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# Youth, Linguistic Ecology, and Language Endangerment: A Yup'ik Example

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Using data from a longitudinal study, this article traces how in- and out-of-school processes placed youth at the center of a community language tip into English in Piniq, a Yup'ik village in Alaska. During an early phase of language tip, youth underscored bilingual connections to community and place through storytelling with peers. Yet youth were also experiencing linguistic insecurities and losing forms that marked a linguistic orientation to land. Further, adult responses to youth language changes fed vicious cycles of reduced resources for and increasing doubts about bilingualism. Situating and examining young men's seal-hunting stories, the article highlights how youth in the first group to speak mostly English mediated life contingencies, uneven linguistic resources, and apprenticeship experiences as they learned a knowledge system embedded in the life of their community. Implications for educators in rapidly changing linguistic ecologies are discussed.

**Key words:** language ideology, linguistic ecology, language socialization, youth culture, language endangerment, community knowledge

Within many Indigenous communities in North America, youth live in rapidly changing linguistic ecologies, yet little research has examined how Indigenous youth mediate language shift. This article draws from a larger longitudinal study of young people's bilingualism in Piniq (all names are pseudonyms), a Yup'ik village of 600 in southwestern Alaska, from 1992 to 2001. The study compared 2 consecutive cohorts of youth, as Piniq experienced a *language tip* (Dorian, 1989), that is, a rapid language shift to English. Youth in the older group spoke Yup'ik as the predominant language of peer culture from 1992 to 1995 and were described by community members as the last "real speakers" of Yup'ik. The majority of youth in the younger group spoke mostly English amongst their peers in 2000 and 2001, but also used bilingualism to "get by," as community members put it, with adults and one another.

In this article, I trace the ways overlapping processes eroded local resources for heritage language learning in Piniq, placing youth at the center of community language tip. I also compare how educators, community members, and young people made sense of emerging signs of language endangerment. Examining young men's seal-hunting stories in particular, I demonstrate how youth in the younger "get by" group mediated life contingencies, uneven linguistic resources, and apprenticeship experiences as they learned a knowledge system embedded in the

life of their community. As we will see, youth in the first group to speak mostly English used Yup'ik to connect to community, place, and local knowledge. Yet youth were also experiencing linguistic insecurities and losing linguistic “forms whose possibilities of use ha[d] been explored and learned for many generations” (Woodbury, 1998, p. 256). Further, adult responses to changing youth practices fed vicious cycles of increasing doubts about and reduced resources for bilingualism.

By situating youth language ideologies, trajectories, and practices, we can critically highlight the ways in which (a) linguistic resources are shaped across levels of daily life, timescales, and geographic spaces, and (b) schooling shapes the maintenance and/or disruption of unique languages and knowledge systems. We also gain key insights into youth as icons and agents of radical sociolinguistic change.

### YUP'IK SUBSISTENCE AND SCHOOLING

Indigenous-language issues in Alaska, as elsewhere, are “embedded in a political discourse centered on land and the role that land plays in Aboriginal cultures, including their spiritual values and languages” (Patrick, 2007, p. 51). Many Yup'ik villagers currently practice extensive hunting, fishing, and gathering. In the latter 20th century, as increasing bureaucratization and movement have transformed the Yup'ik region socially, politically and economically, “subsistence and land rights have been the main line of defense” through which Yup'ik community members have fought cultural extinction (Morrow & Hensel, 1992, p. 40).

In the Yup'ik region, questions abound regarding the role of schooling in a rapidly changing society. Historically, elementary schools in Alaska attempted to eradicate Indigenous ways of knowing, punishing students for speaking their Indigenous languages. In the mid-20th century Yup'ik students were sent to distant boarding schools where they were submersed in English. After decisions were made with regard to several State and federal court cases in the early 1970s, many Yup'ik communities in southwestern Alaska gained local high schools (see Charles, 2009) and transitional elementary bilingual programs offering a few years of Yup'ik language instruction. From 1980 to 1995, however, the number of Yup'ik speakers dropped from 13,000 to 10,000 (Krauss, 1997). In 2007, teachers from multiple villages where children spoke Yup'ik in 1995 reported that increasing numbers of children were speaking mostly English, underscoring the urgency of reconsidering Yup'ik bilingual education (Wyman et al., forthcoming). A new Yup'ik immersion school in the hub town of Bethel and local decision-making about school programming offer transformative possibilities for connecting schooling to community knowledge and reversing language shift. To take advantage of these opportunities, language planners, educators, and community members must develop keen awareness of the ways bilingual programs and young people's practices situate within and across linguistic ecologies.

The present study, focused on Yup'ik youth, is among the first to track both in- and out-of-school influences on Indigenous young people's language use longitudinally. As such, it provides a uniquely detailed portrait of how wide-ranging processes shape young people's linguistic practices, how youth negotiate processes of language shift, and how young people's negotiations, in turn, shape the language trajectories of peers, families, and communities.

## STUDYING YOUTH IN LANGUAGE SHIFT COMMUNITIES

### Theoretical Framework

Language shift is a notoriously complex phenomenon to document in progress. Often multiple internal and external pressures and processes combine to produce community language shift (Fishman, 1991, 2001). The “choice” to abandon a language involves social assessments about the possibilities and purposes of bilingualism, as well as value judgments about the role of the heritage language in maintaining community. While the “choice” may appear to occur suddenly, often, changing *language ideologies*—seemingly commonsense assumptions about languages relating to communities’ sociohistorical circumstances—lay the groundwork for shift before it is apparent (Dorian, 1989; Gal, 1979; Kulick, 1992). As we will see in the following, language ideologies may also proliferate quickly when individuals try to maintain or document an endangered language or make sense of language endangerment (Hill, 2006), naturalizing ongoing processes of shift.

Language shift studies must also examine how linguistic resources and language learning opportunities change as youth are socialized by adults, as youth socialize one another and younger children, and as adults interpret and respond to young people’s practices over time (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Kulick, 1992). Further, studies of language shift must take into account the ways that individual forms of bilingualism are shaped by unique life circumstances (Valdés, 2005, Zentella, 1997). By incorporating complex systems theory into language research, scholars are reconceptualizing how learners integrate heterogeneous sets of resources and experiences across longer and shorter processes of socialization, with implications for the formation of identities and language practices (Lemke, 2000). Scholars have also begun to document how individualized, yet overlapping *language socialization trajectories* account for similarities, differences, and dynamism in the linguistic and cultural repertoires of youth (Wortham, 2006).

This study examined the changing contours of local peer culture in Piniq from 1992 to 2001, considering language assumptions in light of sociohistorical changes and local and extra-local relationships of power. The study also traced typical and atypical language socialization trajectories of individuals, peer groups and families to analyze how (a) youth in Piniq were socialized through the use of language and socialized to use language (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), (b) youth took up and enacted positions as speakers versus nonspeakers of Yup’ik with consequences for community language practices, and (c) youth integrated language ideologies and linguistic resources with their experiences learning a unique community knowledge system.

### Researcher Positioning and Methodology

Most researchers who set out to study language shift in-depth have arrived once language shift has already occurred, or once all youth under a certain age no longer use a heritage language productively (Kulick, 1992; for an exception see Zentella, 1997). This study, in contrast, grew out of a teacher-researcher effort to connect youth to local knowledge in a village that happened to be experiencing a language tip to English. My relationship with the community of Piniq started when I took a job as a secondary English teacher in the local school. From 1992 to 1995, I taught students ( $N = 75$ ) spanning 7 different levels, including the group that Yup’ik educators

later referred to as the last “real speakers” of Yup’ik. During this time I worked with Yup’ik teachers, community members, and youth on an intergenerational project in which students interviewed community elders as the basis for academic work in English and Yup’ik, and as part of a local language documentation project. In the mid-1990s adults and youth were already voicing concerns about language endangerment. As a teacher-researcher, I documented students’ metessages and language use and critically considered language shift with secondary students. From 1995 to 2000 I lived elsewhere, yet continued to work on the documentation project and discuss language shift with educators.

In 2000 and 2001 I conducted 14 months of ethnographic research on young people’s peer culture and language shift in Piniq. In the 5 years I lived away, language shift had progressed rapidly. Community members quickly identified the last group to use primarily Yup’ik peers (the “real speakers”), and the first group to speak primarily English with one another and some Yup’ik to “get by” in local life. Yet young people’s language uses also varied tremendously within the 2 groups of youth. My research focused on identifying how linguistic assumptions and resources were changing, how they were influencing young people’s language learning and linguistic practices, and how youth culture was intersecting with family and community language socialization.

Longstanding Yup’ik educators helped me trace how multiple contingencies affected the language learning opportunities of individuals, peer groups, and families. I also utilized semi-structured and informal interviews with parents and observations to identify emerging patterns in family heritage-language maintenance and loss. Looking more closely at family language socialization, I additionally conducted 2 case studies of families with young children.

To determine students’ language-proficiency levels, I compared (a) Yup’ik and English test scores; and (b) informal language assessments of teachers, parents, and students themselves. To identify how adults spoke with youth and the ways youth interacted with one another, I also used participation observation, volunteering daily in a 7th grade class taught by a Yup’ik teacher, shadowing other classes, and observing and selectively taping school-related events (parties, sports practices, prom preparations, etc.) and out-of-school activities (community classes, feasts, subsistence practices, etc.).

In order to further document young people’s language use, lives, and emic perspectives, I conducted 11 taped semi-structured interviews with my former students as young adults, and 24 taped individual and small group conversational interviews with youth ages 12–17 from the “get by” group. I also conducted many more non-taped conversational interviews with youth from both groups in the study. To document language associations and minimize students’ discomfort as “semi-speakers” (Dorian, 1989), I steered discussions toward topics of local interest, taping youth with varying language proficiencies in interaction, when possible, and introducing language questions toward the ends of interviews. Local language consultants helped me transcribe, translate, and interpret youth, family, and community discourse samples. Excerpts below come from interviews with youth in the “get by” group in 2000 and 2001.

Between 2001 and the time of this writing, I have discussed findings with educators and community members in Piniq, and used the Piniq study with Yup’ik educators and others to investigate bilingualism and education in the school district serving Piniq and surrounding Yup’ik villages. My insider-outsider positioning and collaborative work informed my analysis and are described further elsewhere (Wyman, forthcoming; Wyman et al., forthcoming).

## Placing Schooling in Linguistic Ecologies

Dominant discourses frame minority language loss as a natural, perhaps regrettable, but unavoidable phenomenon, obscuring local meanings of bilingualism and rhetorically sanitizing inequitable histories leading to language endangerment (May, 2005). In this section, I consider adults' emerging interpretations of young people's changing linguistic practices in Piniq, comparing these to (a) local bilingual practices and language maintenance efforts and (b) long-term processes that laid the groundwork for rapid language tip.

From 1992 to 2001, rotating groups of administrators and educators from outside Piniq made up the majority of local school staff. These educators generally knew very little about language shift/endangerment, yet were aware of the history of linguistic oppression in the region and the local trend toward language shift. As growing numbers of children entered school speaking mostly English, most outsiders and some local educators assumed that parents and community members simply weren't using Yup'ik enough out of school. As one administrator commented:

People are very concerned about the loss of language, and some people are looking to the school to save the language. But the school can't save it. Those people need to speak the language at home, and in the business of the community, when they go to the store, and when they work at the council.

The point that the administrator was trying to make, that schools *on their own* cannot stabilize or revitalize languages, is well established (Fishman, 1991; 2001). Nevertheless, schools play key roles in heritage-language maintenance and revitalization in contemporary Indigenous communities (Hornberger, 2008). Educators send powerful messages about language (learn)ability and linguistic possibility, for instance, in the ways that they discuss schools, individuals, families, and communities. Throughout the decade of the study, most educators in Piniq ostensibly supported bilingualism, sending home "separate but equal" messages that English was the language of the cash economy and Yup'ik was the language of elders, subsistence, and tradition. However, work in Piniq at the time was bilingual work. For many adult community members, elders' *qanruyutait*, oral teachings in Yup'ik, represented a "cumulative knowledge on a timescale and spatial scale that no individual could match" (Lemke, 2000, p. 282) and a heritage only partially passed down to the bilingual adults who attended boarding schools. Middle-aged adults used bilingualism to integrate elders and elders' teachings into village institutions, and youth who got "good" jobs in Piniq's distressed economy commonly used bilingualism in local work (Wyman, forthcoming).

As growing groups of youth stopped using Yup'ik beyond simple Yup'ik words and phrases, community members expressed concern that youth might be cut off from elders and elders' *qanruyutait*. Some also assumed that youth were orienting toward mainstream society, and criticized young people's English use and seeming loss of ethnic identity with comments like, "*Yugtun, kassauguci-qaq?*" ("Speak Yup'ik, what are you, whites?"). Alternately, some local educators noted how wide-ranging rapid changes were contributing to language shift, yet wondered how to "go back and change everyone."

When educators or community members attributed language shift to single causes, or, alternately, pointed out just how many processes of language shift were evident in community life and linguistic practice, both kinds of talk tended to preclude discussion of the ways in which the local school undermined heritage language maintenance, and how the school might be used to support bilingualism within a rapidly changing linguistic ecology. In the 1970s, Piniq had one of the first

Indigenous bilingual programs in Alaska, yet the program was reduced in the 1980s when a non-Native administrator questioned the program's effectiveness. From that time forward, English became the core language of instruction in the elementary school. The children in Piniq who first used English as a peer language were the first group to receive primary elementary instruction in English in the 1980s. In 2000 and 2001, most families started out speaking Yup'ik with their children, and the eldest children of these families used Yup'ik productively in peer culture. Many parents, however, noted how their children started using mostly English after attending school.

In the 1980s and 1990s, increasing village-urban and intervillage movement and the accompanying modern dislocation and relocation of family life (Fishman, 2001) placed additional pressure on young people's Yup'ik language-learning opportunities. Adults from Piniq increasingly moved back and forth between urban and rural Alaska, taking advantage of jobs and education elsewhere while maintaining villages as touchstones of Yup'ik identity (Fienup-Riordan, 2000). Increasing numbers of second-language Yup'ik-speaking adults also married into Piniq to raise their children close to elders and subsistence.

Adding further variation to an uneven picture of language tip, some young people's Yup'ik skills were *fostered and activated* by migration to strong Yup'ik-speaking villages and schools with stronger Yup'ik programs elsewhere. When children in transnational immigrant communities migrate to heritage-language speaking countries, their mobility supports heritage language development and maintenance (Zentella, 1997). Unlike learners connecting to countries with stable heritage languages, however, children in Piniq migrated to and from villages in an Indigenous region where language shift was already affecting a majority of villages (Krauss, 1997). During the course of the study many more children from Piniq moved back and forth to English-speaking places than Yup'ik-speaking places.

As processes above influenced the local linguistic ecology, local peer culture also became a driving force of language shift. In 2000 and 2001, youth in the "get by" group maintained a common base of receptive and limited productive skills in Yup'ik. A majority of youth, however, used English stand-alone words in lieu of the verbal post-bases and word endings at the heart of the Yup'ik morphosyntactic system. Families whose children had cousins or friends who spoke Yup'ik comfortably generally maintained Yup'ik as a home language. Families without support in children's peer networks, however, began to evidence a common pattern in family-level language tip, using increasing English at home after their oldest children went to school.

Thus, within a brief window of time, Piniq moved rapidly toward language shift. Young people's opportunities for learning Yup'ik both eroded and diverged as a seemingly stable setting of bilingualism transformed into a highly uneven linguistic landscape. Next we will consider how youth interpreted and negotiated their central positions within language tip.

## LOOKING WITHIN YOUTH CULTURE

### Peer Dynamics and Diverging Linguistic Repertoires

Youth in the study were keenly aware of community desires for them to speak Yup'ik, and a local language ideology tying Yup'ik to ethnic identity, land-use practices, discourse expectations, and socializing genres of elders' talk. From 1992 to 2001, youth generally expressed positive associations among Yup'ik language, ethnicity, local practices, and local knowledge, yet grew up with a strong

sense of who was and wasn't "really speaking Yup'ik." In 2000 and 2001 school language assessments identified roughly a third of secondary students as "fluent Yup'ik speakers," a third as "minimal Yup'ik speakers," and a third as "non-Yup'ik speakers." Among the shrinking subgroups of youth whose life contingencies aligned in favor of developing Yup'ik, Yup'ik remained an everyday language of peer culture. Yup'ik-speaking students also spoke Yup'ik around peers with more limited productive skills. However, students who (a) spent part of their childhoods in places where English was spoken, (b) had second language Yup'ik-speaking parents, and/or (c) were younger siblings with English-speaking childhood friends spoke of and evidenced linguistic insecurities.

### Emerging Logics of Language Loss and Shift

In the "real speaker" group, youth who spent time in urban areas or English-speaking villages commonly felt like they could no longer speak Yup'ik when they moved back to Piniq. In the mid-1990s these youth were exceptions and rarely linked their individual circumstances to community language endangerment. In contrast, as community members increasingly anticipated full-scale language shift in 2000 and 2001, youth in the "get by" group shared "emergent narrative logics" (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 200) of the ways wide-ranging circumstances contributed to individual, family, and community language loss. Some youth implicitly or overtly critiqued the ways local schooling practices undermined their parents' efforts to maintain Yup'ik at home. One girl, for instance, described how she and her younger siblings spoke mostly Yup'ik as young children, but switched to English when they attended school in Piniq. Other youth described how additional local and translocal contingencies were contributing to their insecurities about speaking Yup'ik. Before the following interview segment in 2000, I asked 2 secondary students what they thought Piniq would be like in the future:

1. LTW: What kinds of things will be the same? What kinds of things will be different?
2. Nathan: Our Yup'ik language might be the same, or might be different, I don't know.
3. Mike: I heard one village lost their language.
4. LTW: What do people say about, like, Yup'ik and English?
5. Nathan: When I used to be small, I used to speak Yup'ik language, but when they were (inaudible) we lost that language.
6. Mike: Me, too.
7. Nathan: When I played with . . . when my mom brought me to Anchorage, I forgot how.
8. Mike: Me, I forgot how from uh, playing with a boy who talked English too much. When I try speak Yup'ik I speak it wrong.

In the excerpt, Mike and Nathan use free-flowing temporal and geographical border crossings (Ochs & Capps, 2001) to allude to local language concerns, and to partially articulate connections between their personal experiences and community language endangerment. In line 2, Nathan states that "our Yup'ik language might be the same or might be different," and Mike follows with a report how "one village lost their language" (line 3). In response to my question about "what people say" about Yup'ik and English (line 4), Mike and Nathan move back in time to share individual stories of language loss, indirectly linking their personal trajectories to the emerging possibility of community language endangerment. Sharing brief stories, they describe how they "knew" Yup'ik and spoke Yup'ik as children, and seemingly explain why they stopped speaking Yup'ik later as youth. In line 5, Nathan speaks as part of a group with a unique relationship to Yup'ik, recapping how "we lost our language."



Both Mike and Nathan emphasize how unexpected life experiences, such as Nathan's stint in a distant city (line 7) and Mike's friendship with an English-speaking peer (line 8) influenced their non-use of Yup'ik. Yet Mike and Nathan overlook how longer-term processes shaped their identities as Yup'ik language "forgetters." Stories of how personal friendships "caused" personal language loss like Mike's, for instance, became common only after changes in schooling and migration eroded young people's collective resources for learning Yup'ik and local peer culture started "tipping" into English. By framing their stories as language "forgetting" in lines 7 and 8, Mike and Nathan leave open the possibility that changing circumstances and their own actions might allow them to "remember" how to be confident Yup'ik speakers. Yet as they narrate their language trajectories, Nathan and Mike also align to create seemingly logical outcomes of unexpected life events including language forgetting, linguistic insecurity, and collective language endangerment.

Importantly, in their spontaneous descriptions above, Mike and Nathan obscure how they themselves *used* Yup'ik locally. Similar to many of their peers, Mike and Nathan expressed insecurity about speaking Yup'ik and did not use advanced Yup'ik post-bases and word endings productively in extended Yup'ik utterances. Nevertheless, many youth like Mike and Nathan who spent years in the village grew adept at combining listening skills with predictable questions and statements in Yup'ik. After returning from Anchorage, Nathan used Yup'ik at home to interact with siblings who never left Piniq, as well as with grandparents, aunts, and uncles. As the younger child of a shifting family, Mike, as well, used Yup'ik with relatives and could translate when local elders exchanged pleasantries with outside teachers. Like others their age, Nathan and Mike also used Yup'ik receptive skills, token phrases, questions and simple statements to learn practices central to community life, as we will consider here.

### Negotiating Connections to Community, Place, and Local Knowledge

Historically, Indigenous youth in many places have been socialized to understand their place in the world through language practices ranging from stories to naming practices, catechisms and lectures, as well as activities including observation and gendered apprentice-style learning (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). In Piniq youth who did not comfortably speak Yup'ik in 2000 integrated various forms of heritage language learning with the learning of *yuyaraq*, (the way to be human), a local knowledge system connecting Yup'ik with human-animal and human-to-human relationships, local activities, and ecological knowledge (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2004; Fienup-Riordan, 2000; Hensel, 1996). In the same interview above, Nathan and Mike describe learning to hunt seals<sup>1</sup>:

1. Nathan: Sometimes, me, me and my *apii* (granddad) only go alone . . . It's fun when we go spring hunting.
2. Mike: For seals.
3. Nathan: Yup.
4. LTW: What's your favorite kind of hunting.
5. Nathan: Seal=
6. Mike: =Seal hunt, everybody.
7. LTW: What's it like?

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<sup>1</sup> Transcription key: In this transcript, slashes (/) are used to indicate the overlapping talk of speakers. Equal signs (=) are used to indicate sentences where speakers' statements followed quickly after one another without a pause.

8. Mike: It's cool, cold, really/
9. Nathan: /Fun/
10. Mike: /Really/ . . . close, real.
11. Nathan: Yup.
12. Mike: You'll catch *maklaar* (bearded seal), big=
13. Nathan: =Really big, really fat, blubber.
14. Mike: And sometime the adults say, they'll cut 'em up, "*tangvauriqluci*" (watch carefully, be ever vigilant). [See discussion below.]
15. Nathan: They cut, cut, cut their head?
16. LTW: Um hmm.
17. Nathan: If they cut their head, put it in the water, say "*Cali taikina*, come back again." Throw it in the water.
18. LTW: Um hmm.
19. Mike: I did that at, uh, fall.
20. Nathan: I did that when we cut a *maklaar* (bearded seal).

Nathan and Mike describe how they used the simple Yup'ik prayer, "*Cali taikina*" (Come back again), and returned heads of hunted seals to the water (lines 17 and 18), enacting the belief that seals treated with respect will return to hunters. Nathan and Mike also use Yup'ik terminology to reference knowledge of types of seals (line 12, 19 *maklaar*/bearded seal) and terms of endearment for older relatives (line 1 *apii/grandad*).

As was common, Mike and Nathan additionally recounted and reenacted the ways they used Yup'ik with adult mentors as they learned subsistence activities. Mike voices an adult mentor (line 14), and his seeming quote, "*tangvaur-i-qluci*," highlights both the challenges and strengths of heritage learners who may evidence linguistic errors yet still be acquiring heritage language phrases, vocabulary, and skills through participation in community activities (e.g., Valdés, 2005). "*Tangvaur-i-qluci*" echoes a common refrain used by adults when instructing youth to pay careful attention—"Tangvaur-*q-qluci*" or "Be vigilant."<sup>2</sup>

Mike and Nathan overlap their speech (lines 8–10), then latch onto one another's statements (lines 5, 6, 12, 13) as the excitement of recalling seal hunting speeds the interaction. Overall, in the segment above, Mike and Nathan counter the common assumption that youth who speak dominant languages in endangered language communities orient away from local practices, physical spaces, and/or marginalized identities. Mike's offhand comment about seal-hunting being "everybody's" favorite hunting in line 6 and the pacing of the segment stand in marked contrast to local worries that English-speaking youth "wanted to be like whites." Mike and Nathan also complicate their earlier self-descriptions as Yup'ik language "losers" or "forgetters," as they offer contrasting evidence of the ways they, as Yup'ik language learners, use Yup'ik prayers, ecological terminology, endearment terms, and teachings to learn the knowledge system of their community.

### Socializing One Another Through Storytelling About Subsistence

Scholars have documented how adults in the Yup'ik region orient toward Yup'ik identities and epistemologies in subsistence discourse (Hensel, 1996; Morrow & Hensel, 1992). Throughout

<sup>2</sup>From the verb stem "*tangvaur(ar)*" (to stare or to watch intently), with the plural second person subordinate mood ending *-luci* as an imperative. I thank Walkie Charles for clarifying this term and for insights regarding the ways adults use the phrase with youth.

the decade of the study, youth in Piniq underscored and distributed the knowledge they were gaining about the environment, their community, and adult roles over time as they told one another stories about their subsistence experiences. Both young men and women in the “get by” group were particularly likely to use Yup’ik in telling subsistence stories (Wyman, forthcoming). Villagers commonly noted in 2000 and 2001 that one of the last regular places to hear storytelling in Yup’ik among youth was in young men’s hunting stories. In another taped interview, Mike shared seal-hunting stories with Evon and Tom, two strong Yup’ik speakers and experienced hunters his age. (Terms in bold are discussed below.)

1. Mike: *Kavialuq* caught *maklaar* (bearded seal) at Friday.
2. Tom: Did they go out Friday?
3. Mike: *Kavialuq* and Ned’s dad.
4. Evon: *Cikigaq*?
5. Mike: Ned’s dad.
6. Evon: *Cikigaq*.
7. Mike: Who’s *Cikigaq*?
8. Tom and Evon: Ned’s dad.
9. Mike: Yeh. *Cikigaq* caught *maklaar* (bearded seal).  
You know when we **go down**, we **go that** way?  
I mean, that **this** way?  
And then, there was a *maklaar* (bearded seal) **right there**.  
*Issuriyagaq* (one-year-old spotted seal), Ernie said took ’em, and then . . . We were shooting **that** one, and then they **went that way**. And they xxx **this way**, and then they shot it. It went “Qrr ch: . . . vvuu tksh;” on the second one.  
Almost/ sink./
10. Evon: /Was it in/ the water? Under water? When they harpoon it?
11. Tom: Evon-*am pugtangainarnartuq* (never let it pop up)
12. Evon: Neh, it was gonna *kit’aq* (sink) it was like this, its back, very big, and it was going down. First it went like this “ch:” /staying on the water/.
13. Tom: /And then it was/ it was floating.
14. LTW: Hmm.
15. Mike: *Tegullruan*? (Did you take it with your hands?)
16. Evon: Harpoon.

As youth in Piniq were mentored in learning subsistence, they entered into relationships of responsibility with older community members and socialized one another to recognize adults by their commonly used Yup’ik names. As in other Yup’ik villages, Piniq community members received multiple Yup’ik and English names, comprising “webs of many . . . strands weav[ing] each person inextricably and uniquely into the community” (Fienup-Riordan, 2000, p. 194). Yup’ik names tied living individuals to community members who passed on, and to ongoing relationships with living relatives and friends of the namesakes. In the excerpt above, lines 1–9, we can see how Tom and Evon socialized Mike to use the correct Yup’ik name of an adult hunter, in lieu of the more childlike English description, “Ned’s dad,” before allowing Mike to describe a hunting event.

As young people’s Yup’ik skills came to vary widely within peer groups, strong Yup’ik speakers like Tom and Evon also used Yup’ik to emphasize their relative positions of power with peers as they negotiated the floor in everyday storytelling sessions (Jorgensen, 1998). Youth who reported linguistic insecurities, as well, used simple phrases in Yup’ik to position

themselves as knowledgeable participants in conversations about subsistence. In the excerpt above, after Evon asks Mike for a clarifying detail about a seal hunt he witnessed (line 10), Tom gains the floor in line 11 by using a relatively complex combination of morphemes in Yup'ik, "*pugtangainarnartuq*" (never let it pop up). In doing so, he shifts the conversation from strong Yup'ik speakers and hunters (Tom and Evon) listening to a minimal Yup'ik speaker with less hunting experience (Mike), to strong Yup'ik speakers sharing an inside joke about a different story. In the lines immediately following, Evon and Tom discuss the subsequent story in English (lines 12–13). However, Mike uses a clarifying question in Yup'ik to regain the floor (line 15):

Ex: *Tegu-llru-an?*  
 'Take'-PAST TENSE-2sSUBJ/3sOBJ  
 Gloss: *Did you take it?*

In his question, Mike combines a single, common verbal post-base to mark tense, *-llru*, with a transitive word ending marking subject and object, *-an*, demonstrating his knowledge of how to make simple statements in Yup'ik. At the same time Mike sticks to the type of simple Yup'ik construction that was becoming common among youth in 2000 and 2001.

### Losing Language, Losing Direction . . . ?

As we have seen, in an early, uneven phase of rapid language shift, youth who described feeling insecure about speaking Yup'ik used Yup'ik tokenism to maintain and negotiate connections to community members and local knowledge, as well as to maintain their positions in local peer culture. Yet in 2000 and 2001, young people's stories also evidenced how youth were losing forms marking a linguistic orientation to land. Often scholars point out how a unique worldview and knowledge system disappears with each endangered language (Harrison, 2007; Woodbury, 1993, 1998). One feature of Yup'ik that particularly interests linguists is an extensive system of demonstrative pronouns, adverbs, and related verb stems meaning "to go (in some specific direction)." The Yup'ik demonstrative system elegantly marks a highly tuned orientation to the physical surroundings of the speaker. Yup'ik demonstratives distinguish, for instance, whether an object is near or far, up or down (in the air or down below, up or down the slope of the land), in or out (upriver or downriver), over or across from the speaker (as in across a body of water or trail), moving towards, moving away, spread out or contained (described in detail in Woodbury, 1993).

Elders who are fluent speakers of Cup'ik, a dialect of Yup'ik, use demonstratives to achieve "broad artistic and communicative goals" (Woodbury 1993, p. 10). Observing that speakers do not or only partially tend to translate form-dependent expressions like demonstratives into English, Woodbury argues that, while many aspects of cultural continuity transfer across languages, in language tip settings, "the continuity of intricate, complex, delicately tuned, deeply interwoven systems" can also be dramatically disrupted (1998, p. 256).

We see an example of this disruption above, at line 9, where Mike tells a short hunting story in English. As Mike briefly summarizes for his listeners where he went in a single hunting trip, he uses 6 instances of the demonstrative pronouns "this" or "that," the related adverb "there," and 3 instances of the verb "go" (identified in bold in the excerpt above). In similar interactions there was little evidence that young people could not follow one another in the absence of Yup'ik demonstratives. During the interview, Mike oriented his listeners by combining hand gestures with English approximations of Yup'ik demonstratives. He also called up shared

experiences and knowledge of land, asking in line 14, “You know when we **go down**, we **go that way**?” Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine how Yup’ik demonstratives and related verb stems might dramatically affect the level of detail in the story above, or any similar description of navigating on land. In 2000 and 2001, elders, parents, Yup’ik teachers, and students noted that Yup’ik demonstratives and related verb stems were disappearing from young people’s Yup’ik use. As one parent described,

And everything to them is *tageq* (go up an incline), everywhere, like they don’t have the meaning of direction. If they don’t . . . like, toward the river? *Wani* (Here). Toward the airport? *Piani* (Up, away from the river). Toward the [building’s name in Yup’ik] building? *Agaani, agaani*. (Across there, across there). *Man’a-ll’ tuai, un’gaani* (And this one, downriver, extended). *Tua-i-ll’, agaani* (Then, across there extended)? If you’re talking about *agaani* (across there extended)? My generation: “*Qaqartua* [building’s name Yu’pik] building-*amun*” (I’m going to go to the [building’s name in Yu’pik] building). *Atraqartua kuigem tungiinun* (I’m going to go down in the direction of the river). *Tagqartua elitmaurvigmun* (I’m going to go up to the school). *Un’gaavet, waten, uterteqartua* (Downriver, like this, I’m going to go back home) . . . *Ellait-llu tua-i* (And then they), if our kids talk? “*Tagqartua*” (I’m going up). That’s all they say, “*Tagqartua*” (I’m going up). “*Tagqartua kiingan*” (Only, I’m going up). That’s the only word they started using from Wes’s generation.

Young people’s flattening of the Yup’ik demonstrative system raised local questions about the significance of losing a linguistic orientation to land. Yet perhaps even more importantly, adults described how, in some cases, young people’s loss of demonstratives was causing inter-generational miscommunication and contributing to vicious cycles of increasing doubts about and reduced resources for Yup’ik maintenance in home settings. The parent quoted above, for instance, described how she had easily maintained Yup’ik with her older children in the “real speaker” group without consciously trying to use Yup’ik or realizing “how bad our language was going to be dropped, later on.” Yet she also described how she found herself switching into English to accommodate her children in the younger “get by” group when they seemingly couldn’t understand demonstratives in everyday directives. An elder described how her granddaughter could not understand simple requests involving Yup’ik demonstratives. The elder reported that, as a result, she had started using her minimal English, *versus* Yup’ik, with her granddaughter.

## CONCLUSION

Young people’s experiences of language maintenance and endangerment are deeply rooted within local relationships, practices, knowledge systems, and geographical places. Even in very small communities, such experiences vary among individuals, peer groups, and families within cornerstone generations of language shift. They are also continuously negotiated within the interactional moments of everyday life. At the same time, young people’s linguistic performances and opportunities for learning or losing heritage languages are shaped by forms of schooling and flows of people, policies, and discourses across timescales and geographical spaces. Changes in young people’s peer cultures can accelerate waves of sociolinguistic transformation in endangered language communities (Harrison, 2007). Yet, as we have seen, in early settings of language shift, these waves can happen in spite of the ways youth may value their

heritage languages and the ways they socialize one another and are socialized by adults to maintain connections to specific communities, knowledge systems, and spaces.

Schools are embroiled in historical and contemporary processes feeding rapid sociolinguistic transformation in Indigenous communities. Even after the directly oppressive period of Alaska Native education, the school in Piniq maintained “social and linguistic hierarchies [that were] remarkably persistent” (Jaffe, 2007, p. 73), undermining heritage-language programming and community heritage-language maintenance efforts. As history “sped up in the margins” (Hill, 2006) and language endangerment became evident, some educators, community members, and youth recognized the ways that the local school was undermining heritage maintenance. Yet many more pointed either to “single root causes” or an overwhelming array of out-of-school processes of language shift in community life. Together, these emerging logics of shift obscured ongoing effects of schooling on language practices, as well as local meanings of heritage-language maintenance and the possibilities for bilingualism.

Indigenous educators and community language advocates face tremendous challenges in rapidly changing sociolinguistic settings. In early language tip, young people’s linguistic repertoires may diverge, requiring educators to develop new programs, pedagogies and strategies for language planning as the proportions of youth with low and high productive skills change dramatically in as little as 5 years’ time (Wyman et al., forthcoming). While youth often initially maintain considerable receptive skills in heritage languages, they may quickly take up positions as “heritage-language listeners” versus speakers, expressing and evidencing linguistic insecurities. Youth may also lose unique linguistic forms in heritage languages, challenging everyday intergenerational communication.

Institutions such as schools are not typically set up to foster heritage-language learning or to “recognize (the) multiple norms and mixed codes” of youth in dynamic shift settings (Jaffe, 2007, p. 73; Jorgensen, 1998). In general, teachers who work to reverse language shift must build students’ linguistic repertoires so that they can interact comfortably with older generations. However, if youth feel embarrassed about their mixed language practices, they are likely to shift further toward dominant languages (García, 2009).

Understanding how youth mediate connections among Indigenous languages and local knowledge in light of their combined experiences, learning opportunities, and discourse practices may also be discouraging for Indigenous-language educators. Local processes such as peer language socialization and interactions in homes, or translocal processes such as patterns of migration, understandably seem to be out of local educators’ control. Single events and short-term processes can also have long-term effects on young people’s positions vis-à-vis their heritage languages.

Nevertheless, the ways in which specific events and processes of language shift play out also depend upon subsequent events and the accumulation of further choices and everyday interactions in schools, peer groups, families, and communities (Lemke, 2000). The ongoing impact of the decrease in Yup’ik programming in Piniq in the 1980s, for instance, was shaped by concurrent changes in patterns of migration, and later by the ways educators, community members, and youth commonly focused outside of school for explanations of language shift, the ways youth tacitly and explicitly positioned themselves as Yup’ik language “forgetters” in interactions with peers and adults, and the ways adults responded to young people’s changing linguistic practices.

Language shift, heritage-language learners' identities and practices, and community members' future "sense of direction" are also contingent—subject to the actions of educators, community members, and others. Young people's positions as speakers or nonspeakers of their heritage languages can be reshaped, especially if their heritage-language learning is sustained over time. Even in rapid language-shift settings, there are windows of opportunity for connecting individuals, peer groups, and generations to linguistic resources, local relationships, and community knowledge.

Situating youth language in time and place, and engaging with contingency in young people's linguistic practices, can help language planners, educators, and community members to (a) recognize a potential role of schooling in supporting, versus disrupting, local knowledge systems, (b) focus on "what languages mean to community identity claims, how linguistic and social meanings get constructed in daily life . . . and why they are important" (May, 2005), and (c) strategically rebuild heritage-language learning opportunities. In-depth consideration of Indigenous youth culture can also help counter damaging discourses and binary assumptions that Indigenous community members simply orient toward local or global practices, Indigenous languages or English, subsistence versus cash economies, or traditional versus modern worlds. Such countering is crucial for disrupting the damaging essentialisms that are imposed on both youth and Indigenous peoples. It is also necessary for grounding language planning struggles and for creating sustained "ideological and implementational" spaces (Hornberger, 2008) within which Indigenous community members can work through the types of complexities described above to create preferred futures for youth and their languages over time.

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