

Language and land in fragile ecosystems: Mapping the Inuit language of Canada's Arctic

Inuit Nunangat, or Inuit homeland, is a vast territory covering over 3.5 million km² in Canada's Arctic. It is home to about 50,000 Inuit living in 53 communities spread across all of northern Canada. This distance between communities, in earlier times accessible only by dogsled or kayak, has resulted in at least 9 dialects and many subdialects of Inuktitut, the language of the Canadian Inuit. Differences are found in the lexicon, phonology and morphology in a dialect continuum from coast to coast (Dorais 2010).

Inuit identify strongly with their communities and regional dialects. Dialects provide a common language for those with a shared regional identity, as well as being a symbolic and practical link to the past (Tulloch 2006). This paper presents our work in documenting Inuktitut dialects in the *Atlas of the Inuit Language in Canada* (Murasugi, et al. 2015-2019, Murasugi and Ittusardjuat, 2018). Inuit are experiencing an erosion of their language due to the dominance of English in current Inuit culture and society, as well as Canada's legacy of residential schools and marginalization of Indigenous languages. The goal of our Atlas project is to help protect and strengthen the vitality of Inuktitut dialects, as the linguistic effects of regional isolation diminish in this age of air transportation and information technology.

References

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