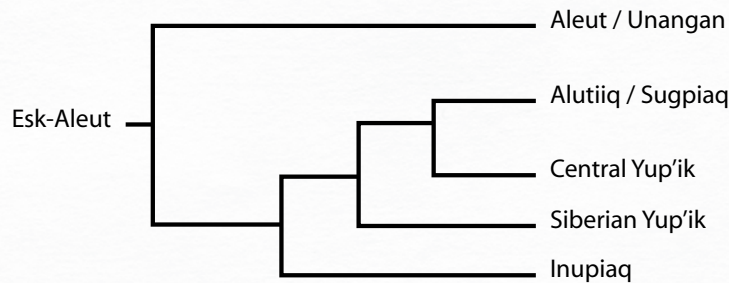


# LET'S ALL STUDY ALUTIIQ!

## – GUANGKUTA LITNAURLITA ALUTIIT'STUN!

The Alutiiq people speak Sugt'stun, or simply Alutiiq. Some Alutiiqs also refer to the language as *Alutiit'stun* - which means like an Alutiiq. This language belongs to the broader Esk-Aleut language family, which has two main branches – Aleut and Eskimoan. The Aleut, or Unangan people, of the Aleutian chain speak the language of this branch. The Eskimoan branch is spoken from southern Alaska to Greenland by a variety of different cultures. Speakers of Sugt'stun, the Alutiiq language, are found in the Gulf of Alaska, Yup'ik speakers are indigenous to Western Alaska and Siberia, and speakers of Inupiaq or Inuit live in Northern Alaska, Canada and Greenland. The diagram below illustrates the relationships between these languages as understood by linguists:



*Adapted from Woodbury 1984*

Each branch in this diagram represents a distinctive split between languages, with each language most closely related to its nearest neighbors on the chart. For example, an Alutiiq speaker can communicate easily with a Yup'ik speaker. Their languages are closely related as illustrated by their nearness on the chart. In contrast, Alutiiq and Aleut speakers cannot understand each other. Although distantly related, their languages are very different. A comparison of some common Alutiiq, Yup'ik, and Aleut words illustrates this situation.

### WORD COMPARISONS

ENGLISH	ALUTIIQ	YUP'IK	ALEUT
hair (plural)	nuyat	nuyat	imlis
person	suk	yuuk	angagisinax
ten	qulen	qula	hatix
ocean	imaq	imaq	alagux

As a maritime culture, members of classical Alutiiq society were highly mobile, traveling and trading great distance across the Gulf of Alaska. In their travels, Alutiiqs interacted with Aleut, Dena'ina, Eyak, and Tlingit people, who spoke very different languages. Thus, villagers long ago had to learn their neighbors' languages to facilitate travel, trade, and intermarriage. Some people also used war captives as translators. It is not surprising that many Alutiiq families became multilingual when young men returned from visits to foreign villages or people from other societies joined Alutiiq families.

Today, there are two major dialects in the Alutiiq language - Koniag Alutiiq and Chugach Alutiiq. While part of the same language, each dialect has differences in accent and vocabulary, much like the difference between American and Australian English. Residents of the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound speak Chugach Alutiiq, while residents of Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula speak Koniag Alutiiq. Each dialect is further broke into sub-dialects and sub-sub-dialects, accounting for smaller variations in Alutiiq speech.

### PLURALIZATION

Singular words in Alutiiq usually (but not always) end in q. Dual (two) of a noun will end in k, and plural (three or more) of a noun will end in t. For example, one rock is *yaamaq*, two rocks is *yaamak* and three or more is *yaamat*. Note the singular and plural use of Alutiiq nouns throughout this book.

## ALUTIIQ SPEAKERS TODAY

During the period of Western colonization, Alutiiq people learned Russian and English in addition to their own language. Many people became bilingual and some trilingual. In the 1900s, however, American schoolteachers punished Native children for speaking anything but English. In later years, many parents chose not to teach Alutiiq to their children, hoping to protect them from racism. As a result, the number of Alutiiq speakers declined steadily during the twentieth century. In 2002, average age of Kodiak's Alutiiq speakers was 67.

To many Alutiiq people, reawakening the Alutiiq language is a critical part of preserving Native heritage. Today, there are many projects underway in the Kodiak community to revitalize the language. Kodiak College has hosted Alutiiq classes. The Alutiiq Museum continues to publish and broadcast an Alutiiq Word of the Week program. Native organizations are incorporating language lessons into summer camps for children. Elders are teaching Alutiiq vocabulary in elementary schools. A new Alutiiq dictionary is in production, and island-wide language preservation and documentation projects are underway. Through these efforts, the sounds of Alutiiq are returning to Kodiak.



### LEARN MORE:

#### PUBLISHED RESOURCES:

Classroom Grammar of Koniag Alutiiq: Kodiak Island Dialect, 1996, by Jeff Leer and Nina Zeedar, University of Alaska, Alaska Native Language Center, Fairbanks.

A Conversational Dictionary of Kodiak Alutiiq, 1978, by Jeff Leer, University of Alaska, Alaska Native Language Center, Fairbanks.

Kodiak Alutiiq Language Conversational Phrasebook with Audio CD, 2006, by April G. Laktonen Counciller, edited by Jeff Leer, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Qik'rtarmiut Sugpiat Niugneret cali PatRiitat – Kodiak Island Words and Pictures, 2008, by Alisha S. Drabek, edited by April G. Laktonen Counciller, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.

Eskimo and Aleut Languages, 1984, by A.C. Woodbury. In, Arctic, edited by David Damas, Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 5, W.T. Sturtevant gen. ed., Pp. 49-63. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

#### ELECTRONIC RESOURCES:

Alutiiq Museum Web Site  
**[www.alutiiqmuseum.org](http://www.alutiiqmuseum.org)**  
Learn the Alutiiq alphabet, study grammar, and browse Alutiiq Word of the Week lessons.

Alutiiq Language Web Portal  
**[www.alutiiqmuseum.org/portal/](http://www.alutiiqmuseum.org/portal/)**  
Watch videos of Alutiiq language speakers, study an interactive place names map.

Alutiiq Language Word Games  
**[www.quia.com/pages/alutiiq.html](http://www.quia.com/pages/alutiiq.html)**  
Try your skill at word games featuring Alutiiq vocabulary.