Language and Well-Being in the Arctic:
Building Indigenous Language Vitality & Sustainability

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An indigenous-driven project, the Arctic Indigenous Language Initiative is working to reverse language shift through active engagement and collaboration throughout the circumpolar region. The project is defined and determined by the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council, who are working to collaborate with researchers, representatives from Arctic Indigenous organizations and Arctic governments, language activists, and policy makers. While the long-term goal is to achieve vitality and sustainability for Arctic indigenous languages, the first measures center around assessment in three key areas: (1) Arctic language policy; (2) language acquisition; and (3) language vitality. We discuss each of these three areas, including the creation of indigenously defined assessment metrics; the establishment of feedback mechanisms from the community, including community-based (peer) review of findings; and the role of academic linguists and community members. Critically, we explore the mechanisms for creating policy changes at all levels, and the measures needed to turn the findings of the assessment teams into action to promote Arctic indigenous language vitality. We address the challenges of working across such broad geographic territories, spanning multiple national boundaries, and the challenges of working with so many stakeholders with such diverse interests.

Introduction

For Arctic indigenous peoples, knowledge of their ancestral language is a central component of well-being. Not only is this view taken by external researchers (see Schweitzer et al. 2010), but it is also the attitude of Arctic indigenous peoples themselves. The present paper reports on how Arctic indigenous communities are working collaboratively and across national boundaries to change the course of indigenous language shift through the *Arctic Indigenous Language Vitality Initiative: Assessing, Monitoring, and Promoting*. We focus on the three themes around which the

project is organized: the assessment of language vitality, language policy, and language acquisition. The circumpolar Arctic is undergoing radical climate change and equally radical cultural disruption. To name just a few examples, some communities are relocated due to coastal erosion, while others are displaced due to an influx of foreign development, and changes in the plant and animal ecologies alter their traditional food sources. Language shift is an integral part of cultural disruption in this region: of the 50 or so indigenous languages spoken in the circumpolar Arctic, all but Kalaallisut (Greenlandic) are endangered.

An indigenous-driven project, the *Arctic Indigenous Language Initiative* (or simply referred to as the "project" here) is working to reverse language shift through active engagement and collaboration throughout the circumpolar region. The project is defined and determined by the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council, who aim to collaborate with researchers, representatives from Arctic Indigenous organizations and Arctic governments, language activists, and policy makers, to assess and promote Arctic indigenous languages. The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum made up of the eight Arctic nation states: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States. The Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council comprise the six transnational indigenous Arctic groups: Aleut International Association; the Arctic Athabaskan Council; Gwich'in Council International; the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC); the Saami Council; and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON).

In this paper we present the views of our collaborators on the project, but our interpretation is in part determined by our own attitudes, experiences and roles. Grenoble is an external linguist who specializes in language shift, revitalization and vitality, with many years of experience working with indigenous peoples in the Arctic, and serves as project coordinator. Olsen is a linguist specializing in the Inuit language, with expertise in Yup'ik and Inuit regional dialects as a whole. An Inuit political leader, he has many decades of service to the Inuit Circumpolar Council from its establishment until the present day. He is Chair of the Greenland Government's Language Committee and the Place Names Authority, and has served on the Personal Names Committee. He has also been working with language issues in the Nordic context and took part in revision of the Nordic Language Convention and Nordic Language Policy Declaration of 2006. Within the context of Arctic Indigenous Language Vitality project that is the focus of the present article, he serves as the Chair of the Steering Committee under the Sustainable Development Working Group. Throughout the present paper, we strive to present the views of the many different representatives of the Permanent Participants working on this project and so the authorial "we" here represents our collective voice.

Background

The Arctic is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the world, and yet it is home to a large number of different indigenous groups, representing different languages and cultures. Just what territory the term Arctic references depends on one's definition: some define the *Arctic* as the area above the Arctic Circle, while others take the line drawn by the Arctic Human Development Report as delineating the Arctic, that is, the area roughly above the tree line. By the same token, the exact number of indigenous languages depends on what criteria are used for determining the boundaries between language and dialect; somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 to 60 is

generally accepted. Barry et al. (2013) provides a table of 87 languages, of which 21 are already extinct. (Here too the notion of "extinction" is problematic, as Evans (2001) points out.) Regardless of the details, these figures provide an approximate assessment of the number of different Arctic languages. They differ significantly in terms of the size both of the ethnic population and of the number of speakers. Some have a quite small population base (as in the Itelmen of Siberia, with perhaps 80 speakers from a total estimated population of 3200, 2010 All-Russian Census) to quite large (as the Inuit, who total approximately 120,000 across the Arctic). Overall vitality of the languages varies as well, and the parameters of this vitality, the factors involved in increased or decreased vitality, are at the heart of the project. In the Arctic, as in many indigenous communities elsewhere, language is a recognized factor in overall cultural and social well-being (Schweizer et al. 2010); language vitality is seen as an essential component of a healthy society. For the purposes of the Arctic Indigenous Language Vitality Initiative, the Arctic Indigenous Languages it represents are those languages spoken by the members of the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council.

The Arctic Indigenous Language Vitality Initiative grew out of a meeting called by the Permanent Participants in 2008 in Tromsø to discuss the challenges of fostering indigenous language vitality. Its roots can be traced to the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council, held in Salekhard, Russia, in 2006. The Salekhard Declaration, signed by the Ministers representing the eight nation states of the Arctic Council, included explicit statements of support for the Permanent Participants to hold this meeting, specifically stating that all eight Arctic states:

> **Encourage** Member States and other parties to support the cultural diversity of the Arctic and especially uphold and revitalize the indigenous languages, **support** the Arctic Indigenous Languages Symposium and **welcome** further projects in this important field.

<center>Salekhard Arctic Council Declaration 2006 (emphasis in original)</center>

The resulting Symposium, the 2008 meeting in Tromsø, was the first meeting ever called by the Permanent Participants themselves, a point that underscores the importance of language to the peoples themselves. In response to a request from the Arctic Council for more information and for more focused requests, a second group was convened in Ottawa in June 2012. This meeting, the *Arctic Languages Vitality Workshop*, included researchers, representatives from Arctic Indigenous organizations and Arctic governments, language activists, and policy makers. Collaborations between stakeholders and these other parties are seen as central to the success of the project; there is widespread recognition of the need to call upon external expertise in the assessment stage of the project to understand the complex dynamics of Arctic language ecologies. This is accompanied by a belief that policy changes, at the international and national levels, need to be made in order to create an environment that more favorably fosters indigenous language use. The Arctic Indigenous Language Vitality Initiative resulted from this meeting and is a project of the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) of the Arctic Council. Although the long-term goals are to achieve vitality and sustainability for Arctic indigenous languages, the first steps include an action plan with short-term and more intermediate goals, and setting intermediary deadlines. Initial plans to have completed a comprehensive assessment of the vitality of all Arctic languages by this time were re-evaluated as being overly ambitious, and aspirations have been adjusted to more realistic goals. [Proceedings of the 2008 meeting are

available at the SDWG website (www.sdwg.org/media.php?mid=980). Details of subsequent meeting and report can be found in Tulloch (2012), which includes a summary of the findings of the 2008 meeting.]

To clarify the overall organization, the Arctic Indigenous Language Initiative is an indigenous-driven and indigenously defined project, as determined by the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council, the six indigenous groups who have a seat at the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council organizes its activities in six working groups, which are comprised of a combination of representatives from the various sectorial ministries, government agencies and researchers. One of these six working group is the SDWG; this project is one of a slate of activities of the SDWG that has been approved by the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials. It is thus at once an indigenous project and a project operating at a very high inter-governmental level. The project is managed by the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Canada, (or ICC Canada) and more specifically by the President of ICC Canada, Duane Smith, who is also the co-vice chair of SDWG. The workings of the project itself are overseen by a Steering Committee, which consists of one member of each of the Permanent Participants. The authors of this paper are directly involved in this organizational structure, with Grenoble working for ICC Canada as Project Coordinator and Olsen serving as Chair of the Steering Committee. This complex structure represents the complexity of the overall project. It aims to operate at very local levels to foster language vitality in the home, at the level of individual speakers and at the level of speakers within communities. At the same time it also operates in the international arena, reporting to the SDWG of the Arctic Council and working with governmental officials to create the conditions needed for language vitality at all levels.

Goals

The long-term goal of the Arctic Indigenous Language Initiative is to achieve vitality and sustainability for Arctic indigenous languages, but in order to achieve this goal, there are necessary first steps. The project participants have defined three key areas to focus the initial assessment: (1) Arctic language policy; (2) language acquisition; and (3) language vitality. Committees have been established to analyze each of these areas and make recommendations for improvements or changes as needed. We discuss each area separately in the next sections. The first years of the project are focused on the effort to assess existing resources and identify both gaps and strengths. Each of the three committees is currently assessing existing resources (human, material, and financial), and policies and practices, along with possible impediments and challenges, in each of these areas. In this context, human resources are understood to include speakers (with varying levels of fluency); motivation to teach, learn and use the language; and the numbers and qualifications of teachers. Materials include pedagogical and reference materials, and programs and applications that enable digital use (e.g. spellcheckers, dictionaries for mobile phones, applications for tablets, digital games). Funding to support language use goes into a wide variety of venues, teacher-training workshops, salaries for language commissioners and their staffs, subvention funds for publishing, funding to support radio and television media, for signage, and so on. There is a wide array of measures that communities can undertake to bolster the visibility and use of their language, but many of these cost money.

In this first stage of the project, the objective is to create a language profile of each indigenous language. This snapshot profile can and does vary in different regions, even from village to village. This work is pre-requisite to taking any measures to bolster language vitality. A foundational principle of the project is that it must be indigenously driven; its goals and parameters indigenously defined; and all work must be conducted according to indigenous principles. This represents a basic recognition that the ultimate responsibility for indigenous language vitality rests with the communities themselves.

In the remainder of this section, we turn to a brief discussion of each of the three focal areas.

Arctic Language Policy

Arctic language policy is viewed on multiple, intersecting levels. One aspect of this project is gathering and assessing existing policies and their implementation to determine where improvements can be made. On an international level, instruments such as the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007), *International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169* (ILO, 1989), and UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO, 2003) are important symbolically and can be used to support indigenous language rights. Yet the only one of these documents that is legally binding is ILO No. 169. From among the eight Arctic states, it has been ratified by only two of the Arctic nations, Denmark (22 February 1996) and Norway (19 June 1990) (ILO, 2014). To date the UN Declaration has been ratified by all Arctic nations except the Russian Federation, but despite their signatures, it is viewed as advisory, not legally binding. During the 68th General Assembly of the United Nations, on 13 October 2013, James Anaya, special rapporteur of the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) issued a statement that implementing the Declaration on Indigenous Rights would be "difficult or impossible without greater awareness" of the value of human rights (Anaya, 2013).

Policies can be positive, negative or neutral, and participants recognize that even the most supportive policy is ineffective if it is not enforced. By the same token, there are limits to the positive effects that international and national policies alone can achieve. Language usage is determined at a local level, by speakers themselves. Thus as part of this project, the Permanent Participants are encouraged to develop their own language policies. This puts the responsibility for language vitality with the communities whose languages are at stake. The Permanent Participants can take ownership of how the languages develop for their members, and be in a position to develop strategies and resources for language vitality in a focused way, if they have their own language policies.

Language Acquisition

Within this project, language acquisition is understood broadly to encompass the different methods used to teach the language, the different language learners and educators. Many Arctic languages are no longer learned "on the mother's knee," but taught more formally in the schools. The language acquisition committee seeks to find out who teaches the languages, who studies them, what materials are available for language learning and what kinds of resources (pedagogical and reference) exist. As one concrete example, pedagogical materials have historically been designed with a single target group in mind, such as school-age children or college students.

Language shift in Arctic communities has created challenges for teaching a language to adult learners versus very small children; these needs have not been adequately addressed. There is recognition that different materials and different methods are needed for different age groups, and for different educational experiences. (Immersion-based learning may be realistic in preschool, on the model of Language Nests, but not for middle-aged parents who juggle family responsibilities with full-time jobs, for example.)

The committee is exploring different teaching and learning models, including the Master-Apprentice Program, immersion learning, and the use of technology in language learning. Technology can be used for dictionaries and other mobile apps on cell phones and tablets; internet-based communication systems (such as Skype) can be used to connect speakers separated by great distances, or to link teachers to learners. As one example, nomadic schools in parts of the Russian Arctic make it possible for children in some regions to stay with their families who are actively engaged in reindeer herding and still obtain an education.[1]

One area of concern that quickly emerged is the need for more adequate teacher training. In some areas where language vitality is low, there is an additional challenge of finding teachers with adequate language proficiency to teach. Pan-Arctic challenges include providing sufficient training in modern pedagogical methods; in training teachers to incorporate traditional knowledge and traditional methods in the classroom; and finding new models for sustained training. At present, many regions host short (one- or two-week) workshops for teacher training and for language revitalization. They have clear benefits but longer programs are needed as well.

Assessing Language Vitality

Existing measures of Arctic indigenous language vitality are insufficient. They rely heavily on census data and/or report outdated findings. Examples include the *Ethnologue* (Lewis et al. 2013, and the UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages (Moseley 2010), and the *Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic* (SLiCA), well-known in the Arctic but lacking the detailed information the Permanent Participants seek, and already somewhat dated, since the survey was conducted in 2008. Data from official census sources are synthesized in Barry et al. (2013), which arguably gives the most comprehensive snapshot of language vitality today. Such reports provide, at best, a broad overview of indigenous languages but draw on official census data, which rely on self-reporting of language proficiency and use. Self-reporting is notoriously unreliable, with problems in terms of both under-reporting and over-reporting language proficiency. Speakers often interpret questions about their "mother tongue" as referring to their heritage language, and thus may inadvertently signal that they "know" a language that is the ancestral tongue known by previous generations although they themselves are monolingual speakers of a majority language. Alternatively, in cases where use of a language has low prestige, speakers may under-report to avoid negative repercussions, perceived or real. Census data reports fail to give the kind of detail and accuracy needed to make the best decisions possible about how to leverage resources.

The language assessment committee plans to create a "language profile" for each indigenous language. The assessment profile should include both linguistic and sociolinguistic information, such as data on language proficiency as well as domains of usage and language attitudes. Specifically, the group intends to collect information on proficiency across generations, and in different domains and conversational situations, recognizing that some speakers may fluently

discuss some topics and not others. One goal is to create an indigenously defined metric for proficiency, something that is currently in development. An assessment of attitudes should include the attitudes of a wide range of different people: individual speakers, communities, states, and academics about the language, about language standardization and other language survival strategies. Recognizing that indigenous language ecologies are situated within a complex social dynamic of speakers of one or more other languages, the assessment group is interested in the attitudes of community members as well as those of external, non-community members. Included here are members of the majority language(s) group and speakers of other indigenous languages who are in contact with the target language. Another important component of the assessment is information about domains of use. A vital language is used by all generations in all domains (Fishman, 1991). The assessment committee seeks to identify language usage across domains, defining relevant domains with input from the communities themselves. Two concrete examples illustrate the importance of this principle. One is that in many Arctic indigenous societies, language usage is highest in domains associated with subsistence activities, such as hunting, fishing, or berry picking, in addition to traditional folklore and ritual activities. At the same time, participants are interested in assessing language usage outside of traditional activities, that is, in the home, on the street, in public spaces. People have a general sense that usage varies according to such factors as the proficiency of both and the interloctor(s), the relationship between them, topic of conversation and the setting, and seek concrete data about such variables. Finally, detailed information about speaker proficiency levels is needed in order to make decisions about what measures are needed to foster vitality. Current metrics provide numbers of speakers, recognizing speakers and non-speakers. The project participants are interested in determining a greater range of speaker abilities.

A full assessment of Arctic indigenous language vitality is a multi-year project, requiring significant financial and human resources. Beyond the general lack of funding for such a project, we currently lack adequate numbers of trained specialists who are sufficiently proficient in the indigenous languages to conduct the surveys. More realistically, the committee is striving to create an adequate survey and pilot test it in a handful of communities for a proof-of-concept trial which can subsequently leveraged to apply for funds to conduct a full-scale pan-Arctic survey. There is a deep commitment to gathering the necessary data to make informed decisions for action. Finally, community members must have opportunities to provide input into assessments and to peer review findings before they are finalized. This last requirement comes from the experience of participants of many years of outsiders painting inaccurate pictures of their communities, and from a desire to make this a true indigenously enterprise, defined in terms of indigenous models of inquiry.

The second set of challenges facing the assessment group is more intellectual in nature. Through firsthand experience and past surveys, in particular those conducted by linguists in close collaboration with community members (see especially Vakhtin 1992, 2001), and information from indigenous community members,[2] we know that the details of micro language ecologies differ in the Arctic, and language vitality can vary from village to village, even within the same region. Yet policy makers, administrators and leaders often do not have the time, interest in or patience for fine-grained, detailed accounts; they need summaries upon which they can base broader conclusions. It is unclear how assessment protocols can balance the desire for details to account for complex communities with the desire for a snapshot view of vitality in each

community across the Arctic. Last, the need to keep the project defined within indigenous models of inquiry and research while at the same time having sufficient academic rigor to stand up to the scrutiny of policy makers and other individuals with European understandings of data. This places the project in larger discussions in the Arctic of how to balance traditional knowledge and Western science, but the impact of the potential balance (or imbalance) may have direct repercussions for language vitality, and so there is much at stake.

Indigenous Principles

What distinguishes an indigenous-driven project from other, non-indigenous projects? In part of course this means that the stakeholders themselves have control of and responsibility for the project itself, its goals, methods and outcomes. This is an important aspect of indigenous self-determination in a post-colonial era. But the implications extend beyond this, as the project is driven by an adherence to indigenously defined principles for research and ethical conduct. These include decision-making processes that depend on consensus, broad and ongoing consultation, and collaboration between all parties. Transparency about process and outcome is critical. One novel aspect of the project is the implementation of a peer-review process for the assessment. This goes beyond the standard ethical conduct for linguistic research that involves sharing results with communities. In this project preliminary results will be taken back to communities so that they can review them in a community-referee process. The idea here is that the assessments should be in line with the experience and knowledge of the communities, who have an opportunity to provide more input before results are finalized. It is our hope that this process will insure more accurate results, and will engage community members in the project in a deep and meaningful way.

Three key fundamental principles that guide the overall conceptualization of the work include networking, collaboration, and communication.

Networking and Collaboration

A core principle in this project is the commitment to networking with others throughout the Arctic. The goals include sharing information on existing research, policy and practice, with continuing information about best practices for collaborative community-based research in Arctic contexts, and best practices for enhancing language vitality. There is a deep commitment to overall transparency and open exchange of information. To that end, the project website has become an important hub of information; in the future more interactive features will be incorporated into the site to encourage participants to submit their own materials and findings. The project also aims to establish parameters for effective collaborations, including effective interagency and international collaborations. External researchers may receive official endorsement from the project if they agree to follow the indigenous guidelines for ethical conduct and make all their data and findings readily accessible.

Communicating and Sharing Data

Transparency, in terms of both the process and dissemination of the results, is an important aspect of the project. The distribution of reliable and comparable data for the status of all Arctic indigenous languages in a centralized, accessible format is a standard for all findings of the

project, and adherence to it obligates the committees to report their conclusions in a format that is accessible to community members. Thus, for example, terminology must be comprehensible and clearly defined. The aim is to facilitate the local, regional, and international sharing of best practices in addressing Arctic indigenous language vitality. Concretely, this means open access of data and results. At present such open access is managed through the project website (see the discussion on **Data Management and Information Access**).

Governance and Project Management

Project management is in the hands of the Permanent Participants themselves, and the overall governance structure is built upon the foundational principles of consensus and collaboration. At the same time, management is needed to keep the moving forward and to insure clear reporting structures, since this is an Arctic Council project. At the request of the Arctic Council, ICC Canada is responsible for managing the project, with President Duane Smith overseeing the initiative. The Steering Committee is advisory to the President. It is chaired by Carl Chr. Olsen, puju, of ICC Greenland and a member of the Sustainable Development Working Group of the Arctic Council, and consists of representatives from each of the six Permanent Participants and an external linguist (Grenoble) as project coordinator, working closely with the Steering Committee and reporting to the President of ICC Canada. The Steering Committee members provide a mechanism for their members to have direct input into the project, and serve as an important bridge for information among the different Permanent Participants.

The organization here underscores the importance of consultation and collaboration at every stage of the project. Success depends on close working relationships, open communication, commitment to the project's goals, and a large measure of trust and respect. The governance structure is central to keeping the project indigenous-driven and organized along principles of collaboration and consensus building, while still being able to make progress on assessment and meeting goals. The principles of collaboration and consensus require broad consultation with stakeholders.

Data Management and Information Access

The project website (arcticlanguages.com) serves to link project participants, provides centralized storage for information, including publications, language-learning resources, listing of events, and the like, and provides accessible information about the project to outsiders and community members alike. In a multi-party, international initiative like this, a vibrant website is an important tool for creating a cyber-community of users. Our site features several innovative features. One is a digital library (constructed as a Zotero database) with a collection of hundreds of publications, citations, and links to publications, on Arctic languages, language policy, and educational practices. The website also includes links to surveys of language vitality and other relevant databases. Finally, it serves as a centralized portal for language-learning resources and reference materials. At present, such resources consist primarily of existing web-based resources, and our site provides links to them (organized by language). Ultimately, researchers with project endorsement will deposit copies of their recordings and documentation corpora on the site, making them available and accessible to speaker communities, language learners, and other researchers. Currently, linguists generally deposit their recordings at their academic institutions or in archives specially designated for language deposits. In the Arctic, one such archive is the

Alaska Native Language Archive (http://www.uaf.edu/anla/). To the best of our knowledge, it is the only archive dedicated to Arctic indigenous languages. Often the recordings and other documentation of Arctic indigenous languages are inaccessible to the speaker communities; one goal of the project is to make these materials both known and available to indigenous communities who often want them for revitalization purposes and as part of their cultural heritage.

Challenges

The overall scope of the project can be overwhelming. The circumpolar Arctic, with a total area of 14,056 million km^2 (or 5.4 million mi^2), encompasses eight nation states, with eight covering multiple time zones. The sheer size of the territory, geo-political differences of the states involved, varying local demographics and language contact situations, and relatively disparate, isolated populations create certain specific challenges for this project. In some cases speakers of the same or closely related languages live in different countries, and so come in contact, often on a daily basis, with different majority languages. Such is the case of the members of ICC, whose speakers are in contact with Danish, English, French and Russian, or Saami speakers, who are in contact with Finnish, Norwegian, Russian and Swedish.

Differences in time, space and language mean that communication is a major challenge. Although English cuts across all these territories as a major global language, and is often the lingua franca for international meetings, information needs to be delivered to participants in a great number of different languages. The problem is compounded by the fact that many Arctic indigenous peoples continue to live in relatively remote areas. A large percentage of the stakeholders do not have easy internet access; in some regions there is no mobile phone service. Engaging speakers in remote communities can be challenging. Digital language resources are thus only part of the solution.

In many parts of the Arctic, language shift is a legacy from colonial regimes that actively suppressed the use of indigenous languages. Elders in Alaska, Canada and the Russian Federation alike report the carryover of trauma from their experiences in the boarding or residential schools, a situation which has affected their choices about which languages to use with their children, and their own self-esteem. Healing is an integral part of the process of language reclamation in the Arctic. Many of the project's leaders believe that healing is underway, but there is still much work to be done.

The project is first and foremost conceived of as an indigenous-driven initiative, formulated on indigenous terms. Yet collaboration with multiple partners, including academic (and often non-indigenous) linguists, policy makers and political leaders, seen as critical to success, is labor-intensive and time-consuming. The commitment to collaboration comes from acknowledgement that there is insufficient capacity and expertise within indigenous communities alone to do all the necessary work, and a recognition that changing some aspects of the language ecologies requires outside support, in particular from governmental agencies. How can we balance this different perspectives and approaches? One major challenge is to bring the indigenous values and collaborations together with external partners in a seamless fashion.

Last, there are the pressures of time and money. The kinds of assessment that people desire take considerable resources and are very time-consuming; creating a full language profile of each

Arctic indigenous language would be expensive and would require many years to complete. Meanwhile, many of the languages are in advanced stages of shift, and measures need to be taken immediately to revitalize them. The aspirations for thorough evaluation to inform language practices and policies are at times at direct odds with the needs to take immediate action.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to promote and maintain the vitality of Arctic indigenous languages. In some cases revitalization work is necessary, while in others measures need to be taken to insure ongoing vitality. The current design of the project is aimed at identifying the needs of all Arctic language communities, determining where new initiatives are needed and where existing work needs to be enhanced and supported. Language is a living part of human culture, and is as dynamic as the cultures themselves.

This project provides communities with opportunities for revitalizing their languages. The overall responsibility resides with them. In part the project offers people the challenge of directly confronting the issue of taking control of language vitality themselves.

Notes

1. An overview of nomadic schools in the Republic of Sakha/Yakutia is given at http://www.nlib.sakha.ru/knigakan/tematicheskie-kollektsii/kochevaya-shkola.html; UNESCO has a brief description of Siberian schools in English on its website: http://www.unesco.org/education/FollowingtheReindeer_eng.pdf

2. There is much debate among researchers in the Arctic as to how to incorporate local or indigenous knowledge into Western scientific models. Within the workings of this project, participants on both sides are eager for both kinds of information, and standard language vitality surveys rely heavily on the knowledge of the community members.

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