways.

There is nothing in SB 103 that should present a threat to persons opposed to Alaska Native languages. There are no demands forcing Native language instruction on persons or communities who not desire it.

SB 103 is a positive step to counter more than a century of policies designed to weaken or eliminate the Alaska Native languages that are the unique heritage of our State. This modest bill provides an opportunity for the Alaska State legislature to offer some small measure of positive, largely symbolic, support for the survival of Alaska Native languages by recognizing the legitimacy of their inclusion in the school curriculum. SB 103 also includes suggestions for standards of content and methods of instruction, especially for state of the art distance delivery.

We agree with the background information articulated in the Sponsor Statement and in the section on Findings. We urge the committee and the legislature as a whole to support SB 103.

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Senator Georgianna Lincoln

State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182  
(907) 465-3732  
Fax (907) 465-2652



Standing Committees:  
Resources  
Transportation  
Budget Subcommittees:  
Natural Resources  
Corrections  
Public Safety  
Commerce & Economic Development

## DISTRICT R

Alaina  
Alcan  
Allakaket  
Aniak  
Anvik  
Arctic Village  
Beaver  
Bettles  
Big Delta  
Birch Creek  
Boadway  
Canyon Village  
Central  
Chalkyitsik  
Chenaot Bay  
Chickik  
Chitochina  
Chitna  
Chukchik  
Circle  
Cold Foot  
Copper Center  
Coppersville  
Cordova  
Crooked Creek  
Delta Junction  
Dry Lake  
Dry Creek  
Eagle  
Eagle Village  
Eganville  
Fort Greely  
Fort Yukon  
Galena  
Galeana  
Georgetown  
Glennallen  
Gowling  
Gulkana  
Healy Lake  
Holy Cross  
Hughes  
Hudon  
Kaktovik  
Kenai Lake  
Koyukuk  
Lake Minchumina  
Lune Village  
Livingood  
Lower Kalskag  
Manley Hot Springs  
Marshall  
McCarthy  
McGrath  
Medfra  
Mendocino  
Mentasta  
Minto  
Nabesna  
Nemati  
Nikolai  
Northway  
Nulato  
Pascua  
Pilot Station  
Rampart  
Red Level  
Ruby  
Ruston Mission  
Shageluk  
Slana  
Skretvick  
Stevens Village  
Stony River  
Taktovik  
Tanacross  
Tanana  
Tanulika  
Tartan  
Tetlin  
Tetlin  
Tok  
Tolovana  
Tonina  
Tulokuk  
Tuxek  
Upper Kalskag  
Valdez  
Venetie  
Whittier  
Woonsocket

## SPONSOR STATEMENT SB 103 NATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION ACT

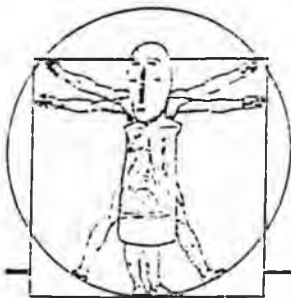
SB 103 provides that schools where a majority of the students are Alaska Natives may teach the language that is traditional within the community. A local Native language curriculum advisory board shall be established to review and make recommendations about the teaching of the Native language. If the advisory board recommends the establishment of a Native language education curriculum, it then may be incorporated into the school curriculum and taught by certified or trained instructors. The bill allows for the delivery of language instruction by existing satellite instruction or other distance delivery technology, including computer programs and audio distance delivery. The effective date of this legislation is July 1, 1999.

Many of Alaska's Native languages are on the brink of extinction. Dr. Michael Krauss, professor of linguistics at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, predicts that "short of a miracle or radical social change" we will lose 15, and possibly 18, of our 20 Native languages by the year 2055.

Sadly, the loss of Alaska Native languages is rooted in anti-Native language educational policies promoted by American missionaries and educators around the turn of the century. Schools played a critical role in efforts to assimilate Alaska Natives into the Western/Anglo religion, language and culture; in fact, children were punished for speaking their Native language.

Schools cannot, nor should they, carry the burden of Native language preservation alone. Parents, extended family members, and communities have important roles as well. In many villages, however, many of those tools are lost. We must have our schools involved and committed to teaching and preserving our Native languages. Presently, many of our village schools are teaching German, Spanish, Russian and Japanese to our children. Many who have the capability to extend their programs to include Native languages have not.

Native Language Education has received strong support from the Alaska Federation of Natives, the White House Conference on Indian Education, the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation, the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Interior Education Council, the Village Participation Conference, the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, and by numerous villages.



# FRAME *of* REFERENCE

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM • VOL. VI, NO. 1 • DECEMBER 1995

## LANGUAGE LOSS IN AMERICA

*Languages represent the web and wealth of human life. So why are we losing so many of them?*

—Pages 1

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

*Congress "conserves" the endowments—but with a big cut in funding.*

—Page 2

## THE SONG OF THE FUTURE . . .

*Howard Weaver bids farewell with a speech in Juneau to the Alaska Historical Society.*

—Page 6

## RECENT FORUM GRANTS

*Films, research, exhibits, books, and lectures receive Forum support.*

—Page 10

## SPEAKERS BUREAU

*The Forum presents its lineup of speakers for the 1995-96 season.*

—Page 12

## COMMUNITIES OF MEMORY and TALKING ANCHORAGE

*Community-based public forums gather momentum in 10 towns statewide and in Anchorage.*

—Page 14

## MAKING FRIENDS

*Friends of the Humanities continues to grow. Please join us—or give a gift membership!*

—Page 15



## LANGUAGE LOSS IN ALASKA, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE WORLD

— by Michael J. Krauss

WE KNOW BY EXPERIENCE THAT LANGUAGES are passed from generation to generation by being spoken to children. From time immemorial this has been the way, a supremely human miracle, a process that works so naturally—and so irreplaceably. Elders simply speak the language to children and the children simply learn, with fluent control over the complex grammar and vast vocabulary that every language has. This is how a language lives on to perpetuate a people's unique culture and identity.

Why, then, don't we understand that if a language is not spoken to the children, it will die within a lifetime—and that with the language extinct, the people will suffer immeasurable loss to their culture and identity?

As every adult Alaska Native must know, the American educational system beginning in the 1880s forbade all use of Alaska Native languages in school. This was not done to make Alaska Natives bilingual in English in addition to their own languages — a per-

fectly possible goal, as the Russians' had been with Russian — but rather to wipe out Alaska Native languages and replace them with English. That system, brutally imposed on children with mental and physical punishment, has now nearly reached its goal. At first it produced a generation of people who were bilingual in Native and English, but who were trained to speak English and not their Native language to their children, with the false understanding that children can easily and naturally learn only one language, and that the language should be English, English only, as the Native language was inferior, an obstacle to their progress and assimilation from an "inferior" culture and identity to a "superior" one.

By the 1930s in many parts of Alaska, parents who were now bilingual began to raise the first generations of children who could not speak the language of their grandparents. The result now is that of the 20 Alaska Native languages alive today, *(continued on page 3)*

# LANGUAGE LOSS

from page 1

only two—Siberian Yup'ik and Central Yup'ik—are still being learned in the traditional way, of parents speaking to children.

One language, Eyak, has left only one speaker, and she is in her 70s. Two languages, Tsimshian and Haida, have no speakers in Alaska younger than 60. Eleven languages have no speakers younger than 40; they are Aleut, Alutiiq, Tlingit, and seven of the 11 Athabaskan languages: Ahtna, Tanaina, Ingalik, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Tanana, and Han. Three Athabaskan languages, Upper Kuskokwim, Upper Tanana and Tanacross Athabaskan, may still be spoken by younger adults in their 20s or 30s. Younger adults or teenagers in a few isolated communities speak Aleut at Atka, Alutiiq at English Bay, Inupiaq on the Upper Kobuk, Tanaina at Lime Village, and Kutchin at Arctic Village and Venetie.

With just two languages being passed on in the traditional way, 90 percent of the Native languages of Alaska are no longer spoken by children. Without radical change, these languages will be extinct or have no native speakers left some time during the first half of the century nearly upon us.

Let us now broaden our consideration to put Alaska in perspective, to compare the Alaska situation with that of Native North America and the rest of the world.

Something over 300 Native languages were once spoken in what are now the United States and Canada. Of those 300 or so languages, about 210 are still spoken or remembered. Considering the disastrous history, it is surprising that perhaps two-thirds of these languages survive. But for how much longer?

Thirty-five of the 210 North American languages are spoken exclusively in Canada, leaving about 175 still being spoken in the United States (including the 20 in Alaska). I have divided these languages into five classes for degree of viability, or amount of time they may endure as living, spoken languages.

In Class A are languages that are still spoken by many, most, or all of the children. These languages are still viable, and may go on forever. As we shall see, however, they are by no means unendangered or "safe." In this very small and elite class are at best 20 of the 175, about 11 percent. (These include the two

Alaska languages noted above).

Class B consists of languages no longer spoken by children, but by adults of all ages, including the immediate parental generation. This class, larger than A but still the second smallest, has about 30 languages, or about 17 percent.

The largest is Class C, those languages now spoken only by middle-aged or older adults, the grandparental generation and up. About 70 Native U.S. languages are in this class, or 40 percent. (This class, as noted, includes most Alaska Native languages.)



*With just two languages  
being passed on in the  
traditional way, 90 percent  
of the Native languages  
of Alaska are no longer  
spoken by children.  
Without radical change,  
these languages will be  
extinct or have no native  
speakers left some time  
during the first half of  
the century nearly  
upon us.*



Then there is Class D, those languages spoken, or rather remembered, by a small handful — say one to a half-dozen — of the very oldest individuals. To this class of very nearly extinct languages belong the remainder, about 55 of the 175, a deeply alarming proportion of U.S. languages, about 31 percent.

Thus, at the rate things are going, most of these languages will become extinct unless radical changes are made and people take determined measures to preserve their own languages. Otherwise, by the year 2000 or soon thereafter, of the present 175 U.S. languages, 55 will be gone; by 2025, 70 more will be gone; and by 2050, 30 more will have joined class E — extinct Native American languages.

Will the remaining 20 languages, those fortunate few in Class A, also be on the road to extinction?

Not even the Class A languages are safe. One would think Navajo—by far the largest North American Native group, with some 200,000 people—would enjoy safety in numbers. But apparently not: In 1969-70, 90 percent of the children in first grade, age 6, came to school able to speak, dominant in, or monolingual in Navajo. Now, according to informal reports, it is quite the reverse: Eighty to 90 percent of Navajo children coming into the schools at age 6 are able to speak English but unable to speak Navajo.

During the past 25 years, then, a major American tragedy has taken place — silently, with no press coverage that I know of. Navajo had more children speaking their Native language than the other 174 languages put together. If Navajo is not safe, then none of these uniquely American languages is. All Native American languages are threatened — or beyond that.

How does Alaska compare? Despite its relative remoteness and late contact with Europeans, only two of 20 languages still are spoken by children, compared with 18 of 155 in the other States. Alaska is at best typical, or perhaps a bit worse off, than the rest of the United States.

Let us now look at the whole globe. There are currently some 6,000 languages (give or take 10 percent, depending on the distinction between languages and dialects, which is often difficult to draw consistently). Given that mankind's population is approaching 6 billion, the "average size" language would be spoken by about a *(continued on page 4)*

## LANGUAGE LOSS

from page 3

million people. But the 15 largest languages account for more than half the world's population, leaving still, say, 5,985 languages spoken by the other half. There are actually only about 250 languages with a million or more speakers, and the median language—that is, the three-thousandth largest or smallest language—has only 5,000 to 10,000 speakers.

Much more difficult to count is the number of languages still being learned by children. Statistics for this are very hard to come by.

The best single published source is the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Wycliffe Bible Translators') *Ethnologue*, edited by Barbara Grimes, most recently in 1992. *Ethnologue* lists the world's languages and their numbers of speakers. For about 60 percent of the 6,000 it also gives an assessment of viability in terms of need for Bible translation. Grimes (in a personal communication) estimates that a maximum of 20 percent are not viable enough to warrant Bible translation.

But I believe 20 percent is a minimum figure for the languages no longer being learned by young children. From private estimates by linguists who have worked widely in various parts of the world, I estimate that as many as 50 percent of the world's languages either are already no longer transmitted to children or by the end of this century no longer will be. Thus I believe it most likely that between 20 percent and 50 percent of the world's 6,000 languages will become extinct during the coming century.

The only way to estimate the number of languages that are merely "endangered" is by setting aside those at the other end of the scale that we may term "safe." How may we define these?

One obvious criterion is sheer size in number of speakers. Navajo, in 1970 the largest North American language with perhaps 175,000 speakers (20 times the world median), is a sad lesson that 175,000 speakers may not be enough. Breton, the Celtic language of Brittany in France, had a million speakers in living memory, but now probably has fewer child speakers than Navajo. Under certain circumstances even a million speakers is not a safe number.

Another important factor is official state use and support, which Breton did not have. With state support, even much smaller languages,

such as Icelandic (250,000 speakers), or Greenlandic Eskimo (45,000), seem quite safe.

With increasing local autonomy and a growing number of independent states in the world, the number of state-supported languages may soon increase to about the same number—250—as are spoken by a million people or more. The majority of these states, however, support mainly English (45), French (30), Spanish (20), Arabic (20), Portuguese (6), and only about 70 others, most of which (including, e.g., emerging Estonian or Slovenian) have more than a million speakers anyway.

Still, it does not seem unrealistic to guess on these bases that 300 languages may be deemed "safe"—that children will still be learning them at the end of the coming century. Let us be generous and optimistic, even, and double the number to 600, or 10 percent.

Of the world's 6,000 languages, then, 5 to 10 percent are "safe." Another 20 percent to 50 percent are headed for extinction during the next century insofar as they are not being learned by children. This leaves between 40 percent and 75 percent, 2,400 to 4,500, that are merely "endangered." The fate of these languages—that is, whether or not they will be spoken by children at the end of the next century—hangs in the balance.

We might well ask: What "balance?"

Consider what has happened already in the United States (language mortality approaching 90 percent of 175 aboriginal languages) and Australia (mortality beyond 90 percent of 250). Nine countries have more than 200 languages: Zaire and Brazil (210 each), Mexico (240), Australia (250), Cameroon (270), India (380), Nigeria (410), Indonesia (670), and at the top Papua New Guinea (with 850!). These nine countries alone account for nearly 3,300 of the world's 6,000 languages. Another dozen countries, including, for instance, Ethiopia, Chad, and Burma, have more than 100 languages each. Consider the social conditions in many of these countries as they "develop" (in the direction of the United States and Australia?). What is likely to be the fate of their linguistic minorities?

Considering again the fact that the median-sized language has 5,000 to 10,000 speakers, one can grasp the enormity of the loss we face. It is a very realistic possibility that 90 percent of mankind's languages will become extinct or doomed to extinction during the coming century.



*Languages are more than just practical systems of communication. Each is also a creation of beauty, through the collective and creative spirit of countless generations of our ancestors, with spiritual and emotional values unique to the identity of each society.*



Why are we so unaware of or indifferent to the fate of our planet's linguistic diversity? Compare especially our growing concern for and willingness to act, even to sacrifice, for our planet's biological diversity — for whooping cranes and snail darters and perhaps even spotted owls.

The statistics of animal species endangerment are interesting to compare with the ones just given for languages. There is an "official" list (Red Book) of "endangered" or "threatened" species. Here let us take the two categories most visible and "charismatic" to us, mammals and birds. There are about 4,400 species of mammals, of which about 330, or 7.5 percent, are officially listed as "endangered" or "threatened." There are about 9,000 species of birds, of which 240, or 2.7 percent, are so listed. Because of politics, economics, and inaccessibility, however, it is certain that these figures are gross undercounts. Many conservation biologists estimate that the number of endangered species may be as high as 50 percent. Even the lower counts for endangered species have caused us great alarm, with good reason.

Yet the best estimate for the future of language diversity is worse than the worst for

biological diversity. Should we not be at least as concerned for languages? Is not human life as we know it utterly dependent on language?

I think the reason we do not care about the loss of language diversity is that we believe one or a few languages — the one or ones we know — would do for all mankind, even that mankind would be better off with only one language. It is a question considered at least since Babel. This is certainly a typical American English-speaker's belief: that with one language — presumably English — there would be greater mutual understanding and therefore peace on earth. That is an understandable argument, one with which I am often challenged.

The conflicts in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia are strong counterevidence to that hypothesis. Linguistically, Somalia is one of the least diverse countries of Africa, with 90 percent of its population speaking Somali or languages very close to Somali. Serbian and Croatian are the same single language; the difference does not even correspond to the dialectal differences within the language, but is strictly religious and political, expressed in different alphabets (Roman for Croatian, modified Cyrillic for Serbian) and in conflict that has nothing to do with language.

So much for the argument that one language would bring world peace and understanding.

On the contrary. The loss of any one language diminishes us all. Every language is as infinitely complex as a living organism, and the most marvelous manifestation of the human mind. A hundred linguists working a hundred years could not fully fathom the mystery of a single language, let alone the world of human languages.

Frighteningly late, we have barely begun to see the world of our languages as an interdependent system. In this we are still far behind our emerging understanding of the biological world as an interdependent system. Just as all life utterly depends on the natural world to sustain it, surely human life as such depends on the linguistic world to sustain it.

At the very least, just as our biological survival depends on an ecosystem, a web of life, can we be at all certain that our 6,000 languages are not at least as essential a part of an intellectual and social system upon which our humanity depends? How many languages are expendable, and which?

I can see at least four types of reasons why we must value and do our best to maintain mankind's linguistic diversity.

First, let us take the aesthetic or spiritual reasons. Languages are more than just practical systems of communication. Each is also a creation of beauty, through the collective and creative spirit of countless generations of our ancestors, with spiritual and emotional values unique to the identity of each society. The very diversity of languages itself constitutes its own beauty, of which we are still less aware or mainly take for granted by comparison with the beauty of the natural world.

If we were forced to choose only a few flowers to look at or smell — say, only roses and tulips, nice as those are — would not the world become a less satisfying place to live, dangerously less so? Might not the same be true about languages? Can man live by bread alone? Granted, this is only an aesthetic or spiritual argument, probably the weakest one, yet even this alone could be crucial for the survival of humanity.

Second, I cite the political, social, or ethical argument of human rights. Language, as noted, is also the expression of our culture, nationhood, and identity. Many people do not like to give up their language and take on another instead. So, from an ethical or even strictly pragmatic point of view, who is to choose which language gets to be the one everybody has to speak? People surely tend to prefer their own. A pure pragmatist, believing that might makes right, may not have to worry about Aleut preferences, which might not give much trouble. But what of Estonian, or French, or certainly Chinese? Well, alright, let's allow for several languages. But how many? Where do we draw the line between 2 and 6,000 — and who gets to draw it?

Do we just permit survival of the fittest, as we seem to be doing today? (Actually, these are not necessarily the "fittest" languages — there are no primitive or unfit languages. Fittest here means the most powerful and aggressive societies.) Are we not obligated, because of our very humanity and for the sake of humanity, to use instead our ability to make reasonable and responsible decisions?

Third, to an argument of perhaps still greater enormity. Our languages are our knowledge and understanding of the universe, our intellectual wealth, mankind's accumulated experience, store of ideas and insights. As

anyone who has learned more than one language surely has found out, different languages are not simply different or mechanically convertible ways of saying the same thing. Every language is priceless in that it expresses a unique knowledge and understanding of the world, an infinitely complex system of human thought, with information and concepts unique to it. Concepts can be transferred or borrowed, as English has done more than any other language. Some simple examples are the words omelette, kangaroo, kayak, and quinine. But even English has barely begun to incorporate the knowledge that is present in other languages of, say, history, technology, or medicinal plants.

Further, with the loss of any language, with its different grammar and way of interpreting reality, we lose our ability to think in different ways — even our freedom to think in different ways.

What could be worse than that? The fourth and final argument is that we simply do not know the answer to that question, or the ones before it. In our extermination of languages we simply do not know what we are doing. We do not know what further negative effects on human existence would result from the loss of all languages but one, or even all but 600 (which, as I point out, is a very real threat). Without fully understanding the consequences of what we are doing, do we have the right to make such irrevocable decisions?

Might not the lesson of Babel be that we were meant, for our own good, to live in intellectual and cultural diversity with our many languages? Or does our behavior show that we have now finally reached such a pinnacle of wisdom and reason that we no longer need our diversity?

I would add, finally, that for mutual understanding and peace on earth it is not necessary or even desirable to eliminate a single language. It is perfectly possible, in fact quite normal — though not so much currently in the tradition of American English speakers — to learn more than one language, to form a worldwide network of people who can understand each other and get along, and at the same time to maintain the web and wealth of human life that is our languages. ■

MICHAEL KRAUSS is director of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

# Alaska language among 'endangered'

The Associated Press

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—Tucked away deep in Alaska's interior, there are three households where Upper Kuskokwim is still spoken. In Oregon, two people in their 70s keep Klamath alive. And in northern Australia, about 10 native speakers of Jingulu are left.

Kuskokwim, Klamath and Jingulu are among the world's most endangered languages, having fallen victim to social and economic pressures that demand people learn more common tongues like English.

As the world becomes smaller, so does the number of viable languages: Linguists predict half of the approximately 6,000 languages spoken today will be extinct within the next century.

At Yale University, a modest effort is being made to counter the trend through a fund that allows researchers to travel to far-off regions to study and help resurrect dying languages, often by compiling dictionaries and other written records.

Set up four years ago by linguist Douglas H. Whalen, the Endangered Language Fund is this year financing its first projects. Ten projects, including efforts to preserve Kuskokwim, Klamath and Jingulu, will each get \$1,000.

"A lot of communities have been forced in various ways to start abandoning their language. I think people often don't realize that there's cultural value in their language until it's too late," said Whalen in a recent inter-

view at his office at Haskins Laboratories, a New Haven research institute that studies speech processes and disorders.

A distinct language, he said, often defines a unique community and binds it together but can become threatened by other encroaching languages and even, in some cases, by governmental force, Whalen said. Endangered languages exist on all continents, including North America.

"There's been direct government suppression of languages all over the world. In the United States, for example, the native American languages are the ones that were here first and for centuries there were deliberate attempts to get those languages to stop being used," he said.

Other victims of government suppression include Kurdish, which is currently banned in Turkey, and the language of Tasmania, which died out when the native speakers were killed.

More often, languages die because of the prevalence of more common languages like Chinese, English or Swahili. Modern technology and easy transportation have quite shrunk the planet in linguistic terms.

Although experts say there are at least 100 languages that are down to one native speaker, numbers don't always tell the full story.

For example, a language can have relatively few speakers, but if it is spoken by a community that remains fairly isolated and the language is used as the main instrument

of communication by all generations, the language may continue to thrive.

Conversely, a language can have thousands of speakers and still be considered endangered if all of the speakers are more than 50 years old and the younger generation doesn't use it.

That is what has happened to the Tohono O'odham language, which is an Indian tongue spoken by roughly 12,000 people in parts of Arizona and Mexico.

While the eldest generation speaks Tohono O'odham, many of their children refused to teach it to the next generation, deferring instead to English. That's because they themselves faced discrimination when they spoke it as children in U.S. schools, said native Ofelia Zepeda, a grant recipient.

"Across the country, you have a generation of native speakers who were not allowed to speak their languages or who were punished for speaking them," said Zepeda, an associate professor of linguistics at the University of Arizona.

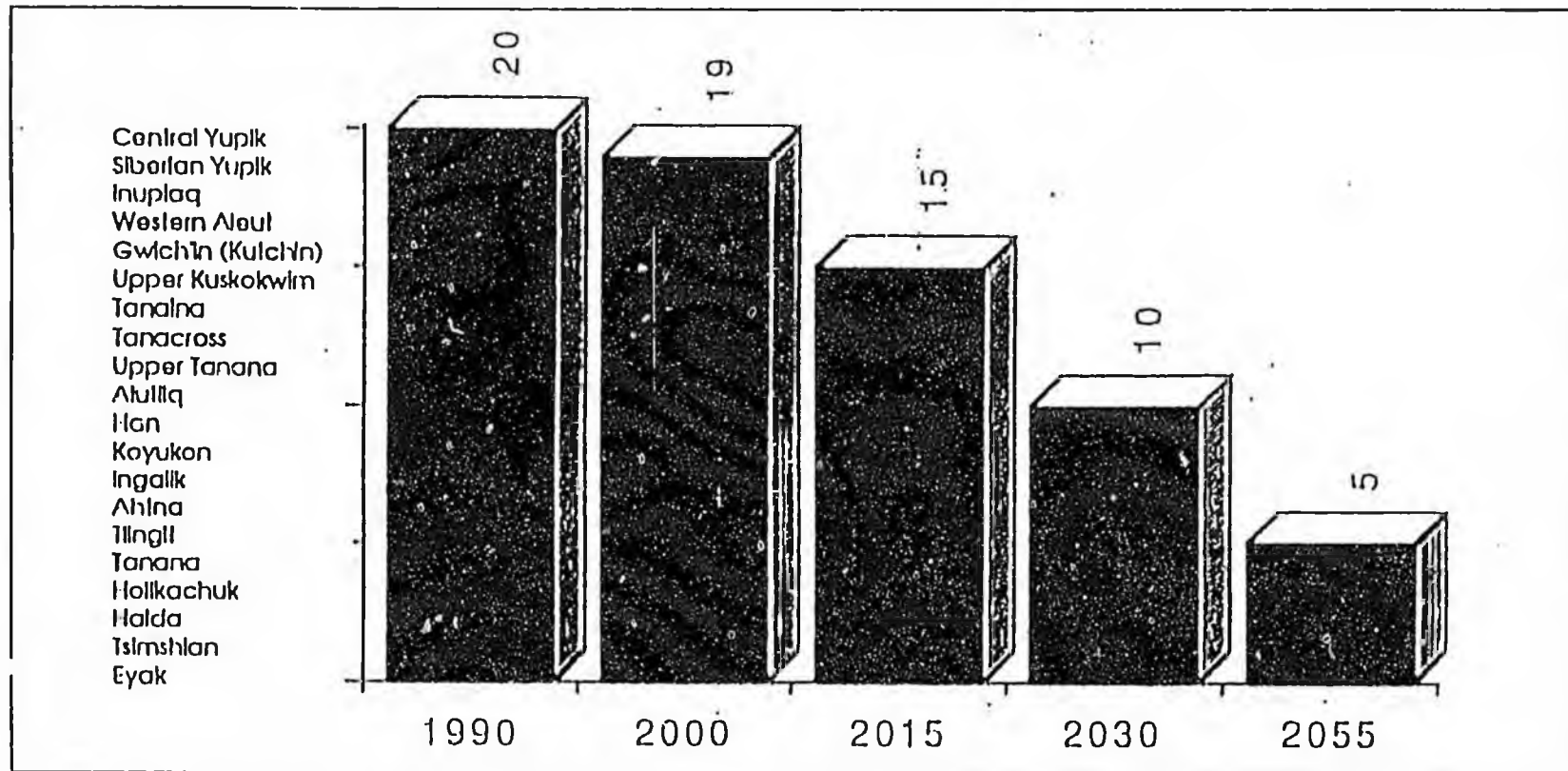
"Now they are parents and many have no interest in teaching the language. It took a long time to convince parents that their children wouldn't be punished for it," she said.

Zepeda will use the grant money to help finance a three-year project to produce a comprehensive dictionary that could be used as a teaching tool to recover Tohono O'odham.

"It will help the young children who are now learning the language. It's difficult because English is so pervasive," Zepeda said.

Foks Daily News  
2/14/88

## Languages in Peril



Not allowing for miracles, Eyak will probably not survive this century; Alaska Tsimshian, Alaska Haida, Holikachuk, and Tanana will probably be extinct by 2015; and Tlingit, Ahlana, Ingallik, Koyukon and Han will probably be extinct by 2030. Furthermore, Atulliq, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Tanaina and Upper Kuskokwim have an extremely doubtful future . . . not allowing for miracles or other radical changes, they will probably be extinct within a lifetime, by about 2055. By that year, then, probably only five of the twenty Alaska languages will still be spoken . . . Western Aleut . . . Kutchin . . . Inupiaq . . . Central Alaska Yupik and Siberian Yupik . . .

Dr. Michael Krauss  
 Alaska Native Languages: Past, Present and Future  
 Alaska Native Language Center Research Papers - 1980  
 University of Alaska Fairbanks



# A matter of voice

ADIU 1-11-98

## Native speakers would be lost without their language

By FERN GREENBANK  
Special to the Daily News

"I don't know what you mean," the students said over and over.

It seemed like a mantra and an excuse to avoid working. When you're a visiting teacher, you never know what teenagers will try.

After a few weeks in the village of Nunapitchuk, I started to wonder, "Maybe they really don't know what I mean." So, I asked them.

"What do you mean, you don't know what I mean?"

What a dumb question, their faces answered.

"We just don't know what your words mean," one student would say.

"Just keep talking," another would add. "We'll get it."

### OPINION

Eventually, I'm the one who got it. Students discussed questions and issues in Yup'ik and answered me in English. I knew how it felt to be the minority.

#### FIRST THINGS FIRST: YUP'IK

The majority of high school students in the Southwest Alaska village of Nunapitchuk are considered Yup'ik speakers. I only heard them speak English when they were talking to English-only speakers.

My visit to Nunapitchuk was my first experience with Native speakers. All other school media projects had taken me to villages where

Please see Page F-5, LANGUAGE

# LANGUAGE: Native students say

Continued from Page F1

English is the first language for students, with bits and pieces of Inupiaq or Athabaskan spoken by elders.

In the end, I realized the problem was not so much English as it was my choice of words, rate of speed, new concepts, isolated environment and the hodgepodge of educational programs the students had experienced over the years. It wasn't that they couldn't get it or didn't want to get it, they just didn't get it yet.

And, if the Legislature had anything to do with it, they might not have the chance to get it.

## DEPENDS HOW YOU LOOK AT IT

People are placed in positions all the time where they have to make decisions that affect others' lives without having any firsthand knowledge or understanding of those lives. Government policies reflect this. Media coverage reflects this. Classroom materials reflect this. It's easy to make mistakes from a distance. Alaska has a lot of distance.

In Anchorage, I investigated all points of view, but being in the village was different, surrounded by children just living their lives. The issue of money or resurrection and preservation of language seemed moot. Whenever I questioned students about why it was important to have Yup'ik language instruction, they just looked at each other with bewildered expressions as if I were asking why they were Yup'ik.

"We're just like you," said Nunapitchuk junior Nick Williams. "We don't want to lose our language anymore than you'd want to lose yours."

"If I didn't speak my language, I would just look Yup'ik but I wouldn't be Yup'ik," said senior Joni Larson.

"If a young person doesn't understand what their Elder is saying to him, he would be very ashamed to call himself a Native person," said Gabe Serradell.

One student chose to stand back and look at herself. "Christina wants to start all over again using her own language."

But what about the cost, I asked. There's a big fuss going on, you know?

## WHAT FUSS?

Ask any student in Nunapitchuk what all the funding fuss is about, and they'll tell you they didn't know there was a fuss. They know English is the first language for other villages, but not for them. It's difficult to tell them it isn't that simple.

If you ask students the same questions you ask school officials or legislators, you're likely to solicit more telling, more truthful answers, if the truth is what you're after. Students say they are not immigrants, they are Native Americans and they have the right to speak their Native language first. They look incredulous when you discuss the state's right to take it away.

My job was to help the students under-

## bilingual education important

### LETTER: Language helps to maintain culture

Continued from Page F-1

the bond between Native land and Native people, especially elders.

English is necessary because it helps us deal with a changing world. Native people who were bilingual made our Native land and lifestyle more accessible for use by passing ANCSA.

Without bilingual education, we would be speaking only one language, which would cause great confusion among people and would keep us from working and living together successfully.

To me, bilingual education is like having the key to the door of opportunity — self-esteem, confidence and a will to dedicate ourselves to future generations.

If the legislators said we should not have Yup'ik culture taught in the schools or if the state wanted to stop bilingual education, it would be helping to destroy our bond of respect toward Native ways. They would be helping to destroy and abandon our elder's great wisdom and understanding. How would we, in return, show our appreciation and gratitude if we don't speak our Native language? Without our Native language, we are nothing with a name called "nobody."

I feel fortunate because I am able to understand what the elders and white people are saying. But, when I'm speaking in Yup'ik and can't say what I have in my

mind, I use English to carry on to another subject till I can say my ideas in Yup'ik. I'm still having some trouble translating ideas in Yup'ik because there isn't always a Yup'ik word for a Western idea.

In our village, Nunapitchuk, which means "small piece of land," I usually hear people speaking in Yup'ik. The only time I hear them speak in English is when they are talking to a white person. Children usually speak in Yup'ik except for those whose parents speak in English to their relatives.

Bilingual people get a sense of pride because of the confidence they gain from having learned their language. Alexis Isaac and Lillian Michelle, Yup'ik broadcasters at KYUK radio, said that if we value our language, we value our culture and the people around us. Lillian said that when a child asks what a Yup'ik word means, it is a sign that we are losing our language.

They said that people with bilingual skills are needed by businesses in the Delta because they are able to translate orally and in writing. They allow Natives and non-Natives to communicate.

The school district should be allowed to continue spending money on bilingual education. The reward is greater than money; it is the ability to learn and deal with a changing world.

— Alice Toocluk

stand an issue that affects them and then write about it persuasively. I repeated all the opposing arguments: Some want to make English the official language because it is easier and cheaper. Some are concerned that students will develop trouble functioning outside the village if they are enrolled in Yup'ik-only programs. We talked about villages that do not speak the Native language. We discussed the state's responsibility vs. the family and the cost, always the cost.

"What does money have to do with it?" students asked.

Every year for the past few years the Alaska Legislature has debated the merits of bilingual education, the level to which it should be funded and the formula by which money is distributed for language instruction. The issue is a political live wire across the nation. Those legislators opposing a change in the funding formula, and a resultant drastic cut in bilingual education dollars, are often criticized for not supporting Alaska Natives. Those favoring continuation and even expansion of bilingual education are often called on the carpet for not being realistic in light of available funds and test scores.

If I came to no other conclusion after

spending three weeks in Nunapitchuk with Yup'ik speaking students, it was this: The state of bilingual education, and funding, is one of the most difficult ethical dilemmas facing Alaska because it calls into question our understanding of ethnicity, identity and assimilation. It redefines the role of our educational system.

## YOU HAD TO BE THERE

Nunapitchuk was unlike any village I had ever visited. The community is actively involved with making, and enforcing, school policies. People are interested in what you do, not why you're there or how soon you're leaving. Children downright funny, curious, friendly and kind.

It looks much like any other village externally: empty horizons, fierce blowing snow, messy dog yards, roaring snowmachines and fantastic sunsets. The village is built on soggy tundra that requires an elaborate system of boardwalks to keep from sinking knee-deep in muck.

The airstrip is across the river, which is fine when it's frozen and fine when it's not, but when it's in between, travel to meet planes takes some creativity and a bit of bravery. On a good day, you can showma-

mine to Bethel in 25 minutes. There are several villages within eye shot, giving Nunapitchuk a less-isolated feel. The village itself is spread out more than most; it's hard to find stable ground to build on. Every year, foundations have to be adjusted to keep up with the heaves.

The students also were unlike any group of students I'd worked with before. Sure, some had trouble expressing themselves in writing. Their English skills appeared below average. They struggled with skills such as making phone calls or setting up interviews, following through with tasks or thinking for themselves. A few had attitudes. But, they know who they are. Their sense of self and identity is remarkable and refreshing. They understand there are problems adjusting to life outside the village and that speaking English is a necessity to succeed out there. They will talk openly and honestly about race, intolerance and stereotypes.

#### HEARING IS BELIEVING

I knew the student's experience was more revealing and more accurate than any piece of documentation we could dig up. But, I had to explain that "Westerners historically do not accept heart, spirit or instinct as evidence. You can't turn in a paper with the only argument, "I know it's true because I feel it."

"Why not?" they asked.

Sometimes being a teacher sucks.

From experience, I knew the students' "distinctive" voices would not be published. I also knew there was a chance their "Western" voices would sound dry and monotone. It's just the harsh reality and one I don't like dealing with. Village English is interpreted by most readers as poor English and illiteracy. Heavy handed "clean up" of village English makes the essays take on my voice. While the original essays had more heart, my job is to teach journalistic writing skills based on facts.

The trick is to blend the heartfelt experiences of a culture with the Western standards of publishing. Three weeks just wasn't long enough.

When the students adhered to the tenets of editorial writing, they lost some of their "voice." The final essays don't sing like the original gut-felt essays. But, I know they have "distinctive" voices, both Yup'ik and English, because they let me get to know them.

The students' solution to the entire issue was simple; relocate the state capital to Nunapitchuk so legislators would get to know them and hear their bilingual voices. As the likelihood of this happening is slim, here are their Westernized voices. It helps to read between the lines.

---

□ Fern Greenback is director of The Village News Network, an independent media studies program for rural students. She also is former director of special projects for the University of Alaska Anchorage Journalism and Public Communications Department.

---