

INSIDE STORIES: AGENCY AND IDENTITY THROUGH LANGUAGE LOSS  
NARRATIVES IN NUNATSIAVUT

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines narratives told about language loss in the Inuit territory of Nunatsiavut in Northern Labrador, NL, based on forty-five interviews carried out in 2002/2003 and in 2013/2014. (These are narratives in the folkloristic sense of a text that tells a story.) Language shift in Nunatsiavut has progressed rapidly since the mid-twentieth century until the current population of active speakers is low enough to cause concern about the survival of Inuttitut. The following questions were addressed: what people think caused the decline of the language; what the effect of Inuttitut language retention or shift has been on Labrador Inuit identity; and how these narratives have changed in their character and use over time.

Analysis of the interviews and accompanying research on Moravian education, literacy, and the use of narrative revealed that people's explanations for language loss varied according to their age, and, accordingly, they had different ideas on the importance of Inuttitut retention as a part of Inuit identity. The oldest generation of people interviewed, most of them Inuttitut speakers, identified a combination of circumstances that arose from community decisions, but they retained their feeling that the language was a vital part of identity. The next generation felt that Inuttitut had been removed from their communities through the combined forces of school, church and government, and felt that it was possible to be Inuit without the language, but that it continues to be important. The youngest generation of informants, who saw the settling of land claims while in their teens, are still interested in the language but have begun to look beyond traditional symbols in identity formation for what it means to be Inuit.

The set of narratives about language loss presents the dominant explanations of language loss, in an era when the collective Inuit identity of Canada informs popular conceptions of the trajectory of language loss, and the counter-narratives present the contrasting ones from the same group that are much less often shared now, but which have much to say about the autonomy Labrador Inuit had over language for most of their history.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

As I near completion of my thesis I realize anew that what can at times seem like a very solitary task is in fact one only possible with legions of supporters behind the writer. My thanks are due to many people who have made this project a real pleasure as well as a learning experience.

The people of Nunatsiavut who spoke to me about their language over the years have been supportive and gracious, and I have benefitted greatly from their wisdom. My thesis incorporates forty-five interviews, but beyond those are years of reflection and conversation with people, and I am grateful for every one of those talks. All were helpful, but I would like particularly to thank Mrs. Miriam Lyall, Mrs. Hilda Lyall, Mrs. Fran Williams and the late Dr. Beatrice Watts for all they taught me. I would also like to thank the local interviewers, Mary Webb, Nancy Flowers and David Igloliorte, who collected information for me, no doubt connecting with people I might never have met. Carla Pamak and Michele Wood, who administer the ethics procedures of Nunatsiavut, were of great assistance in helping me obtain permission for my research, and I thank them as well.

I owe a great debt to my university. Memorial is my employer as well as my institution of learning and has helped me in many ways. I would very much like to thank Dr. Noreen Golfman, who as Dean of Graduate Studies gave me permission to undertake my program entirely by distance from my home in Labrador. With my work and family commitments I could not have undertaken this if it had required a move, and I thank her

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I have been extremely fortunate in the people I have worked with as my committee. My supervisor, Dr. Philip Hiscock, was supportive, quick to respond, helpful with advice and encouraging in every way. His understanding of language and folklore is vast and his generosity in sharing his knowledge made my task much easier than it would otherwise have been. It is impossible to imagine help beyond what I have received from him.

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me with the collection of excerpts on education from the *Periodical Accounts* which he compiled. I am also grateful for his translation of Bishop Martin's curriculum from German, and for his support and encouragement.

Dr. Doug Wharram taught me everything I have learned about Inuttitut, not least of which is an understanding of the meaning it carries for Nunatsiavut people. Our many conversations on language loss sharpened my interest in this topic, and his help with scholarly references has been invaluable. I would also like to thank Dr. Robin McGrath for her generosity in sharing resources on Inuttitut with me.

As a student pursuing a degree by distance it might be thought that a scholarly community would have been absent from my life. This possible deficit was more than made up for by my colleagues at the Labrador Institute, and my good fortune in working with a group of people whose dedication to their jobs is only equalled by their extensive knowledge is a daily blessing. Dr. Keith Chaulk, Director of the Institute, has been unfailingly supportive since the beginning of the program, and without his initial encouragement I would never have begun the process. Hallway conversation with many of my colleagues inspired me with new thoughts and interpretations of my material, and their reflections have been immensely valuable. I would like to acknowledge Nathaniel Pollock, Dr. Andrea Procter, Dr. Ron Sparkes, Ruby Best, Dr. John Thistle, Dr. Sylvia Moore and Dr. Scott Neilsen, and would especially like to give my thanks to Beatrice Dickers, who accompanied me on some of the interviews, and to Morgon Mills, who not only gave me immense help in producing a finished product, but who amazed me daily with his insight and reflections.

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The three examiners of my thesis, Dr. Amy Shuman, Dr. Martin Lovelace, and Dr. Angela Robinson, provided insightful comments and reflections that enhanced the final version of this thesis, and I would like to thank them for their generosity in sharing their expertise.

I would very much like to thank my family for all their encouragement. My parents, Jessie Cameron MacDonald and the late Bob MacDonald, exemplify the values of the culture I grew up in: veneration for education, hospitality, and good works. I thank them for their excellent example and their unwavering support through all the years of my education.

My children, Lucy, Tom and Ellen Niles, were all at university themselves during this process, and I thank them for their encouragement, their reflections on what it means to be a Labradorian, and the sheer delight they continue to bring to us.

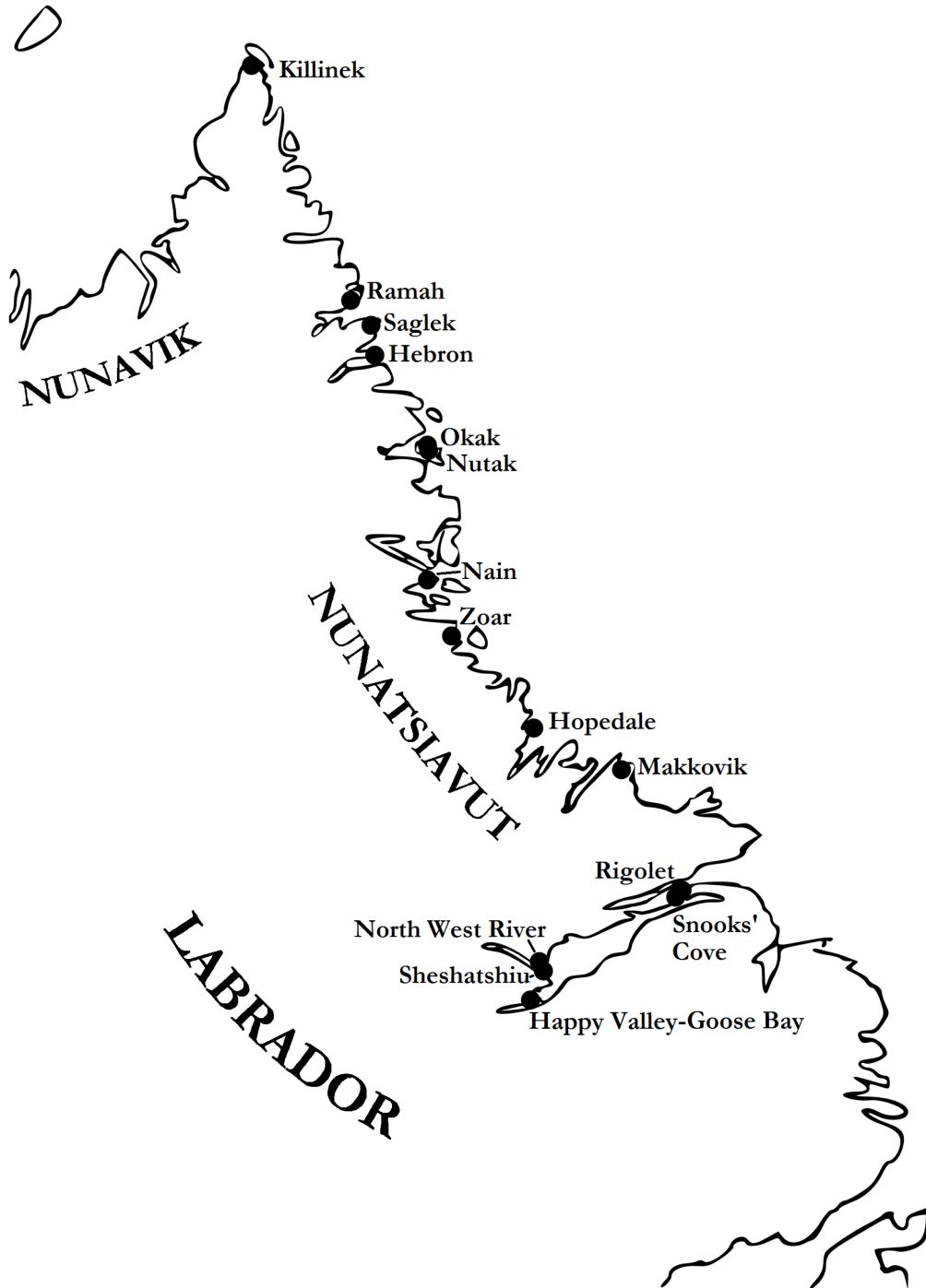
And finally, but of course first, last and always, I thank my husband, Al Niles, for every good thing.

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Figure 1. Selected Labrador Locations



## INTRODUCTION

The body of material discussed in this thesis is the narratives told in Labrador about the loss of Inuttitut, the version of the Inuktitut language still spoken, though with diminishing frequency, in the communities of northern Labrador. These accounts, collected from informants as well as existing in the published literature, are examined for the information they provide on the decline of the language, the sense of personal responsibility for this change, and the historical factors which led to the change in language use. In addition, this examination provides insight into the state of Aboriginal identity in Labrador, a social phenomenon which has seen great change in the past fifty years.

The use of the word “narrative” in this thesis corresponds to the understanding of that term by folklorists: a narrative is a text that tells a story. “Narrative” is a term used widely by scholars as well as outside the academy, and Holstein and Gubrium in their introduction to *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* remark that “many researchers view almost any oral, written, or visual text as narrative” (Holstien and Gurium 2012:1). Folklorists are more specific about what is considered a narrative, as explained by William Bascom: “Prose narrative is an appropriate term for the wide-spread and important category of verbal art which includes myths, legends and folktales. These three forms are related to each other in that they are narratives in prose, and this fact distinguishes them from other forms of verbal art on the basis of strictly formal characteristics” (Bascom 1965b: 6). Bascom goes on to define legends: “Legends are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience,

but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today. Legends are more often secular than sacred, and their principal characters are human” (Bascom 1965b: 9). I examine these accounts of language loss and deal with them as legends, in the sense that they are stories told as truth, passed along within a particular group of people, the Labrador Inuit, to explain language loss. The other element essential to this sense of narrative is that the stories are passed along verbally amongst members of a folk group, in this case the Labrador Inuit, and are told as the collective expression and experience of the group.

I asked people for their own explanations of why language shifted in Nunatsiavut, and closely examined the resulting statements. When I began to see patterns emerging in the responses, I decided that these responses could be classified as “narratives.” As mentioned, this is in contrast to the use of the term “narrative” by scholars in other disciplines, using other approaches. Although their analysis of what I will call “subjective accounts” rather than “narrative” has been undertaken very effectively for purposes ranging from developing public policy to understanding the use of first-person accounts in solving psychological problems, these approaches are concerned with the process of delivering accounts and the resulting interaction with the selected audience, rather than with the transmission of the texts within the source community. Taking the stance that these explanations of language loss are in fact narratives in the sense of stories, and that they are used as part of the collective heritage and identity of Inuit, allows me to present both the narratives and the Inuttitut language itself as folklore genres, specifically personal and family legends, that are undergoing change in response

to social and cultural shifts. This presentation of language and the stories about it are what I hope to add to our understanding of the close interaction of language and folklore.

The variations in the narratives and the changes in them over time are examined to reveal aspects of identity and the kind of agency Inuit have had when dealing with language shift. Some of what I present deals with challenging the received notion of language loss as one of victimhood, and offers instead the idea that, although the Labrador Inuit have most definitely been injured parties in many of their interactions with outside cultures, they have demonstrated considerable agency and power in their use and shaping of that language.

The thesis is written from an interdisciplinary perspective and employs the intellectual tools forged by folkloristics, linguistics and religious studies, in order to best answer a central question: “What do people think happened to Inuttitut?” The pursuit of an answer to this question leads to an examination of how these language narratives are used and what they tell us about people’s attitudes towards language, served by the synthesis of ideas and approaches provided by the three disciplines.

The interdisciplinary approach does more than bring a three-part focus to bear on the material; it allowed me to become familiar with some of the ideas present in subjects outside my previous training, and it encouraged the asking of questions normally outside the boundaries of a single discipline. This work, in fact, has proven to be as much of a historical assessment as anything, and has required an approach that has allowed me to provide a broad analysis of historical events.

Much of the recent work I have done was informed by an earlier study by Dr. Hans Rollmann in which I participated in 2002/2003. This project, entitled “Moravian Inuit: a Legacy of Literacy” was funded, in a one-time joint venture, by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the National Literacy Secretariat under a program entitled “Valuing Literacy,” and was approved through Memorial’s ethics procedure. The interviews I carried out at that time as my task in the project were designed to determine, amongst other things, how the decision was made to change the language of instruction in Moravian schools from Inuttitut to English and to what extent people felt the presence of reading and writing was important in their communities. The project resulted in a cataloguing of the bibliography of Labrador Inuttitut materials produced by the missionaries for the purpose of instruction, but the ethnographic approach also produced a significant body of oral history gathered through interviews with thirty informants living in Goose Bay, Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik. Some of the interviews were carried out by bilingual community members under our supervision while the majority were done by me. I was on occasion accompanied by Dr. Rollmann, by Dr. Tim Borlase or by my colleague Beatrice Dickers. I am grateful to Dr. Hans Rollmann as principal investigator on that project for giving me permission to use the interviews in my present work. All transcriptions were done by me.

Looking back at this body of material after more than ten years gives a strong sense of the value of having carried out interviews at that time. Many of the informants have since passed away, or are no longer available to be interviewed, and this makes it more significant to have a record of the thoughts and ideas of Labrador people on the

state of their language. When I decided to extend my interest in the question of language shift narratives to a PhD project, I applied for permission to the Nunatsiavut government as well as to Memorial's ethics committee to study these questions of language and identity perspectives, and carried out further interviews with fifteen additional Nunatsiavut beneficiaries, both speakers of Inuttitut and non-speakers, with a more focussed approach to the idea of identity. The change in the narratives over the decade since my previous interviews was surprising, and informs much of what I have written here.

Beyond both sets of interviews, however, I feel that my research has been enlarged by more than twenty-five years of conversations and observations. I first came to Labrador in 1988 when my husband went to work in Goose Bay, following a very common pattern; we planned to stay for a few years before seeking work elsewhere, but became attached to the way of life and sense of community and remained, raising three children.

My interest in language goes back a long way. Growing up in a family and in an era when bilingualism in Canada was seen as a state to be desired and worked towards, the idea of having two languages at one's disposal was one that inspired me both to learn French as a second language and to inquire deeply into the state of Scottish Gaelic, the language that was lost in my own family within living memory. My particular interest in language shift itself dates from childhood and the stories of the loss of the Gaelic language in my Cape Breton family. My grandfather, whom I now recognize to have been a passive bilingual, had a strong interest in regaining the language and also was an

advocate for the retention and celebration of the culture in which we grew up. I wrote about language loss in Cape Breton in my master's thesis (MacDonald 1986) and continued to be fascinated by the status of minority languages. On arriving in Labrador I embarked on a series of conversations which continues to this day, and simply put, I wanted to know why people were no longer speaking a language which was clearly of importance to them and which in the modern era would be useful and beneficial. It seemed to me that the answer must lie within the stories that people told to explain the role of language in their lives, and I set out to have that conversation as often as possible. I hope that what I listened to may shed some light on what is a complex question.

I have spoken to my friends, neighbours, colleagues and students to gather this information, and hope that I will do their words justice. My intention was to gather the narratives and examine them without judging or idealizing, and always with the acknowledgement that the informants speak for themselves, but that in my analysis I speak for no one except a long-term resident with an enduring interest in a people I deeply respect.

The chapters that follow examine the central question in the following progression:

**Chapter One: Literature Review** presents the literature consulted on language shift, on identity from the perspective of folklorists, and on the use of narrative. It also details the historical and scholarly resources dealing with Labrador and in particular with Labrador Inuit.

**Chapter Two: Language Shift** considers the phenomenon of language shift, also described as language “loss” or “death.” The language under discussion, of course, is Labrador Inuttitut, also known as Inuttut, a dialect of the Eskimo-Aleut language family spoken primarily in the north coast communities of Nain and Hopedale, with some speakers in Postville, Makkovik and the other communities in Labrador outside the Nunatsiavut land claims area. The spelling varies from the usage of one writer to the next. I have chosen to use “Inuttitut,” as that is the form used by the Nunatsiavut Government. In some cases during the earlier interviews, both the informants and I used the word “Inuktitut,” which is also commonly heard and is a collective word for various Canadian dialects in present-day usage. I have kept that spelling when quoting from interviews.

**Chapter Three: Education** looks at the education provided by the Moravian missionaries to the Inuit from the late 1700s to the mid-twentieth century. Formal education in Labrador is not only of long duration, but has been a vital force in shaping the world view and life experiences of the Inuit. Education was provided for the greater part of its history in Labrador by the Moravian missionaries, who arrived first in 1752 led by Johann Christian Erhardt in an abortive attempt to bring Christianity to the Inuit after earlier work in Greenland. Although the first group was forced to return to Europe after a significant number were murdered, a second attempt in 1771 led by Jens Haven after three exploratory voyages (1764, 1765, 1771) established the Moravians and their system of religion and education along the coast for centuries to come. The first settlement was established at Nain under the leadership of Christoph Brasen. Some background is



provided on the Moravian mission itself and its theology, which influenced not only the Inuit's spiritual life but their educational history as well.

In **Chapter Four: Literacy** I discuss that associated topic, which has itself come to form part of the culture of the Labrador Inuit. The very long history of literacy in Inuttitut will be examined to see what it reveals about the state of the spoken language and how literacy in Inuttitut, far from being an oppressive force enabling literacy in the dominant language, instead provided Inuit with the means to assert themselves politically and socially. I also look at the existence of vernacular literacy and informal education in Labrador, relying on the recollections of my first set of informants to explore the process that led some people to be largely self-taught in two languages.

**Chapter Five: Identity** looks at current and past understandings of Inuit identity in Labrador and the role language plays in maintaining and moulding that identity. The question of shifting identity and pride in Aboriginal culture continues to fascinate me after more than twenty-five years of living in Labrador. The sense of being Inuit, which has grown so that people are proud of their culture and have very little interest in their European ancestry, is something which was much less in evidence when I first moved to Labrador. As Inuttitut fluency diminishes, somehow the sense of being Aboriginal has grown, and this phenomenon is explored through the use of people's reflections on language and education. The narratives about language retention and loss demonstrate the place of these factors in past and present Inuit identity.

**Chapter Six: Narratives of Language Loss** looks at the stories that were told to me by three generations of Labrador Inuit. The heart of this work is the collection of

narratives derived from forty-five interviews as well as the published memories of Nunatsiavut Inuit, and the discussions I have had with many people on the subject. The stories I have heard have changed over the years and are examined in terms of the way people use narrative against the backdrop of a changing sense of identity and a set of historical factors. In particular, I identify a binary set of narratives which underline the powerful influence of current understanding of colonialism and present political reality in Nunatsiavut and in Canada generally. These consist of one set of stories that corresponds to explanations of language loss attributed to outside agencies, and another set that draws upon actions and decisions taken by the Inuit themselves that influenced language shift. This contrast leads to an examination of the role of the Inuit in language shift that goes beyond the perception of them as either victims or agents of language loss. The chapter will demonstrate how the use of these narrative structures contributes to a current understanding of the way in which Inuit language fluency has become a smaller part of daily life, with attention to the generational change in the narratives.

**Chapter Seven: Conclusions.** This chapter, of course, brings together what I believe is the answer to the question of why language shift is so much more pronounced in Nunatsiavut than in some other Inuit regions in Canada and how that shift has affected people's sense of identity as Inuit. More importantly for the purpose of this thesis, it looks at how this change in language and identity is reflected and projected through the narratives told.

The methodology used for the research consisted of the collection of ethnographic data through qualitative interviews, including the thirty interviews conducted in 2002-

2003 and the additional fifteen in 2013-2014. For the 2002/3 project, I interviewed and recorded many people in my community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay. These were all people who were brought up in Nunatsiavut but who had moved to central Labrador. In almost all cases I contacted the informant by telephone and followed up with a visit to the person's home, where I recorded interviews usually lasting an hour. I also recorded a number of interviews in Nain, Makkovik and Hopedale. In addition, some interviews were carried out in these Nunatsiavut communities by researchers who were trained by me and paid to locate and interview people. Some of these interviews were done in Inuttitut and translated for my benefit. Interviews were carried out with more than one person in attendance on occasion.

In 2013/14, I interviewed and recorded all informants myself, occasionally by phone in the case of those living on the coast. All of the people in the second set of interviews were known to me personally, as I had met them through my job or volunteer activities over the years. These interviews were carried out in accordance with the consent I received from the ethics board of Memorial University (ICEHR) and from the research coordinators of the Nunatsiavut Government. I did not pay people for the interviews, but gave them gifts and letters of thanks, in accordance with what I proposed to both ethics boards. Written consent was obtained for every interview. In almost all cases permission was given by the informants to use their real names. This decision accords with remarks made by Madeleine Redfern at the Inuit Studies Conference of 2014. She felt that keeping the identity of Aboriginal people anonymous in the products of research was akin to publishing photographs of them without attaching their names. In

a couple of cases the informants preferred to remain anonymous, and in a few others I chose to leave out their names. In all cases, they have my deepest respect and gratitude for the help they gave me. I hope that in the pages that follow I will have done justice to the faith placed in me.

I divide my groups of informants into three sections, according to their dates of birth. Group One is composed of people born before 1940. Group Two consists of those born after 1955, and Group Three refers to people born after 1985. These divisions were made not just on the basis of age, but in accordance with a number of historical events that affected their language use and their sense of identity, including Confederation, school attendance, and the formation of the territory of Nunatsiavut.

Use of terms: references to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada and elsewhere have changed over time and continue to do so. I most frequently use the term “Aboriginal,” which came into popular usage in Canada after 1982 following the terminology in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. The term refers to the above groups in the Canadian context, and is the term preferred by the Aboriginal peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador. The word “Indigenous” is also employed here occasionally, and is understood to make reference to First Peoples in an international context. (<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/identity/terminology.html>)

“Ethnicity” and variations on this word appear in quotes from various authors, and their usage reflects the understanding of the word seen in Oring: “As currently conceptualized, members of an ethnic group, it is claimed, share and identify with a historically derived cultural tradition or style, which may be composed of both explicit

behavioral features as well as implicit ideas, values and attitudes. Furthermore, membership in an ethnic group is acquired primarily by descent. Finally, an ethnic group is conceived as part of a larger social system rather than independent and self-sufficient (Oring 1986: 24). It is this last sentence that has led me to avoid use of the term “ethnicity,” in spite of the usefulness of Oring’s ideas on historically-derived traditions. In current understanding, First Peoples in Canada may object to the idea of being an “ethnic” group within the nation state of Canada, viewing themselves rather as Aboriginal nations. I have therefore sought other terms to express the particular kind of group affiliation experienced by Labrador Inuit.

Further to the discussion on nation-states, Newfoundland and Labrador underwent a shift in status itself when it entered Confederation with Canada in 1949. The entire province experienced substantial change after this date, and some of these effects are discussed below with reference to the education system in northern Labrador. It is significant that within the Terms of Union, no provision of any type was made for any Aboriginal group in the province (Kennedy 1997). This meant that no federal monies were provided for the particular needs of these groups until 1954, and Aboriginal peoples could not register under the federal Indian Act, making their territories vulnerable to outside forces. It also meant that the control of the education system rested with the province and not with the federal government, which had implications for language retention. The significance of that relationship will be discussed below.

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis poses a central question about the meaning of narratives concerning language shift and its causes and effects amongst the Labrador Inuit. The quantity of literature published on Labrador is quite sizeable, considering the region's small population, and extends back in time, reflecting the early exploration and settlement of the territory. Preparation for the thesis involved extensive reading on Labrador and its people, as well as on the thematic areas and contributing disciplines.

I was able to read primary sources reflecting the lives of Labrador Inuit, which extended the content of the interviews I carried out, as well as academic analyses of observations and records amassed by scholars in several fields. In pursuing the answers to this question I have relied on the words of informants from Nunatsiavut as my primary sources, but have augmented this information with additional accounts from the Nunatsiavimiut as they appear in published accounts. These include descriptions of language and education from *Them Days Magazine* and published memoirs such as those of Paulus Maggo (Maggo 1999) and John Igloliorte (Igloliorte 1994). The transcripts of interviews carried out by Carol Brice-Bennett (Brice-Bennett 1993) for her work on the relocation of Hebron are on deposit at the Labrador Institute of Memorial University and were helpful in extending the picture of language change I received through my own interviews. I also called upon the published scripts of the Labrador Creative Arts Festival, which has brought Labrador school children together once a year for the past thirty-nine years to stage original plays dealing with concerns in their communities. The views on

ethnic identity and language presented by the students in their own words are a valuable source that provided a version of collective narrative on language and identity.

The *Periodical Accounts* of the Moravian Mission were published in English from 1790 to 1970 by the United Brethren and detail the work of the mission around the world. The periodical is held at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University in St. John's. These printed documents are very extensive, and I had the good fortune to be given access to a collection of excerpts on the subject of education, which was compiled by Hans Rollmann. The *Periodical Accounts* are a primary source from the view of the missionaries, circulated to pass along news of the mission activity to church members in England. They deal with many subjects of daily interest, and it is here that we find the missionaries' assessment of the level of learning and the commitment to education of the Inuit. Many of the other Moravian records are of great use as well, such as the curriculum of Bishop Martin, which provides a guide to the educational methods and materials used at the beginning of the twentieth century. Unlike the *Periodical Accounts*, this exists in manuscript form and only in German, so I was fortunate to have translation done for me by Dr. Rollmann.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this inquiry, sources were consulted in the fields of linguistics, folklore and religious studies, with a focus on narrative. I began by looking at the subject of language shift as investigated by linguists. I read the works of David Crystal to give me an understanding of the nature of language shift, and found his work *Language Death* (Crystal 2002) to be a comprehensive study of the topic. He looked at the importance of preserving and maintaining minority languages because of

the richness they add to the linguistic heritage of the planet and because of the ideas contained within language. This point of view, which is widespread in the literature on language shift, was echoed with particular emphasis on Aboriginal languages by such writers as Ken Hale (Hale 1996), Michael Krauss (Krauss 1996), Jon Reyhner (Reyhner 1996), Suzanne Romaine (Romaine 2007) and Joshua Fishman (Fishman 1996).

I was especially interested in the approach of K. David Harrison, who also explored the ideas of cultural knowledge embedded in language in his book *When Languages Die: the Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* (Harrison 2007). Although several other writers have presented the view that languages intrinsically incorporate unique cultural information that is lost to the world when the languages become extinct, Harrison's was particularly useful because he provides very specific and well-researched examples of the ways in which languages differ in their provision of knowledge, tailored to those who use it. It came to my attention that many writers felt passionately about language revitalization and connected it closely with the idea of "language ecology," stating that a multiplicity of vigorous languages is a parallel to the desirable biodiversity found in nature. The opposing view, or at least a challenge to the language ecologists, is that held by writers contributing to a volume edited by Monica Heller and Alexandre Duchêne (Duchêne 2007). The authors in this collection examine the discourse around language endangerment as equated with ecological damage, and question the assumption that the almost inevitable shift in language use is a danger to the whole world.



One of those writers is Donna Patrick, whose research on Inuktitut in Nunavik provides some revealing comparisons with Inuttitut, particularly in her book *Language, Politics and Social Interaction in an Inuit Community* (Patrick 2003).

Lenore Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley edited two volumes that provided the widest overview of the questions surrounding language shift; both *Endangered Languages* (Grenoble and Whaley 1998) and *Saving Languages* (Grenoble and Whaley 2006) address the complex issues around losing and saving languages, and are less of a battle cry to save languages than a reasoned explanation of the factors involved, which may include competition among indigenous languages, denial and blame, issues with teacher training, and many others.

A number of writers have addressed Labrador language specifically; these include Marina Sherkina-Lieber (Sherkina-Lieber 2011), Catharyn Andersen (Andersen 2001; Andersen and Johns 2005; Andersen 2010), Rose Pamack Jeddore (Jeddore 1979), Sybella Tuglavina (Tuglavina 2005), Tim Borlase (Borlase 1994), Alana Johns (Johns 2001), Irene Mazurkewich (Mazurkewich 1991) and Jennifer Thorburn (Thorburn 2012). Most of these writers are linguists, and Catharyn Andersen is both a linguist and a Labrador Inuk, informing her commentary from both the community and the academic perspective. Andersen based her work on surveys of language usage in Nunatsiavut, and also edited the proceedings of a language conference. Rose Pamack, a Labrador Inuk with a strong command of the language and a store of traditional narratives received from her mother, brought this knowledge to her work as an educator. Her essay is quoted a number of times in this thesis, both for the information provided on orthography and for

the insight it gives into the political awakening of young Inuit in the 1970s through the lens of language. She was influenced by the linguist Larry Smith, who worked with her to propose a new orthography for Inuttitut in the 1970s and 1980s. Other linguists whose work illuminated the attempts to revive Labrador Inuttitut are Irene Mazurkewich and Alana Johns (Mazurkewich 1991; Johns and Mazurkewich 2001).

A frequently consulted and quoted source is Louis-Jacques Dorais's book *The Language of the Inuit* (Dorais 2010), which considers the dialects of Nunatsiavut in detail and places them in context alongside the other forms spoken in Canada, giving insight into the question of Inuttitut decline. Jean-Philippe Chartrand (Chartrand 1987) also provided valuable information in his article dealing with the role of Inuktitut in the formation of Inuit identity.

Two other writers who took their first-hand experience with the Inuit and brought it into print were Rev. F.W. Peacock (Peacock 1947; Peacock 1974; Peacock 1977; Peacock 1984; Peacock 1985) and Brigitte Schloss (Schloss 1964). Speaking as, respectively, a Moravian minister and a Moravian teacher, they naturally praised the efforts of the Moravian church and its mission in Labrador and with a few small criticisms of possible paternalism, portrayed the mission as the force that saved the Inuit language and possibly the people themselves from either assimilation or extinction.

The related topic of literacy brought forth a number of interesting works. The most important work on Inuit literacy is provided by Hans Rollmann in two specific articles. "Moravian Education in Labrador: a Legacy of Literacy" (Rollmann 2008a) brings forth the most comprehensive overview of the literacy tradition of the Inuit, and

“Moravians in Central Labrador: the Indigenous Inuit Mission of Jacobus and Salome at Snooks Cove” (Rollmann 2010) elaborates on the vernacular education that came about, even in parts of Labrador where no missions were established. Robin McGrath (McGrath 1984; McGrath 1991; McGrath 1993) and Frank Tester (Tester 2001) have also contributed to an examination of literacy in the Inuit world, both looking at populations beyond Labrador. Additional works include Penny Petrone’s *Northern Voices* (1988) featuring a selection of writings by Inuit across Canada, as well as *The Moravian Beginnings of Canadian Inuit Literature* (2009), which describes the collection of Lawrence Lande’s books in the possession of the McGill library.

The subject of education, which is the precursor to the work on literacy here, was developed through consultation with a number of sources. Besides the work of Hans Rollmann (Rollmann 2008a; Rollmann 2010; Rollmann 2014), we have more general works on the educational philosophy of the Moravians such as those by Mabel Haller (Haller 1953), Gisele Mettele (Mettele 2010), Felicity Jenz (Jenz 2011), Heikki Lempa (Lempa 2010), Peter Vogt (Vogt 2010), Amy Schutt (Schutt 2012) and Pia Schmid (Schmid 2010). These deal with the Moravian heritage exclusively, but other works on education in Labrador specifically are those by Brigitte Schloss (Schloss 1964), Anne Brantenberg (Brantenberg 1977), Patrick Flanagan (Flanagan 1984), and Dianne Grant (Grant 2003). Schloss, mentioned above, gives us a history of the school in Nain, published in 1964. Anne Brantenberg was the next of this group to write, and her 1977 piece, published in Robert Paine’s *White Arctic*, is the first to note the marginalization of the Inuit population of the school in contrast to the Settler, or partly-white people.

Anthropologist Patrick Flanagan (Flanagan 1984) develops this theme in his MA thesis entitled *School, Souls and Social Class: the Labrador Inuit*, wherein he gives a compelling picture of the social situation in Nain in the late 1970s. In spite of the pseudonyms supplied, we clearly see the influence exerted on education and on the social life of Nain by Rev. F.W. Peacock and Moravian teacher Kate Hettasch. Flanagan was critical of the mission and what he saw as its stranglehold on the Inuit in Labrador. Dianne Grant (Grant 2003) did her fieldwork in the 1990s and though equally critical of the education system, which she saw as perpetuating injustice based on ethnicity within the community of Nain, she ascribed this to the actions of the provincial government rather than the Moravian mission. It is noteworthy that Grant considers the question of language loss, which was not a factor of concern when Flanagan did his research.

These writers, excepting Anne Brantenberg, were the generation that followed an earlier group of anthropologists with considerable experience and interest in Labrador. Many of these (including Anne Brantenberg) are represented in Robert Paine's volume *The White Arctic: Anthropological Essays on Tutelage and Ethnicity* (Paine 1977). Carol Brice-Bennett lived and worked in Labrador for decades and her work ranges from an influential volume of land use and occupancy published by the Labrador Inuit Association, *Our Footprints are Everywhere* to the editing of Paulus Maggo's life story, *Remembering the Years of My Life* (Brice-Bennett 1999). These scholars formed part of a cohort of anthropologists interested in Labrador who continued to publish on the topic, a critical mass that has not since been repeated, although we may be rebuilding with the recent work done by Andrea Procter (Procter 2012) and Peter Evans (Evans 2013). The

work of Shmuel Ben-Dor (Ben-Dor 1966), John C. Kennedy (Kennedy 1977), Terje Brantenberg (T. Brantenberg 1977) and Anne Brantenberg (A. Brantenberg 1977) were immensely valuable in providing a rich account of language use, education, customs and identity formation in Nain and Makkovik during the 1960s and 1970s, and especially for demonstrating the terminology of the time which made a distinction between “Inuit” and “Settlers.” This distinction, which is no longer described in those terms, forms an important part of the later discussion I will present in terms of Inuit identity.

Other writers who provided solid background information from the perspectives of visiting scholars and observers are Vaino Tanner (Tanner 1947), Helge Kleivan (Kleivan 1966) and Diamond Jenness (Jenness 1965).

With this background of linguistic, historical and anthropological approaches and a solid representation of primary sources, I began to consider the material using perspectives from folklorists to examine the concepts of identity and of narrative. I am indebted to Roger Abrahams (Abrahams 2003) and Elliot Oring (Oring 1986) for their work on identity, and to Gerald Pocius (Pocius 1996) for thoughts on identity from a nationalist point of view. Claire Owen’s master’s thesis (Owen 2011) was of great interest as she approached the role of language in the formation of Aboriginal identity, using a small group of women resident in Ottawa as the subject of her study.

Comparative examples on identity in minority cultures were provided by Robert Klymasz’s work on the Ukrainian community in western Canada (Klymasz 1970) and Nancy Schmitz’s discussion of the Irish in Quebec (Schmitz 1991).

I read more recent anthropological studies by Lawrence Dunn (Dunn 2002), Andrea Procter (Procter 2012) and Peter Evans (Evans 2013) with great interest. The latter two are very recent works, and are therefore examining the Nunatsiavut of the present day, examining the changes that have taken place since the settlement of land claims. Dunn's work was done not long before the creation of the territory of Nunatsiavut and provides a contrast to both earlier and later works, most evidently in his list of identity keywords. He provided terms used at earlier times and updated these according to the current usages by the Inuit at his time of research.

Both Evans and Procter have addressed the topic of agency, Evans through the concept of Inuit "middlemen" and Procter through an examination of the use of cultural difference in the struggle for political and economic control in Nunatsiavut. Reading these works not only informed me of more recent scholarly perspectives on Labrador Inuit society, but pushed me to expand my existing ideas on agency as applied to a diminishing language. In this I was aided by examining the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986), especially as interpreted by Heather Sparling in her research on Gaelic and its use in the song traditions of Cape Breton (Sparling 2005). Bourdieu's thoughts on social and cultural capital gave me new ideas about the potential gain from Aboriginal identity and the networks achieved by maintaining this form of currency.

My pathway to understanding what happened to Inuttitut was the narratives told by my informants and other Inuit in collections of personal experiences such as *Them Days Magazine*. To get a better sense of what the definition and use of the rather elastic term "narrative" brings forth, I consulted a number of sources. Philip Hiscock's work on

the Sheila Nageira legend (Hiscock 2002) assisted me in my consideration of the Inuttitut accounts as legends, while the works of Barbara Allen (Allen 1989) and Sandra Stahl (Stahl 1977; Stahl 1989) were helpful in framing them as personal experience narratives within the realm of folklore. Another set of explorations of the narrative genre was provided in James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium's book *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* (Holstein and Gubrium 2012). These two sociologists have gathered a valuable collection of insights into narrative inquiry that includes explorations of the voice given through narrative to marginalized groups (Donileen Loseke) and their use in public deliberation (Franscesca Collette). Although I am using the term "narrative" in the sense used by folklorists, as explained in my introduction, these works were extremely informative, not only in illustrating what other people understand narrative to mean, but also in demonstrating the variety of ways in which subjective accounts can illuminate and inform research on a wide variety of human problems.

As I began to look at the narratives I had collected as worthy of inclusion in that genre as understood by folklorists, I was assisted in my understanding by reading Amy Shuman's *Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy* (Shuman 2005) and Linda Dégh's work on legend entitled *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Dégh 2001).

The pertinence of these and other works will emerge in the following chapters to illuminate the process of change in Labrador Inuttitut and the stories that account for it, beginning with the next chapter, which addresses language shift in Nunatsiavut.

## CHAPTER TWO: LANGUAGE SHIFT IN NUNATSIAVUT

The topic of language death, or language shift, is the central question being posed in this thesis. Language shift is described this way by Nancy Hornberger:

Language shift refers to “the gradual displacement of one language by another in the lives of the community members” manifested as loss in number of speakers, level of proficiency, or range of functional use of the language. (Hornberger 2012: n.p.)

I asked residents of Nunatsiavut for their explanations for the decline in the use of Labrador Inuttitut since the mid-twentieth century and looked at their answers to investigate the role of language in Labrador Inuit identity. Before the narratives and what they disclose are discussed, I will consider how scholars have treated the question of language loss to understand the process that is being undergone by Inuttitut and the many other languages in the world that are either continuing under duress or losing ground to more dominant languages. These perspectives include those from some scholars who see language loss as a global tragedy, and those from others who examine this discourse to reveal what they see as highly contested and political statements on ownership and responsibility for indigenous languages. It is significant that in spite of the copious writing produced on the subject, it is common for scholars to remark that the reasons for both loss and retention of language remain largely unknown: “On the scientific front, our knowledge is still quite imperfect as to how and why language death occurs, or how individual decisions made by children ripple through societies to create a tidal wave of change” (Harrison 2007:9). It is my hope that the narratives I have collected will shed some light on how this happened in this particular culture.



It is worth noting that my discussion here is limited to a population that is rural and has a recent history of Aboriginal language use. Although present-day discourses about Aboriginal identity and its connection to language involve discussion of the “urban” versus “rural” Aboriginal populations in Canada, I am confining myself here to the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, who constitute a rural population. This is because of my interest in that particular population, and also because of the request made by the research division of the Nunatsiavut Government, to whom I applied for ethics clearance, that I concentrate my ethnographic research on residents of the land claims area.

### **Definitions of Language Loss/Language Shift**

Although language loss has been an ongoing process for centuries, there has been a much faster incidence of this decline in the last 500 years. There is no single explanation for the shrinking state of languages today, although the full range of factors is quite evident. Briefly put, these include the large global population, the rate of interchange amongst people of different nations, rapid changes in transportation and communication, the high level of language contact and the remarkable international influence of the English language (Crystal 2002:70). The factors range from physical danger to the speakers themselves (famine, drought, natural disasters, disease, war) to economic factors causing displacement of populations, to sensitive political situations leading to power imbalances affecting the right to speak one’s native tongue. Following this urgent list is another set of factors that sees the people remain in place while the language evaporates, due to the emergence of a new dominant culture and language. This leads to assimilation in three stages: the first is immense pressure on people to speak the

dominant language, followed by a period of bilingualism, and finally a stage where young people become proficient in the new language and identify with it to a greater extent (Crystal 2002:77). From then on we sometimes see an assumption of shame about the old language and its relegation to the sphere of old people and more backward times. It is at this stage that folklorists may study, for instance, humour arising from ridiculed language patterns. This is discussed in Klymasz's work on Ukrainian folklore in Canada (Klymasz 1980:70).

The strongest likelihood of stopping this trend is to intervene at the time of emerging bilingualism, while there is still language proficiency and interest amongst the generation capable of transmitting the language to younger people. Since the reasons for the existence of the two languages are different, there is no reason not to keep both of them, as they serve different functions for the speakers. The need for pride in the maternal language and its important function as an expression of identity is necessary, but this positive attitude may be missing due to racism, or political insecurity, loss of domain or lack of prestige. In some places people may not be actively hostile towards a minority language, but it may be marginalized and may take on the functions of symbolic use only. All of this depends on a dominant culture cultivating negative attitudes towards the speakers of minority languages, chiefly through practices that penalize the use of it. This leads to the seemingly universal accounts of punishment in school for using minority languages, further enforced through shame; these stories are among the dominant narratives of language loss and appear in many cultures. For example, Scots Gaelic was treated in this way until the 1930s (Bary 2002:218) as was the Alsatian dialect of German

(Vassberg 1993:33), and these are only two of many instances of this common explanation for language loss. Eventually there is often also a narrative of institutional persecution, even in situations where history does not bear out the reported extent of this treatment.

The issue of language change has not always been a central concern, and with respect to Labrador it is rarely discussed in the literature prior to the 1980s. The process is a gradual one. Grenoble and Whaley say:

For the sake of simplicity, discussions on endangered languages are often framed as though speakers suddenly switch from the use of one language to another. The reality, though, is that language shift takes place over the course of a generation or more and can only occur in a context of multilingualism. (Grenoble and Whaley 1998:xv)

Concern about the diminishing use of minority languages has been expressed by diverse constituencies. These include citizens of the language communities affected, global organizations such as UNESCO, who also support the retention of intangible cultural heritage, and linguists, who have devoted their academic careers to studying the use and development of language and are naturally concerned with the potential loss of their subject matter and its importance to the communities from which it came.

Indigenous languages are of special concern to many scholars, as no communities of native speakers exist elsewhere to sustain or renew the present population of speakers.

Much of the writing on reversing language loss is prescriptive and sends forth a rallying cry, not only to community members but to linguists and the larger population in general, to safeguard these dwindling linguistic resources. (See for example the volume *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*, edited by Gina Cantoni, a collection of essays

published in 1996 issuing from a conference in Flagstaff, Arizona, dealing with ways to revitalize and preserve Aboriginal languages in the United States.) And in looking at language as a resource, it has become popular to compare the idea of language loss with that of a threat to cultural biodiversity. Linguists reason that much as the planet is impoverished and even endangered by the elimination of species, so too is the human world diminished by the loss of some languages and the cultural knowledge embedded within them (Harrison 2007; Crystal 2002; Hale 1996).

More will be said about this below. This comparison bears some scrutiny, however. Biologists have observed that species have become extinct through incompatibility with their natural environments or through excessive predation, but this process is not seen as unnatural. Speciation and extinction continue to cycle at the same time, and the process has certainly predated human intervention. In this sense language too can be seen as a temporally-based phenomenon in that populations grow and thrive and then give way to other languages. In a model similar to that of plant and animal populations, they also evolve and form new dialects or separate languages entirely. However, the social and political conditions around language shift have given strength to the determination to see minority languages as species that must be preserved.

As we will see when the narratives around language loss are examined in future chapters, the peril in which indigenous languages currently stand is often attributed to shame in speaking a language that was considered second-rate. In the present day the prestige of indigenous languages has been reversed, and yet many of these continue to lose speakers at an alarming rate.

James Crawford addresses this: “Despite the end of punitive English-only policies in Indian schools and the advent of bilingual education, especially since the mid-1970s, the shift to English is accelerating in many Indian communities. Why is this happening now?” (Crawford 1996: 46). This question is one that has poignancy for those interested in language loss; has the acceptance and indeed celebration of minority and Aboriginal cultures come too late to help them survive?

Crawford provides several observations on language shift. Language shift is very difficult to impose from outside (Crawford 1996:47). This is a surprising observation, given the generally insistent note of fear about language death. But in defence of minority-language speakers, people resist the factors that lead to language death because language is so important to their sense of self and identity. Earlier educational policies of the United States and Canada were alike in promoting the assimilation of Aboriginal populations through a process of “civilization.” Crawford notes that opposition to this forced assimilation policy was expressed by missionaries, who saw value in retaining native languages for educational and religious purposes. As I will show, the Moravian missionaries subscribed to this view, in Labrador and in the other mission fields where they worked. This objection was overruled in many instances, but the threatened languages somehow persisted. One of the legends of language loss is a corollary to the English-only language policy: that of resistance to this suppression. Crawford points out that a frequently-expressed belief about residential schools is that parents decided not to pass on the language to their children for fear of repeating the negative experiences, but he also wonders if the effects came solely from the assimilationist policies or from

messages from the dominant culture. In a school system that did not repress the native language but did not offer it either, perhaps a more subliminal message about its value in the community was transmitted. We see this in accounts of students from northern Labrador who attended boarding school in North West River. They reported that they were not forbidden to speak Inuttitut, but chose not to. This is discussed in Chapter Six.

A second point is that language shift takes place by means of internal change. In other words, this happens within the community; although outside pressures are great, Crawford asserts (Crawford 1996:50) that language speakers are responsible through their attitudes and choices for the decision to speak or not to speak based on demographic factors, economic forces, mass media and social identifiers or role models.

Furthermore, language shift reflects a change in social and cultural values (Crawford 1996:51). This is seen in Labrador and in other indigenous communities in the transition from a more collective group-based Aboriginal identity to one that emphasizes such qualities as individualism, pragmatism and materialism, viewed as values deriving from the dominant culture. Technology, in spite of its ability to assist in reclaiming language, has allowed these values free passage into once remote societies, fostering a more global climate and exposure to ideas and goods once unknown. These ideas are expressed in the dominant language, and probably material goods enhance the prestige of the language presenting them, inculcating a desire to associate with it. Each community has a different story about why its members are not passing on the language, and it is important not to generalize about language death in all communities. These explanations include the lack of a sense of urgency, low status of the language, changes in housing

patterns that segregate age groups, dispute over the “correct” dialect, and the lack of instruction in the school system.

Crawford points out that successful reverse language shift is not an objective standing alone (Crawford 1996:55). Rather, it is one that is part of a broader social change, particularly when that change addresses the goals of self-determination. In Nunatsiavut, as we will see, self-government and the processes leading to it have brought about the establishment of language committees and the proposal of measures to restore Inuttitut, with varying degrees of success. Whether these succeed or not, it is evident that the desire to retrieve fluency is part of the process of self-determination, which also includes responsibility for such matters as health and post-secondary education funding.

Language shift cannot be reversed by outsiders, however well-meaning (Crawford 1996:56). Although inadequate education programs and lack of funding for language retention are frequently mentioned by community members as a critical factor in diminishing language use, scholars are in agreement that language use must begin and continue in the home. Neither can activism by interested outsiders guarantee restoration, and no single situation fits all circumstances in language revival. Above all, indigenous leadership is required to galvanize a population to change its language circumstances, with outsiders providing resources, training and encouragement only if requested (Crawford 1996:58).

Michael Krauss, unlike Crawford, sees the linguist’s role as primary: “How much longer, though, will these remaining languages survive? That concern brings me here to Flagstaff, because it is up to us more than anybody else to help save these languages”

(Krauss 1996:15). He divides the remaining Native American languages into four categories according to their vulnerability. The largest of these is Category C, which consists of languages spoken by the middle-aged or grandparental generation and older; he warns that a language having a large number of speakers in this category still does not guarantee survival, since the next generation is not carrying on the tradition of using the language. Category D, nearly extinct languages, contains about a third of the indigenous languages of the United States. Continuing with the theme of culture embedded in language, he feels that we should care about language loss because diversity of thought, language and experience are important to our survival as human beings. He also acknowledges the importance of the intrinsic beauty of language; the argument of scientific importance, which holds that comparative knowledge must be obtained from the greatest variety of languages possible; and the ethical perspective, which presents the right to speak one's language as a basic human right.

Joshua Fishman cautions us that "Attitudes toward language loss depend on your perspective." (Fishman 1996:71) There is both personal and more collective loss, including the cultural loss inherent in setting aside the traditions and world view implicit in one's first language. Fishman acknowledges the inevitable changes in a living language, yet maintains that much of culture is lost when a language disappears; as he says, "Take it away from the culture and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers" (Fishman 1996:72). He contends that "the language stands for that whole culture," meaning that the language represents the entire culture, ethnicity or nation to



those outside. By contrast, those inside the culture find its deepest expression in the morality and sanctity that they see as represented in the language.

Fishman goes on to describe the difficulty of language restoration. Like Krauss, he recognizes the denial amongst speakers that can slow down and hinder restoration efforts, because speakers believe that the problem will take care of itself in time. Fishman states, “When languages die, people do not stop talking. Cultures do not fold up and silently steal off into the night. They go on and they talk the new language” (Fishman 1996:76). These non-speakers, quite predictably, justify their decisions and assert that they can maintain their identity without the language. They may decide to acquire it through a school experience, but this becomes a hobby or cultural acquisition rather than a self-renewing system that will guarantee the continuation of the language.

As Robert Klymasz has shown in his study of the Ukrainian culture in Canada (Klymasz 1970, 1980), the position that an endangered language moves into is one that displays a sense of connection to a culture and pride in it, but with the sense that the history and traditions can and indeed must be maintained within the language of the dominant culture (Klymasz 1970).

Jon Reyhner (Reyhner 1996) views minority language retention as a right: he points out that in spite of winning the legal right to maintain their language and culture, Native Americans have not been able to exercise the effective right to do so by gaining access to the resources and strategies required to resist the erosion of language and culture. Reyhner also makes reference to social problems and sees them as the result of a cycle in which language shift is part of the damage done to a culture, which then

contributes to further social difficulties and eventually produces such trauma that addressing language loss is low on the list of priorities. The human rights element of this position was reinforced by the declaration of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People in 1993 (Reyhner 1996:4). The ideal of asserting the right to practice traditional customs and languages is in accordance with the ideals of freedom and democracy understood as the cornerstone of the UN's universal declaration of human rights. Therefore, it is seen as important that Aboriginal communities resist the values of the dominant society and retain their earlier values based on land, culture and community; not perhaps an easy set of values to re-establish after the punitive practices of the past. Nonetheless, at least in theory, the various Aboriginal groups have asserted their belief in the necessity and possibility of re-establishing traditional language practices while continuing to pursue the kind of education needed in a modern society.

Ken Hale (1992) treads the same path, regarding language and its growth, complexity, and peril as analogous to the concept of biological diversity. Like the others, he deplores a fall from grace where the natural world is no longer flourishing, due to the pernicious activity of humans. Hale's chief idea here is that linguistic diversity is important to human intellectual life, particularly as it relates to culture and art. In terms of linguistic information alone, we would lose a great deal by having only English to inform us on grammar, structure and vocabulary, since no single language displays all the possible features that are of interest to linguists. When we look at language as a larger field, its diversity needs to be safeguarded because the loss of variation means the loss of a sufficient sample size to thoroughly understand the differences between languages and

the extent of their grammatical possibilities. In terms of raw data for the linguist, this situation is as dire as the loss of plant species for the botanist.

On a more human note, as Hale remarks, “Language—in the general, multi-faceted sense—embodies the intellectual wealth of the people who use it” (Hale 1992:36). In a practical sense, verbal art can’t exist without the vehicle of language, and the world is therefore poorer every time a language is lost. At the same time, languages must change in order to remain part of living tradition. As he points out, “It is precisely where local languages are viable that new traditions develop.” In other words, it is not the languages themselves that we must safeguard but the circumstances that allow linguistic diversity to flourish and continue. Here we can see the importance of language to scholars outside the community and outside the field of linguistics: Joel Sherzer, for example, sees the verbal arts he studies as a key element of language and notes its functions: “Play languages are used to mark ethnic and social identity, to keep secrets, and to express opposition to the hegemonic rule of upper-middle-class and education-oriented standard languages and dialects” (Sherzer 2002:29).

David Crystal emphasises that the fragility of a language is based less on the number of remaining speakers than on the age group of those who still speak it, which provides an indicator of the likelihood of the language remaining vibrant in the future. Thus a language with only a few speakers, but those few representing the youngest generation learning it at home, is much more secure than one with a healthy speaker population that represents only the older generation in the community (Crystal 2002:11). Language loss is rapid and unpredictable. It can be quantified to some degree, however,

and is highly dependent upon the age at which language use changes, being particularly critical at the young adult phase, which is a crucial time for the young children of this group to be exposed to language. Crystal is yet another writer on language using the comparative model of biological diversity; he sees language preservation as an important step in safeguarding diversity and the web of natural systems in existence, in which all elements are affected when one is removed.

Techniques for rescuing language are of course part of the diagnosis and treatment approach of some linguists. Many strategies to retain and revive language can and should be used, since the problem presents itself differently in different places. Involving professional linguists is one front of attack, but so too is fostering positive attitudes about language and its retention. The community of speakers, ironically, is one place where there may be resistance to devoting much time and energy to revitalization, perhaps because a minority language situation is also one in which there may be other needs that are seen as more pressing. It is axiomatic in Labrador that the strongest speakers of Inuttitut are frequently those who are most marginalized and furthest from the dominant culture, and therefore most needful of resources to address social problems. The association of language skills with resettled communities and the loss and deprivation their inhabitants went through in the first half of the twentieth century may have been a reason for people to distance themselves from a language they came to see as a burden.

There may be other priorities for the local government, even when such a body exists, as is the case with the Nunatsiavut government. In addition, a community may feel

that describing their language as “in peril” is harmful to them: “They refuse to accept that their language is ‘endangered,’ ‘vanishing,’ ‘dying’—indeed, they may object most strongly to having such labels used about them at all, perceiving them to be a denial of their ethnicity” (Crystal 2002:108). Communities may also feel that the institutions that deprived them of their language should make the effort to restore them, or that a concerned society or foundation may have sufficient interest to do so. The linguist may then have a role and even an obligation to work for the preservation of languages that are not his or her own maternal tongue. As Crystal notes, “...outsiders can often see, in a way that insiders cannot, the merits of a long-term view. They know very well, from experiences the world over, that one of the loudest complaints to eventually emerge is of the ‘if only’ type” (Crystal 2002:105). It is easy enough for the next generation to reproach its elders for not having taught them the language, knowing little of the situation that caused that decision to be made.

An extension of this view is that intervention by outsiders is justified because of the finality of language loss, and that there is no essential difference between this and intervening in the case of natural disaster. Yet this does not take into account the feeling of ownership and blame attached to language loss, the sense of personal failure and defensiveness that are bound to arise in the midst of this good-hearted interference. It is somewhat paternalistic to assert that people may not know what they are losing when they lose a language (Crystal 2002:109) and that the aim of preservation is to conserve heritage, not conversation. To assume that people do not properly understand the value of their own heritage and to simultaneously expect them to make every effort to maintain it

shows a lack of empathy about what the experience of feeling responsible for a dying language would be like.

There are myths that need to be dispelled about language maintenance. One is that being a fluent speaker is enough to make one a good teacher and conversely that only a native speaker can be a good teacher. (This is clearly not the attitude in Canadian French-immersion classes, where Anglophone children in Anglophone communities learn French from Anglophone teachers.) Another misconception is that children will quickly learn a language if it is the one that their forebears formerly spoke. In fact, it is no easier for a person to learn an ancestral language than it is for a complete stranger to learn it, if there is no prior experience for either. (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 84) Another key factor in language maintenance is the necessity for the older generation and existent speakers to give credit to those trying to learn rather than to criticize their version of the language. The Innu community, for example, according to Jennifer Thorburn's MA thesis (Thorburn 2006), is tolerant of the changing lexicon and pronunciation of its youth, and this support is essential in order to sustain the effort made by the young. The idea of ownership of a language is something that may well prove to be an obstacle to the maintenance of more precarious languages. If new populations are discouraged from learning a minority language, or if older people take exception to the vocabulary used or the changing pronunciation of young people, there is a risk that the effort will come to seem too great for the benefits accrued.

Language revitalization is a complex endeavour with unpredictable results. Crystal identifies six factors that can be considered prerequisites for language

revitalization: increase of prestige within the dominant community; increase in actual economic power within the dominant community; increase in political power within the community (being taken seriously, in other words); an increase in presence in the educational system; the use of electronic technology amongst the speakers, and finally an ability to write the language (Crystal 2002:130). Literacy, in fact, is sometimes seen as an enemy to the dynamic quality of narratives and to the flexibility of a primarily oral language, and raises the question of which dialect or version of any given language should be the one chosen to be recorded and preserved, and to become the standard bearer for the language (Crystal 2002:139). Chapter Four discusses this aspect of language shift.

The role of the scholar in dealing with endangered languages is important to reflect upon, as what begins as an academic line of inquiry may evolve into a political activist's sphere of influence. Of course, the ethics requirements exacted of present-day researchers would seem to guarantee an approach incorporating community assent and involvement. Rather than "helping them to understand" why their language is important and should be maintained, the student of endangered languages should be aware that the social costs of maintaining a language may be more than he/she understands and may not be worth the price to the community, regardless of what the public face on the question is. Linguists need to be objective enough to respect which languages are in most urgent need of preservation. The distinction between ownership and stewardship of a language is one that needs to be understood by all parties, a point that comes up in terms of intellectual property.

There is no doubt that real grief exists over the death of a language. Awareness of the problem is much greater than it once was, but the future is uncertain to those within the profession of linguistics as well as to the members of individual language communities. K. David Harrison tries to answer the question, “When a language dies, what is lost?” (Harrison 2007) Like many others, he takes the perspective of value in diversity, and is very specific in the examples he delivers. This is particularly important in view of the vagueness that is sometimes attached to the statement that culture is embedded in language. The strength of Harrison’s work is in the descriptions he provides of the way knowledge is packaged in a language, giving very precise examples of concepts that are expressed in a way that gives information about customs or practices. One example is the Tuvan names for different ages of reindeer. Another is depictions of time: for example, the notion of the week is missing from many languages; it is an abstract idea and cannot be conceived of without linguistic anchoring (Harrison 2007:87).

Harrison gives the following example:

Before the arrival of the modern calendar, most indigenous cultures did not sequentially number years. This yields a different view of history, in which the past may be commemorated in song or epic, but people have no need to say an event took place, say, exactly 57 years ago. Similarly, most indigenous cultures never counted the ages of people in years, but instead used complex age categories based on physiognomy, social status, kinship, and other factors. (Harrison 2007:82)

As well as time, spatial concepts differ from one culture to another, and this difference is reflected in language. Topographic names are meaningful in many cultures in the sense that they indicate knowledge of geographical features necessary for



navigation, and indicate the location of valuable resources, especially sources of food and shelter.

Much of the writing on language shift, as we have seen, is a passionate avowal of the need for protection for the languages in question, and a healthy dose of shame for the outside forces that seem to threaten this diversity. Yet a number of scholars have examined the idea of language endangerment and have looked closely at the discourse to see what it reveals about expectations around language preservation (Duchêne and Heller 2007; Muehlmann 2007; Patrick 2007; Cameron 2007). In particular, the tendency to discuss languages rather than the speakers themselves reveals attitudes that place an obligation on the speakers to preserve their cultural inheritance as part of the world's riches. Writers examining this discourse have pointed out that history shows that no one language has ever ruled the planet for too long and that some shift in language must be expected over time (Ostler 2005:xxi).

The point of view that languages require protection because cultural information is embedded in the languages themselves, and that losing any of them represents a loss to all of humanity, is shown in its most extreme form in what is known as the strong Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:

It holds that the language a person speaks places strict limits upon his or her potential individual thought patterns. Speakers are trapped, as it were, within a conceptual universe their language builds around them, and their worldview is inescapably shaped by it. Over the years, people have constructed many elaborate arguments both for and against this view, and it remains quite controversial. While the extreme form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been largely abandoned, the search for more modest effects of language upon thought remains an active topic of investigation by linguists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists. (Harrison 2007:184)

Although this idea in its extreme form is currently discredited, as Harrison says, many of the above writers hold views that reflect some attachment to it. Not only scholars but minority language speakers and communities of endangered languages, as well as large sections of the general public, continue to believe this, sometimes accepting it as a given in the same way that narratives of language loss have remained unquestioned. Other scholars have entered into a discourse on language endangerment, challenging the idea that all languages must (or can be) preserved, and in some cases have taken the equally extreme view that languages should be allowed to pass away because cultural pluralism divides groups of people and allows them to emphasize their individual group allegiance to a dangerous degree. (Malik 2000) These diverging views require us to seek a greater understanding of the interrelationship of language and culture, and compel us to consider where exactly the responsibility for language preservation begins and ends.

### **Discourses of Language Endangerment**

As noted, not all writers hold the belief that Aboriginal people must retain their languages, and we see this alternative point of view in a moderate form in a statement from Nora and Richard Dauenhauer:

We should emphasize here our feeling that it is wrong, unrealistic and mentally unhealthy to insist or expect that all Native American persons speak and appreciate the ancestral language (and be found wanting if they do not.) This is not something generally expected or required of other ethnic groups. (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998:76)

But others have gone further in their critical examination. Heller and Duchêne have issued a volume of essays examining the discourse produced around concerns about language loss. These language shift concerns are usually voiced in a couple of ways:

facing the loss either of a language, or of a unique world view that each language represents. (Some writers such as Suzanne Romaine believe that linguistic and biological diversity are actually linked.) All these arguments are brought together in a political take on language loss, claiming that speakers have the right (and perhaps the duty) to protect their languages against powerful dominant ones. Speakers are not the only constituency who may gain advantage from pressing this agenda: “Linguists and [linguistic] anthropologists not only use the field of language endangerment as a place to affirm expertise and professional, technical knowledge but also to legitimize their disciplines in terms of the social relevance of the fields” (Duchêne and Heller 2007:3).

The ideological dimensions of the discourse are of course drawn from our era’s ubiquitous discussion on environmental concerns and our collective responsibility for the planet’s dramatic changes. The extension of these concerns to changes on the linguistic map is largely unchallenged. Language shift is seen as something imposed from outside the culture, impinging on the rights of the speakers and the collective scientific and cultural heritage that should provide a form of cultural balance and diversity. Heller and Duchêne amongst others take a closer look:

Inspired by Cameron’s work on verbal hygiene (Cameron 1995 and this volume) we have taken the position that discourses of language endangerment are fundamentally discourses about other kinds of threats which take place, for specific reasons, on the terrain of language. The linguistic order is a space which is partly constitutive of the social order, and the moral order which regulates it. (Heller and Duchêne 2007:4)

Writers on this side of the debate (who certainly think minority languages are of importance) point out that much of the discourse privileges the languages above the speakers themselves. They are cautious about the promotion of language conservation as

a tool for the promotion of other ideologies that might normally be challenged more readily. And they warn against the appropriation of the assumed cooperation of the speakers. As Miroslav Černý says:

A common tactic in the literature on endangered languages is to present speakers of threatened languages as ‘natural allies’ of language preservationists. This is particularly striking in the repeated use of the terms ‘guardians of diversity’ or ‘custodians of endangered languages’ to refer to both their speakers and communities. These terms act to shift responsibility for language preservation solely onto the speakers of endangered languages. (Černý 2010:22)

Shaylih Muehlmann explores this current fascination with the idea of linking language with biodiversity: “When the concept of biodiversity is extended to the language advocacy movement, the threat to linguistic diversity is constructed in a similar manner, prescribing the same roles for the actors involved, particularly indigenous people” (Muehlmann 2007:14). The danger in this argument is that social marginalization, of which language loss is a symptom, is disregarded in favour of a concern with the loss of linguistic diversity as an injury to the whole human race, once again displacing a concern for the speakers of indigenous languages with an abstract idea and one whose scope discourages the utility of attempts to change the situation: “Specifically, it assumes that the problem with biolinguistic diversity is its impending extinction and it construes this problem in a manner that radically constrains the options for solutions” (Muehlmann 2007:16).

This metaphor of language as a biological species has contributed to the phrase “language ecology,” reinforcing the idea that language can and should be protected in the same ways that activists have used to try to stem the exploitation of natural resources. In

both cases, this approach heavily involves the idea of indigenous people as stewards of resources, but doesn't allow them to use these resources as they see fit: "As with environmental discourses on biodiversity, linguistic discourses on biolinguistic diversity forge tenuous connections between capitalism and conservation, efforts to revitalize and efforts to archive, and the simultaneous valorization and dehumanization of indigenous people" (Muelhmann 2007:18). Making indigenous people responsible for the loss or maintenance of their language may seem reasonable; the point has been made that language must begin and largely be maintained in the home. At the same time, when speakers are seen as the natural allies of linguists and are criticized when they do not obligingly fulfill this cultural and political function, they are being denied the agency to do as they wish with their cultural resources, just as they are for using their natural resources in a way that is unacceptable to Western ways of thinking, whether it be to use them in a way that is unsustainable, or leaving them alone.

Following Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on social and cultural capital, it may well be the case now that communities see linguists as self-interested extractors of cultural wealth (Bourdieu 1986). The often-cited example of such appropriation is the collection of traditional medical knowledge that has profit implications for pharmaceutical companies, and this suspicion of motives is becoming more widespread as concern with ethics in research leads to tension between academic freedom on the one hand and the community's assumption of their right to set a research agenda on the other. Seeing an endangered language as more valuable than the speakers and their needs reduces their individual human rights rather than protecting them.

To add to the complexity of this question, many speakers of endangered languages are not indigenous, and this creates a kind of hierarchy of need for protection entwined with treaty rights, possession of land and political rhetoric. It also places Aboriginal identity in a separate category from those of other minority groups. However, it is also notable that in Canada at least, Aboriginality is not tested or awarded by virtue of possession of a native language, placing the ability to speak at a lower premium than other cultural practices. Donna Patrick comments on this: “As far as the Supreme Court of Canada is concerned, Aboriginal ‘culture’ is preserved only through the continuation of specific traditional practices such as hunting or fishing, and is not tied in any direct way to language use” (Patrick 2007:43).

Instead, revitalization of language has taken on the aspect of “healing” and reinforces the links between land, spirituality and language. A culture without a solid connection to its original language must therefore emphasize other links, given that some form of authenticity to claims of Aboriginality is expected by the majority population in view of the benefits received. Patrick wonders, without making any conclusion, “Would one be seen as less ‘Aboriginal’ if one engaged in non-traditional, urban cultural and linguistic practices? If language is so connected to spirituality, can one be ‘authentically’ spiritual without speaking the traditional language?” (Patrick 2007:52).

In my view, the social capital that indigenous people hold in the form of their maternal languages is the equivalent of what Bourdieu saw as the social and cultural capital of the middle classes: their educational attainments and the ability to achieve education and to guarantee its achievement for their children (Bourdieu 1986:243). The

social prestige now attached to being a native speaker of an Aboriginal language increases with its scarcity and makes the prospect of further endangerment more costly in terms of social capital and of authenticity. Therefore, the language loss narratives serve the purpose of exonerating both the community and the individual from the responsibility for keeping this birthright. The only other strategy is to disavow the value of the endangered language, which is not acceptable to the community.

Deborah Cameron is interested in how language endangerment is reported, and in the framing of these reports in order to bring attention to the issue. Language endangerment has moved into the mainstream, much like climate change, and, because it deals with mostly marginalized people in remote places, it needs to be cast in a heightened way in order to make an impact. In her view, the result is that reporting runs the risk of being both alarmist and inaccurate, making use of emotionally loaded terms like “death,” “extinction,” and “loss”:

Moral indignation about the plight of endangered languages is generated by linking the issue to ecological concerns about biodiversity and the conservation of the earth’s resources (which are seen in this context as including its array of human cultures), rather than—as would also be possible—to political concerns about human rights, social justice and the distribution of resources among more and less powerful groups. (Cameron 2007:270)

The issue, then, is presented in the media as a cause, much like world hunger and the destruction of the Amazonian rain forest, which calls for a moral response from responsible citizens. It may be simpler to look at language shift as an injury to humanity and an environmental issue than to look at the individual political struggles that some language loss can be linked to, or to look at it as an unpopular but autonomous decision

by the speakers of the language. Struggles around language are frequently linked to struggles for land rights, compensation, or withdrawal of a foreign military presence, amongst others, and to look at language shift as a globally-shared concern is to deny the individual group's much larger stake in the outcome. Cameron says that this "organicist" view (languages as organisms) relates to ideas that flourished around Darwin's thinking. "In that period it came with other kinds of ideological baggage—in particular the notion that the language of a people was a repository of their history and cultural heritage, an expression of their characteristic nature or spirit, and the vehicle through which all these were transmitted to each new generation" (Cameron 2007:273). It is also a legacy of Romanticism and its celebration of folk cultures.

Taking this view is problematic. These defenders of culture may have no idea what traditions are embedded in the language, and are not at liberty to decide whether keeping the language is the only way for this to happen. Preserving someone else's culture is not only presumptuous but may be ill-informed. As Cameron points out:

It is also possible for group identity to be maintained in the absence of distinctive linguistic markers, using non-linguistic cultural resources like genealogies, rituals, music or visual art styles. But most rhetoric about endangered languages holds that any shift away from the language of your ancestors must entail a catastrophic loss of identity and culture. (Cameron 2007:280)

Not only does this fervency from outsiders regarding language loss take away the agency of the individual group, it places on its members the burden of retaining cultural riches that many of us have let go. If we compensate for our lack of diversity by attempting through moral suasion to make others retain theirs, we take away their freedom of choice and have commodified their language in a way people may find



intrusive. An informant in Nain remarked on the resentment she saw amongst speakers of Inuttitut when it was suggested to them that having fluency was an asset; they don't see it as a commodity. "I know some people are just really humble about it, and some people when you try to say 'That's really an asset,' they get offended and say, 'It's not an asset, it's who I am.' Some people find that offensive" (personal interview 2014). With all these approaches to language shift in mind, we will now look at the present state of Labrador Inuttitut.

### **Present State of Inuttitut in Labrador**

Labrador Inuttitut is a dialect of Inuktitut, a branch of the Eskimo-Aleut family. It is referred to in various ways, as Jennifer Thorburn enumerates:

Labrador dialects of Inuttitut are variously referred to as Inuttitut (Andersen and Johns 2005; Dicker et al. 2009), Inuttut (Smith 1975; Smith 1977a; Smith 1977b; Smith 1978; Basse and Jensen 1979; Fortescue 1983; Johns 1993; Johns 1995; Wharram 2003; Swift 2004), or the Nunatsiavut dialect (Dorais 2010) in the literature. (Thorburn 2014:20)

Although the various spellings appear in the sources I will quote, including the more general word "Inuktitut," I use "Inuttitut" as my term of reference, following the current practice of the Nunatsiavut government.

A number of scholars have directly addressed the state of Labrador Inuttitut, and others have included it within their studies of the Inuktitut languages across Canada. This section will provide information on the current state of the language in Labrador and some discussion of Inuktitut in other regions. While Inuktitut worldwide remains one of the more viable indigenous languages, in Labrador, as in the western Arctic, its hold is much more tenuous than in the Canadian territory of Nunavut and in Labrador's

neighbouring territory of Nunavik (Northern Quebec), as explained by linguist Marina Sherkina-Lieber:

While Inuktitut in general is considered viable, the Labrador dialect has been endangered over several decades. In the UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, Nunatsiavummiutut (Labrador Inuttitut) is listed as "definitely endangered" (3 on the scale from 5 (safe) to 0 (extinct) as defined in UNESCO document Language Vitality and Endangerment.) This is the result of the language shift from Inuttitut to English that has been taking place in Labrador Inuit communities. (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:35)

This is also addressed by Louis Jacques Dorais:

Three dialects seem to be in a very problematic condition: Uummarmiut, Sigliitun, and Nunatsiavut are spoken as a first language by 20% or less of their ancestral populations. The last one, in particular, is in sharp decline, having decreased from 52% of native speakers in 1986 to 20% in 2006. (Dorais 2010:243)

The Labrador dialects have largely formed one variety, with the Rigolet dialect maintaining its individuality. (It is now close to extinction.) Rose Jeddore spoke of the influences of other dialects:

Prior to 1955, the Inuit communities of Nain, Hopedale, Hebron and Nutak were pretty well isolated from each other and a separate dialect was spoken in each. With resettlement by the government, the Inuit people of Hebron and Nutak were moved to all points from Nain to Goose Bay. Over the years most Inuit people drifted back north to Nain until it became the centre for Inuit people. There were conflicts at first as communities were re-organized and people began to learn each other's speech patterns. Now there seems to be a standard Nain dialect that everyone uses. (Jeddore 1979:88)

Alana Johns and Irene Mazurkewich discuss the effects of these moves:

Another historical change that affected Labrador Inuttut was the social upheaval caused by the resettlement of two more northerly communities of Inuit (Nutak and Hebron) into the more southern Inuit communities... This move increased the number of monolingual Inuttut-speaking people in the

three coastal communities where they were resettled but introduced yet more dialects in those communities. (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:356)

Informant Johannes Lampe described a family with its own dialect: “There’s different dialects in Nain. Even one example that John Jararuse uses for Hebron, there are Inuit from Hebron and about five or ten miles north of Hebron there was a family who had a totally different dialect” (Interview Lampe 2014).

Now, however, the dialect has become uniform with the exception of some individual terms, and Inuttitut use at present is confined mostly to an older generation of speakers. Sybella Tuglavina produced a report in 2005 entitled *Status of the Inuktitut Language in Labrador and Language Revitalization Strategies* for the Torngâsok Cultural Centre. This report gave a portrait of Inuttitut use in the community at the time, and began with this snapshot:

A very typical day in the Labrador Inuit home today looks like this: Television and/or radio/music is on and English is more likely to be heard, unless the radio is tuned into OKalaKatiget Radio, where both English and Inuktitut are used for at least two hours a day from Monday to Friday. If there are elders in the house, they are usually talking amongst themselves while doing activities, or telling an older child to do or about something in Inuktitut.

Teenagers are speaking in English amongst themselves, and responding in English to their Inuktitut-speaking parents and/or grandparents. When spoken to in Inuktitut, a lot of them cannot understand. Young mothers and fathers are also speaking English between themselves and their children.

Small children are conversing in English.

And this is very typical in modern-day routines in Northern Labrador. English is everywhere. On the television and radio, in the schools, on the road, etc.

From the young to the adults, most conversations are in English. Some of those around 35 years or older can speak some Inuktitut, if not fluently. Most people around 45 years and up can speak and understand Inuktitut. And yet, they prefer to use English to the younger generation.

The question here is: how do we get everyone to start speaking in Inuktitut in their own homes? (S. Tuglavina 2005:3).

Her suggestions for the new Nunatsiavut government, still a work in progress at the time she wrote, seem to indicate some skepticism towards their possible support of the language:

In the new Nunatsiavut government, the Legislative Assembly committee will have to urge Nunatsiavut Government to create a government-wide language policy. Without a strong language policy, it will be difficult for Nunatsiavut government to meet its goal of making Inuktitut its everyday language by 2025, assuming this is a realistic goal (S. Tuglavina 2005:6).

Certainly work has been done to assess the state of the language and strategies for its restoration. A language survey was undertaken by the committee in 1999-2000 (Andersen 2001) to determine language use and attitude. Half of Labrador Inuit Association members responded to the survey, with 15% declaring that Inuktitut was their first language, but 90% responded that they felt that Inuktitut was important and wanted their children to learn it, indicating that the avowal of the importance of language retention is not directly linked to efforts to make it happen.

Much of the information we have on the most current state of the language was produced by Catharyn Andersen, who became familiar with Labrador Inuktitut through her father, a fluent speaker, through her work as director of the Torngâsok Cultural Centre, and through the research that led to her 2009 master's thesis at Memorial University. She reviews the work that has been done, including Irene Mazurkewich's research, the 2000 language survey done by Torngâsok, and Sybella Tuglavina's report on language revitalization strategies, and then goes on to the 2009 survey that formed the basis for her thesis. A snapshot of the 2009 state of affairs is as follows:

A true mark of the health of a language is if it is spoken in the home. The results show that less than 10% of people always or usually speak Inuttitut at home and 42.5% of people never speak Inuttitut at home. Furthermore, 82% of respondents stated that their parents never spoke Inuttitut to them at home. These facts do not bode well for the future of the language. A shift in the predominant language from Inuttitut to English has occurred. This is evidenced by the fact that 42% and 35% of respondents' mothers and fathers respectively spoke Inuttitut while only 15% of respondents stated Inuttitut as their first language. However, there is still a chance to reverse the language shift that has occurred. (Andersen 2009:11)

It is notable that self-assessment of ability to speak, read and write is lower than the community's belief in these strengths. Andersen's survey was done with people over 19, so there was no chance to assess language use by children, if any exists. She also looked at the domains of speaking Inuttitut. It is used more often in social situations and out visiting than at home, which probably indicates that is used amongst elders rather than intergenerationally. Code-switching (alternating between two languages in the course of a single conversation) seems to take place amongst the elderly rather than the middle generation, as was expected; this paints a picture of social gatherings where elders may speak some Inuttitut to each other but readily switch to English with anyone younger and perhaps even with each other.

When questions were posed by Andersen about the importance of Inuttitut for Nunatsiavut, 94% said it was important to Nunatsiavut and 90% said it was important for the children to learn it. 95.7% said Inuttitut immersion was a positive thing, although there were a few caveats; 100% wanted special policies and projects around language, 70% believe it "will always be spoken in the community," 80% feel it is possible to live successfully without speaking English and 88% felt that non-Inuit in Nunatsiavut should learn the language. Balanced against this fervent support for the continuation of Inuttitut,

we see that 63.8% said a person does not need to be bilingual to be bicultural, and when asked if one has to speak Inuttitut to be a “real Inuk” 78% said no. Clearly these numbers reveal a desire to keep the language, but perhaps not through the medium of home transmission: only 31% thought that Inuttitut would be spoken in their family in the next generation. And the survey results show that most people (69.4%) believe the responsibility for maintaining the language lies with the school (Andersen 2002). This is borne out by the statements given by Johns and Mazurkewich in their work on Aboriginal teacher education, where they reflected that although people spoke to their children in English all the time, they laid the blame for their lack of fluency on the teachers and the school system (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:361).

A language committee was struck in 1999 (Andersen 2002:13) to help initiate revitalization programs, later evolving into six separate committees before re-forming into a regional committee entitled Inuktut UKâlalautta. Various revitalization programs have been proposed and some have been implemented, but most of these present some difficulties. Inuttitut core programs are carried out in Nunatsiavut schools, but teachers and students alike have had difficulty. A shortage of materials for school programs has often been mentioned, with the Inuit teachers complaining that, unlike the English teachers, they must frequently devise their own (C. Andersen 2001:16). Students of core Inuttitut classes complain that they learn very little, with the same lessons repeated year after year (Anonymous informant: personal communication). At the language and education conferences held over the years, the Inuit teachers frequently voiced their view

that they were not respected by the English-speaking teachers and that they had insufficient space to work in.

In April 2001 the establishment of a language nest (Inuaggualuit) in Hopedale took place, but it proved difficult to find people who both speak Inuttitut and have the required Early Childhood Education certification required by the province. Without this license, only three children at a time can be looked after together (C. Andersen 2001:5). Adult courses have sometimes been offered but this provides only sporadic employment for instructors. Torngâsok has provided youth camps since 1991, and these are popular but expensive to run. A master-apprentice program with one-on-one teaching has also been undertaken.

An Inuttitut Language Skills Development room was piloted for six months for the LIA workers in Nain, but unfortunately only a very small number of the employees used this service, according to Sybella Tuglavina (S. Tuglavina 2005:7).

Other attempts at revitalization have been undertaken, including the production of the Rosetta Stone language software, used in the schools and in the community. The north coast schools hold activities such as Inuttitut speaking competitions, and an Inuit curriculum coordinator position has been in place for several years at the Labrador School Board. In spite of interest in these activities, there may be unrealistic views of what the schools can do without adequate community support, according to Andersen.

One symbolic source of support for the language has disappeared since Andersen and Johns issued their report: “In addition, the President of the Nunatsiavut Government must be a fluent speaker of Inuttitut, thus ensuring that someone with the knowledge and

respect for the language will be in a position of strong political influence” (Andersen and Johns 2005:20). The current president (2015) of Nunatsiavut is not yet a fluent speaker, and Dorais’s comments may shed some light on this:

Among Inuit politicians, for instance, the importance of Inuktitut, Inuktun, or Inupiaq [other dialects of the language] is related more to its role as a symbol of Aboriginal political and territorial rights than to its intrinsic value as a legitimate medium of communication. Inuit interviewed in Iqaluit in 2003-4, especially the elders, were often critical of the role of politicians, whose promises to protect Inuktitut were, they believed, forgotten as soon as they were elected. (Dorais 2010:258)

Language shift in Nunatsiavut has been attributed to a number of factors, including the long history of European presence in Labrador. Even though retention of Inuktitut was insisted upon by the Moravian missionaries, the influence of other languages was inevitable, including the occurrence of word borrowing due to the circumstance of sedentary life around European trading posts and missions (Dorais 2010:152) and to the much longer interaction of Labrador Inuit with Europeans than the population in Arctic Quebec, for example (Dorais 2010:156).

Education has been a factor as well, as we will see in a later chapter. Dorais’s surveys of Inuktitut-speaking populations reveal that the approach to teaching of the native language has a significant effect on language retention. As might be supposed, the formal teaching of Inuktitut in schools and local control of the schools has contributed to retention being much greater in some territories. At the same time, acquisition of formal learning and rates of post-secondary education are much higher in Nunatsiavut than in the neighbouring territories:

In Nunatsiavut the level of formal education is higher than the Canadian Inuit average, but most instruction is offered in English. Inuktitut is taught



only in the lower elementary grades of two or three villages, generally as a second language. (Dorais 2010:197)

This comes at a cost; the Inuktitut immersion stream in Nunatsiavut schools is now reduced to the school in Nain until the completion of Grade Two and is embraced by few families. Irene Mazurkewich's research in the 1990s revealed that even Inuktitut immersion students from Inuktitut-speaking families were likely to use English in daily conversation at school. Dorais summarizes his observations:

Inuktitut has also lost its predominance in Nunatsiavut, where, in the early 1990s, most individuals under thirty assessed their proficiency in the Aboriginal language as average or poor, even though older people considered their own abilities to be very good or excellent (Mazurkewich 1992). Parents judged the performance of their children as poor in Inuktitut but generally good or very good in English, the language most frequently spoken by the young. In the region's main centre, Nain, the performance of Inuktitut by Settlers was equivalent to that of the Inuit, although the former spoke mostly English in all circumstances. Older Inuit used both languages among themselves, but they usually addressed their children in English. In such circumstances—which have not changed over time despite several initiatives to counteract language shift (see Andersen and Johns 2005)—Irene Mazurkewich (1992) contends that teaching Inuktitut in school is not really useful and has no measurable impact. (Dorais 2010:230)

This is supported by Sherkina-Lieber, who divided her informants into “high proficiency receptive bilinguals,” understanding 70% or more of what was said to them, and low proficiency, meaning those who understood about 25%:

The youngest fluent bilinguals, high receptive bilinguals who were born in the late 1960s and after, and all low receptive bilingual participants, had Inuktitut classes at school. However, they reported that in these classes, the emphasis was on basic word learning rather than speaking practice, and they perceived the classes as ineffective, at least partly because they already had a basic vocabulary. (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:82)

Diglossia is defined as a linguistic situation wherein two languages have different functions and different statuses, distinguishing it from bilingualism, which, according to Fishman, is “essentially a characterization of individual linguistic versatility whereas diglossia is a characterization of the societal allocation of functions to different varieties of languages” (Fishman 1970:87). Diglossia, at best, is the linguistic atmosphere of Nunatsiavut at the present time. One prominent example is pointed out by Cornelsen:

As Inuit began to use English in dealings with outsiders, while continuing to worship in Inuktitut, a cleavage between the culture of the religious sphere and the culture of the daily economic and social transactions was introduced. Church became the repository of things traditional, while daily economic and social life came to represent things modern. (Cornelsen 1991:62)

The number of people speaking Inuktitut on a daily basis continues to shrink, in spite of the recognition of the importance of the language to the people. The occurrence of diglossia increased in the post-World War II era, when much of the administration in Aboriginal communities was established and was provided in English. This was perhaps taken for granted as a side effect of the benefits that began to flow to Labrador in the post-Confederation era, and was not examined with a critical eye. More recently, however, the shaping of language has been analysed more closely:

It was only in the mid-seventies and early eighties that a few social-linguists, mainly French, began to draw a relation between diglossia and the notion of linguistic conflict in order to give more theoretical sharpness to the former concept. For them, most diglossic situations, despite their apparent stability, were symptoms of far-reaching latent linguistic conflicts between various social classes or ethnic groups. (Dorais 1989:201)

As in many other places, there is no longer pressure to avoid the native language, but the habit of speaking English has taken over to a large extent. The situation in

Nunatsiavut where the *Kablunângajuit*, or “Settler” people lived side by side with the Inuit and joined the Labrador Inuit Association at the invitation of their neighbours (and became a driving force in the organization) has had a great deal of influence on the mixing of the languages. Initially, this influence was shown in the increased usage of Inuttitut, as the Settlers, who saw themselves as white people, became fluent in Inuttitut partly because of their proximity to Inuit families and partly through co-habitation in the boarding schools of Nain and Makkovik. Indeed, this reverse diglossia, as it were, shows up in survey results regarding language use in Nunatsiavut. As Dorais says, “In Newfoundland and Labrador the presence of bilingual Settlers might explain why 19% of those speaking Inuktitut do not have this language as their mother tongue” (Dorais 2010:238). (See Chapters 5 and 6.) He sees this interweaving as part of the social fabric of the territory:

It is only in those regions where the social division of labour resulted in *de facto* segregation (Europeans occupying the leading positions and Inuit the unskilled jobs) that native languages survived. Elsewhere (i.e. in Nunatsiavut, the Inuvialuit region, and northern Alaska), the presence of lower-class Euro-Americans (trappers, fishermen, etc.) with whom Aboriginal people could identify more easily entailed the partial suppression of ethnic boundaries and thus the linguistic assimilation of the Inuit. (Dorais 2010:257)

Dorais, like Cornelsen, also feels that the language itself underwent a division in Nunatsiavut, where archaic forms used in the church became associated with ecclesiastical functions and English stepped in as the default language of more contemporary interaction.

It is interesting to note that in Nunatsiavut, the internal division within Inuktitut (church versus spoken) seems to have contributed to the predominance of English, whereas in Nunavik the presence of two

competing European languages (English and French) appears to have helped with the preservation of Inuktitut, still spoken by the vast majority of the population. (Dorais 2010:336)

There are close connections and family ties between the two territories, but the difference in language retention rates is remarkable. The resilience of the language in neighbouring Nunavik (Northern Quebec) in comparison to Nunatsiavut is a subject that could be expanded upon more than space allows here, but Dorais's observations on the divide and conquer status of the dominant languages in that territory is no doubt a factor, as is the history of education being the domain of the Inuit in Nunavik, in contrast to the situation in Nunatsiavut, where the government has so far not chosen to take control over the school system. (One of the recommendations of the language conference of 2001 was that the LIA should push for control of the education system.)

There is no doubt that Nunavik enjoyed some historical advantages, as well as a continuing geographic isolation of communities that probably safeguards the use of Inuktitut. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement paved the way for the establishment of the Kativik School Board, which initiated the teaching of Inuktitut, French and English in schools. Patrick reports that inclusion of Inuktitut into schools was almost accidental and was a reaction to the plan to offer both English and French. A parent in attendance at a meeting of community and government representatives in Kuujuaq in 1964 asked whether Inuktitut would also be included, and after a few minutes of deliberation, the decision was made to offer all three (Patrick 2003:41). It may be that Inuktitut had a better chance because with French and English both seeking some ground in the system, neither was completely dominant, and Inuktitut was able to find its

place. With a certain amount of autonomy, the board in the 1980s was able to define a territory for the teaching of the language, making Inuktitut the only language used during the first three years of school (Patrick 2003:44).

In Nunavik, Inuktitut speakers have to incorporate two languages of power. Schools are supposed to preserve culture and also prepare students for jobs “outside” or for post-secondary education in Montreal. To accommodate this tall order, after the first three years the language is taught as an academic subject. According to Donna Patrick, only a small number of students excel in the school system and an even smaller number continue their education after school, and this is where the downside of the Nunavik situation takes place. However, there is no question that the presence of the language in the education system is a powerful force: “The prevalence of Inuktitut in Nunavik can be seen most clearly in the schools. During the first three years of school, pupils are taught entirely in Inuktitut; in subsequent years, they receive six to eight hours per week of Inuktitut-language instruction in Inuit language and culture and in physical education classes” (Patrick 2003:159).

The linguistic situation in Nunavik is such that people may have to function in two languages, and possibly three, but their continued proficiency in their native language means that the existence of diglossia does not necessarily put Inuktitut in a lower-status context. By contrast, Inuktitut in Labrador is so little spoken at the present time that it has assumed an ideological status as the representative language of Inuit culture, while identity is maintained, by necessity, through the English language. As we have seen in the work done through Catharyn Andersen’s language survey, Labrador

Inuit place a huge emphasis on the importance of the language, but maintain that it is not absolutely essential for retaining identity. This is problematic, as Patrick explains: “In order to make legitimate claims to power within Canada, based on an inherent right to self-government and a special status under Canadian law, Inuit must remain distinctly “Inuit” and avoid categorization as “assimilated” or “ordinary” Canadians” (Patrick 2003:206). Although clearly people continue to self-identify and be identified as Inuit in both Nunatsiavut and Nunavik, the language situations are far different. Patrick herself says her study does not offer an answer to the question of why Inuktitut persists in Nunavik. An explanation of close-knit social networks and daily interactions is insufficient, as these exist in Nunatsiavut as well.

Dorais discusses a report by some Inuit authors on education in Nunavik:

Even if several Inuit contend that the current decrease in the use of Inuktitut entails a loss of identity, they must realize that language is just one component of identity among many others. What really matters is the social function of the vernacular speech form, not this form by itself. Bluntly stated, if Inuktitut stops being functional in contemporary society, it is useless to preserve it. (Dorais 2010:271)

We can see that language functions differently in Nunavik, although in both places the language does retain prestige. Inuktitut in Nunatsiavut increases in its symbolic function as it becomes scarce. The past decades, however, have witnessed an elevation in the prestige accorded to the language in both territories by both Inuit and non-Inuit, a fact that could partly counteract diglossia. According to Patrick (Patrick 2003), this has occurred because a consensus arose on the hierarchy of values related to linguistic choice. One language (English) was considered more useful in practical situations while the other (Inuktitut) was principally efficient in the maintenance of identity.

As Inuttitut declines, how is this Inuit identity maintained in Nunatsiavut? As we will hear in upcoming chapters through the words of informants, people are able to substitute cultural practices of various kinds for command of the Inuttitut language, but there is a sense in which identity continues to be projected through language, namely English as spoken at the present time. Jennifer Thorburn studied the English spoken in Nain, looking for evidence of transfer from Inuttitut and the existence of “Indigenous English” (IndE) spoken as a first language in many Aboriginal communities. This form of English does not require fluency in the native language (Inuttitut in this case) but may show characteristics of the community’s original first language. Although not much research has been done on attitudes towards majority language in Aboriginal communities, Thorburn makes a case that IndE is significant and that identity can be bound up in that language too: “It builds on the idea that use of IndE can be used by indigenous populations to do identity work, as is the case with the Lumbee of North Carolina, who have no clear-cut ancestral Native American language vestiges evident in the[ir] language” (Thorburn 2014:8). Indigenous English is now recognized as a valid dialect (Thorburn 2006:17), and within this dialect linguistic identity may have found a new place to reside.

Marina Sherkina-Lieber has done research on an important constituency of the Nunatsiavut language community: “receptive bilinguals,” a term that she uses in preference to “passive bilinguals.” This state of language retention is explained as follows: “Receptive bilingualism is especially common in cases when the language in question is a minority language, such as immigrants’ children, as well as the younger

generations in indigenous communities where a majority language has become dominant” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:1). She outlines the process of “heritage language acquisition,” the incomplete acquisition of a first language as a result of a shift to a second language.

Specifically describing northern Labrador, she says:

Residents of Nunatsiavut report that there are many Labrador Inuit who understand speech in Inuttitut, and can even translate from Inuttitut to English, but who do not ever say anything in Inuttitut; typically, they were raised by Inuttitut-speaking parents or grandparents. Such individuals are receptive bilinguals. They are English-Inuttitut bilinguals in speech comprehension, but English monolinguals in speech production. (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:3)

In terms of language acquisition history, Sherkina-Lieber has divided the groups by age, as Catharyn Andersen did in her survey and as I did, coincidentally, with my informants: those born in the 1940s and before are fluent speakers, while those born in the 1950s and 60s are either fluent or high passive bilinguals:

Inuit born before 1950 were educated in Inuttitut and most are fluent. Those born after 1950 were educated in English. Among them, those who were born between 1950 and 1970 constitute the most diverse group in terms of proficiency in Inuttitut, both in Andersen (2009) and in the present study: it includes fluent speakers, receptive bilinguals, and (in Andersen 2009) individuals with low proficiency in Inuttitut. Those born after 1970 mostly have low proficiency in Inuttitut. In the 1940s, a child from an English-monolingual family started school and learned Inuttitut from his classmates. In the 1960s and later, children from Inuttitut-monolingual families started school and lost speaking abilities in Inuttitut because everybody spoke English at school. (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:79)

Many of these people were raised in Inuttitut-speaking homes, so this is technically their first language, though incompletely acquired. Receptive bilinguals are a subset of heritage speakers, practising “unbalanced bilingualism” at the low end of this scale of fluency. (Heritage speakers are those with an incomplete knowledge of the



language, but who speak to at least some degree, unlike receptive bilinguals.) Typically, heritage speakers are not literate in the language, and their vocabulary depends on what was talked about at home in childhood when they were learning. Language attitudes obviously affect language production. (For example, German Jews immigrating to the US during the Nazi regime showed high attrition of German.) Sherkina-Lieber's research, like Catharyn Andersen's, demonstrated that most heritage speakers reported positive attitudes to heritage language; the era of feeling shame at speaking Inuttitut has passed.

Sherkina-Lieber, like many writers on Labrador Inuttitut, is quick to assign blame to exterior forces for the decline in the language, talking about the "assimilationist policies" after World War II, and stating (without source) that after Confederation "White teachers required students to speak only English at school, and punished those who were caught speaking Inuktitut" (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:35). She also recounts that north coast students went to school in North West River where they were a minority, although North West River is now considered an Inuit community, and the other students from the community in attendance at the school were Labrador Inuit Association members and later on beneficiaries of the land claims agreement. (See Chapter Five for a discussion of changing identity amongst the Labrador Inuit.) Sherkina-Lieber goes on to make the point that the most significant changes in retention of Inuttitut actually happened in the 1970s (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:36). In 1971, 91% of Labrador Inuit had Inuttitut as their mother tongue, but by 1981 this number was down to 58.6%. This was the same era (1970s) when efforts began to maintain and revitalize the language, with the Inuttitut immersion option in the schools being pioneered in 1987. Other efforts included some of

those mentioned above, such as an interpreter/translator program, the Rosetta Stone software, and the myriad activities of the OKâlakatiget society. The general picture she gives is that there is certainly some knowledge amongst this group of near-speakers, but that there is as yet no concerted movement towards converting these abilities into a state of fluency. Attitudes towards the language are good but intergenerational transmission is low, so the attributed sense of importance does not lead to action in recovering the language: “Therefore even now, when Labrador Inuit are aware that their language is endangered, not all fluent speakers speak Inuttitut to their children” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:38).

She found that many used some Inuktut, but not always full sentences, and added English constructions to their speech. Some of her informants had spoken fluently in childhood but lost their Inuttitut after being exposed to English and subsequently received negative comments on their attempts to use it, and stopped speaking:

In fact, as children, they were in a difficult situation of not being accepted as speakers of any language. One of them recalls being humiliated at a family gathering: “I must have been six, and I said a wrong word in Inuttitut, and the whole family laughed at me. So I remember saying to myself, ‘I’ll never speak Inuttitut again,’ but then when I went to school, I said the wrong word in English.” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:81)

In a reverse situation, Sherkina-Lieber notices that even non-speakers use some Inuttitut words while speaking English, a phenomenon also noticed by Mazurkewich in 1991. These are usually words for traditional food, clothing and equipment and fish and animal species, which was also reported by several of my informants. Her question as to which language bilinguals choose when speaking to each other seems to receive the answer that this language use is situational; when spiritual or traditional activities are

being undertaken, those with the capacity to do so will probably choose Inuttitut:

“Typically, younger people go on the land with older relatives who speak Inuttitut, and this is where they hear more Inuttitut than in their everyday life in town” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:73). This is reminiscent of Beatrice Hope’s assertion that of all the children in her family, only the one son learned to speak Inuttitut from his parents, because it was the only language used when hunting with his father (Hope 2013). Even this small amount of encouragement is enough to help Sherkina-Lieber conclude that “The present language situation in Labrador is such that at this point, it could develop in both ways. The language shift can be either reversed or completed” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:39).

After examining the present state of Inuttitut, it might be assumed that the chances of it surviving much longer are low, but considering the pressures it has undergone, it is perhaps surprising that it has continued as long as it has. “Most participants said that if Labrador Inuttitut disappeared completely, this would be a terrible, devastating loss. They also expressed that it would make them feel very sad, and it would be ‘shameful’ to lose their language” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:85). Fluent bilinguals regret not speaking it to their children and point to the job opportunities, sense of identity, and power of communication the language now brings. The existence of receptive bilinguals has implications for language revitalization; receptive bilinguals are the last generation to have some competence in the language, but their knowledge is incomplete, which could impede transmission of the correct forms. Additional information on receptive bilingualism is provided in an earlier publication by Alana Johns and Irene Mazurkewich.

They point out some of the difficulties inherent in placing the hope of reviving the language on passive, or receptive, bilinguals:

Within the context of the language courses we offer, we have observed that while a passively bilingual student often starts the course well ahead of the other students who know nothing of the language, he or she often falls behind in later stages of the course, usually when the sentence grammar is introduced. It appears as if having heard and used the language as a child disinclines these students to study it formally (2001:362).

They are not particularly hopeful about these speakers as a source of revitalization:

Once a particular generation of children is raised as passive bilinguals, the language is gone from that family, since children in future generations of that family are unlikely to be raised in Inuttut. For this reason, we view passive bilinguals as the last-chance generation. We may be mistaken.” (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:362)

What can we expect the future of Inuttitut to be? Some people in Nunatsiavut can be considered bilingual, but although bilingualism is usually thought of as a positive language condition, it depends on what kind of bilingualism is in existence. As Muehlmann remarks, “Bilingualism is subtractive when the mother tongue is partly pushed aside by the second language. It is additive when learning another language leads to an enrichment of knowledge that is not detrimental to the mother tongue” (Muehlmann 2007:331).

In Labrador after the mid-twentieth century, the people who kept their language were those who had little hope of participating fully in the prosperity that came along with English in its wake. Inuktitut thrives in smaller communities such as those of Nunavik, and since a large portion of the Labrador Inuit is resident in the larger communities of central Labrador and is made up of people who have no living memory

of Inuttitut in their families, the challenges are indeed great. Grenoble and Whaley point out the unlikely scenario that would be the sole possibility for guaranteed linguistic survival:

The only way of making absolutely sure that a language will survive is to restore complete cultural autonomy. In linguistic terms, cultural autonomy means that, for a given language, there can be maintained or created the existence of a sizable body of speakers who are monolingual in that language and who can go about their normal daily lives in the Aboriginal language without being exposed to or having to use the dominant language. (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:2)

If Inuttitut is not a daily language in Nunatsiavut anymore, has its function changed? As some scholars have pointed out, the desire to revitalize Aboriginal languages is often to provide a symbolic presence rather than a restored sphere of communication. As we will see in subsequent chapters, identity is connected with language in ways that may change according to the level of use:

Inuit identity appears to be as strong in Alaska, Nunaqput, the Kitikmeot region, and Nunatsiavut as it is in those areas (i.e. eastern Nunavut, Nunavik, and Greenland) where a majority of people still speak their Aboriginal language. One may wonder, however, whether this is not an ethnic identity, one based on the social and political relations a native group maintains with the majority society, and whether the more fundamental cultural identity will not grow weaker and weaker for want of its ancestral linguistic support. (Dorais 2010:271)

Language loss and shift are a result of political action and social change. In Nunatsiavut, politics has ensured that, as the power and autonomy of the region grow, the language declines. This is due to the need for English in interaction with those in provincial and federal government positions, as well as to the power held by non-speakers in Nunatsiavut itself. Those who are more educated are less likely to be fluent speakers, while those who hold onto their language are sometimes correspondingly

marginalized. The elderly, the inmates of the correctional centre, and the people who are the descendants of the inhabitants of the relocated communities of Hebron and Nutak are the ones who hold the greatest share of the cultural inheritance and sometimes the smallest share of the benefits in this changing society. While social discrimination has been at work to some degree in Labrador, the patterns that led to language loss are less clear than in those observed in the communities David Harrison studied throughout the world. There were no official state policies to suppress Inuttitut, but the decision to replace the language of instruction with English, along with a number of other social factors, essentially led to the same result. The influence of education on language retention is significant, whether it be positive or negative, and the next chapter will discuss the particular effects on Inuttitut of the Moravian education system and the provincial government system that eventually replaced it.

### CHAPTER THREE: EDUCATION

Education is a transformative force, and this chapter will show how the framework of education, as its form and intentions developed in northern Labrador from the late eighteenth century to the present day, affected the state of Inuttitut and the fluctuations in its usage.

The primary motivation of the Moravian missionaries in setting up schools, whether in the prototype Utopian communities of Bethlehem and Nazareth, both in Pennsylvania, the mission fields of the tropics, or in the far north, was to provide the means for potential converts to read the word of God and participate in worship. To this end, once the missionaries were established in Labrador (after the first abortive attempt at settlement by Johann Christian Erhardt in 1752), they opened schools almost immediately. From this beginning they would go on to bring literacy and learning to generations of Inuit. That they valued education highly is evident in this early report from Okak:

We have experienced peculiar blessings on all solemn occasions; at the enjoyment of the Lord's Supper, at festival seasons; in the meetings of the baptized and candidates, and in the schools for the children. Though the latter are rather slow in learning, their love for it gives us pleasure, and encourages us to hope for the best. The main hindrance to their retaining better what they have heard and learned, is the roving life of the Eskimo, which being necessary for providing their maintenance, we cannot prevent. But our Saviour is so gracious, that He always awakens them anew; which gives us courage and excites us to diligence and patience, and to constant prayer in their behalf. (*Periodical Accounts Okak* 1802:112)

Much of the information we have on the educational practices of the Moravians comes from the *Periodical Accounts*. These were letters and diaries translated at the time

of writing from German to English and providing the voice of the mission to the English-speaking world. The accounts were first produced in 1790 and were edited by the Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel. In German, the diaries were first circulated as community news in handwritten form. These were later continued in English under the title of *Moravian Missions*, and they continued to provide news of the mission activities in an edited form until 1970. Some of the originals, as well as microfilm copies, are housed at Memorial University's Centre for Newfoundland Studies.

These words, preserved over the centuries through the archival diligence of the Moravian missionaries in Labrador and Europe, show us that the blessings they counted in their work included the education of children as much as the sacraments of baptism and communion. Hans Rollmann assessed this emphasis on education as a vital factor in the development of the mission's place in the lives of the Inuit: "Education and literacy were perhaps the most important factors in the indigenization of the Moravian faith among the Labrador Inuit" (Rollmann 2008a: 228).

This veneration for learning, and its long-term effects on the Inuit up to the present day in Labrador, are part of the background of language shift, as education played pivotal roles in both the maintenance and loss of Inuttitut. This chapter will outline the process of this influential Moravian education and its eventual decline in northern Labrador.

### **Background of Moravian Education**

The Moravian missionaries arrived in Labrador with a fully-formed perspective on pedagogy, which was an inheritance from the people who had shaped their religious



beliefs over the course of centuries, and they continued to pass this on. The diligence with which they educated their own people in the eighteenth century was reflected in the approach they took in the mission fields, continuing into the next century (Schutt 2012:28).

In the revived form of the faith in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, who was responsible for the revival and expansion of the old Bohemian and Moravian *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of the Brethren) when he gave refuge and encouragement to a group of Moravians on his estate in Saxony (Haller 1953:4), the Moravian church took a stance that saw piety as the dominant virtue with education as its handmaiden, setting the tone for a belief system that was about heart rather than head (Mettele 2010). At the same time, Zinzendorf's perspective should not be construed as one that rejected learning. We know that the Moravians valued art, music and writing and that their approaches to education produced fine thinkers, and, for our purposes, an emphasis on literacy that was to leave a permanent imprint on Inuit society.

An emotional approach to the individual's relationship with the Saviour, most noticeable during the eighteenth century's "Sifting Time," and particularly under the leadership of Zinzendorf's son Rhenatus, was tempered somewhat by the elder Zinzendorf and was more specifically advised against in the case of the Labrador Inuit by Spangenberg, but its effects were retained in some aspects of education (Rollmann 2009). Mabel Haller, whose work *Early Moravian Education in Pennsylvania* (Haller 1953) provides much insight into the thinking behind Moravian educational practices, extensively describes the ideals that formed the basis of Moravian living and teaching in

Pennsylvania and in the mission schools in Aboriginal communities that followed soon after. She outlines Zinzendorf's idea, which was essentially to establish Moravian settlements where the distractions of the world would be shut out, giving the community members freedom to foster a strongly spiritual life (Haller 1953:5).

Haller gives us an idea of Moravian concepts of education in her description of the theological seminary at Nazareth Hall in Pennsylvania in 1807:

Its broad curriculum was characteristic of the Moravian scheme of education, which generally held that professional study should be approached by the avenue of liberal studies, and it was based on what had been the conviction of the Moravian Church for centuries, that learning without religion in ministers of the Gospel is a menace to the Church and her sacred function, and that religion without learning exposes the ministry to the imposition of error and false teachings. (Haller 1953:78)

Haller relates that in contrast to the educational theories of some groups at the time, children were treated with kindness and respect in the Moravian schools, with the understanding that a happy rapport between teacher and pupil was of paramount importance; a telling example was the regulation that decreed that disputes between teacher and student should be regulated by a third party. As noted, another aspect of the Moravian faith affecting their educational approach was their early devotion to art and music. Their feeling was that music, especially, allowed believers to connect to the Holy Spirit through the heart, avoiding the dangers and pitfalls of channelling faith through the mind. They rejected the notion of reason and intellect divorced from piety that characterized the eighteenth century in Europe, and retained their attachment to seeing the Christian life as one of simplicity and child-like faith.

This approach probably affected their view on the Labrador Inuit as well as other Aboriginal groups. Right up to the writing of Rev. F.W. Peacock in the twentieth century we see an affectionate but patronising tone adopted in speaking of “our Eskimos”; this may have been tied to the idea of the “noble savages” as childlike humans, possessing an extra grace in the sight of God because of their hold on that enviable state of infancy and innocence. This idea, which is most frequently connected with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is a feature of colonial encounters of the time and has been examined by folklorist Regina Bendix in relation to the quest for “authenticity” pursued by travellers at that time. (Bendix 1993:68)

The Moravians’ insistence on retaining the native language and avoiding outside influences was brought about in part by the appreciation of this desirable state of seeing the world eternally through the eyes of a child, with a child’s energy and curiosity. According to Gisela Mettele (2010), the Moravians equally valued the “emotional” nature of women, feeling that this feminine faculty allowed them to be closer to Jesus. More prosaically, they also placed emphasis on the need for the education of girls and women, and were far more advanced in this respect than other denominations at the time, particularly regarding curriculum, which was identical for boys and girls (Haller 1953:356). The actual power of women in the church did recede somewhat after Zinzendorf’s death in 1760, but the attitude that saw missionary couples as partners in the work gave credit to the efforts of the wives as well, and led to the practice of delegating the education of missionaries’ children in Labrador to a collective home and to boarding school education in Europe.

The Moravians centred their lives and educational practices on the existence and practices of faith, though with attention to the importance of learning in the development of children's understanding of this faith. As Heikki Lempa explains, Moravian educators in this era felt that learning should be hands-on, practical and enjoyable (Lempa 2010:269), and from that philosophy grew a world-wide system of missions and educational establishments.

The view of the human self Zinzendorf adhered to was one that was strongly opposed to the Enlightenment ideals of intellectual emancipation and responsible self-determination that influenced other educational approaches (Vogt 2010:108). Most importantly, the Moravians felt that education should not be restricted to certain social or political groups. Although evangelization led them to the far corners of the world, education was needed to realize this vision.

### **Establishment of Schools in Labrador**

Formal schooling was begun in Nain and Okak in the winter of 1780-81, with classes being held from Monday to Friday, in the morning for girls and in the afternoon for boys. Students were taught reading, writing, the Bible and the catechism, and before long the two classes were combined to make learning a little more "lively." Generally speaking, school was held for children aged five to fourteen, though women sometimes continued until they married (Rollmann 2008a:230). The curriculum offered was meant to provide basic literacy skills, but also included numeracy, and eventually geography, and practical skills. Music, and hymns in particular, were present early on as teaching materials. From the time the Moravians set up their first schools in the 1700s until

Confederation with Canada, Labrador Inuit were given an education that was intended to enlarge their spiritual life, but not for the most part to change the circumstances in which they lived. Further to this goal, a hallmark of Moravian education was the retention of the native language in the places where schools were established, to maintain the traditional life of the Inuit but also in order to avoid the pernicious influence of traders and travellers from the worldly and unprincipled territories away from the mission stations. This was the case not only in Labrador, as Schutt has shown:

Moravian missionaries expended much effort in keeping undesirable people of European heritage off mission stations because missionaries saw such people as corrupting indigenous peoples through the proliferation of bad vices, or through the encouragement to engage in immoral behaviour such as fornication. (Schutt 2012:15)

The *Periodical Accounts* provide many narratives concerning the educational experiences of the Inuit. Throughout the centuries of education, this push and pull between the calling of their religious and practical lives shaped the way the people would learn and the forms of schooling they received. We see from the following early account that a practical approach had to be maintained, as it was necessary for the Inuit to leave the mission stations to conduct their hunting and fishing practices:

Towards the end of November, the schools of the children were begun again by the Brethren Morhardt and Schmidt, and were kept without much interruption throughout the whole winter. They were taught to read the scriptures and to sing hymns, and were diligent in learning texts and verses by heart. There are some hopeful young people among them, but we regret that in spring they must follow their parents to the hunting-places, as they are too apt, during the summer, to forget what they have learnt in winter. We constantly exhort them not only to keep in their heads what they hear and learn concerning the things of God, but to let it sink deep into their hearts that they may know and love him. We return our best thanks to the Society for the school-books they have had printed for us in the Eskimo language. (*Periodical Accounts* Okak 1800:467)

A review of the history of schools in northern Labrador shows us that the mission stations continued to be established steadily, with communities, and therefore schools, extending the length of the coast. These communities flourished for varying amounts of time, though the northern ones were eventually closed due to financial problems and in one case to the effects of the Spanish Influenza, which reduced the population and led people to relocate to communities that seemed more sustainable. (Zoar closed in 1894, Ramah in 1908, Okak in 1919, Killinek in 1924 and Hebron in 1959.)

Schools were present in each community and therefore offered education to most of the population, but reflected the resources and training of the personnel who taught, most of whom were not teachers by profession. Patrick Flanagan describes the pre-Confederation era of education somewhat dismissively as largely religious and bearing little resemblance to “modern practices of education” (Flanagan 1984:51).

Some accounts of school life in *Them Days Magazine* report that the students were divided into age groups for instruction (“top class” and “small class” were the expressions used for this grouping), but they were not passed from one grade to the next as became customary later on. Progress was marked by annual exams and marks were given in twentieth-century classrooms, but the kind of age-graded system we see now was not the norm. Teaching was not intended to prepare them for any life other than that which they already knew and were expected to continue, and it was understood that the amount of time students were likely to spend in school would depend on the variables of the hunting and fishing seasons and the individual family’s need for the assistance of their children in the harvesting enterprise. Women, however, as mentioned, sometimes

attended school until they married (Rollmann 2008a:230). This style of instruction is reminiscent of the “folk schools” of Denmark and other places, and also existed in Newfoundland schools of the 1930s and 1940s. These were non-denominational schools set up under the Commission of Government’s land settlement programs and focussed on practical skills such as carpentry and gardening as well as academic subjects (Higgins 2007).

### **Teaching by Inuit**

Inuit themselves took on some of the responsibility for educating their families and friends, as will be discussed extensively in the upcoming chapter on literacy. As well as the well-known “native teachers” such as Nathanael Illiniartitsijok and his wife Friedericke, a woman named Theresa taught the Inuit of southern Labrador, as seen in this extract from the Hopedale Diary of 1850-51:

A small vessel, coming from Newfoundland, touched at port. Her owner, Mr. Norman, an English trader, called on us, and showed himself a well-informed and friendly man, and well acquainted with the country. He had on board several Esquimaux from Eivektok, or Great Water Bay, whose eagerness after books was quite surprising to us. According to their statements, eight families are residing at Eivektok, among whom a woman called Theresa, a former resident of Hopedale, acts as teacher. She teaches not only the children to read, but also the adults, and sings hymns sometimes with them; wherefore they are very eager in their inquires after hymnbooks, with which, however, we were unable to supply them, being ourselves in want of some. (*Periodical Accounts* Hopedale 1851:286)

Correspondence was carried on between the Hopedale missionaries and the residents of Snooks’ Cove, near Rigolet, in the 1870s. This independent learning is reflected in several other accounts, and it was clearly of great satisfaction to the missionaries to see their efforts replicated by the people:

During the long winter-nights, and when at a distance from the settlements, at their hunting-places, their most agreeable occupation is to read those parts of the Scriptures together, which, by the generous aid of the British and Foreign Bible Society, have been printed for them. As there are some who have not acquired this proficiency, having become converts at a more advanced period of life, the children or young people read aloud, while the rest are quietly mending their tackle, or sitting down and doing their work. (*Periodical Accounts* Hopedale 1823:238)

In view of this diligence, it was a natural step to enlist local help to increase the amount of instruction that could be carried out, especially since the missionaries were themselves still students of the language.

Additionally, there was a long record of Inuit teaching music to newly recruited brass band members, and of course assisting the missionaries themselves in learning the Inuttitut language. The significant policy of hiring native teachers began in the 1860s, following a successful model in Greenland, with the instructors being chosen from the group of chapel servants already making contributions to the life of the church (Rollmann 2008a:231). This model continued until Confederation with Canada in 1949, when the provincial government refused to continue to pay the wages of “native helpers” (Flanagan 1984: 32). These assistants have been recorded for posterity in the Accounts, for their help not only in teaching but in providing help in translating the Scriptures, which were used as textbooks in the schools. Letters from the missionaries provided the following account of an assistant aboard the Mission’s schooner:

Last year, although already in his 69th year, he conveyed Br. and Sr. Bubser from Hebron to Hopedale. In former years he rendered valuable service in teaching the language, and in assisting in music. (*Periodical Accounts* Nain 1854:233)

There were some difficulties in accomplishing this form of training:



Our training-school for National Assistants, I am sorry to say, has given me but little pleasure. Of my five pupils, two have ceased to attend the instructions, one having fallen into gross sin; a third died very happily; he was the most promising scholar of them all. There are, therefore, only two left, and we have not yet been able to find any additional candidates. (*Periodical Accounts* Okak 1852:396)

Brigitte Schloss reports on this topic from Nain, outlining some of the difficulties involved:

The missionaries were teaching the children, but every effort was made to train young boys as helpers and assistants. In 1863, a boy in the senior class helped teach the juniors. Six years later an assistant was tried in the beginners' class. Evening classes were taught for these assistants, but they were beset with many difficulties. Frequently sickness would prevent the training classes, because the missionaries also did all the medical work. Then, when the boys had been out hunting all day, they would fall asleep as soon as they came into a warm, comfortable room. Besides that, it was difficult to get many interested in teaching. To live was to hunt and to think of spending one's days in a classroom seemed strange indeed to the majority. Yet one tried it and stayed for fifty years—this was Nathanael, who adopted the surname "Illiniartitsijok," that is, "the teacher" a well-earned name. His wife, Frederike taught for thirty years also. (Schloss 1964:9)

Schloss also reports on seminaries for helpers held in 1909 and 1910, which sixteen men attended. These were led by Bishop Martin, and both the Inuttitut text of his lectures and a group photo of a class survive. She goes on to mention that getting local helpers was sometimes difficult because of the Inuit's semi-nomadic way of life, where entire families travelled away to fishing camps, but points out their particular skills in translation of the Bible. They were considered authorities and no translation would be approved for printing until they had read it (Schloss 1964:5).

Many accounts of local teachers can be found in *Them Days*, including this one from Kitora Boas, who describes her education in the early twentieth century:

In the winter all the people would stay at Okak. We went to school when we were there, which was in the church. There were three different groups of us; the minister would teach the oldest group, the middle group was taught by Benjamin, an Inuk, and the youngest ones were taught by the women. There were no Kablunak teachers then, only the minister. We were taught in German then, not English. We heard German all the time, German and Inuktitut. We were taught to count in German, not one-two-three like today. (Boas 1986:49)

Labrador Inuktitut retains a number of words that are derived from German, corresponding to concepts that were introduced by the missionaries. These include the counting system and words for telling time, among others (Bassler 1991:144).

Up and down the coast, we see the spreading influence of the educational activity:

Three women from Saeglek have learnt to read in the course of the winter. Thus there are always some, who, when they return to their relatives, are able to read the scriptures to them. When they attend school, I am in the habit of questioning them about what they have read; and though their answers are sometimes very peculiar, I consider it of importance, to let them first think for themselves, and afterwards to rectify their notions. (*Periodical Accounts* Hebron 1853:398)

The *Periodical Accounts* also show us that the self-education continued over time as well as space, from the Hebron account of 1833 and from the following one written more than a century later in the same community:

Our schools have gone on prosperously, and the examination of our thirty scholars proved very encouraging to all present. As soon as a boy is able to manage a kayak, he ordinarily leaves the school, and loses all inclination for learning. It is, therefore, the more necessary to attend to the children, and they are so eager that they stand, even in the most intense cold, waiting for the school-bell to ring, and show the greatest willingness to learn. They, therefore, make good progress. Sometimes, the extreme severity of the weather causes an interruption; as the school-room cannot be warmed, and the books not unfrequently fall out of the children's hands, in consequence of their being benumbed. Some of the parents cannot read; to the children of such, therefore, we pay particular attention, that the latter may read the New Testament to them in their dwellings. This

practice is particularly attended to in the out-places, and, to promote it, we give written directions. (*Periodical Accounts* Hebron 1833:452)

The following twentieth-century account echoes the theme of self-education:

Our day school was carried on from January till Ascension last year, as there were a number of families living here. [Ascension Day, always a Thursday and the fortieth day of Easter. In 1942 it fell on May 14.] Twenty-five children attended. Some families who went away left their children with relatives, so that they could attend. The children are not easily discouraged by bad weather; often when they cannot manage by themselves to weather the storm they arrive on the backs of their parents or elder sisters or brothers. Some of the children of school age live in the southern part of the district and have no chance of schooling; so we wrote out some exercises for them, and sent them the books and pencils, so that they would get a little chance to learn to read and write at least. So now we carry on a sort of correspondence class; we inspect work on our visits, or the parents send the books back for more work, when the chance offers. It seems the only way at present of giving them a start, and preventing them from growing up totally illiterate. We are glad to say that the parents co-operate well and do all they can to help and encourage the children. (*Periodical Accounts* Hebron 1943:42)

This must have been of great satisfaction to the missionaries, although some were seen to deplore the tendency of Inuit to forget their learning when away in the camps, expressing the hope that they might read in the off-season, but fearing that they did not. One wonders if the insistence on rote learning, which was to prove so useful later in the Inuit's memorization of the confirmation service, for example, came about in order to ensure that the Inuit had a ready-made stock of Biblical content in their minds, in case they should be unable to transport the several volumes of the Bible to their customary fishing places.

After the German Bishop Reichel visited Labrador in 1861, he shifted Moravian policy to emphasize the employment of Aboriginal teachers with better pay and training.

The aim of this was to give them more power to the Inuit to develop an indigenous church so that the mission would eventually be dispensable (Rollmann 2010:21).

### **Moravian Curriculum**

The kind of education the students could expect to receive in Labrador Inuit schools probably changed relatively little over the centuries. The Moravians were not a group that planned a classical education for their converts, as did the Roman Catholics and the Scottish Free Church (Jensz 2011:12); in fact they probably rarely possessed such learning themselves, except perhaps for the medically-trained. Theirs was a faith of action and hard work, and every missionary was expected to be master of a trade that would help to support the mission. Given this training, it is not surprising that the emphasis was on reading the Bible and learning useful skills. Vaino Tanner mentions that the Inuit were taught what he termed “sloyd,” a pedagogical method based on learning practical skills, especially woodworking (Tanner 1947:782). In the twentieth century there was a great deal of emphasis on sewing, embroidery and knitting, and a reference to carving soapstone.

Even in the 1940s, just prior to the enormous changes that were about to come to Labrador, it is evident from the diary of teacher Kate Hettasch that the focus was still on Bible study, music and arithmetic, as well as vigorous cleaning. She was clearly opposed to the new direction of education; indeed, Ben-Dor quotes her as saying that after the change to the Newfoundland curriculum, “the soul went out of the work” (Ben-Dor 1966:190).

In a more academic realm, the missionaries mention the children's love for books, which were read to them and are presented as a treat. In the *Periodical Accounts* we see that numeracy presented much greater challenges and was less enjoyed. Many references are made to using maps and globes, which seemed to invite great interest in the outside world. Of particular interest was the request from one of the missionaries for friends in Europe to provide samples of coral, silkworms and other items to display to the children to make the lessons more engaging. There was also considerable interest in learning how to write (a skill taught separately at the time, according to Schutt). The missionaries discuss this:

The schools have been diligently attended, and, we believe, with profit to the scholars. Many of them, especially among the men, show a great desire to learn to write. Some have proceeded so far, though with but little instruction, as to be able to write a pretty [meaning attractive] legible hand; and a few have even copied out collections of hymns. These are subjects which excite our hearts to praise and thanksgiving. (*Periodical Accounts* Hopedale 1804:321)

### **Curriculum of Bishop Martin**

Documents located in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, located and translated by Hans Rollmann, provide detailed information on the curriculum used in the Labrador schools. Bishop Carl Albert Martin provided an outline and resources for teachers. Martin, who produced this curriculum guide in handwriting in 1901, was a mission bishop who had learned Greenlandic in anticipation of serving in the mission field in Greenland. Martin's notes on the proposed curriculum give us a good idea of what was taught and how the lesson plans were arranged. School took place in the mornings only, and the student population was divided into three classes, though Martin

provided for the possibility that only two classes might exist in any given school population. His outline provides class schedules for Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The subjects offered were writing, counting, Biblical history, catechism, reading and singing, and for each of these he recommends texts which include the *52 x 2 Bible Stories*, the geography textbook produced in 1880 by Elsner, and the book entitled *A-B-PAT* that continued to be a source for both formal and informal instruction in Labrador well into the twentieth century. In 2014 it was still to be found on the shelves of the Inuttitut Curriculum Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Martin's directions make it clear that teachers were to be aware that students differed in abilities but that it was important that no student remain too long in the lower class. The structure specified that two years in each of the lower classes was recommended with three years being assigned to the top class, giving a total of seven years for instruction, ideally. This explains the terminology of informants who recalled being in "top class," for example, rather than in a specific grade. Several mentioned that there were no grades when they attended school, but they did recognize a form of promotion when they were placed in the top class, meaning with the older children.

Martin also gave some reflections on education for the guidance of new teachers, and these are informative. He emphasized that he did not intend to give particular instructions for rigid teaching, as some brethren would be entering the teaching field with an innate ability to do so, while others would have less inclination and experience. For those new and younger teachers he set out a very specific suggestion for training in reading, which would involve reading a Bible story aloud, breaking it down into parts,

and having the students re-read the story. This would be followed with a practical application of the lesson learned in the Bible story. In this way he felt that the students might learn only a few Bible stories but that they would learn them in such a way that they would be meaningful rather than consisting of a set of mechanically learned paragraphs. The use of the hymn books was also encouraged, which is not surprising in view of the Moravian attachment to the power of music (Martin 1901).

He also suggested that teachers should make arithmetic more accessible to children by using applied problems, as Hans Rollmann describes:

Martin instructed his teachers “to let children count not merely with numbers but pose so-called applied problems. For example, instead of the simple addition problem  $4+5+6=15$ , [use] the following: ‘Into the bay there come 3 sledges, the first is pulled by 4, the second by 5, and the third by 6 dogs. How many dogs are coming?’ ” “It is my experience,” Martin reflected, “that Inuit children pay more attention to such problems and thus will count faster than if one only operated with numbers.” (Rollmann 2008a: 231)

Essentially the Moravian plan for learning by the beginning of the twentieth century was probably much the same as it had been since its inception over a century before. The resources were limited in terms of texts available, but within this structure of offering education through the Bible, catechism, grammar and geography, we see a teaching approach that emphasized learning by progressive steps, building on previous knowledge, and valuing a few lessons well-learned rather than a larger quantity insufficiently understood.

## Settler Education

Jim Voisey went to the Makkovik boarding school in 1928 and described the curriculum of the time in an article in *Them Days*:

They taught us how to read and write. There was history and stuff like that. Bible stories, there was a lot of that, more Old Testament than New Testament. American history about how Columbus came across the ocean. We had books. (Voisey 1977:9)

Voisey was a member of a population in Labrador that held a secondary educational importance for the missionaries, not being part of the idealized congregation of children of God whom they had come to serve and influence. These were the Settlers, descendants of men who came from European countries and married Inuit women, giving rise to a population of mixed-race Labradorians who lived a similar lifestyle to the Inuit but who saw themselves until recently as a distinct segment of the population.

The designation of “Settler” is one no longer used in Labrador, as people who formerly were thus known by the missionaries are beneficiaries of the Nunatsiavut land claims process and now call themselves “Kablunângajuit” or simply “Inuit.” The transformation of identity in northern Labrador will be more fully discussed in Chapter Five. John Kennedy has written extensively about identity politics in Labrador, including in the 2014 volume *History and Renewal of Labrador’s Inuit-Metis*, and his work amongst that of others will show how identity is constructed at the present time.

The decision to extend the benefits of education to the Settler population was not made until a considerable time after the schools for Inuit had been well-established. The first such instance, in 1879, was at the home of Torsten Andersen in Flounders Bight, where the community of Makkovik would eventually be established (Rollmann



2008a:231). This experiment continued when a school building was established at Hopedale the next year and children from Makkovik and Hopedale were taught by the Hopedale missionary in English in the summer months (Rollmann 2008a:231).

Serving this group was not the initial intention or mandate of the Moravian mission; Zeisberger in 1794 spoke bluntly about a doctor who wished to enrol his children in a Moravian school at the Fairfield (Upper Canada, now Ontario) mission station: “We cut short his hopes. We told him that we do not teach whites nor were we here for their benefit. It was our mission policy not to accept white people” (Jensz 2011:14). Of course in practice they were often accepted, but the policy explains why the Moravians had to do some soul-searching before deciding to include the Settlers in their educational plans.

This integration finally happened in Hopedale in 1880 at the first boarding school, which was taught in English. Settler children were also entitled to free Inuit education if they chose to attend those schools. Hans Rollmann has written about the integration of the Settler population into the Moravian church family beginning in the 1850s, when it became apparent that the Inuit spouses of Settler men felt very distressed about the separation they were forced to endure from the religious life of their youth. Settler men born in England had usually been baptized in one of the Protestant churches and had concerns about their unbaptized children. These circumstances led the Moravians to review their policy of ministering only to the Inuit, and thus led eventually to taking on the responsibility of education for these families as well (Rollmann 2014).

Part of the reason for their original reluctance was that the Settlers were more difficult to control and influence. As Dianne Grant wrote:

Settlers were less restricted by the Moravians as they typically lived away from the stations and were neither as devoted nor indebted to the mission as Inuit were. That may have inspired the Moravians to maintain the pronounced ethnic and linguistic divisions that were reminiscent of both groups' schooling experience up until 1949, when the province of Newfoundland joined the Canadian confederation. (Grant 2003:54)

Of course the division was also influenced by the Settlers, who requested an English education for their children. These two populations, in spite of their shared ancestry and common lifestyles, lived quite separate lives until society altered due to a number of rapid changes following World War II. Although the Settler acceptance into the church and the ensuing education provided to them came about as a result of the Settlers' requests (Rollmann 2014), their practice of living in family groups in the bays outside the communities maintained the division between the two groups. Anne Brantenberg (A. Brantenberg 1977:354) notes that the Inuit saw connections between schooling and the religious mission, and associated the schools with prestige, whereas Settlers, especially in later days, saw the opportunity for employment as a reason for gaining education. They also valued independence and self-reliance, qualities derived from the Protestant teachings of good works over observance and family loyalty above group unity, which made them less likely to accept the edicts of the mission (Ben-Dor 1966:138).

As time went on the missionaries became aware of the need for expansion of their mission field, not least because of the plight in which their flock might be found due to their association with the Settlers:

On the following day we visited another Settler, who, however, appeared quite indifferent regarding our Saviour and the welfare of his soul. His wife is an unbaptized Esquimaux woman. She was thankful for our visit, and expressed her desire to turn to the Lord, and be baptized. With but little assistance, she has learned to read. Some of our Esquimaux, when in the neighbourhood, have given her a little instruction. She earnestly begged for another visit. (*Periodical Accounts* Nain n.d.:165)

A Settler school was established at Hopedale in 1880 (Rollmann 2008a: 231), but this new institution presented challenges both for the missionaries and for the parents. Paying for lodging and tuition, even at the very low rates charged, would have been a struggle in a mainly cashless economy, especially for people with large families. Over the years there are frequent references to some families opting out of education for reasons either of straitened financial circumstances or of lower regard for the institution of education. This appears in the following account:

We had hoped to hold English school for the Settler children this year, and had made arrangements for the same; but, owing to a poor fishery last summer and a positive blank in the fur catch this winter, none of the Settlers felt in a position to incise [sic] the extra expense attached to sending the children to school. The Settler children are much worse off in this respect than the Eskimoes who live at the station. Unless their parents give them instruction, and teach them to read and write, they have very little chance. We hope, however, to make a beginning with them next winter. (*Periodical Accounts* Nain 1908:250)

The issue of expense, not one that was a concern for the Inuit students, also appears in Flanagan's 1984 description of Settler schooling in Nain. (Inuttitut education was provided for free if the Settlers chose that route, but some wanted an English education for their children.) In 1917 a separate school for Settlers was established where children were taught in English, and were cared for by the wife of a Settler chapel servant while their parents stayed in the bays. The missionaries complained that the Settlers did not

understand the importance of education for their children, but also noted that the cost was an issue, as was the loss of their children's labour. (*Periodical Accounts Makkovik*

1921:53) This was noted at an earlier time in Makkovik as well:

The payment of sixpence per day for board and schooling for each child mounts up to a considerable sum for a poor man who has several at school, hence we find that a term of four weeks in the year is the outside limit that we can hope to attain for this institution. The parents have to pay for school-materials, but this year through the kindness of friends I have been able to supply them gratis, for which they are very thankful. The number of Settlers has now increased to one hundred and forty persons. (*Periodical Accounts Makkovik 1881:117*)

The same financial situation was observed much later in the same community:

The great poverty throughout the country made the parents wish to take their children home, for hardly one father will be able to pay even the small school fee. Most of the boarders had left before and at Easter, very few stayed on for some more weeks, and finally only the village children attended lessons until the end of June. (*Periodical Accounts Makkovik 1932:94*)

In spite of these challenges, the education of the Settler people became the mission's assumed responsibility. In 1918/19 a boarding school in Makkovik taught in English opened (with both Inuit and Settler children attending), following on earlier instruction by Jannasch in the 1890s, and the English school in Nain was closed for a period of time, though not all Settler families sent their children to Makkovik initially. As Schloss reports on the Nain school:

But, if the parents didn't see the need for schooling for their children, the missionaries did. Eskimo children, when away from the station were taught by their parents, the Settlers remained illiterate. Great efforts were now being made to give at least some instruction to these children, who had to be taught in a class by themselves because of the language. The first such class is mentioned in 1905. (Schloss 1964:11)

Makkovik was the most distinctly “Settler” community until the mid-twentieth century, as its later increase in the Inuit population was the result of the relocations in the 1950s from Hebron and Nutak. (Its dual cultural character was evident from an early date, as Hans Rollmann demonstrates in his description of the first Christmas service held in the community, which was conducted in both languages. Rollmann 2000)

Diamond Jenness demonstrates that the school reflected this reality:

By that time the Makkovik Eskimos had become much more Europeanized than those farther north; they were more familiar with the English language and ate more European foods; and like the Settlers, they relied on cod-fishing more than upon hunting and trapping. The new mission, therefore, recognized no distinction between white and Eskimo, but taught children of both races in the same classroom, using English as their medium of instruction; and they boarded twenty children in the mission house during the winter months when their parents were trapping in the woods. At all other missions, however, the Moravians welcomed both races alike at church services, but taught the children in separate classes, the Settlers’ children in English and the Eskimos in their own tongue. (Jenness 1965: 40)

### **Boarding Schools**

Residential schools for Aboriginal children and for other minority groups in Canada have been reported on very extensively in recent years. The national apology and compensation provided by the federal government in 2008 did not extend to the Labrador schools, as boarding schools in the region were run by the Moravian Mission and the Grenfell Mission and were not federal institutions, and their establishment pre-dated Confederation. A class action lawsuit is before the courts at present, brought forward by some former students and the children of others (“Labrador Residential School” 2010). This question requires research outside the scope of this thesis, but needs to be addressed here to some extent to provide a background to educational practices and their influence

on language shift. The narratives collected from informants and accounts printed in *Them Days Magazine* and other publications give some insight into what daily life was like. For some, boarding school was where people met lifelong friends; for others, particularly very young children who often came as orphans or from homes where they could no longer be cared for, it was a place of loneliness and deprivation. These contrasting narratives, amongst others, are examined in Chapter Six.

Because of the location of the Settlers' permanent residences in the bays outside the northern mission stations, day schools were for the most part impractical. The Inuit portion of the school population lived on the stations for part of the year, but these students were gone for substantial periods of time for fishing or the harvesting of seals. The idea of self-teaching was encouraging to the Moravians, but at the same time they were well aware that not all of their flock were hastening to the fishing places with Bibles in hand. They therefore decided that the best action they could take both for the academic and "moral" education of the children was to keep them close by as much as possible through the institution of the boarding school. The boarding schools had more than educational utility; they were a practical solution for families, either Inuit or Settler, who had to travel away from the communities to earn a living. In addition, the schools served the role of orphanages for those children left parentless by the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918.

The system was seen as a practical response and its arrangements varied according to the lifestyle requirements of the Inuit. For example, by 1909 the number of

students had dropped, and the school year was shorter, with families staying longer to try to get more food at the sealing places. As Schloss reports on the Nain situation:

These economically hard years [early 1900s] had forced the Eskimos to revert to a more nomadic life again, and it obliged the missionaries to find a new solution to the schooling problem for the children who were left. In 1920 Nathanael and Frederike Illiniartitsijok, the trusted school teachers, agreed to look after any school children whose parents were willing to leave them in their care during the hunting season. Twenty-nine children attended and besides the usual subjects they were also taught the rudiments of English. (Schloss 1964:15)

Boarding school was seen as desirable for the Inuit as well as the Settlers, even though the former often lived on the stations close enough to attend services and day school. The *Periodical Accounts* of 1928 indicate that the missionaries saw a need for a boarding school for Inuit in Nain because when Inuit parents were away they did not always teach the children. Ed Lyall commented on this strategy as well: “They couldn’t always get the Inuit to go to school” (Interview E. Lyall 2003). The missionaries were realistic enough to predict that it would be difficult: “Yet when it comes to having to part with their children for a while, I fear there will be quite a few rocks ahead...” (Flanagan 1984: 55). The English-language school was begun in Nain for the children of the Settlers in the early part of the century and was then closed when the Makkovik school opened (Flanagan 1984:29). Students who were considered Settlers were sent to that one until the MacMillan school in Nain allowed them to attend closer to home. Patrick Flanagan has laid out the stages of Moravian boarding school education in Nain:

1929-1938: Moravian boarding school was established so Inuit children could stay in school while their parents went hunting. [This became a necessity when the Hudson Bay Company took over trade in Labrador and purchased only fur, which meant that trappers had to go deeper into the

country and had to leave the children behind if they were to be educated.] English classes for Settler students were initiated in 1931.

1938-1942: Full-time boarding school established in Nain where students stayed whether their parents were in the village or not, looked after by missionaries and local helpers.

1942-1950: During the years of Rev. F.W. Peacock, students were sent outside to school, chosen and subsidized by Moravians. Students stayed full-time at the boarding school. (Flanagan 1984:30)

The school in Nain continued to take some boarders on an ad-hoc basis until 1971 (Peacock 1981:176) as the necessity for this arrangement continued for some families.

Much has been written on the advantages and disadvantages of boarding school education, which provided learning but at the cost of removing children from their homes at a young age. Some of the motivation was practical and the parents were partners in providing for their children's welfare, bringing food and firewood. Parents were often in favour of sending children to the boarding school as a practical response to both the need to go away to hunt or fish, as well as to have the children cared for during difficult economic times (Flanagan 1984:57).

Schloss provides more detail on this history, beginning with the decision to establish a boarding school in Nain. In 1930 two important events contributed to education, when Commander Donald MacMillan gave Nain a schoolhouse (Flanagan 1984:55), and Kate Hettasch came to teach in it. As Schloss describes, "The school year was to last from the end of one fishing season to the beginning of the next. Children received religious instruction, were taught the 3 Rs, singing, drawing, knitting and sewing, and helped the teacher learn Eskimo" (Schloss 1964:17). By 1942, there were sixty-two boarders and seven day scholars, and the older girls helped with teaching and looking after children in the boarding school.



Miriam MacMillan, wife of Donald MacMillan, who travelled extensively with her husband, wrote about her visit to the school in Nain in her memoir. In the chapter entitled “An Eskimo School,” she recounts her husband’s motivation:

With civilization working in on the coast, Mac had told me, he felt the children needed an education and clean and healthy living. And he admired the work of the Moravians and wanted to help them in their care of the young ones of northern Labrador. So he built this school.  
(MacMillan 1948:60)

Miriam goes on to describe all the items brought to set up the school, including a generator, desks, chairs, blankets and sleeping bags. Patrick Flanagan describes the items as being “left over from MacMillan’s expeditions” but Miriam sees the equipping of the school as more intentional. She also describes all the work done at the school, including the extensive cleaning mentioned so frequently in Kate Hettasch’s diary, and talks about the teachers washing children, searching for lice and replacing their clothing with new items. Clearly she had great admiration for Kate Hettasch and saw all this as positive activity, though some former students of residential schools recall this kind of welcome as a source of negative memories. Evidently Inuttitut was being spoken, as seen in a description of lessons that included prayers in Inuttitut and reading and writing in both Inuttitut and English (MacMillan 1948:63).

The reasoning of the Moravians, as of the Anglicans in southern Labrador when the first boarding school was established in Cartwright in 1920, was that more time spent in school was clearly going to be more productive for students. This was seen in the earlier Mission days: the Settlers were less well educated than the Inuit, living in the bays where they could not attend school. The *Periodical Accounts* indicate that the missionaries felt

that the children would be easier to teach if they could guarantee their attendance by having them live in, even if their parents were close by. Many informants complained that they could not see their families as much as they liked, even though they were in the village. As Flanagan (1984:30) relates, by the late 1930s most of the children were encouraged to stay in boarding school for the full school year, instead of just when parents were away. They could and did visit their homes on Sunday afternoon but had to be back for supper. He further reports from his community interviews that Settlers did not always send their children due to a number of factors, including occasionally strained relations with missionaries. In some cases, the Settlers' greater financial independence allowed them to keep their families at home rather than using the boarding school as a form of support. In Flanagan's view, Inuit sent their offspring because they would be warm and fed and because Inuit were in the habit of following the advice of the missionaries. Inuit were more dependent and also had a longer tradition of learning, while the Settlers, at least to some extent, had better jobs and more independence, and less interest in salvation (Flanagan 1984:63).

Life in the boarding school with large numbers of students and only a couple of teachers meant a great deal of work for everyone, including older children and the native teacher helpers. Flanagan interviewed women who had worked at the schools and who described a very circumscribed life where they had little freedom or pay. (The missionaries themselves, of course, received little financial remuneration for their own work.) These helpers were for the most part young Inuit women and a few Settler girls, mostly daughters of chapel servants, who had finished their own education. While the

missionaries saw this form of employment as bringing prestige to the girls and their families, it was by many accounts also a very demanding job in a strict environment. They were not paid till the 1940s, except with second-hand clothing, and were required to follow a rigorous moral code and strict curfew. Local involvement in the boarding schools was an important element of education and of community life, and its depiction depends on the source. A recent informant in her mid-twenties gave still another perspective on the situation, recounting that local people had some resentment towards their neighbours who worked in the schools and kept for themselves some of the food that parents sent for their children (Interview Anonymous Informant 2014).

For our purposes here, the effect of boarding school on language is being considered. As we have seen, the Moravians emphasized the retention of Inuttitut and provided a boarding school where people were taught according to their language of origin, with two separate schools established in Nain. John Igloliorte describes school and language use as he experienced it in Nain during the time of World War II, just before the major changes in education in Labrador were to take place:

I had to go to school, starting every September. Our school was attended by students from all over Labrador, maybe about fifty children in four different classes. We all lived in the school, too, in two separate buildings, one for the girls, one for the boys, My bed was up in the attic of the main school building; the other kids and I slept on the floor, on long mattresses placed side by side. In the morning, right after breakfast, we'd have lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and Bible study. The Settlers' children, from the families of white trappers and hunters, were in separate classes from us. They were taught in English, and we spoke Inuktitut. The teacher who taught Inuktitut [Kate Hettasch] was of German descent, and her parents were missionaries in Nain, along with some missionaries from England who ministered to us for a long time. It was our teacher's idea to have the separate classes; we were expected to live as our ancestors did, and learn our own language, but some of us,

myself included, picked up some English when we were older, just by being in contact with white people. (Igloliorte 1994:14)

The linguistic situation in Nain was in sharp contrast to that in Makkovik. This is discussed by Manasse Pijogge:

I was living in Hopedale before I went to the Makkovik school. Our people was wanting to learn English. That's where I learned my English from. The people in Makkovik couldn't speak Eskimo, not all of them, a few of the old ones. The first year I went up I couldn't talk English at all so we used to have an interpreter then, one of the children that could talk. I liked the teachers right good. I didn't find it too hard to learn. We were just taught in English. (Pijogge 1977:7)

John Igloliorte's portrait of life in the Nain boarding school, so similar to the accounts offered by many of my informants, represents the end of an era that closed when the province of Newfoundland joined Canada and brought Labrador with it into mid-twentieth century Canadian society, with all the benefits and drawbacks to come.

Whatever today's views may be on the high-handedness of the missionaries in deciding what was best for other people's children, it was a system they knew well themselves. The early Moravians of Zinzendorf's era raised children in a collective way, leaving some of the sisters to care for all the babies while the parents travelled on the Lord's work. The missionaries in Labrador were also required to send their own children much farther away, one of the sacrifices required in that way of life. Kate Hettasch recalled being sent to Holland as a child, where she stayed at school for eleven years and then went on to Germany for kindergarten training while her parents remained in Labrador ("Labrador Kate" 2012:1). Thus their actions and decisions displayed paternalism in a form they themselves had probably experienced as children, and a fate to which they would eventually consign their own young children. Pia Schmid has written

of the loneliness of children who were sent away by their missionary parents, unless they were fortunate enough to find a “significant third,” a person who could act in the parental role (Schmid 2010:171).

Whether this institution was created, as Flanagan feels, to get students away from their parents and life outside the mission in order to proselytize, or to ensure that learning was not interrupted, it was true that such an arrangement gave the missionaries much more control over the daily lives of Inuit children. Early accounts show the Settlers to have been less promising students than the Inuit, who had a longer tradition of attending school and a devotion to learning by rote that was useful in the kind of curriculum favoured for instruction. However, as time went on into the post-Confederation era, the Settlers had the great advantage of having English as a first language, which led to eventual supremacy in the classroom. This is the focus of writings by Anne Brantenberg (A. Brantenberg 1977), Patrick Flanagan (Flanagan 1984) and Dianne Grant (Grant 2003), who all examined the shifts in education in Nain and looked at the results of the changes that were supposed to bring the Inuit into the modern Canadian world. All of these writers spent time in Nain and were able to observe the gradually declining academic performance of the Inuit. They attributed this to a number of factors related to the troubled lives and low social status of some Inuit due to the collective tragedies that befell them over time, including the Spanish Influenza of 1918 and forced relocation from northern communities.

In terms of the effect on language, the accounts given by informants and in other recorded reminiscences show that boarding school in Nain increased the amount of

bilingualism, in that both Settler and Inuit children learned each other's language. Although the classes were segregated, the boarding arrangements meant that children were constantly together outside class time. At this point English was not seen as the dominant language, and it was reasonable for people to speak both languages. In Makkovik, the boarding school language was English and most of the children who attended were considered Settlers. When Inuit children attended, they learned English both in the classroom and from the other children.

### **Changes Following Confederation**

The final chapter of boarding school in Labrador was carried out away from the northern communities and outside the Moravian stronghold. In North West River, a boarding section forming part of the Yale School run by the Grenfell Mission and popularly known as "The Dorm" was open from the 1920s to the 1970s, and this was the school which north-coast students attended in the post-Confederation years if they wanted to continue their education past the age of fourteen or fifteen. Students were not compelled to attend but many did, more often those of Settler background. As Flanagan reports, students went to North West River only if their parents could afford to do without their labour, and only about 20% of students did attend the boarding school. This is not surprising because at the time a diploma did not represent value to people who were still carrying out a subsistence lifestyle and saw little prospect of education leading to a better life. Tony Williamson reports that of students who went out to North West River, nearly half of their mothers had worked at the Moravian boarding school at one point, perhaps indicating a culture of formal education that had taken hold in people exposed to school

for a longer period of time. The school was attended by the children of North West River as well, and accounts vary on the kind of atmosphere it provided.

North West River resident Katharine Baikie-Pottle wrote a letter to the editor of *The Labradorian*, recalling her school days and expressing her distress at the accounts circulated about unhappiness and mistreatment of children in the dorm. She draws a vivid picture of her childhood impressions:

We, children living in North West River, couldn't wait for September when our friends would be coming back to the dorm after being home for the summer. Of course, some were sad, to leave home again for the school year, but we, as young children, could not have understood that, we were too excited that our friends were back! Maybe we were selfish in our delight to welcome the dorm children...we could not understand their grief of leaving home?

If people in my town called dorm children names because of their race, I do not recall it during my days in school. I thought we all looked pretty much alike. Dorm children did have restrictions on where they could go, how late they could be out playing, strict homework time, etc. BUT boy was I jealous! We had strict rules growing up, and before we could think about homework getting done under a kerosene lamp, we had to split, chop and carry wood in each evening, haul gas, kerosene and groceries, help with the house work. (Baikie-Pottle 2008)

She goes on to talk about the kind of discipline that existed in the dorm; harsh, but similar to what prevailed in all educational institutions indiscriminately at the time:

That type of thing was not mentioned in or outside the dorm. If the physical abuse came from teachers...many of us from the town or dorm received the same. No one was spared the book flying through the air, ruler smacks, hair pulling or the wide strap that hung under a principal's choir gown.

Some of our friends from the dorm came to our house often, some to play, have an 'outside' meal, to go hunting and fishing with my older brother and some helped us around the house with our chores. Those came from every community along the north coast and never did we feel better nor different than them...we were friends...Yale school was a model for education. It delivered students who are nurses, engineers, teachers, administrators, managers, many chose trades, and some of the very

brightest came from the dorm. Many of those assisted in establishing the Nunatsiavut Government. Many of the people in my age group will always say, "Where would we be today?" "We might have starved only for the dorm." That is not to say everything was rosy and that they were not homesick. My generation appeared to have had a 'decent' experience but for those who came after something appears to have gone wrong. (Baikie-Pottle 2008)

The perspective from other people who attended these schools was often different if they had been taken away as small children, or if they suffered from loneliness and felt they had little choice about being sent away to school. Disruption in family life and a sense of isolation and powerlessness were often a product of boarding school experiences, and these narratives been widely related in recent years. The account of Toby Obed, who was sent at the age of three to the school in North West River from his home in Hopedale and remained for four years, provides a more direct view on language, including punishment for "not picking up English fast enough." (Sweet 2012). Judge James Igloliorte discussed his experience in an earlier (2010) edition of the *St. John's Evening Telegram*. His view was that though the house parents were kind and the food was adequate, being educated in a context that separated children from their families led inevitably to a loss of culture and language and a breaking down of family relationships. For the purposes of this discussion on language, we can see that even if no policy of forbidding the use of Inuttitut existed, the result of children living away from their families meant that language loss was bound to be a side effect of that form of education. The story is not yet fully told on these Labrador schools and the accounts from all sides of the question need to be examined.



The North West River Dorm experience was only one aspect of the post-Confederation world into which the Inuit and their education system had now been thrust. Confederation with Canada, upon which Labradorians mostly did not get the opportunity to vote (Green 1999), brought with it a number of material advantages but was a double-edged sword. The family allowance benefit provided by the Canadian government was a boon to families, but it was not issued unless children attended school, which meant that their traditional lifestyle was interrupted and that Settler families living in the distant bays outside communities now had to relocate. It also meant that Labrador schools were now expected to make the transition to English instruction. As we will see in Chapter Six, this was not a complete or immediate shift.

Chartrand has looked at the post-war era as a period of rapid change for all Inuit, seeing the hand of the federal government in policies that wanted to incorporate the Inuit into mainstream Canadian society and open the north to development, and he saw the education system as a weapon in this fight: “The major tool for assimilating the Inuit was the development, by the Federal government, of a formal centralized school system controlled by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs” (Chartrand 1987:249).

When fur prices collapsed in the 1930s and much misery ensued, the situation deteriorated until, by the 1940s, Inuit all over Canada were financially dependent on the wider Canadian society. Unequal power relations, federal government assimilationist policies, and internal colonialism combined to place the Inuit in subordinate positions (Chartrand 1987:241). However, the provincial jurisdiction over schools in Labrador

meant that the federal government did not have the same hand in education in Labrador as it did elsewhere in Canadian Inuit communities.

Reading the diary of Kate Hettasch in Nain for 1940/41, one experiences no foreshadowing of the political and administrative changes that were so soon to take place in northern Labrador. Through Confederation with Canada, both Labrador and the Moravian education system were about to change profoundly. Although provincial leaders were reluctant to take on the responsibility of education in Labrador, which they would have preferred to see under federal jurisdiction, they were eventually to take over the schools, instituting a system with prescribed length of school year, curriculum designed for the province as a whole, and most significantly perhaps, instruction in English. This was of course difficult for young children in particular who were from Inuttitut-speaking homes, but it is also true that community elders saw value in having the children learn the dominant language. Neither Brantenberg (A. Brantenberg 1977), Ben-Dor (Ben-Dor 1966), nor Flanagan (Flanagan 1984) expresses much concern over the threat to Inuttitut due to this change; if anything, Flanagan judges school authorities for not teaching it earlier, feeling that some knowledge of English would have eased their path in school.

The next stage of education between 1950 and 1965 began when the Newfoundland government took over its administration. English became the language of instruction and the provincial curriculum was standardized, with attendance mandatory to age fifteen. The Moravians were still responsible for the operation of the schools. Boarding school was phased out in the northern communities and finally the Labrador East Integrated

School Board took over in 1968. By 1975 teacher aides were back in the classroom, teaching the younger children and assisting with their knowledge of Inuttitut after a twenty-year lapse when the government had refused to pay for “native helpers” (Flanagan 1984:31).

It is important to realize that the transition that happened after 1949 was not as immediate and drastic as might be thought. Dianne Grant comments on this in her work on the Nain schools:

Policy-makers’ attempt to realize an “accepted responsibility” was mostly theoretical as Government assumed an entirely financial role for almost three decades. That meant Moravian schooling was *not* radically altered by Government at Confederation despite the introduction of several changes to the schools in 1952. Thus, the administration of the Moravian schools can be divided into two phases: the first was from 1941-1954, when the missionaries exercised absolute control; followed by 1955-1968, when government policies first hindered the Moravians from teaching in northern Labrador then unintentionally pushed them out of the school. (Grant 2003:75)

The Moravians continued to hold considerable influence over education for some time. In spite of the official handover of responsibility, they went on to direct schools until 1955 and only relinquished complete responsibility in 1968 when the Labrador East Integrated School Board took over. What this meant in practical terms was that they continued to teach children in their own language into the 1950s and in individual cases much longer, as seen in the words of informants Selma Jararuse and Bertha Holeiter in Chapter Six.

## **Return of Inuttitit Instruction**

By the time the education conference took place in 1977, parents had become concerned about the unintended effects of teaching English, and at that point an Inuttitit immersion program and life skills classes were proposed and eventually carried out.

Labrador was going through very rapid changes. Flanagan notes: “Indeed in one month in 1975, the population of Nain was introduced for the first time to television via satellite, direct telephone service (which replaced the radiophone) and a hotel opened with the first (and only) licensed bar in the village” (Flanagan 1984:129). Tim Borlase, who attended the 1977 conference and spent the next nine years in Nain, wrote in his book *The Labrador Inuit*:

During the 1960s and 70s, English language and culture were rapidly replacing traditional Inuit language and values in northern Labrador. In 1949 the Elders had voted to change the language of instruction from Inuktitut to English, in order to give students an equal chance in modern society. As Inuktitut slowly disappeared, deep concern was expressed that the schools should reintroduce the native language. While reintroduction of Inuktitut represents some effort to make the school curriculum better adapted to Inuit students, many still do not succeed in school. Some students from hunting and fishing households miss a great deal of class time while they are off with their families. The provincial curriculum holds limited meaning for coastal Labradorians, with the result that most drop out of school before graduating, and few ever go to university. (Borlase 1993:277)

Since this was written, the rates of post-secondary success amongst Nunatsiavut students have significantly improved, thanks to increased funding and better high school graduation rates. Language retention rates, however, continue to drop.

After the long Moravian period of carefully retaining language, interrupted by the abrupt changes after Confederation, the work of attempting to regain it began. Once the

alarm had been raised by the elders of the community and the wider world had begun to value indigenous languages and lobby for their preservation and support, the pendulum began to swing back, but to date not to an extent that has allowed a return of Inuttitut to its former place. In a short-sighted move, the provincial government had removed the Inuttitut-speaking assistants from the classroom and deemed the bilingual Moravian teachers inadequately trained (Flanagan 1984:31). Once it became evident that there was a desire to re-institute Inuttitut, other measures had to be taken. Teachers' aides worked in the schools and a plan was made to advance their educational credentials to allow them to work as qualified teachers, as had been done earlier to a lesser degree when Beatrice Ford Watts was sent out for teacher training. This newer incarnation was done through the development of a program called Teacher Education Program in Labrador (TEPL). Established in 1978 by Memorial University, it was designed to offer instruction in the Labrador communities to bring teachers up to a teaching certificate level, but met with mixed success. Courses were offered infrequently so that students lacked continuity in their learning, and the subjects were not sufficiently oriented towards teaching Aboriginal language and culture (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:356).

The problems with the program were reflected in the attitude of the community towards the Inuttitut immersion program offered in Nain and Hopedale. Although the community was initially very much in support of the immersion program when it was introduced in 1987, it became apparent that there was a lack of educational resources, and that the level of knowledge of the language varied widely amongst the children, so that some were effectively second-language learners (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:361).

The northern communities were in a situation where they were unsure of the value of such programs but still felt it was important to incorporate Inuit language and culture as much as possible. A 1981 “Survey of parents’ feelings toward the Inuttut language and traditional skills programs in Jens Haven School, Nain” was undertaken by Tim Borlase in his school board capacity as social studies coordinator to find out what parents wanted in terms of traditional skills and language programs. Although 96% wanted more Inuttitut taught, it was evident that less and less was being used in the homes. As seen in the survey Catharyn Andersen carried out in 2010, the expressed desire of people to have the language thrive is not directly linked to the extent to which it is spoken in the home. As Johns and Mazurkewich concluded:

Most of the burden of language retention is perceived to be the responsibility of the public school teachers. Some Inuttut-speaking parents speak to their children in English all the time at home. Nevertheless, they often feel that their children’s lack of ability to speak Inuttut reflects the abilities of their teacher and the school system. Linguists and teachers all know that this is an unrealistic view and that the level of success of a language program depends on factors beyond the boundaries of the classroom—for instance, the vital role of widespread community efforts in ensuring intergenerational maintenance of the native language. (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:361)

This language shift was most certainly a legacy of the changes in the education system, no matter what other factors also contributed. Dianne Grant, carrying out fieldwork in the late 1990s, was in a position to see the cultural destruction resulting from this policy, as well as the social effects on students. In her 2003 thesis she declares that “It is the concept of schooling as institution that has often been held responsible for perpetrating inequality in Nain” (Grant 2003:3). Her examination of schooling there led her to conclude that the problems in both school and community were rooted in the

systemic inequality that was created and maintained by long-standing government policies (Grant 2003:16). Grant, writing considerably later than Flanagan and Brantenberg, was able to see the effects of the education system on language and of its loss on the community. At the time the policy of English instruction was implemented, it was seen as a natural accompaniment to adopting the Newfoundland curriculum. This was a marked shift from the Moravian policy that had ensured that Inuit kept their language, with the consequence that many Settlers also spoke Inuttitut and represented the bilingual portion of the population. Flanagan observes this and sees the retention of Inuttitut as a strategy of maintaining boundaries:

One of the most significant, though unwritten, policies of the school was that Inuit children were punished for speaking English, although the Settlers were allowed to speak Inuttitut. The perceived division between Inuit and Settler was thus maintained as a dominant ideology in the school, right up until the 1950s. Even today in Nain, this disservice to the unilingual Inuk is strangely resented by many who were never able to acquire proficiency in what was to become a necessary key for advancement. (Flanagan 1984:66)

(Several accounts of this punishment for speaking English will be discussed in Chapter Six.)

At this point the *Periodical Accounts* reflect what was seen as progress, evidently supporting the idea that learning in English was promoting educational development and participation in the provincial system, which was organized to show a progression in learning through a graded system:

In our schools too there has been marked and very evident progress. We have now changed entirely over to English for all teaching except religion. We have also adopted the Newfoundland Education Departmental curriculum with a few modifications which seemed necessary because of geographical position. We now have children in our school doing Grade 7 work. (*Periodical Accounts* Nain 1952:7)

## **Education and Social Effects**

This optimistic view of the radical changes in the education system as leading to new opportunities and integration into the Canadian lifestyle was not shared by scholars observing its effects. Patrick Flanagan carried out a study looking at the levels of social status evident in the Nain of the late 1970s. His analysis deals with the social problems that emerged as a result of the rapid change in institutions and technological developments in northern Labrador, and is critical both of the current school system and of the earlier Moravian ones, for different reasons. (By contrast, Dianne Grant seemed to have a softer view on the Moravians and a more critical eye to the way the school was conducted under provincial government jurisdiction in the late 1990s in Nain.) Flanagan quotes Kate Hettasch (under the pseudonym of Sister Germer) talking about some of these changes, as they got rid of sealskin boots and caribou sleeping bags, started teaching more in English, and introduced store-bought food. Rev. “Wish” (Peacock) had more to say on the wider effects of the new era:

We gave the people more say and consulted more on school matters as well. They had not been consulted on school matters before. I turned the church finances—collection and the disposal of it—over to the chapel servants...We permitted dancing, playing cards, and through my wife....we introduced new subjects into the school like biology and geography....We also taught basic English classes to the older children at school. (Flanagan 1984:72)

Geography had in fact been taught in the nineteenth century as well, but Peacock’s point that new subjects and new interests were being introduced shows the move towards an education and lifestyle closer to what was going on outside Labrador.



Changes in teaching staff came about as well. On the one hand, the new certification process meant that the Moravian teachers, though many were Inuttitut-speaking, were not qualified to teach in a provincial school. On the other hand, one of the most significant shifts in the conducting of education was the decision to train local students to be teachers. Two students went to St. John's in 1946, supported by grants from the government and equal contributions from parents. One of these two, both considered Settlers at the time, was Beatrice Watts. Brigitte Schloss reports on her contribution as a young teacher: "In all these years of change and progress, Miss Beatrice Ford [Watts], the first fully trained teacher from Nain, was an invaluable help. With her complete knowledge of Eskimo and understanding she really did wonders." (Schloss 1964:22) Flanagan reports that Peacock wanted these students to go away to school, but Kate Hettasch was not in favour. They did go, however, and Beatrice Watts, like Kate Hettasch, became one of the most influential figures in Labrador education.

The social upheaval contributing to language shift was also a result of the closure of the northern mission communities, first Nutak and then Hebron, as well as the earlier influenza epidemic of 1918 that significantly decreased the number of Inuttitut speakers. Flanagan discusses this at some length in his work. Interestingly, he says it was Peacock's decision to close the Hebron station, which was personally communicated to him; later accounts show that all three authorities (Grenfell Mission, government and Moravian mission) held each other accountable. In any event, the result was that the populations of Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik were all altered with the incorporation (or non-incorporation) of the new northern residents of the towns, arriving from Nutak and

Hebron. These shifts naturally added to the stress on the educational system and had effects that continue to this day, where many of the most socially vulnerable continue to be the descendants of the resettled northern people. Some of them, of course, had had the benefit of the traditional Moravian education earlier on, but the records show that the Hebron people were later to take to institutional learning and because of their life out on the land would have had less exposure generally to education. Schloss reports that thirty children arrived from Nutak in 1956, never having attended school.

The northern Inuit suffered a great deal in the transition to a community where resources were limited and already spoken for. Ben-Dor has discussed this in great detail in regard to the Settler/Inuit dichotomy in Makkovik, but it appears that a similar situation existed in Nain, with the players being established Nain Inuit living side-by-side with Inuit from the northern communities. This rendered the situation one that was not a division of race but rather ultimately of social class. Informants mentioned schoolyard fights between the different groups in the community, and remarked as well on the dialect differences that further divided them. It is important to remember that the Labrador Inuit population was far from homogenous in terms of either educational experience or status within the community. It is interesting to note that the situation that saw the northern Inuit ghettoized into the “Hebron end” in Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik may have helped to preserve Inuttitut for those families for some time, as they did not socialize with their neighbours.

This situation was further complicated by the co-existence with Settler populations who had begun moving onto the Mission stations because of the post-Confederation

requirement to attend school in order to obtain benefits such as family allowance. White outsiders with professional jobs constituted still another social group. Educating the children of a community that had become more diverse in many ways was not strictly the responsibility of the Moravian church anymore, but they did retain control over the schools to some extent until 1968 when the Labrador East Integrated School Board was established. Even then, because of the guaranteed religious influence in Newfoundland and Labrador schools, there was still a strong element of church involvement, but now the decisions were made by other groups as well. The scope and nature of education had changed, but the Moravian inheritance was still present.

The premise of Anne Brantenberg's work, published in 1977, is that by that era the school system's expectations were in conflict with the familial expectations of the role of children in Inuit society. Whereas the Moravians had for centuries recognized that the Inuit were required to make a living by pursuing traditional sources of food, the change in government that had required a massive shift in curriculum, teaching certification standards, and the language of instruction also imposed a system that did not allow for the kind of flexibility that would have enabled students to gain an education while still assisting their families. The Moravian missionaries' intentions were to prepare children to continue to live as members of the community, and for this reason they allowed the school schedule to fit with the rhythm of the work year where children accompanied their parents on the traditional and necessary hunting and fishing expeditions required to provide the major portion of the family's income and food resources. They were educating children to stay in the kind of lifestyle that their families had followed for

centuries, and they also recognized that it was essential for the Inuit to continue to hunt and provide for themselves, as otherwise they would depend for their livelihood on the mission. By contrast, the aspirations of the provincial school system were quite different, aiming to incorporate children into Canadian society by providing a curriculum similar to that of the rest of the province. Arriving in a place that had changed very slowly over the course of centuries, this form of schooling inevitably was in greater conflict with community values than the Moravian version of education had been.

Added to these complications was the boarding school factor mentioned above. For those whose education did not extend to higher grades at “the Dorm” (and this was by far the larger part of the population), the shifts in schooling seem to have reinforced the power structure. Parents who were not wage earners needed the labour of their sons and daughters to help with fishing, and those children would have to leave school, while students whose parents did not need their help were also in a better financial position to send them out to North West River. Over the next several years, protests by students and parents led to the eventual establishment of the high school grades in the northern schools (Flanagan 1984:122).

Other changes came about as political awareness and development increased in the 1970s. The establishment of the Labrador Inuit Association and community councils came in as the power of the mission was declining. The Settlers began to rise to prominence in leadership when they were included in the Labrador Inuit Association in 1975 (Kennedy 1997:11), as their competency in English allowed them to overtake the

Inuit in education, while the northern Inuit benefitted less from the rising awareness of Inuit nationalism.

Language issues are dealt with more directly by Grant, who saw this social inequality as reflected in and resulting from the inequalities faced by students as Inuit in the community. That this social consequence is directly related to the education system itself is asserted in her statement regarding the post-Confederation changes:

Once the provincial government took charge of the region's school system the greatest changes ever to be effected in northern Labrador's 200 year history were realized as policies designed to assimilate were implemented. (Grant 2003:18)

Grant ties the tension in community life to the change in language use in the schools, which subordinated Inuttitut speakers while at the same time demanding a greater degree of conformity to southern norms of education, and additionally making the Inuttitut-speaking teachers of the time ineligible to instruct. She also sees the decline in parental involvement in the school as a result of these changes, further disadvantaging the children. The sharp decline in Inuttitut as a daily language in the community resulting in part from educational policies can be viewed as a contributing factor to social alienation in school and damaged intergenerational relationships within families, as its status fell below that of the rising dominant language.

In sum, rapid changes in Labrador society were reinforced in the school system, which ultimately began to bear some of the blame for the negative consequences. As Grant saw it:

For children in the privileged group and in possession of the most profitable social/linguistic capital, their comfort and success is fostered by their socialization within the privileged paradigm enforced at school.

However, children in the minoritized group learn quickly that their language and worldview are not equally valued in school and therefore, later in society. (Grant 2003:115)

The education system in northern Labrador continues in the present era as part of the provincial system, with Inuttitut offered as a core course in all the Nunatsiavut schools and with the immersion program in Nain only. Although the Nunatsiavut government is in a position to take over control of the public school system, it has not yet chosen to do so. At the time of this writing, a new teacher education program for Labrador is in the works with students in the pre-education year. This program, co-sponsored by the Labrador Institute, Memorial University's Faculty of Education and the Nunatsiavut Government, aims to provide local teachers for Nunatsiavut communities in the hope of reducing teacher turnover and providing culturally relevant curriculum. The proposed program includes a substantial Inuttitut training component, as none of the candidates are fluent speakers of the language.

### **Valuing Education**

How important was education to the Inuit throughout this long period of Moravian schooling? Did education go beyond the first purpose of teaching the word of God and become a true possession of the people? It is clear that from an early point the Inuit embraced this gift and made it part of their own culture. Grant remarks on the ownership of literacy and learning by Inuit, as early as 1824: "By that point literacy and schooling were social as well as intellectual endeavours, actively preserved and highly valued by Labrador Inuit" (Grant 2003:44), and Hans Rollmann comments on a letter by the Inuk

Amos dating from 1810 (personal communication). This is also evident in some of the early anonymous entries in the Periodical Accounts:

The office of schoolmaster, which I had ceased to fill for a space of thirteen years, I was also called to resume. My first lessons I had to give in an apartment without a fire, at a time when Fahrenheit's thermometer stood at 15 to 20 degrees below 0; yet my 28 scholars attended with pleasure, and some of them made good progress. This was particularly the case with a young good-looking Eskimo, about 17 years of age, who had come to us from the heathen a year before, and was so intent upon acquiring knowledge, that he was not ashamed to sit down among the children who were learning their letters, and to receive instruction at home from two of the elder pupils. (*Periodical Accounts* Hebron 1832:255)

This dedication varied; a voice that must have belonged to the more cynical of the missionaries observed: "The attendance on the schools, and the proficiency of the scholars, appear to have been affected rather injuriously by the mildness of the winter, and the plenty which prevailed in the dwellings of the Eskimo." (*Periodical Accounts* Okak 1842:443)

If religion was the impetus for learning to read and write, was the desire to do so still there when the religious intent was no longer the central focus of the school system, when it had been replaced with a system bent on enclosing the Labrador Inuit in the fold of Canadian mainstream values? One might suppose that after nearly two centuries the practices of literacy and education were deeply enough entrenched that they would have become part of daily life, and in fact the Inuit did incorporate literacy in particular into practices of their own, which showed that they took ownership for their own purposes of what had been an imposed practice and an artificially created need. Yet, as shown by the changes after Confederation, school became an arena for displaying the discrepancies between not only white and Inuit, Settler and Inuit, but Nain and northern Inuit.

Additionally, at a point where Inuttitut literacy was well-enough established that it might have blossomed into the creation of an indigenous literature, the policies of the provincial government and the Inuit's desire for an English education for their children interceded.

While much valuable information has been provided, and much blame assigned, for the present circumstances of students, there remains the question of how the Inuit themselves saw the change in language and education. Their own explanations for the valuing of education changed as political shifts again took place, with the creation of Nunatsiavut, the national concern with residential schools, and the increased self-identification of people as Aboriginal. This question will be examined as we look at the narratives provided by Inuit about language change and the role of education within that change.

## **Conclusion**

There can be no doubt that the freight carried to the New World by the Moravian brethren included literacy and education, or at least the bricks that would build this lasting legacy. Equipped with their strong faith and the traditions of an educational philosophy that emphasized practical learning, the reading of the Bible, and some addressing of secular subjects, they were prepared to bring their joy and devotion to Christ to the inhabitants of Labrador as they had done in Greenland, the American colonies and other places where they felt their Christian obligation should send them. The tradition of education carried in the hold of that ship came out of a philosophy that had its roots in the faith in action approach favoured by Count Zinzendorf, who had revived the faith of the old Bohemian and Moravian *Unitas Fratrum*.



Clearly the whole purpose of the intense labour of educating generations of Inuit and Settlers with inadequate human and financial resources was to infuse religion into the lives of people who, in the missionaries' view, had no previous notion of God and salvation. The education was religious because without that purpose it would simply not have happened, and because the history of colonization has always included the propagation of the Gospel as one of its primary functions, well beyond the Moravian church alone. When the strangers came to urge the Inuit to replace their own faith, their shamans, their traditions and their notions of social institutions such as marriage with ones that limited their freedom of thought and movement to some extent, it was most likely that practical considerations of trade goods and the possibility of relief in the event of dire poverty and starvation prevailed upon them to accept these autocratic and ethnocentric if well-meaning strangers into their homes. Gosling reports: "A neighbor of Kingminguse at once professed his anxiety to receive baptism also; but another man voiced the more general feeling when he declared that he too believed very much, but what he wanted at present was a knife" (Gosling 1910:271). Religion, like any form of customary behavior, would have had to display a strong function to allow its practice to continue.

The missionaries saw literacy and education as a pathway to religion; looking back on the history of Moravian education in Labrador we might look at it in the other direction. It was religion that provided the impetus for education and the will to sustain the effort to provide it. In the *Periodical Accounts* and other writings by the missionaries we can readily see the level of discouragement, the exhaustion and self-doubt, the

massive frustration with students unable or unwilling to learn. The depth and breadth of education has also been viewed as limited, because the instruction offered was somewhat constrained in terms of actual hours spent in the classroom (although quite regular in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), and because it focussed so strongly on the spiritual education of the Inuit above all else. The lack of “grades” that would have signalled progress and the restricted subject matter, as well as the minimal formal education of some of the teachers themselves, could be seen as limiting the education supplied, though on the other hand the first language training and the emphasis on music were attributes that later educational offerings would conspicuously lack.

The force of religion was what had put education in place, and as it kept pace with the development of the Inuit’s awareness and devotion to Christianity, religion was a companion to education. When religion was taken out of schooling in the twentieth century, not only did a great shift take place in the manner of teaching, but the primary connection with religion as the purpose for schooling was no longer there. It may be that at that point the *motivation* for learning declined, as it was not able to be replaced with the kinds of aspirations normally attached to the popular idea of education. There were no professional jobs waiting at the end of high school education and few post-secondary opportunities. As Brantenberg, Flanagan and Grant have demonstrated at intervals since the changes in education in the 1950s, two results of the expanded and well-meant efforts in education were the emphasizing of the unequal social status of children in the community and the sidelining of the native language.

Brigitte Schloss's view was that the Moravians wanted the Inuit to be "integrated but not absorbed" into the changing world. She feels that the barriers to education were different in the pre-Confederation era from those observable afterwards; initially these consisted of two factors, essentially poverty and ill-health, both of which made it difficult for children to learn. In the new Canadian world with more financial resources at their disposal, she saw a new challenge, in that contact with the outside world made the Inuit more critical, discontented and suspicious, but also more curious in terms of learning:

More frequent boats, tourists, planes and the radio made the people even more conscious of the world beyond Labrador. They also felt more and more that knowing only their own language was becoming a serious handicap. They wanted their children taught in English and so the Newfoundland curriculum was introduced in 1949. This was no easy task since not only the language but also the concepts in the books were foreign to the children. (Schloss 1964:20)

The earlier missionaries would have been surprised and dismayed to see their efforts at schooling viewed as a negative and limiting force. Flanagan, like Grant, sees the school as a tool of oppression and limitation, except that in his case it is the earlier school system designed by the Moravians that bears responsibility, rather than her contention that post-Confederation practices caused structural inequalities:

The all-pervasive control exercised by Moravian missionaries until the 1940s was nowhere more evident than in the schools they established for the Inuit and Settler wards. These were undeniably confining for the students, both in terms of curriculum focus and future utility. With the establishment of a boarding school in the late 1920s, the restrictive nature of schooling increased dramatically. The school became a major tool of the Moravians in their efforts to proselytize, settle, and cloister their Inuit followers. (Flanagan 1984:50)

Flanagan perhaps misses the point that the children in these schools were Moravian by religion already, as were generations of their families. Dale Jarvis pointed this out in his 1993 study of the symbolic significance of the Moravian mission buildings:

At the end of the nineteenth century the Moravian church in Labrador was no longer a mission church in a true sense. By 1860 most of the Inuit had been converted to the faith and by 1903 the Moravian ministers were preaching to a congregation of mostly second or third generation Christians. (Jarvis 1993:88)

While the missionaries may have had aspirations of controlling their behaviour and influencing their education, their religious orientation was probably secured. By the time the Moravians arrived in Labrador the Inuit had already been exposed to European influences (see Kennedy 2009). With the history of colonization in Canada we can be reasonably sure that even without the arrival of the Moravians a religious group would have arrived and provided to, or foisted upon, the Inuit some kind of Christian influence, including education.

What then can we say was the *specific* legacy of the Moravian church in terms of education? There is no doubt that because of the philosophy of the church and its long history in the mission field, there were aspects to education that left a legacy of learning particular to the Moravian influence. This included a long-term adherence to teaching in Inuttitut, and a tradition of rote learning, which, while not unique to Moravian teaching, was adopted as a core value by Inuit in their practice of the sacraments.

The provision of scripture in printed form and in their own language was an advantage that might not have been provided by other churches to the same extent, and the musical education that generated a long tradition of vocal and instrumental practices

was also particular to the Moravians. The education of girls and the provision of Aboriginal assistants and teachers were further ways in which the church's policies and background contributed to the kind of education provided and to the place of education in Inuit society from the 1860s on. In fact, the custom of providing teacher training for local people eventually led to the expectation that some would go on to provide leadership in education themselves, leading to the decision of some parents to send promising young people such as the young Beatrice Ford (Watts) away to school.

The other great tradition of the missionaries that emphasized the importance of literacy was the archival practices and writing of the life stories known as *Lebenslauf*, which may have influenced the Inuit to keep diaries and write letters, taking literacy on as a possession of their own, and perhaps inspired by the Biblical example of the letters of Paul. Following on this would be the sense of pride in their literacy that Inuit developed, perhaps allowing for the assertion of ownership of the written language that issued in the 1970s from people like Rose (Jeddore) Pamack. We cannot say that valuing literacy was the same as valuing education; we know that absenteeism was often high and that parents needed their children's labour. Even closer to the present day, grandparents have expressed the view that the children should be home looking after their elders rather than going away to university (Interviews Watts 2003). Much as Dianne Grant saw the difference between "education" and "schooling," so too in the Labrador Inuit value system we might see a different ranking given to literacy than to education.

We can see that education at first glance acted both as a preserving force for Inuttitut in the Moravian schools and then as a destructive force when English was

imposed. It is this very process that will be examined by informants in the narratives they recount on language shift in the chapters to come, but as a historical background the educational picture is one that was different in Labrador from that in other northern territories. As Donna Patrick's work on language retention in Nunavik shows, a crucial intervention by Inuit in the 1960s that allowed Inuktitut to be taught alongside French and English was one of the forces that kept that language vibrant to the present. In that case, a public discussion on the rival merits of teaching children either English or French was attended by Inuit, one of whom suggested that Inuktitut be offered as well (Patrick 1999:258).

The educational tradition of Labrador Inuit had the earlier advantage of the Moravian language policy, but the period following World War II, unlike the stage of decolonization noted by Patrick, was instead influenced by the effects of the new partnership of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador with Canada. Under this arrangement, the Inuit were deprived of a previous school system that lacked many educational amenities but at least guaranteed security of the native language, and were also deprived of recognition as Aboriginal people, which would have provided them with some other resources. By the time public awareness of the decline of Inuktitut and resulting modifications to the school system such as the immersion program became available, much damage had been done. However, as we can see through the words of informants, Inuktitut was taught officially until about 1955 and unofficially for some time afterwards, and by the 1970s it was a focus of concern and proposals for change. This means that the period of time without any Inuktitut in the schools was of relatively short

duration, so that in spite of education being a strong factor in language decline, it was far from the only force at work.

Dianne Grant observed that during her time in Nain, people felt that since they had survived the Spanish flu and the Hebron relocation they could survive other trials as well. This opening glance at the development of education shows us how in some measure the resiliency of the Inuit stemmed from the ways in which they used literacy and education to reshape their world. Despite its resiliency, Inuttitut is currently under stress, and the strong educational tradition of the Labrador Inuit is one of the most powerful resources available to combat that threat. As the narratives of informants unfold, a more detailed look at the place of education and its influence on language will be presented in the words of the Inuit themselves. In the next chapter we will see the specific influence of literacy, the most enduring product of the Moravian educational system.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LITERACY

Following upon the discussion of education and its role in affecting language shift, I will now look at written literacy, one of the chief products of education and one that has had considerable influence on the use and maintenance of Inuttitut since the arrival of the Moravians in the late eighteenth century. Is literacy necessary for the maintenance of a language? K. David Harrison acknowledges the danger to languages that cannot furnish a written record: “Without writing, all linguistically encoded knowledge is always only one generation away from extinction....This means that what does get passed on is somehow essential, important, and not frivolous or tangential to human life” (Harrison 2007:147). However, he also strongly emphasizes the value of the oral tradition:

Once societies make the transition to letters, writing may come to seem indispensable to them. But do people sacrifice something to gain this prize? Is something essential lost when a purely verbal culture gives way to writing? This question goes well beyond the literary or linguistic realm, raising fundamental issues of thought, culture, and psychology. (Harrison 2007:147)

If we examine the question of literacy as an aspect of language shift, will we see the negative effects predicted by Harrison? His statement that oral traditions are lost to us when the language takes on literacy requires further thought, as it is apparent from looking at cultures with strong language retention that traditional language genres continue to change, and that verbal cultures co-exist with literacy everywhere. It may well be that these speech events would have been lost to the Inuit due to cultural changes as much as to linguistic loss, or they could have survived to be incorporated into a written



culture. In this chapter I will look at the importance of literacy to the Inuit and how it contributed to their sense of identity and the retention of their language.

The Moravians came prepared to teach the Inuit to read (and later to write; Amy Schutt points out that in the eighteenth century these were quite different skills and were taught at separate stages of learning (Schutt 2012:42)), and they achieved this to a degree that was remarkable for the time, place and resources involved. The list of works printed through the translation efforts of the missionaries shows us that although the focus was largely on the sacred, a tradition of reading and writing grew up that extended eventually to correspondence and diary keeping. Inuit took control of literacy and made it their own, much as they had taken Moravian religious traditions and infused them with a sense of Inuit identity, thus leading them to be known, by themselves and others, as “Moravian Inuit.”

When the Moravians first arrived in Labrador they were faced with a daunting task. Although three Moravian missionaries had the capacity to speak Greenlandic (Jens Haven, Drachardt and Schneider), they did not speak the exact dialect of the Labrador Inuit, and most missionaries on arrival had neither language. Therefore, before the people could be “brought to Christ” there was groundwork to be laid in learning the language, perfecting a method of writing it, and making sure that printed works for study would be available. Bringing written literacy into a culture that had no previous experience or need of it required the manufacturing of that need, in a sense, a need that became real as the years went on and the Inuit’s participation in religion became part of their own sense of identity.

There is a very long tradition of literacy in northern Labrador, due to the obligation the missionaries had to include education as part of their missionary activity. The schools that they set up soon after their arrival in Labrador were taught exclusively in Inuttitut, and they maintained this policy until a considerable time after the official handover of schools to the provincial government in 1949. The schools were largely dedicated to the purpose of providing reading and writing for religious instruction, and less for the larger education of the students, as we will see in the words of former students. Nonetheless, literacy profoundly affected the language, because it established written conventions, it solidified and enshrined ideas that carried on in the value system of the Inuit, and it produced materials that became products over which the Inuit had real ownership, especially those that they produced themselves. Most importantly, literacy and education under Moravian rule were always carried out in the Inuttitut language, emphasizing its importance and the necessity to keep it. In fact, the ability to read and write Inuttitut became part of oral tradition in a sense, because many Inuit learned how to read and write in their own language without benefit of formal education, either at camps or from neighbours, and the literary materials became a contribution to the religious and social identity of Moravian Inuit. Robin McGrath examines the question of why literacy was held as a strong value in a culture where basic survival was already demanding so much time and energy:

At least part of the answer lies with the fact that teaching literacy was not seen as the prerogative of specialists but was seen as being a tool to everyday comfort and survival, much like the ability to use a gun or set a trap, a skill to be acquired from a parent, elder sibling or neighbour. (McGrath 1991b:39)

As circumstances changed in Nunatsiavut, literacy began to lose this characteristic:

After the turn of the century, the use and prestige of Inuktitut in Labrador began to decline drastically and assimilationist trends began to erode the language... Literacy and education became compartmentalized, and once literacy was seen as being only relevant to spiritual life, it began to lose its power to encourage spontaneous learning. (McGrath 1991b:40)

Literacy is a skill which in any language takes on aspects of status and mystery and confers benefits. This would have been as evident to the Inuit of the eighteenth century as it is to people today. The emphasis on keeping the Aboriginal language, which was part of Moravian philosophy in all the mission fields, meant that not only the written but the verbal language was retained, as keeping it in the schools meant that the value of Inuktitut was clearly advertised by the authority figures in the community. This began to change with Confederation and the other historical forces at play, but the force of Moravian thought largely kept Inuktitut as the language of daily life till that point. When Newfoundland, and by default Labrador, became a part of Canada in 1949, the language of instruction became English for all schools. The push to change the language of instruction is certainly coincidental with the date of Confederation, but the narratives around language change disclose that there was more than a simple edict in place. Chapter Six will use the words of informants to expand on the complex reasons for the shift in Inuktitut usage.

The existence of literacy in Labrador's Moravian-influenced Inuit communities from such an early date derives from the philosophy of that church, which dictated that the faithful should be able to read the word of God in their own language and participate

in liturgy. This aim has been advocated by other religions for other Aboriginal groups, but the educational philosophy and approach of the Moravians fell on especially fertile ground with the Labrador Inuit, and ensured that literacy reached them long before other Inuit regions. It is an often-reported fact that the literacy rate in northern Labrador reached nearly one hundred percent in the days before the school system was taken over by the Newfoundland government. As Helge Kleivan reports:

We need not necessarily assume that the Eskimos felt themselves inferior to the fishermen. It must have been of some significance, for example, that quite a large number of the Newfoundlanders were illiterate, while most of the Eskimos on the east coast, already in the nineteenth century, were able to read and write their own language. An annual report from Makkovik (1900) relates that it is surprising to discover how many of the fishermen cannot read. Grenfell writes that a Newfoundland fisherman once had to consult an Eskimo and ask him to read a letter for him. (Kleivan 1966:121)

Diamond Jenness confirms:

Now by the first decade of the twentieth century, they had advanced the Eskimos to a stage where, in Grenfell's judgment, they were the most literate people along the Labrador coast and were teaching their own children in the mission schools while the white missionaries taught the children of the Settlers. (Diamond Jenness 1965:31)

Though Jenness somewhat overstated the case in terms of Inuit instructors (they taught alongside European teachers and usually instructed the less advanced students) it is clear that the educational attainments of the Inuit were something to be emulated.

Scholars are not in total agreement over the importance of literacy when it comes to language retention. The inclusion of a written form of indigenous language in the toolbox is not the same across the board; while many languages have had a written form for a long time, others have had literacy imposed upon them, some within quite recent

memory. Much has been written about the effectiveness and influence of written forms of a language, and these have been presented both in a negative and positive light, here by linguists Grenoble and Whaley, who point out that literacy has been seen as an agency of protecting and also of weakening local languages:

One of the most complicated issues in language revitalization is literacy. It is often assumed that literacy is a necessary first step in language revitalization programs: developing literacy in a local language can imbue a greater sense of prestige to it; most school-based revitalization programs typically require literacy; literacy in a local language makes it suitable for use in many social domains; and so on. At the same time, it has also been argued that literacy can actually facilitate acquisition of a majority language, thereby accelerating the loss of the very language it was instated to protect. Instituting literacy can be very divisive as decisions are made about what the standard form of a language should take, decisions that inevitably promote the use of one dialect over others. (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:102)

As noted by Grenoble and Whaley, a frequently expressed idea is that literacy in a local language paves the way for literacy in the dominant language, ultimately weakening the first language. Sometimes this is viewed as collateral damage, but in other cases it is seen as a ploy to remove the presence of the native tongue. In many societies, introduction of a local literacy has paved the way for literacy in the dominant language to knock at the door (Sebba 2000:67).

In the case of the Labrador Inuit, however, the presence of the white Settlers who wanted English instruction for their children was seen as a hindrance to the missionaries whose intention was to serve the Inuit in Inuttitut only. This is only one of many ways in which the Moravians', and consequently the Inuit's, approach to education were different in intent and effect from other groups operating in the north. It is also significant that the missionaries themselves spoke German and had no desire or intention to make that the

language of the territory they now inhabited. (The instructors for the Settlers in the nineteenth century were either native speakers of English or people with bilingual proficiency.)

The word “literacy” and its companion “illiteracy” are evocative, and are not neutral. Illiteracy has been seen as a blight or illness, a state that must be remedied, while literacy, as the bright side of the coin, is viewed, especially in the policies of UNESCO, as the panacea for economic and social ills. UNESCO policies placed what was called “functional literacy” in native languages amongst the priorities for a changing society in 1953, ironically just after the change of instruction from Inuttitut to English took place in Moravian schools (UNESCO 1953). (This view, of course, does not take into account the importance of oral culture and may imply that cultures without literacy are less worthy of respect. The emphasis placed here on literacy is meant to show how Inuit used this life skill while continuing to retain a rich verbal tradition.)

Literacy continues to hold a place as an indicator of progress towards First World values, and even as a human right, but it is still seen by some scholars as a possible detriment to retaining some of the distinctiveness of minority or Indigenous languages. It may also be seen as instituting a process that ultimately leads to literacy in a dominant language, and eventually to an eradication of the language it was begun to protect.

Literacy therefore has become a topic of great interest to linguists. Much of the literature discusses the advisability of developing literacy programs in order to bolster endangered languages. When scholars want to assess the practical or cultural value associated with literacy, they are often talking about *future* envisioned contexts. Yet we

see that in northern Labrador, the achievement of literacy was realized in some instances through the individual efforts of people who taught their children and even themselves, because of the value they individually placed on the ability to read and write. Indeed, literacy in a second language was achieved in Labrador, when Settlers learned to read and write Inuttitut, whereas in southern Labrador many people were non-literate in their own language of English well into the 1970s. Films produced by Memorial University's Extension Department about the south coast communities of Labrador reveal that literacy was identified as the possession of a few community members who lent their skills to others when the need arose (the *Labrador Film Project* 1969).

Clearly a cultural value was attributed to literacy in the Inuit communities. Additionally, the possession of literacy was viewed as a form of cultural capital, especially literacy in both Inuttitut and in English, which has been seen as a tool in the advancement of employment opportunities and of prestige, depending on the historical context. Whereas learning English was promoted by elders in the mid-twentieth century in order to take advantage of opportunities, there is at present a greater cultural capital attached to the possession of Inuttitut in Nunatsiavut in the twenty-first century because of its scarcity and its desirability in this era of heightened cultural awareness.

It is interesting to speculate on what the Inuit expected of literacy. In today's world, and probably in the thinking that drove the UNESCO policies of the 1950s, literacy is seen as a tool for economic and social advancement. New Literacy Studies (NLS) scholars have further challenged the treatment of literacy as a skill-set, arguing that such an approach "obscures literacy's connections to power, to social identity, and to

ideologies” by “privileging certain types of literacies and certain types of people” (Gee 1996:46). These NLS scholars have focused on understanding literacy as a social and cultural activity, where it is seen as consisting of fluid, purposeful social practices which are embedded in broader social goals, cultural activities, power relationships, and historical contexts (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:344). In examining Labrador Inuit literacy, we see a practice that began as a simple skill-set to advance religious culture, but which evolved into one of the components of identity and agency.

For the Inuit, literacy originally occupied a realm that dealt primarily with the faith that reshaped their lives and introduced practices that became incorporated into their own traditions. In time, their possession of literacy showed itself as a skill that they used alongside the others they had developed over time (including learning to speak English) to cope with their environment and to improve their life circumstances. By examining the following three facets of literacy (orthography, domain and canon) in the context of Labrador Inuit, we will see that the acquisition of literacy began in accordance with the mission’s policy to assist the Inuit to read the Bible, but that it evolved over time into a tool that was used for self-expression and a measure of autonomy. Eventually it became part of identity and in doing so its possession and the authority to use and change it demonstrated its status as both cultural and social capital.

### **Orthography**

In an examination of literacy and its effect on the spoken language and the retention or revitalization of language, consideration must be given to orthography, which is the basic tool for providing the texts that presumably nurture and sustain a language.



The importance of this consideration is underlined in the introduction to *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*. As editors Grenoble and Whaley point out: “We have devoted two entire chapters to these issues because so many linguists and activists see literacy as a fundamental requirement for successful revitalization, yet the issues behind literacy and orthography development are so complicated that they are rarely discussed in depth in the literature on language endangerment” (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:x).

The negative effect of inadequate orthography on the wider issue of language retention is a concern, as expressed by Louis-Jacques Dorais, who felt that the writing system in Nunatsiavut was responsible in part for the language change: “The decline of Inuktitut was also precipitated by forcing the young to use an Inuit orthography that was both obsolete and uselessly complex” (Dorais 2010:336).

Dorais elaborated on this in a discussion of diglossia, the use of different languages in different contexts:

For many years, the predominant Moravian orthography did not reflect the actual pronunciation of the Nunatsiavut dialect. It was highly valued, however, because of its intimate link with the history and religious life of the region. Moreover, the missionaries and some church elders considered the present-day language to be “bad Inuktitut” (Jeddore 1979), an attitude that explains why, during religious ceremonies, clergymen pronounced—some of them may still do so—the texts they read exactly as they had been written over a hundred years ago. Until the adoption, during the 1990s, of a standard orthography closer to modern pronunciation, two social dialects co-existed in Labrador: an extremely valued church dialect and an ordinary speech form that some people considered a degenerated language. According to Rose Jeddore (1979:91) this internal diglossia contributed to hastening the decline of Inuktitut starting in the 1960s by strengthening the negative attitudes of young speakers toward their mother tongue. (Dorais 2010:250)

Linguists Alana Johns and Irene Mazurkewich have also commented that upon their arrival in Labrador the Moravians were used to the West Greenlandic dialect and would have considered the Labrador dialect to be “nonstandard.” As they commented, “A reaction to the encounter of a new dialect is often negative. This would lead to a false notion of there being a standard language against which the Labrador dialect would not compare favorably” (Johns and Mazurkewich 2001:356). Hans Rollmann disagrees with this statement, as he contends that the missionaries did adapt Greenlandic texts to Labrador Inuttitut, in particular the early translator Johann Ludwig Beck, and that missionaries were sensitive to dialect differences between the individual communities and between the Labrador and Greenlandic dialects. (personal communication).

Orthography is not a neutral topic; as Peter Mulhausler says:

One of the most important aspects of orthography development is the recognition that, beyond purely linguistic considerations, there are a range of social, psychological, economic, political, and historical issues involved in making decisions about how to write a language. (Mulhausler 1992:136)

The reason behind the attention devoted to orthography for any language is clear: without the existence of a standardized form the language is inaccessible to a sufficient number of speakers (Barton 2007:15). In the initial development of written Labrador Inuttitut, the Roman alphabet was used, as that was the convention of the German missionaries who came to Labrador in the 1700s and carried on the work originally begun in the Greenlandic dialect. This predated the syllabic script commonly used in many parts of the Arctic; in fact Labrador Inuttitut was the first Canadian Inuit dialect to be written (McGrath 1984:22). As Rose Jeddore observed, this of course has placed the

Labrador dialect in the minority in terms of the alphabetization of Inuit languages, which probably led to a feeling of isolation amongst the Labrador population. Kenn Harper at the 2014 Inuit Studies Conference related that missionaries such as Peck and Stewart, who pioneered the use of syllabics, did use some Roman-orthography texts as source materials that they then translated into syllabics, and much of this material was originally from Labrador, including the Nain journal *Aglait*.

Writers on orthography often make the point that standardization of a language is essential in order to produce a written form that is comprehensible to all speakers of the language, but that in furnishing this they are inevitably obliged to choose one amongst several dialects of the language, thereby creating a new prestige dialect. The negative consequences of choosing one written standard to express all the dialects of a given language are numerous: people develop attitudes that there are right and wrong ways to write a language and the language itself gets more rigid after publications are produced. This standardization can lead to a loss of linguistic diversity as some forms are rejected in favour of others, while the dialects not chosen to be expressed universally in the written form lose status.

For some Indigenous languages it is assumed that the possession of a written language will right the imbalance of power between local language and the language of the colonizers (Grenoble and Whaley 2006). The case is different for Inuttitut since the written language was devised so very long ago, and the possession of orthography was not meant to redress any form of power imbalance adjustment for the Inuit. Rather, the bestowing of literacy was part of the greater objective of compelling the Inuit, “for their

own good,” to accept the Christian way of life, and the education they received, while beneficial in many ways, was not at that time destined to promote any self-awareness or self-governance. Additionally, as mentioned above, the language of the majority of the “colonizers” in this case, was German, rather than English, the dominant language of the colony of Newfoundland and later the country of Canada. Although there was colonization happening in Labrador, the result was not an imposition of the language of the incomers. In spite of some German words that entered Inuttitut to express new concepts, the Moravians did not force their own language on the Inuit and did not have the capacity (or desire) to compel them to speak English. Imbalance of power existed in other spheres, but if anything, the Inuit were the linguistic masters in their universe, as the missionaries continued to struggle to learn Inuttitut.

The battle waged amongst the missionaries and various segments of the Inuit population over the accepted method of writing Inuttitut is one of the aspects of language that has consumed a great deal of time for those seeking to maintain the language in recent years, and may have detracted from efforts to maintain its oral strength. However, unlike many communities where dialectic differences retarded the agreement on a standard way of writing, such as the twenty-year duration of efforts to establish an accepted orthography for Innu-aimun (Baraby 2000:81), in Nunatsiavut there was less dissension about the differences in dialects, as Rose Jeddore remarked in reference to a standard Nain dialect used by everyone. (Jeddore 1979:88) (Hans Rollmann suggests that the custom of listening to the long-running radio station, OKâlaKatiget Society, may have contributed to the acceptance of the Nain dialect.) The dissension amongst forms of the

language was not due to one being chosen over the others, but rather to a situation where the older forms created by the Moravians were rejected by the Inuit, as the language changed and its spoken form became distant from the way it had been written many years before. Although some revision by the missionaries had taken place over time in the Moravian orthography, such as the introduction of the capital K and the substitution of “gg” for “kk,” and it would be incorrect to assume a monolithic “missionary” orthography, the changes were seen as insufficient to reflect the current spoken usage.

At the beginning of the 1970s, some young Inuit from Nain were in favour of an orthographic reform. They wished that a phonemic orthography reflecting the actual pronunciation of Nunatsiavut Inuktitut be adopted. A few texts—including a dictionary (Jeddore 1976)—were published in the new writing system, but the religious authorities and the elders voiced their opposition to the proposed reform. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Labrador Inuit Association passed a resolution stating that the Moravian script remained the only acceptable orthography for the Nunatsiavut Inuit. It was only during the 1990s that an arrangement devised by teachers and other language specialists partly modified the system. (Dorais 2010:176)

The act of defying the missionaries on any topic would have been a bold step at that period, and choosing language as the battleground on which to establish a sense of autonomy seems particularly appropriate. Orthography took on a meaning that had much more depth than the choice of a spelling system; it pitted the established religious system against young Inuit reaching for autonomy, and in turn engaged that group in conflict with the elders of their communities. Support for the old spelling system indicated an alliance with the past and with the older generation, reflecting the social changes and modernization that were taking place across Labrador as travel and communications broadened the world view and accessibility of the Inuit.

The ongoing discussion on the written form of the language has not ceased from that time. As Grenoble and Whaley reflect, “Standardization is a natural part of the development of any written language, but in the case of unwritten languages or languages without a recent written tradition – just the sort of languages typically involved in revitalization – the establishment of a literary standard represents an abrupt, and often controversial, step” (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:13). We can perhaps argue that the timing of the invention of orthography for Labrador Inuttitut (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) did not allow for controversy, since it was established at a time and place where integrating the Inuit into consultation on establishing a written form of their language would not have been a top priority (although there must certainly have been discussion with the Inuit), but the timing of the re-examination of the traditional writing system in the 1970s did in fact coincide with the beginning of concern over the maintenance of Inuttitut as a living language. Lawrence Smith saw the hand of the missionaries as firmly in control of this process:

At the same time we have seen that while they introduced literacy to the Labradorians they began to set the stage for *qallunaak* assertions about what should be considered correct or incorrect, proper or improper usage and pronunciation. It may perhaps be surmised that over the years Moravian missionaries have frequently disagreed with the Inuit about the so-called “correct” way to write Inuttut. (Smith 1979:108)

Smith’s view was no doubt influenced by his time living in Nain in the 1970s, when he was witness to the emerging desire of the Inuit for control over their governance and cultural resources. Hans Rollmann sees in the documentary evidence a certain

flexibility towards spelling changes demonstrated by the missionaries, who did in fact adapt the language over the long period of their influence.

Dorais attributes difficulties with the writing system to some inadequacies amongst the missionaries, though he may be too quick to generalize about their varying levels of competence:

For unknown reasons, the Labrador missionaries never succeeded in reaching a level of linguistic fluency equal to that of their Greenlandic co-religionists (Nowak 1995) even though the most gifted among them, Theodor Bourquin, did indeed benefit from Kleinschmidt's advice. [Bourquin produced a Labrador Inuttitut dictionary and grammar.] The Moravian orthography suffered from this situation. Not very precise, sometimes downright erroneous, it was difficult to handle correctly. Moreover, as was also the case in Greenland, the progressive evolution of the spoken language entailed a growing discrepancy between orthography and pronunciation. Moravian orthography thus represented Nunatsiavut Inuktitut as it had been heard over a century before. Nevertheless, when reading religious texts aloud, ministers and lay preachers took great care in pronouncing them the exact way they were written, thus reviving for a moment the old Inuit language of Labrador. (Dorais 2010:175)

An accepted spelling system is obviously needed in order to produce mutually intelligible written materials, but the standardized form must be acceptable to the community. Grenoble and Whaley caution that different generations may find different forms acceptable (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:129) and this is clearly the case with Labrador Inuttitut. Although initially the Inuit accepted the system developed by the Moravians, oral history accounts presented in Labrador show the community's increasing desire for input into the education system and consequently into the way the language was written, in order that it might more accurately reflect the ways in which the spoken language had changed. Not only does Rose Jeddore's writing show this, but so too do the

accounts from the language and education conferences held throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

From an early time native teachers had a strong influence on the presentation of literacy and learning as an Inuit-generated value, rather than a completely imposed and artificial system of learning. As time went on, Inuit felt increasingly empowered to state their views on a system that no longer seemed to suit their needs. After centuries of regarding the Moravian missionaries as the authority on the written standard for a language that was not their native tongue, a generation of Inuit (not coincidentally in the 1970s, when a great deal of social and political change took place in Labrador) took the initiative to re-examine the written language. The fact that the language was being used less and less at that point perhaps lent poignancy and a sense of urgency to the desire to re-establish ownership.

This is not to say that there was agreement amongst the players in this debate, nor even amongst the Inuit themselves. Accounts from the reports of language and education conferences and the words of informants as well as scholars tell a tale of increased interest in the writing of a language that was ironically under heavy stress in the spoken form. "It is unfortunate that in the past, loyalty to a system of writing was often considered loyalty to the institution that spawned it, for this greatly hampered a consensus on orthography among Inuit and non-Inuit" (McGrath 1984:23). This sense of loyalty, in this case to the Moravian church, was finally being re-examined as some Inuit became educated and as the political organization (Labrador Inuit Association) representing the interest of the Labrador Inuit gained in strength. Rose (Pamack) Jeddore



was a proponent of a new standardized form of writing in the 1970s. As she wrote, “Orthography has been quite a controversial issue in Labrador for the past four years since we began working on the Inuit common writing system” (Jeddore 1979:84). Along with Lawrence Smith and Inuk Sam Metcalfe, who both lectured at Memorial in the 1970s, Rose Jeddore worked to devise a new writing system to be used in their research. This system, which she refers to as the “Inuit common writing system,” was used in a dictionary that is by all accounts quite good, but which never became commonly accepted by speakers of the language. As Catharyn Andersen explains:

Labrador Inuit have for a long time been producing dictionaries of their language. Rose Jeddore (Pamack), a Labrador Inuk, first made a Labrador Dictionary in 1976. This was constructed by Rose Jeddore as editor/author/organizer along with a group of very committed Labrador Inuttit speakers. The dictionary produced is excellent, using roots as entries, followed by numerous colloquial and colourful examples illustrating the use of these roots in a variety of contexts. Drawings in the dictionary were made by the well-known Labrador artist Gilbert Hay. The main drawback to the dictionary is the fact that it uses an orthography which was never accepted by Labrador Inuit. Later on the Labrador Inuit Standardized Writing System was agreed upon and is the one now generally used, and another dictionary was produced in the 1990s by August Andersen and William Kalleo. (Andersen 2005:18)

Sarah Townley, Inuit Language coordinator for the Labrador School Board, described some of the difficulties with Rose Jeddore’s work. As she said, “Rose’s orthography didn’t catch on. She was using the *q* and *ng* from outside (Nunavik and Nunavut). In Labrador we used big K instead of the *q*, and didn’t use double vowels. The old missionaries used “R”, as well *nng* and *ngg*. The main thing was to get rid of the R” (Sarah Townley, personal communication).

Lawrence R. Smith also wrote about this dictionary, long before it proved to be inaccessible to the general population. His enthusiasm is linked no doubt to the fact that he used the same orthography:

Rose Jeddore has edited the first Canadian, perhaps North American, Inuktitut dictionary produced by Inuit alone. Although neither missionaries nor professional linguists were involved in its production, Jeddore's innovative inclusion of example sentences, in addition to her phonemic rigor, means that dialectologists and theoretical linguists alike have better access to the facts of the language. In most details it is identical to the ITC Language Commission's recommendations and to the new Greenlandic orthography. (Jeddore 1979:94)

The 1974 Inuit Language Commission proposed changes to written forms of Inuktitut all across the north, in order to standardize the writing system. Although each area had developed its own orthography, there was consensus amongst most to adopt a written system that would be mutually intelligible. (Fabbi 2003: np) Labrador Inuit were reluctant to embrace these changes, however. Rose Jeddore felt that Labrador Inuit were being asked to make more changes than other groups in adjusting to a common writing system:

The Language Commission created a lot of confusion, not only in Labrador but also in other parts of Canada. People did not want a standardized Inuktitut, people did not want to change their writing systems. People did not want to be the only ones to change anything about their dialect, language, or orthography. (Jeddore 1979:89)

The suggested changes seemed to cause friction, both amongst the larger Inuit population and within Labrador. Jeddore commented that she and her committee were accused of rejecting the traditional Moravian writing system, which reflected the way people had spoken long ago. The struggle was compounded by the attitudes of

missionaries who didn't want any change. Jeddore felt that the archaic system was preventing people from reading Inuttitut. As she said:

We never have to write our language on a day-to day basis. We, who are educated in English, are always provided with a translation that we can read three times as fast as any written Inuttut. We have not been educated in traditional Moravian so we cannot understand that what we speak and what we write must be two very separate things. (Jeddore 1979:86)

The Moravian missionaries learned the language faithfully and taught the Inuit in Inuttitut, but it is not to be supposed that they spoke it the same way the Inuit did themselves. Lawrence Smith comments on Inuit imitating the accent of the European missionaries, showing that there was a sense of confidence and ownership around language, and that vernacular versions of the dominant language existed. There are many accounts by Inuit of the humour they found in the mispronunciations of Rev. Peacock in particular (Smith 1979:110). Jeddore felt that the missionaries did not sufficiently acknowledge that the language had changed and the orthography needed to reflect these changes, because they had been educated using the old publications produced by the church. Her view is that:

What we have proposed through the Inuit common writing system is both radical, unspeakable, and unmentionable. Instead of having a standardised way of writing, we have been telling people that they should write just as they speak (Jeddore 1979:87)

This view embraces the integrity of dialects and supports the idea that spoken language can and does change, but of course the result for written language is that there is not a standardized form.

Views on the proposed changes were mixed, as can be seen particularly during the education conference held in Nain in 1977. Representatives of the provincial Department

of Education were present, and much discussion took place on the role of the Inuttitut language in the school system, where it had not formally been the language of instruction since 1950. Jerry Sillett, Chief Elder of Nain, reminded the Minister of Education that at a meeting discussing what he still termed “Moravian schools” the previous September, he had asked that the older style of writing Inuttitut not be dropped, to which the Minister replied that a local decision was needed on this matter, and it was not for the Department of Education to decide.

Rev. Siegfried Hettasch then reported that he had been asked to stop teaching the language in Nain because of the introduction of a new system of writing it. At a later point in the conference he referred again to the question, saying that the Moravian Synod, during a September meeting held in Nain, had decided unanimously in favour of the use of the old spelling system (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:36). Hettasch read a letter from Rev. F.W. Peacock concerning the orthography question:

The spelling (orthography) used by the Moravians in their writings in Inuttut is not an arbitrary imposition by missionaries. The Labrador orthography is the result of careful and scientific study of the Inuit language, not only by Labrador missionaries but by native born Greenlanders and Labrador Inuit. The orthography was the result of experience of the Inuit language in both Greenland and Labrador. The Labrador Inuit language might be described as the classical form of Inuttut. I have heard the Labrador mission spelling referred to as “German” spelling and “Peacock’s” spelling, it is neither. It is purely a scientific writing of a language following definite rules for consonant changes when illision [sic] (joining) takes place between consonants and indeed when vowels come together. The Labrador orthography is part of the Inuit cultural heritage and is the result of at least 150 years of investigation and study. The so-called new orthography was hastily devised over a couple of years after consultation with a few young Inuit who had no knowledge of the accurate and scientific rules governing the

writing of Inuttut, indeed they had hardly any knowledge of the grammatical forms of the Inuit language. If we wish to retain as much of the Inuit culture as possible, we must retain an orthography which has proved itself over a period of 200 years and not use an orthography which will bastardize a beautiful, expressive and extremely mobile language. The Labrador Inuit speak English clearly and enunciate well, should they not do the same with their own language, and not permit its written form to be degraded? (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:56)

Other participants at the conference had their views as well: Beatrice Watts made the point that the older people did not like the *q* and the double vowels, though she stated that she preferred not to take a stand on the relative merits of each system. Abel Leo said that while he appreciated what younger people were trying to do: “He pointed out that while he could read the local Inuit system despite a lack of education, he could not read the Greenland system or the one in use in other parts of Northern Canada” (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:63). In another example of local speakers wanting to retain the earlier form, Bill Edmunds reported that at the Labrador Inuit Association annual general meeting three years before, the membership had voted almost unanimously to keep the old system, a statement confirmed by Sam Andersen (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:63). Sam Metcalfe presented a view that was more in keeping with the academically trained speakers of the community; he felt that the new standard system would enrich the language. The delegates at the conference from the North West Territories and Greenland reported that a similar situation had occurred in their regions; in Greenland a revision of the orthography meant that young people and non-Inuit could write more easily, but there was still a

feeling of loyalty to the old system (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:64). Informants from 2013/2014 recall the continuing discussion:

There was always a question about what orthography are we using. It went on for years. There was a Labrador orthography and then there wasn't...I think now it's a Labradorized...I think it even changed after Beatrice [Watts], it was always changing so what the complicating factor was, we'd use kids' books from up north and the words were the same but not always spelled the same. It was problematic for immersion. There was Rose's [Jeddore] dictionary and Rev. Peacock's...his was too complicated. What we have now is a modified Reverend Peacock version. (Interview Borlase 2013)

Catharyn Andersen spoke on the same topic:

It's incredible how emotionally attached people can be to a writing system. The Moravian system was in use for a long time. Then there was a meeting of elders and they were trying to make it more user-friendly and based on phonetic sounds. It's quite simple. I've been in meetings where you've been hung up on these things for a long time. (Interview C. Andersen 2013)

When asked if the writing system continued to be a source of conflict, Torngâsok language coordinator Toni White replied:

Absolutely. When it was re-established, the new writing system back in the 1980s, there was an elders' meeting where Beatrice Watts headed up the meeting and she helped to define the new writing system. And I think the struggle is that a lot of elders don't understand the new writing system. When they reprinted the Bible in the new writing system, people were really unhappy, they didn't want certain things changed and there was a lot of pitting against one another. "Let's get it out there so our kids can read," versus the elders saying, "I don't want it changed." Same with hymnbooks. Only the elders at the conference had a say. (Interview White 2014)

Lawrence Smith commented that there have always been difficulties with Labrador orthography: "At this earlier stage the difficulties were largely due to the fact that the Labrador dialect had never been independently analysed. The orthography was based on

Greenlandic, which was demonstrably different from Labrador Inuttut” (Smith 1979:106). He points to a gap between native pronunciation and missionary writing, as well as ongoing sound changes, which all combine to produce patterns of speaking that have changed greatly since the era in which the Moravians developed the written form.

This difference between Moravian theory and Inuit practice has existed for some time now in an atmosphere of linguistic purism. There has consequently developed an attitude among recent missionaries that the speech of the Inuit themselves is incorrect. A good example of this attitude can be found in a recent publication by Rev. F.W. Peacock: ‘Inability to read has also led to a further complication in the pronunciation of Inuktut so that the careful pronunciation of older and well read (comparatively speaking) Inuit has given way to a more casual pronunciation which quite often seems to be a sign of illiteracy.’ (Smith 1979:106)

Rapid language change took place, the more pronounced in a community that was largely ceding pride of place to English linguistically:

The language changes described above have been so extensive that the Moravian orthography and religious translations may be said to be obsolete. Similarly the dialect described in the Moravian linguistic accounts (and the one spoken by some missionaries) can no longer be said to be serviceable in everyday communication. Through linguistic change the Labrador Inuit have reclaimed their language. (Smith 1979:108)

The current system came about in the 1980s when another conference led to further discussions on standardizing the writing system. Some feeling of attachment remained to the old writing, as seen in the conference report from 1987: “There is a need to retain the old writing system so that older and younger people can communicate. While Inuit are arguing over what writing system to use, Inuktut is being lost” (Labrador Inuit Association 1987:39). A corroboration of this history came about during a discussion at the 2001 Language Conference, when questions were asked about the

standardized dialect to be used for the Rosetta Stone Inuttit software. Sophie Tuglavina reported:

This question was asked before when Beatrice Watts was working at the Curriculum Center. There were differences in the way the words were used in Makkovik, Nain and Hopedale. In 1984 there was a conference held with elders and teachers where the elders asked to standardize the writing system. Our schools started using the word ‘Inuktitut’ as a result of this conference. (C. Andersen 2001:19)

By the time the most recent language conference took place (2008), the pressing question was the survival of the spoken form of the language and how that could be achieved. Comments on the writing system were reduced to this: “Concerns about the Nunatsiavut Government civil service and policies were raised. It is not known what the status of the Labrador Inuttut standardized writing system is” (Torngâsok Cultural Centre 2009:5). Looking back from the vantage point of 2015, as elders continue to pass away and leave the language resource ever more depleted, it seems that concerns have changed a great deal from the 1970s, when orthography was closely tied to identity, as we can discern from Rose Jeddore’s impassioned comments:

The chief argument for maintaining the status quo was tradition – two hundred years. A lot of bad blood was spilt by misunderstandings on both sides. We did not like to be told that our way of writing was a Qallunaak system. We did not believe that a writing system using geometric figures was a gift from God to the Inuit. If anything, the Language Commission firmly entrenched the traditional Moravian system in Labrador. The Labrador Inuit were not about to be dominated again, even if the dominant group this time were another group of Inuit. During the period from 1953-1974 when only English was used in our schools, our children were taught to think only in English and to develop negative attitudes towards the Inuktitut language and their culture. We now have more loan words from English than we would have if we had been allowed to develop our language without outside interference. There has been so much language loss amongst young Labradorians that unless we begin a full-scale education program in Inuttut and unless we adopt or develop a writing



system that will make literacy in Inuttut possible then we will truly lose the use of our language. Having had to re-educate myself in Inuttut, I know how difficult this is. I would like full literacy in Inuttut and have at my fingertips something other than religious text to read. (Jeddore 1979:91)

## **Syllabics**

An aspect of orthography in Labrador that has received very little scholarly attention is the use of the syllabic writing system, the “geometric figures” of Rose Jeddore’s speech. The Moravians developed the Labrador orthography based on their work in Greenland, and used the Roman alphabet, which incidentally would have made the acquisition of English literacy easier, and may support the idea that literacy in the local language leads to literacy in the dominant language. However, there is ample evidence that the use of syllabics occurred in northern Labrador. This was most common amongst the people of Hebron and Nutak, but it was used in other places as well.

Kenneth Butler, who served as an RCMP officer at Killinek in the early 1920s, reported:

The hymn books at the mission were printed in Syllabic–hieroglyphic-like characters which represented sounds. This system had been taught to both the Indians and the Eskimos for many years past by various missionary groups, but it was a comparatively new form of instruction among the Labrador Eskimos. By using these characters they were able to read and take part in the service. (Butler 1963:48)

Donna Patrick and Louis-Jacques Dorais both reported that Inuit in Nunavik were often self-taught in syllabics and had, like the Nunatsiavimmiut, a tradition of literacy. In the case of the Labrador Inuit, literacy began earlier and was able to transfer into English because of the similar orthography, giving the double-edged legacy of facility with English and a quicker drop in Inuktitut facility. Many of the people I interviewed reported the use of syllabics, called by them “the little writing” or “hooks and eyes,”

indicating the lower status and less frequent use of that writing system in Labrador. Clara Nochasak Ford, relocated from Hebron, reported: “My mommy used to teach me some syllabics.” (Interview Ford 2003). Christine Baikie, a self-taught reader in both languages, described her reading history:

CB: I just sort of picked it up on my own. And my mother taught me some. My mother never went to school, but she picked it up too.

MW: What about writing Inuttut?

CB: I learned that on my own. At one point in time I was able to read and write in syllabics too. But when I went to North West River working I lost contact with it. I used to write to Sarah Ittulak, we always did that.

MW: In syllabics?

CB: Yes, I used to be able to but I haven't a clue now.

MW: Where did you pick that up? I thought that wasn't around here?

CB: Well, Sarah Ittulak and those people, Okkuatsiaks and them, they came from up around George's River and they brought it from there. (Interview Baikie 2003)

Sarah Townley reported that her mother wrote in syllabics, and Bertha Holeiter also recalled her mother sending letters to people in other communities, written in syllabics. Selma Jararuse remembered her grandfather showing her how to write her name in syllabics in the 1960s. Fran Williams was instructed in this writing by a fellow patient at the St. Anthony hospital. Hilda Lyall's mother wrote in syllabics as well as in Roman orthography, and had handwritten stories about trapping and hunting which she read to the children in the tent at their fishing place:

HL: I remember that her age [group] used to read syllabics I think a lot, the Barbours... David Barbour and his wife from Nain, I remember. And my aunt used to read syllabics. It must have come from Quebec border, somewhere up there. She learned from her mother, because she used to be up in Okak. They used to use syllabics there more than in Nain. The stories were about fathers out trapping or anything to do with trapping or hunting or fishing, stuff like that. I guess somebody wrote them, they were really short stories.

MM: And would she have written in syllabics?

HL: No, like first time she did but after I was born I guess she learned, when she was in Makkovik I guess she learned Roman orthography and I think she forgot how to write syllabics after too. (Interview Lyall 2003).

Beatrice Watts reported her encounter with the northern writing system:

Some people had it. I tell you the first time I came across that, I was teaching in Nain and when the Hebron and Nutak people were relocated there were a couple of families that had syllabics. I know one lady had the Lord's Prayer in the back of the Bible. I don't know who printed it in the back of her hymnbook. There were two or three families that had syllabics. They brought it from northern Quebec. People were so mobile with the fur trade that there was a lot of movement in those days. (Interview Watts 2003)

There are many other accounts of syllabics being used in Labrador, and the informal adoption of this system is an example of the "folk learning" that will be discussed in the following section on "domain." The use of syllabics was not part of the central debate over orthography but rather an interesting aside in its history, which included the previously-mentioned use of Roman-orthography texts translated into syllabics. This included the magazine from Nain entitled *Aglait illunainortut* (Hans Rollmann, personal communication).

The battle over orthography would continue to affect other dimensions of the literacy question. Meanwhile, as Nancy Dorian points out, "The existence of a writing system and even the existence of a notable literature do not necessarily ensure that a language will survive as a living speech form, much less thrive" (Dorian 1998:11). In spite of Dorais's remarks and those of Abel Leo that the orthography difficulties hastened the decline of the language, the effect of orthography establishment on Inuttitut was probably a positive one in that it allowed for the development of a written canon that also extended the domain of Inuttitut literacy.

## Domain

Much of what has been written about literacy considers the aspect of “domain,” the niches in which written language is used. In Barton’s ideas on the ecology of language, many factors are considered when looking at the evolution and place of literacy, and some of these social factors translate into the sense of place that a language has, where it is appropriate to use it rather than another language, and how this has changed over time (Barton 2007:43). The survival of a language has been linked to the prestige it holds, and this is associated with the domains in which the language is used:

The prestige may derive from a number of factors (including the facts just noted—government support and large numbers of speakers); *inter alia* a language typically grows in prestige if it is associated with a rich literary tradition, is used in local or national media of communication, is utilized in processes of commercial exchange (and thus is associated with economic advancement), or if it is tied to a widely practiced religion. (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:ix)

When there is no written tradition of a language, we see a corresponding lack of domain for it:

Most of the moribund languages are not written down, and where there is a writing system there is very little written in the language and only in a narrow range of domains. This is also true for many of the endangered languages. Literacy can have a role in slowing down language death, by giving a language status and widening its uses. Sustaining local literacies can be important. (Barton 2007:203)

The creation of domains where literacy could be used provides opportunities for a language to see increased usage. There are a number of places in which language is practiced and sustained, some of which are essential for the continuation of usage. These include the home, the school, and the church, as well as daily meeting places such as the store. There were other domains in which the Labrador Inuit found a place for their

language, and where literacy served their purposes and reinforced written Inuttitut as appropriate and useful. Unlike some cultures where the Indigenous language was seen as second to English in status, Inuttitut continued to be the daily language for both the Inuit and the missionaries and retained its prestige until the shift took place after Confederation. We can look here at the several domains in which Inuttitut was supreme until the mid-twentieth century, when changes in technology and work practices increased the domains for English usage.

### **Education**

Education is a critical domain and, as discussed in the previous chapter, much of the decline of Inuttitut can be traced back to the decision to replace it with English as the language of instruction in northern Labrador schools. Some see the school as the natural protector and promoter of a language, as children spend a considerable amount of time in the classroom and administrators and teachers have the power to instigate language programs.

Many scholars assert that language retention must be tied to home use, but in a practical sense, education and schooling are also partners in the crusade to retain or revive Indigenous languages. This effort to involve the language in many domains is part of the success found in the revival of such languages as Mohawk, Maori, and Hawaiian (McCarty 2010:304).

A great deal has been written about the Moravians and their educational practices and policies in Labrador; suffice it to say here that from 1780 until about 1953 they ensured that the Inuit were taught entirely in their own language and that schooling was

provided in English for Settler children. Publications were produced at a very early date and the importance of literacy was underlined by the provision of native teachers and of education for both boys and girls. It is therefore remarkable to see how severely spoken Inuttitut diminished once it was removed from the educational domain, and this fact underlines the importance of examining the connection between literacy and language retention. The drop in church attendance over time also removed a domain that traditionally reinforced literacy.

There was some unofficial instruction in Inuttitut after Confederation; Beatrice Watts continued to put *Dick and Jane* aside in order to teach unilingual students, and as mentioned in the 1977 Education Conference report: “Ms. Watts then referred to the question of dropping Inuttitut from the schools. She recalled that in 1951, some Inuit was still taught in religion. She had taught introductory lessons, with tales in Inuit [Inuttitut] being used” (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:36). As we will see in the narratives provided on language loss, informants Bertha Holeiter and Selma Jararuse recall being taught in their own language in the Nain school in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Once English was taught as the official language, the Inuit lost their academic advantage in school as well as their comfort level in learning, according to Brantenberg’s and Grant’s examinations of the success level of Inuit children in Nain schools compared to that of Settler children and newcomers. Moravian education was a primary domain for Inuttitut literacy for the better part of two centuries, and it is a testament to the power of the educational domain that its removal from that space precipitated an eventual change

in the daily use of the language. In this case it was not literacy but the lack of a domain for Inuttitut literacy and learning that affected it. Not only was the status of the language reduced by removing it from daily use at school; one of its crucial functional spaces was also eliminated.

Once a context or domain that requires literacy exists, the machinery of producing and maintaining this cultural possession continues to run. In the case of Labrador Inuttitut, a second domain, related to the first, was that of community-based informal education. Hans Rollmann has described many examples of Inuit teaching each other while at fishing and hunting camps, where they took along their Inuttitut Bibles and hymnbooks. This education was widespread and extended to regions south of the Moravian strongholds, where people in Snook's Cove and Carawalla were reported to have learned reading and writing from a woman who had spent time in Hopedale (*Periodical Accounts* Hopedale 1850). In the same region, Joe Palliser in 1860 was seen to practice writing with a piece of iron on soft stone (Rollmann 2010:19). Carol Brice-Bennett has also discussed this:

Inuit women married to Europeans and to Southland Inuit kept up the religious practices and literacy skills which they once learned as members of a Moravian congregation. Earlier it was noted that a woman at Cape Harrison, formerly an Okak resident, taught Inuit and their children how to read at Groswater Bay, at the mouth of Hamilton Inlet. (Brice-Bennett 1981:446)

Many informants report this practice in more recent times; Jessie Ford and Christine Baikie never attended school, but learned to read and write in both English and Inuttitut in the 1940s with the assistance of their mother, who likewise was largely self-taught. Another informant was taught by a neighbour in Hebron, and Rosie Ford learned

from her husband. Because of the conditions of weather and travel, and the obligations Inuit children had to their families, many people gained much of their learning through informal instruction outside the school system. Sarah Townley, daughter of unilingual Inuit from Hebron, also learned to read at home in Inuttitut, and Sophie Kajuatsiak reports learning to read by herself. Peacock, writing in 1947, mentions two men in Nain who have never been to school but can read and write in both languages. (Peacock 1947:155)

Miriam Lyall told me in an interview:

I have heard of people learning to read on their own, those who were up in the bays and all that. I think then if they did they'd practice it more. After Grade Three my mother taught herself a lot, how to read and write more 'cause all those people who went to Grade Three or less more or less taught themselves [in Roman orthography] (Interview M. Lyall 2003).

People remember that reading and writing were considered important. Ed Lyall related this:

EL: Oh yes, everyone could read or write. There wasn't too many people that couldn't read or write years ago. There was more Inuit that could read or write than there was the Settlers. I think it was going to church and reading the Bible and the hymn book. Where they, the whites, were a little lazier. (Interview E. Lyall 2003)

Beatrice Watts discussed the same topic:

I always felt that my parents impressed upon us that school was important and that we should go to school. But the difference is, my father was more immersed in that way of thinking, and my mother felt that way too I guess, she always felt that she was denied going to school. She couldn't go to school, not after the flu. [Spanish Influenza epidemic] She grew up in Okak and after the flu a lot of the children were picked up by people in Nain and adopted, and a lot of them were used as helpers, servants...slaves...and she wasn't allowed to go to school. My father taught her to read and write, but she had been learning somewhere along the way. She used to read to us all the time. (Interview Watts 2003)



William Andersen III and his siblings were taught by their father to read and write before they came to Makkovik in the mid-1950s, and this training was sufficient to enable him to write letters to his parents in later years. Sarah Townley's mother taught her to write on Sundays in the 1960s, and like other families, they took books with them when they went fishing. Tim Borlase reflected on the families he knew in Nain in the 1980s:

I think some of the Inuit people must have learned to read Inuktitut at home. Because there would be families that would come and they would be taking it in school and they could already read it. So I can think of a number of families like that. So I'm not sure what they were reading, the newspapers and the religious books 'cause there wasn't a whole lot. But you know that little red book *A-B- PAT*? A lot of people had that, even in their homes, so they must have learned how to use that book. It's a series of exercises. And that book is from 1890, so the fact that people still had it so many years later... So maybe these people remembered how they were taught to read Inuktitut and then taught their kids and grandchildren. 'Cause we're talking about thirty years later. I remember there were hundreds of copies of that book in Nain and Hopedale in the mission houses. (Interview Borlase 2013)

*A-B-PAT* in fact dates from 1790, not 1890, and was provided to families so that parents could teach their children the alphabet before they started school (Hans Rollmann, personal communication). The use of this book is a familiar motif in Labrador Inuit literacy narratives and shows the control of and interest in literacy that the Inuit displayed from an early time.

All of these situations would be familiar to Barton as part of the "ecology of language:" "Before the coming of compulsory schooling there was still a great deal of literacy teaching. There were parents, grandparents and siblings all involved in the activity of reading, with teaching aids for parents in existence" (Barton 2007:128). And

further: “The family is an ecological niche in which literacy survives, is sustained, and flourishes. In contemporary society literacy is part of the web of family life” (Barton 2007:148). The value the Inuit placed on literacy since its early introduction into their lives also translated into taking responsibility for its dissemination.

### **Reading for Entertainment**

The Labrador Inuit, by reason of their long exposure to literacy, were also able to see reading as a recreational activity, in spite of the limited amount of literature at their disposal. In more recent times as people became fluent in English they were able to enjoy reading and being read to in that language as well, as Fran Williams related:

What I remember when I was a kid [in the 1940s] was this time when the missionaries were the Grubbs. We used to go there every weekend and Mrs. Grubb would be reading *Heidi*. And we loved it. She read the whole book to us. There'd be lots of kids going there and then I could visualize the Alps and what she looked like, and her uncle, you know I'll never forget how I enjoyed that book so much when she used to read it to us. We normally didn't have any books (Interview Williams 2002).

As we will see in the section below on “Canon,” the Inuit did not have many published books to read from, but the sharing of the Bible among Inuit when away from the mission stations set a precedent for the role of literature in everyday life.

“Historically, many people have started with the pages of the Bible and have learned to read with an everyday book” (Barton 2007:162). Peter Evans remarks on this: “Those who could not read—adult converts—would sit in the tent “mending their tackle” or doing other domestic work while children and young people read the Scriptures aloud” (Evans 2012:126). Kate Hettasch’s diary from 1939-40 reflects the value placed on

recreational reading when she says that children were read to as a treat, and were sometimes allowed to read books in bed (Hettasch 1939).

### **Correspondence**

One of the most frequent manifestations of literacy in Northern Labrador was the reading and writing of letters. This was a natural consequence of the observed behaviour of the missionaries. Grenoble and Whaley describe the situation of the Diyari of south-central Australia, where missionaries and their wives kept records of many kinds, as the Moravians did. The Diyari gradually became Christianized and wanted to read the Bible, and from there used their new-found skills for communication (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:128,) just as the Inuit did. The same observation is made by these authors about the Vai of Liberia, who had an Indigenous literacy that included the writing of letters and diaries, and which was taught informally (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:106). Similarly, no context for literacy existed before the missionaries arrived but, once they were established, cultural domains were created in which literacy could and did operate. Brice-Bennett comments on this:

The Inuit had also learned to write and used the skill to communicate with friends and relatives in other settlements. Their letters contained information respecting the families and friends of the writers, and, not infrequently, edifying remarks and meditations, on religious subjects. The achievement of literacy added a new dimension to Inuit society and introduced a cultural revolution, as dramatic and important as the adoption of Christianity itself. (Brice-Bennett 1981:198)

There is much evidence to indicate that the use of literacy for communication that was both voluntary and exterior to formal learning was Inuit-generated, probably beginning with letters dictated to missionaries for the church elders in Europe. By the

1820s, letter-writing had become common as education progressed, and the exchange of letters amongst families and friends up and down the coast was a common practice and was one that maintained relationships and group solidarity. It is here that we can include Robin McGrath's statement that Inuit were never forced into literacy: "There has never been any resistance to the written word or the printed word among Inuit; rather they have accepted it as a useful tool for maintaining family relationships, developing political autonomy and encouraging cultural survival" (McGrath 1984:24). We see the evident pleasure taken by the missionaries in observing this use of knowledge amongst the Inuit reported in the *Periodical Accounts*, where they received letters from the Inuit to transport to other communities.

Another context for correspondence was the letters from patients who were sent south for treatment for tuberculosis. These letters, some of which were from Labrador residents, were sent to family members and also to government officials, complaining that their traditional clothing had been taken away, expressing concern that their families would not be looked after, and asking for information on when they would be sent home. Clearly the Inuit were aware of the channels of communication and were not reluctant to use their literacy to pursue their rights. As McGrath says, "Language problems caused serious communication difficulties for patients. Area administrators and Department of Indian and Northern Development officials frequently received letters in Inuktitut appealing for information about patients, letters that in many cases came from the patients themselves" (McGrath 1991b:33). The tuberculosis epidemic amongst the Inuit was a life-changing experience that exposed them to the power and dominance of the

English language. Fran Williams reports that she remarkably lost and regained her language twice, the first time being when she spent time in St. Anthony being treated for TB in the 1940s. (Interestingly, this was the period during which she received some informal instruction in syllabics.)

Frank Tester has written about the Inuit TB experience during the first half of the twentieth century and, like Robin McGrath, has examined letters sent by Inuit to express their homesickness and concerns about people left behind. In the domain of correspondence we see Inuit exploiting their literacy to express a desire to return to the world that was their own and where they felt more powerful. The issue of power is what Tester is exploring; literacy conferred a power on Inuit to participate in the dominant system, but ironically its acquisition began to challenge the values of the Inuit's own system. Tester remarked that young patients who learned English in sanatoria, as in school, had access to the values of a different world whose language their parents could not understand: "Whether in the form of letters or petitions, Inuit writing can be seen as an important manifestation of the invasion of the ideas of progress and modernity to what was previously an oral culture" (Tester 2001:138).

Inuit also took on power by using their literacy to advocate for themselves, in the kind of resistance activity they undertook in challenging the orthography of the mission establishment. By appropriating literacy and seeing it as their own possession, Inuit could turn the tables on the culture that had provided it. As Peter Evans has noted:

Writing, in the hands of the elders, became a powerful instrument for communicating with distant St. John's, from where, in the 1920s, governors of the colony of Newfoundland cast occasional glances toward the Labrador coast. So Inuit elders sent petitions to the Governor in St.

John's in 1921 and 1924 objecting to the government's attempt to regulate caribou hunting. (Evans 2012:163)

This is evident also in letters in the Joseph Smallwood papers, held in the Manuscripts and Special Collections Division of the Queen Elizabeth II library at Memorial University. The district files of the Smallwood papers contain a number of letters from residents of Labrador Inuit communities. One example, dated 1950, is written in syllabics and is signed by a number of well-known Nain elders of the time, including Paulus Maggo, Martin Martin and Jerry Sillett (Smallwood Papers District Files 075 123.005). That particular letter requested financial assistance to match the collection the community had taken up to build a community hall. Many letters exist in the collection, including some from school children written to the Premier. The fact of their existence as well as the incidental use of syllabics bears witness to the extent of this domain, and a closer examination would undoubtedly reveal much about the topical concerns of the communities as well as the extent of their literacy practices. Evans comments further on this correspondence:

The Inuit Elders used letters to communicate with distant officials and they tended to choose prominent officials to lobby the people they identified as big camp bosses or big men. Joey Smallwood's files, for example, contain a trove of letters written by Inuit Elders about community development and politics in the 1940s and 50s. (Evans 2012:31)

The correspondence of individual families is attested to through numerous informants' accounts, as well as through the records kept by the missionaries, and shows us that this domain was an important one long before letters to provincial officials became a common practice. Hans Rollmann discusses this:

Correspondence with Inuit in different locations and with missionaries took place via a postal system that had community mailboxes and transported mail by sledges. This correspondence reinforced the importance of writing. Benjamin Gottlieb Kohlmeister reported in the 1820s that on occasion he conveyed as many as 50 letters from Inuit in one community to relatives or friends in other communities. (Rollman 2008:230)

Miriam Lyall reports on this:

ML: Oh yes, there was a lot of letter writing when I was growing up, we had friends and that was the way to communicate.

MM: Did you write in Inuttitut?

ML: Some of them did. And even in the Paddon Home when I was working in the past six or seven years I was still reading letters in Inuttitut and writing back for them in Inuttitut. So it was still happening [in the 1990s] for our elderly people. (Interview M. Lyall 2003)

Sarah Townley indicates a close relationship between language retention and literacy when she recounts that she maintained her language skills while away at boarding school in North West River in the 1970s by writing letters home to her parents in Makkovik. Inuttitut was not taught at the school and students generally did not speak it to each other, although they were permitted to do so. Nor was telephone communication frequent, but she was able to retain her connection to the spoken language as well as the written by writing letters.

### **Other Written Materials**

Inuit also kept diaries. One that has received much attention in recent years is that of Abraham Ulrikab, who kept an account of his trip to Germany where he and his family were exhibited as part of Carl Hagenbeck's zoo collection in Hamburg, and eventually died of smallpox (Blohm, Ipellie, and Lutz 2005).

There is also a long tradition of making notes, either in English or Inuttitut, on the margins of the Moravian Daily Texts, keeping an account of the arrival of planes, the weather, hunting activities and so on. In a place where paper was scarce, these books, annually purchased and printed in either language, provided a place to keep track of thoughts and events (Vincent 2003). Christine Baikie confirmed this in an interview with Mary Webb:

CB: We used to get mail once or twice in the winter and maybe once or twice in the summer, but there used to be people travelling back and forth and we'd write notes to friends, not even in an envelope, just folded up.

MW: What about keeping diaries or writing stories?

CB: I never did but my mother always did, every day she'd write in her diary.

MW: Same as Mommy too, kept diaries. What the weather is today and so on.

CB: I have some of them. When my mother passed away we all shared her diaries up. I have quite a few of them. (Interview Baikie 2003)

As Evans contemplates, "Abraham's relationship with literacy was probably not unique among Mission Inuit, for whom diaries and letters were commonplace. Indeed, the writing of notebooks and diaries continued to be popular with Inuit at the turn of the century and letters remain important vehicles for self-expression to the present time" (Evans 2012:137).

A more recent forum for writing in Inuttitut is the newsletters produced by inmates at the Labrador Correctional Centre. Inmates write reminiscences in Inuttitut about their daily life in Nunatsiavut, which are included along with crossword puzzles and jokes in these publications issued by the students at the prison classroom. As well, *Them Days Magazine* publishes articles in Inuttitut and has done so for more than thirty years. A number of pieces have also appeared in *Decks Awash* (McGrath 1993). In very



recent times, we see instances of younger Inuit posting on Facebook in Inuttitut, as reported by Toni White, “I do see some of the younger generation using Inuktitut on Facebook. It’s not always full sentences but you do see it, talking about the weather, going off, bit by bit. We’ve got a lot of champions” (Interview White 2014).

The need for teaching materials is a common feature of language retention programs. The existence of domain in this context is shown by Marit Vamarasi in “All Literate and Nothing to Read: the Problem of the Lack of Written Literature in Rotuman,” where English is the language of school while Rotuman (language of the South Pacific island of Rotuma) is reserved for home. Vamarasi feels that in that culture there is no urgency to have books, as home is not a place where reading is normally carried out (Vamarasi 2000:119). This raises the question of how literacy was used in some cultures, in the absence of mass book production. Writing was banned from the education of Druids, for example, who as the sacred elite, had to memorize vast quantities of ritual liturgy, giving a reverse prestige to the lack of literacy (Vamarasi 2000:125). Feats of memory are more common in the non-literate, as indeed they must be, and this is perhaps one of the fears regarding the achievement of literacy, that the kinds of traditional knowledge normally lodged in the memory would instead be simply abandoned when people became lettered. In the Labrador Inuit usage, fiction lived on in folk tales and literacy operated in quite a different sphere.

Memorization, curiously, was in fact a tradition in the Moravian church introduced by Inuit. It was customary for Inuit to memorize the confirmation liturgy; the church itself did not require this, but Inuit felt it was a requirement and custom that they

placed upon themselves, and went to great lengths to be sure that they were word-perfect for the ritual. This of course required literacy in order to be able to study the texts to be memorized (Ben-Dor 1966:99). Beatrice Watts recalled this: “Oh yes, I remember going in and watching a confirmation at the sunrise ceremony at Easter, and everybody would memorize everything. All the responses to the questions, to do with your belief. And then they had the Apostles’ Creed and all those things to learn” (Interview Watts 2003).

### **Religion and Literacy**

Religious life was the strongest domain of Inuttitut literacy and in 2015 probably still holds that place. After the language of school changed, the Moravian churches continued to be well attended for some time, and Inuttitut was still the *lingua franca*. As mentioned earlier, people also gathered together informally to read the Bible. Many people, both Inuit and Settlers, who were English-speaking, could read and sing the liturgy and hymns in Inuttitut, and in many cases the church was where they learned to read the native language. Services are still held in Inuttitut in Moravian communities and in Happy Valley, but the attendance is much diminished. As a young informant said, “I practice my culture more than my religion” (Anonymous 2008), and while self-identification as Inuit has increased greatly in the past twenty-five years, language use has diminished.

Beatrice Watts recalls the influence of religion on reading habits:

BW: I think that was done through reading the Daily Text. Moravian Daily Text in English and Eskimo, Inuit. I’ve got one here. There was a text every day, and people were encouraged—it was all through religion, see, everything was through religion. And people were encouraged to read a text from the Bible every day and it was in Inuktitut and that was how they did their reading.

MM: So they would take that with them when they went fishing.

BW: Oh yes, they'd have it with them, same as you'd have the Bible in your home, they'd have that anyway, the text and the Bible and that's where the reading was taught, through the Bible. Well, in the English-speaking homes too. And I know we'd read it too, the Daily Text, my father read it every morning at breakfast, in English, and Inuit did the same in Inuktitut. And as you got older you could read it. (Interview Watts 2003)

The dominant place of religion in literacy is examined more fully in the following section entitled "Canon," wherein the preponderance of religious literature is discussed.

Examining an issue that crosses over between domain and canon, the question of materials for the teaching of Inuktitut comes up frequently in all the language conference reports. The amount and quality of these materials seem to vary according to the source consulted: "They [Inuit teachers] have three teaching and learning centers with the mandate to produce only Inuktitut material. They have between 100 and 150 books published in Inuktitut along with a lot of teacher support material" (Torngâsok Cultural Centre 2009:9). Some materials were developed for use in the Inuktitut immersion program described by Irene Mazurkewich. In 2015, the program runs only in Nain. A frequent complaint of teachers was that they were required to develop their own materials, unlike the English teachers who used the prepared curriculum. Yet Sarah Townley also speaks of the extensive resources available (Interview Townley 2013). Certainly recent development of the Rosetta Stone in Inuktitut and apps available on iPads have increased the resources available for learning Inuktitut in schools.

Literacy was clearly not only valued but required, as time went on, as we see in the words of Miriam Lyall:

MM: If a person couldn't read or write would they be looked down on?  
ML: No, but they would go to other people who could read or write, and I'm sure I know people even now who can't read and write and have to have other people go into the shops with them and read and write for them. It was very valuable (Interview M. Lyall 2002).

Some of the domains for literacy were clearly established by the Moravian missionaries, who introduced it, yet the Inuit claimed and exploited others for their own purposes and satisfaction. It is possible that there might have been even greater use, had the stock of literature been more extensive, as we shall see below.

### **Canon**

It has been widely suggested by such scholars as David Crystal (Crystal 2002:138) that achieving literacy is an essential part of reviving a language, and indeed, one of the actions taken in language reinstatement is to draw upon a canon of existing literature for teaching materials. If none exists, it is recommended to create such a body of material, being careful to include culturally-appropriate materials, particularly those deriving from the existing pre-colonial oral culture.

Barton has said that "The notion of a canon of books which any cultured person should know is a means of defining membership and including some people and excluding others" (Barton 2007:168). This view was far from what the Moravians desired for the Inuit, as they felt that the purpose of reading was to advance knowledge of the Scripture. (Over time this view expanded to include other works produced by the missionaries, including readers and periodicals.) Barton's next words are far more significant for this context: "Historians are constantly surprised by the discoveries of the large amount of reading done by ordinary people, men and women, and the role of books

in their lives” (Barton 2007:127). In Labrador, the recreational use of reading was not extensive due to the limited number of books, but there was a social use of reading that developed independently of school. This included reading for religious purposes and the reading of the correspondence already described, as well as the newspapers published locally. In addition, Moravian journals reporting from the world-wide missions, translated into Inuttitut, provided information to Inuit on the wider world.

Concurrent with the development and roll-out of teaching in the communities by the missionaries was the production of materials to be used in the classrooms and for eventual home use. These were largely works that were used interchangeably for religious education; as Rollmann points out, “Except for the geographical and mathematical texts, the religious orientation of education does not permit a strict separation of secular and religious literature” (Rollmann 2008a:232). A basic text was the *Labrador Primer*, which was printed in six editions between 1790 and 1929 and provided the alphabet, numbers from one to 100, and Biblical and religious texts.

Many of these publications, which eventually included hymnals and liturgies as well as sermon anthologies, appeared first as handwritten manuscripts that circulated in the communities and were later printed with the revisions supplied by the users. This tradition did not die out, as seen in the handwritten copy of *A Pilgrim’s Progress* owned by Miriam Lyall, and the accounts given by Hilda Lyall (Interview H. Lyall 2003) and Sabina Lidd (Interview Lidd 2003) of handwritten stories and dictionaries they recalled from their childhood in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Bible was published in several volumes over time, making it available around the time that the Moravians celebrated their centenary in Labrador. The effect of the Inuit's possession of the Bible was evident in their educational practices while away from home, as described above. Other works included catechisms and theological texts. Rollmann describes one of these as an "Inuit bestseller," the collection of *Two Times 52 Biblical Stories*, originally published in German.

The work of translating these important documents must have been a labour of love for the missionaries who worked long hours under difficult conditions. The *Periodical Accounts* give us a sense of the extensive work involved in producing written materials to buttress the Inuit's growing faith and literacy. Brethren who had to work hard to support the mission in a practical sense and teach to sustain the word of God were also spending their precious spare time translating the Scriptures into Inuttitut. We get a glimpse of this in this excerpt from the *Periodical Accounts*:

The Lord has graciously assisted me, in my poor attempts to proceed with the translation of His Holy Word. Last winter, I completed an Eskimo version of the book of Genesis, which is now in course of revision, by those of my brethren at the several stations, who are best qualified for the task. I have likewise translated several portions of our congregation and missionary accounts, which are listened to with great interest and pleasure by our people. I am now about to proceed with the translation of the Scriptures, and though I do not wish to lose sight of the book of Exodus, I feel a strong impulse to take in hand the prophecies of Isaiah, so rich in instruction, warning and consolation, for the church of Christ Spirit, to guide them into all truth (*Periodical Accounts* 1831:66).

There was very little literature that was not distinctly religious in flavour until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when such works as *Christie's Old Organ* and *Jessica's First Prayer* appeared. In addition, grammars and dictionaries had been

developed since missionaries first took to heart Spangenberg's instructions from the eighteenth century, recommending that they take note of new words and their meanings as well as syntactical relations. (Rollmann 2008:233)

That this provision of Scripture in Inuttitut was effective was proven to the missionaries at last in 1804/05 when a "Great Awakening" took place (Rollmann 2008a:234). The missionaries felt that the Inuit had moved to a beginning of genuine religious feeling, and that this breakthrough came about in large part because of education and the resultant literacy. Although circumstances such as dependence on the mission and the decrease in the practice of shamanism might have been factors in the increase in Christian devotion, it becomes evident in looking at the power and popularity of the Passion narrative in particular that a great desire for the presence of Christ was being manifested in the Inuit. Public readings of this text became immensely popular with baptized and unbaptized Inuit alike. As Rollmann comments: "The profound religious identification with and internalization of the death, suffering and resurrection of Christ was made possible through education and literacy and in particular the availability of the Passion narrative" (Rollmann 2008a:236).

By reason of their long exposure to literacy, the Inuit came to see reading and writing as recreational activities, in spite of the limited amount of literature at their disposal. As they became fluent in English they enjoyed reading in that language as well. In fact, according to Dianne Grant, it was evident to the missionaries that the Inuit were more interested in literacy than they were in Christianity, and that they were most adept at receiving the message when it came through the printed word rather than through a

sermon (Grant 2003:36,42). It is also clear that the Inuit were not passive recipients of the Scripture or of literacy in general. They helped with the translations, read and taught each other, maintained a flourishing tradition of correspondence and were generally invested in the idea of learning for its own sake. Indeed, literacy in a second language was achieved in Labrador, with Settlers in some cases learning to read and write Inuttitut. Literacy was a social and cultural activity, and not merely a tool for acquiring knowledge or a requirement enforced by spiritual authorities.

Many cultures have been presented with literacy as an outside and alien form, meant to transform their way of life, often without their cooperation or approval. The Labrador Inuit seem to have embraced learning from the earliest days, and they moved over time from a learned literacy to a literate culture. Once Inuit took the initiative to use their literacy of their own volition, on their own terms and for their own purposes, they fostered a literacy domain of their own, albeit one with limited resources.

The list of published books available to the Inuit in Inuttitut, though primarily religious, is extensive and covered the range from the Labrador Primer of 1790 through hymnals and books of sermons to songbooks, linguistic reference books and of course the complete text of the Bible (Rollmann 2008a:233).

References to the instructional book *A-B-PAT* show up everywhere; Kate Hettasch reports using it in the boarding school in Nain in 1939, and Tim Borlase recalls it being used in Nain in the 1980s. Sarah Townley had copies in the Labrador School Board Curriculum Centre in 2013. Ben-Dor reports:

Not all the books were of a religious nature. In addition to the Bible, Moravian liturgy and the Moravian Hymn Book there were others like



*Okautsit illiniaraksat suurrutsinut, Learnable Words for Children*, as well as the very popular *Imgerutut notiggit 100*, which was a collection of a hundred German folk tunes with Eskimo words, the Moravian Text Book, which consists of selected Scripture passages for daily use has been translated annually for the benefit of the Labrador Eskimos, and it is up to the present the only known calendar to many Eskimos and Settlers. (Bendor 1966:197)

In spite of this range of text, many people interviewed said they only had the Bible for reading material, indicating perhaps a diminishing of reading resources available. Mary Voisey told me: “The only book I ever saw when I was growing up was the Bible. He was wrote in Eskimo, and that is what the most of them had to read. They had nothing else to read only the Bible. People in their houses, that’s what they’d have.” (Interview M. Voisey 2003)

However, the Bible was a resource for learning that went beyond the spiritual message offered. Kate Hettasch reported using the Bible and hymn books for dictation lessons in school (Hettasch 1940) and this continued with the teacher assistants when Inuttitut classes were reinstated. For example, writing booklets used Bible passages as sample sentences.

Scholars are in consensus in saying that a corpus of literature is helpful when introducing a literacy component to a minority language, because such works provide a connection to the past, and in practical terms provide a set of learning resources. Written materials in Labrador Inuttitut were not (and are not) especially numerous, but they come from a variety of sources. As former teacher Brigitte Schloss explains:

They didn’t have much to read—they had the books that the old missionaries did, the old geography or the old Bible stories. Now they themselves had a lot of stories that they would tell and that they had written down. But we would not see them—that was strictly for

them...Because sometimes when I would go visiting—“cruising” they say in Makkovik and “polaking” they say in Nain—then they’d have stories that were strictly for them...I think it was private and I think it was discouraged at one point, in the early days. (Interview Schloss 2002)

The following voices show us the extent of the canon of literature available in northern Labrador.

Christine Baikie reported on her informal education:

My mother, when she was a child she had some books from Okak. They had a big old place in Okak. My mother had some books maybe the missionaries gave her, or her aunts. Well, I always had a Bible, my grandmother gave it to me when I was six. And I know my mother had a book they called *A-B-PAT*. And I think I learned from that on my own. The only Inuktitut books we had were the *A-B-PAT* and the Inuit hymnbooks and the Bible and the liturgy. Atatsiak [grandfather] used to read that little prayer book [*Daily Texts*] in the morning and before meals...I can’t remember the name. I love reading, always did. I used to learn off milk cans or anything on the label, asking my mom. I guess my mom taught me the alphabet. I used to ask why “knife” was spelt with K. (Interview Baikie 2003)

Muriel (Lucy) Andersen:

We had English books, *Reading without Tears*, Royal Readers and we used to learn poems, just a few I can remember, like about Lucy Gray and she got perished lost, eh. And we learned “The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck”...the good old days. My grandmother could read and write in Inuktitut. She talked all Inuktitut. When I went to school I was six. I spoke very broken English, ‘cause my grandmother talked all Inuktitut.  
MM: Did your grandmother have books in Inuttut?  
MA: Yes, she had hymnbooks and the Bible. I can remember grandmother and my grandfather. We was poor people and she’d get up on the big table and she’d get out the Bible and we’d all have to sit around and she’d read the Bible and she’d sing.  
MM: So where did she learn to read?  
MA: I don’t know. From her people I guess eh, ‘cause there was no schools and a lot of old English people, Kablunaks, they picked it up from their parents. My grandparents had the *Daily Texts*. (Interview M. Andersen 2003)

Naeme Tuglavina started school in 1950 in Nain, taught by Beatrice Watts. She mentioned using children's Moravian songbooks. At thirteen she went to school in North West River, but was already literate in Inuttitut:

NT: Yes, I started 'cause we used to be away in our cabins any time of the season, eh, and we used to have those books, *A-B-PAT* we used to call them, the little red books. We used to use them to learn how to read. Mom read, and I can remember when I was starting school Mom used to teach my father how to read from the Bible, from the New Testament and he used to say, "You got any Inuktitut literature?" In our house she always used to have him reading from the New Testament, teaching him like that. I don't know how I picked it up, how to read Inuktitut. I found a note one time on the road and without realizing it I knew what it said and gave it to Mom. I remember she was really surprised. Then she got me a liturgy book for going to church with her because she knew I knew how to read then. (Interview N. Tuglavina 2003)

Beatrice Watts reported on the available resources:

Well, the *Pilgrim's Progress* was all translated, and I was just talking to a friend in Ottawa last week and she was remembering how she used to sit around and listen to them reading to each other on Sunday afternoon, the adults. And as children you had to be very quiet or go outside and they used to listen to stories. They'd read to each other, whatever books they had. (Interview Watts 2003)

Sabina (Haye) Lidd also remembered the book that parents used to teach children:

Yes, they read to me a book, Inuttitut, just like the Bible, [probably *Two Times 52 Biblical Stories*] and they tried to taught us how to read besides.

MM: A book of Bible stories? Where did they get it?

SL: I think they came from their own parents. And sometimes when they don't have the Bible, they was written by the older people.

MM: Handwritten?

SL: Yes, this is why we got all that stuff, we still got that in the house. Yes, very interesting. Our parents wrote them down and had them from the far past, my great-great grandmother. It's kind of interesting, taking it as a souvenir. And there's a dictionary, written just like the English dictionaries, some parts might be missing. It's like an alphabet...no pictures, just old scribblers, what you call them, they're only small little old ones. (Interview Lidd 2003)

The possession of hand-written materials in Inuttitut seems to have been widespread; Hans Rollmann reports seeing a hand-written autobiography of Martin Martin in the home of Nain Inuk Gordon Obed. (Hans Rollmann, personal communication)

The most prolific contributors to the canon were of course the Moravians, and they were joined in this interest by other religious groups, who along with traders were the most likely to have a stake in learning Indigenous languages (Francis and Reyhner 2002:44).

Hans Rollmann has written extensively about printed Inuttitut sources, which included a Labrador primer from 1870, hymnals, liturgies and sermon anthologies translated from Greenlandic into Labrador dialect, and for more general enjoyment, translations of German folksongs and the popular *Two Times 52 Biblical Stories*:

Only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can we observe printed readers and individual texts that might be described as secular in nature. Such are the anthologies compiled and translated by Albert Martin and Walter W. Perrett [the *Eskimo Book of Knowledge*] as well as a religiously or ethically flavoured literature that qualifies as children's literature, e.g. the translation of O. F. Walton's *Christie's Old Organ* and Hesba Stretton's *Jessica's First Prayer* (Rollmann 2008a:233).

Rev. F. W. Peacock wrote in 1947 with some disdain about what he saw as the Inuit's inability to grasp the ideas present in literature:

Finally, we must take the attitude of the Eskimos towards literature, an attitude which is entirely lacking in imagination. There is, apart from the Holy Bible, little literature in the Eskimo language; but among the books translated into Eskimo, is one called "Jessica's First Prayer", which I believe was a best seller some years ago. The Eskimos read "Jessica's First Prayer" and apparently enjoyed it; since the book was first translated successive generations of Eskimos have enquired of different missionaries whether Jessica was still alive. Upon being told that the story was merely

fiction, or as the Eskimo language has it, “only words,” the Eskimos have expressed their disbelief, and have quoted incidents from the story of Jessica, to prove that she really lived. (Peacock 1947:132)

This is only one of several instances in which Peacock displays a patronizing attitude towards the Inuit with whom he spent a great part of his life. Perhaps the fervency with which the missionaries urged the Inuit to accept the Scriptures as true persuaded them to show that their willingness to believe also extended to Jessica, but more likely the lack of a tradition of fiction in their reading material meant that printed materials were to be taken literally. These did include more than just the liturgy and hymn book, as people were also provided with Inuttitut translations of German folk tunes and the Moravian Daily Texts (Ben-Dor 1966:197).

In this instance, Labrador Inuttitut may have received more attention than many similarly “Christianized” groups:

Soon after the initial boom of publishing works in Native American languages that was promoted by the various religious orders (in Latin America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, on a more limited scale in North America during the 1800s), Indigenous languages began to be viewed as unworthy of writing, or any other academic function. This view has held sway till recent times. (Francis and Reyhner 2002:131)

As Brigitte Schloss mentions, materials existed in Inuttitut that were generated by the Inuit themselves. These include the handwritten copy of *A Pilgrim’s Progress*, the dictionary and stories mentioned by Sabina Lidd, and the stories recalled by Hilda Lyall. There were also English materials read by the Settler families which included the *Family Herald*, comic books, and the classic novels and children’s stories described by Fran Williams and Beatrice Watts, including *The Little Match Girl* and *Gulliver’s Travels*. Additionally, Moravian missionary Rev. George Harp translated *Tom Sawyer* and *A*

*Christmas Carol* into Inuttitut (Tanner 1947:782). Peacock also translated English works into Inuttitut for radio broadcast purposes.

These materials, of course, had their limitations, and were insufficient to develop the habit of recreational reading to any great extent. Irene Mazurkewich describes interviewing Inuttitut immersion students in Nain to gauge the extent of their use of their mother tongue:

Story-telling in this culture is an ancient oral custom, but reading stories from a book to children, as we did in this study, and then requiring them to tell the stories back is not. Moreover, there are very few books available in Inuttitut for those families who might want to read to their children. (Mazurkewich 1991:64)

The lack of story books for children is certainly a hindrance in this or any other language, but Mazurkewich also notes that the linguistic challenge present in her experiment was one of domain:

The insistence of the kindergarten children on speaking English almost exclusively seems to be due to their view of the school as a domain for English which is the dominant language of the community, and they may be less inhibited in reflecting the language shift they have noted. One other serious problem that needs to be addressed is the development of a wide variety of appropriate materials in Inuttitut that can be used by the students. (Mazurkewich 1991:65)

However, the writing of fiction is not a domain into which literacy in Labrador has made much of an inroad. As noted in the section entitled “Canon” below, Inuit did read and enjoy works of fiction, but so far in Labrador few local publications have appeared in Inuttitut. There are several well-known autobiographies by Labrador women, and these have been analysed in terms of Inuit autobiography, but it cannot lack

significance that in spite of their Inuit heritage these women had much European ancestry and composed their works in English.

Another factor is the existence of oral literature for entertainment. The cycles of Inuit folk tales and the ubiquitous legends continued to hold sway as a form of entertainment; in 2008 I received a term paper from a student whose mother provided her with a version of the caterpillar legend that the mother had learned in Inuttitut, her first language, probably in the 1950s (Jararuse 2008). (This story refers to a childless woman who adopted a caterpillar, which sucked the blood out of the woman's body.) This may refute somewhat the fear expressed by K. David Harrison that literacy diminishes the value placed on the oral tradition, or that texts become frozen in time and format. There can be no doubt that written literature and oral culture both flourished. Rose Pamack Jeddore, spokesperson in the 1970s for Inuttitut, was well aware of the legend cycles transmitted to her by her mother and discussed them in a paper written for my folklore class by Beatrice Hope (Hope 2007). Others were recounted by Emilia Kajui, collected by folklore student Andrea Webb (Webb 2007).

Legend collections such as those presented by Dale Blake (Blake 2001) record Labrador Inuit literature, but do not present them as entertainment for children. They are, of course, often rewritten for that purpose. (A number of current research projects aim to produce children's books as deliverables, including Lisa Rankin's CURA project with NunatuKavut, *Understanding the Past to Build the Future*, as well as legend projects in progress at the Labrador Institute of Memorial University.) A much earlier project of the same kind was carried out by Bishop Martin, who translated a folktale about the origin of

fog into German for children. (Rollmann 2008b: 79-84). These collections are not extensive, and more could certainly be brought forth from unpublished collections to provide the culturally-relevant materials so often requested. At the Labrador Inuit Association Education Conference in 1977 a suggestion was made to establish a body of literature and literacy in Inuttitut, possibly adapting literature from other places across the circumpolar north (Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service 1977:4). In spite of any such gathering of resources, clearly they continued to use the Bible as a teaching resource, evident at the 2001 language conference from this comment from teacher Nancy Ikkusek: “Also, when we teach Inuktitut from the Bible or in a Biblical way, it almost feels like we are being ridiculed by the English teachers” (C. Andersen 2001:29).

Using traditional materials as learning resources has its limitations, in spite of the value placed on the idea of a culturally-specific curriculum. These may not be the ideal resources for teaching in subject areas such as mathematics and science, according to Francis and Reyhner:

Cummins (2000) urges educators to recognize and incorporate into the curriculum the vernacular discourses of language minority students, and at the same time to guard against romanticizing the role they can play in the full development of academic language proficiency. And even in the case of a language with millions of speakers, and a long and extensive development of its oral genres, language learners need to go beyond the traditional discourses. (Francis and Reyhner 2002:107)

Moving literacy into the production of literature is a huge step that requires the desire to possess and the ability to produce reading materials, and a transition from the fluid forms and public performance of oral literature to the acceptance of a fixed form of



narrative. As a society that has its deepest cultural roots in the collectively-owned oral tradition, the Labrador Inuit have not yet found their full voice in fiction, and with the decline in the use of Inuttitut it is possible that they will not.

How important is the existence of a local literature? Harrison created a book at the request of speakers of Os, a Siberian language (Harrison 2007:153) but felt that such an activity would do nothing to preserve the spoken language. However, we must not discount the powerful symbolism of having a book in existence in the local language. (Witness also Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine*; in a lecture I once attended she mentioned that she believed that everyone in Acadie had the book in their house and were proud of it, even though they had not actually read it.) It may be that recording oral literature is a first step that precedes writing fiction. In cultures where recreational reading is not yet a cultural imperative, the written tradition will proceed naturally from the spoken, so that autobiographies and legends may be the first materials to be produced, before a member of the culture feels sufficiently empowered and licensed to produce original material as an individual voice issuing from the collective experience.

It is important to recognize as well that the volume of materials provided for education and general use exceeded the canon of reading materials for improving literacy. The early missionaries fostered an interest in geography in the Inuit through public readings of missionary journals from the world-wide Moravian missions and introduced a text that considerably preceded the geography curriculum provided by Doris Peacock. In addition, education in numeracy was provided, which was of practical use to

the Inuit in their dealings with the trade side of the Moravian mission activity in Labrador.

The desire to have an accessible canon is not a misplaced notion, as seen in other language revitalization strategies:

A final note on literacy and writing: the existence of an archival record (the preservation, in books, of traditional IL [Indigenous language] literature, much of which otherwise would have been irrevocably lost) has played no small role in the Hawaiian language revival. (Francis and Reyhner 2002:38)

When a culture has been literate and educated as long as the Labrador Inuit have been, it recognizes that the dominant culture wields its power and expresses its status through the possession of the written word, and that literacy has traditionally conferred power and authority on its holders. The missionaries, for whom as Moravians the Bible was literally the Word of God, set this model and provided the means for Inuit to follow suit with the production of their own materials.

## **Conclusion**

Inuttitut literacy has been a cultural possession of the Labrador Inuit for over two hundred years. We can see that the presence and forms of an orthography, a canon and appropriate domains for reading and writing, no matter what the outside influences were in creating them, have shaped the way the language was passed on, and have provided records that inform us about the change in the language as well as the way of life of the Inuit, and additionally have provided resources to be used in the study of the language.

At the same time, Inuttitut literacy was not self-generated to begin with, and much of what was read and written came from a spiritual and moral universe imposed, however

kindly, on the people. This is far from a unique circumstance, and not only Indigenous cultures but many others have had their language both shaped and used by impinging cultures. Although some scholars may feel that the imposition of literacy interfered with the continuation of the oral forms native to the Inuit, it is inevitable that oral narratives shift and change with time; this has clearly happened in cultures using the most powerful of languages.

Preservation, if such a thing is possible, is not a valid reason to deny the benefits of literacy:

However, the lack of a literary tradition, or the presence of a strong oral tradition, does not serve as a principled argument against the concept of introducing local literacy, because it is based on the false premise that oral and written uses of a language (or oral and written traditions) are in conflict. This assumption is driven by a view of orality as a merely developmental stage en route to literacy, an idea prevalent both in Marxist thought and in the Western tradition more generally. Empirical evidence contradicts it. (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:121)

Inuit became literate through the offices of the church, and were successful at it through their own efforts until it became part of their identity. Literacy was not only a force for social change, a vehicle for obtaining information and a method of communication, but was a transformative agent. The very high rate of literacy was a source of pride and a force for retaining culture even as it adopted forms that came from outside. The impact of literacy was profound; Inuit were encouraged to keep their language by the Moravians to avoid the influence of southern traders, but were also convinced of its place as a viable method of communication, particularly when it could be used to pass along devotional and literary works of great significance. In fact, literacy transcended the bounds of the classroom and in the best manner of folk tradition made its

way into the daily lives of the people. The instruction that took place between literate and learning Inuit at the fishing camps, or between educated children and their parents, shows that cherishing and promoting literacy was one of the values brought by the Brethren and internalized by the Inuit over a period of time. Although the influence of the church has been greatly diminished in recent generations, the effect of the educational efforts of its missionaries has left a lasting impression that went beyond the original purpose. As Beatrice Watts reflected:

Education and reading was important so they could win people over to the faith. Because everything they had been doing up to that point had been “wrong”– I think that was it in a nutshell. The big drive was to convert people, to save them from their own plight. That sounds cruel, but that’s the way I see it. You need another motivation. Maybe that motivation is gone and there’s another one now– to learn for the sake of learning, not because you’re going to be saved. (Interview Watts 2003)

## CHAPTER FIVE: IDENTITY

To quote folklorist Roger Abrahams, “Identity has become the encompassing term for cultural, social and spiritual wholeness. It also emerges in discussions of territorial integrity, often as a rhetorical ploy in struggles for establishing and maintaining domain. As such, it references many of the most central fictions of our time” (Abrahams 2003:198).

What exactly are these fictions, and how fictional are they? How necessary is it to anyone to declare an identity, and how often do we try to ascertain and define our own identity? For many of us, this sense of identity may arise in terms of our education, profession, or family relationships, but for others it is a question of group and ancestral heritage, with a great deal at stake. What are the narratives told by the Labrador Inuit to situate and reinforce the identity that includes the coin of land transactions, the poignant fading of language, and the uniform of political warriors?

Abrahams goes on to suggest:

For many psychiatrists and sociologists, as well as folklorists, one’s identity emerges from the stories one tells on oneself or one’s community. The sum of these stories constitutes the life-history of the individual or the group. Each incident, each report of past experience, is transformed as an emblem of both the uniqueness of the individual—insofar as they replay an experience unique in its time and place of occurrence—and a badge of group membership. (Abrahams 2003:201)

Thus the stories told of language use, whether they be the narratives of loss and deprivation, or the narratives of inclusion from learning Inuttitut as a second language, represent not only a life experience of participation in the folkloric transmission of

language, but also a stake in the larger game of establishing the extent to which language must be maintained as a marker of identity and of membership in a group.

Identity is clearly a high-stakes commodity in those parts of the world where territory and resources are contested, and where identity is used as an excuse to rationalize military takeovers and even to carry out genocide. It can, of course, be used in much more benign ways to achieve political and social equality (Abrahams 2003:202). The latter, more positive case obtains in Labrador, and the essence of that identity is still in the process of being defined and refined.

In this chapter I examine how the possession or absence of the Inuttitut language informs and affects identity in the lives of the Labrador Inuit. The words of informants as well as those of scholars are presented to demonstrate how Inuttitut as a marker of culture has changed within the Labrador Inuit community as it has become less commonly used, and how that culture is expressed in alternate ways, now that it is less closely associated with the maternal language.

Claire Owen examined language as a marker of Aboriginal culture, discussing the experiences of five women of Aboriginal ancestry attending university in Ottawa. The sample was small and homogenous in terms of gender and location, but it was significant in many ways, particularly in view of the vehement declaration of these women that they were Aboriginal, though each had one non-Aboriginal parent and only one had any fluency in her native language. Her view was that they downplayed their non-Aboriginal heritage and displayed an acculturation strategy of separation, identifying only with their Indigenous side (Owen 2011:151).

Citing Eastman (Eastman 1984), she goes on to discuss the disputed territory language occupiers:

The precise nature of this relationship between language and identity is a contested topic. Some believe that a particular language is fundamental to a particular ethnic or cultural identity, in part because it is thought to “encode” a cultural worldview and traditional forms of knowledge. Others find this characterisation too essentialist, and feel instead that language is a contingent marker of identity or even that it is simply a surface “behavioural” feature, so that a specific language is easily replaceable by another with no change to the underlying “primordial” aspect of that identity. (Owen 2011:1)

In Labrador as well, people are aware of the European roots of their ancestry, but in recent years are much more likely to display and celebrate their Aboriginal ancestry. This shift in thinking is often attributed, by both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, to the benefits now attached to Aboriginal status, but discussions with informants reveal a more complex evolution in the history and self-perception of the people who make up the population of Nunatsiavut.

The subject of Labrador Inuit identity, when sieved through increasingly finer mesh, reveals a number of keywords that must be looked at carefully in order to understand the way that people in northern Labrador have identified themselves and their neighbours since the arrival of people with links to European countries. Examining this question requires an understanding of historical issues and current preoccupations, and when looked at through the prism of language it affords a glimpse into chosen and attributed identities that have changed in terms of self-perception and social status.

The people who have occupied the centre and coasts of Labrador over the generations have borne various names; leaving aside the recent incomers and the Innu

population who occupy less-contested space in terms of identity, we are left with a set of keywords that have carried shifting meaning and value over time. Some of these are represented in the glossary PhD candidate Lawrence Dunn provided in 2002 for his readers, and my elaboration of them reflects the development of Labrador's mosaic identity over the last decade. The following list demonstrates the change in terminology over time and the circumstances under which the change happened.

### **Eskimo**

The term 'Eskimo' is widely regarded as pejorative, due to its Mikmaw/Algonquian meaning of "eats raw flesh," yet it was used both in reference to the people and to their language by the Labrador Inuit themselves until recently. Dunn defines it as "Term referring to Inuit; now considered a derogatory slur" (Dunn 2002:xiii). In fact, the term "Eskimo" is one that some Inuit have suggested resuming, as explained by one informant from Hebron "We wanted to differentiate ourselves from the other Inuks," the ones she said didn't want to associate with them before the days of the land claims agreement (Interview Anonymous 2013).

Rev. F.W. Peacock, who served as a Moravian missionary for decades in Labrador, used both words, though predominantly chose the word "Eskimo" (Peacock 1981). My older informants (those born before 1950) used the word "Eskimo" without self-consciousness, though they sometimes added, "We say 'Inuit' now." When used in its full form it was not meant to be pejorative, unlike the diminutives that were clearly used as slurs, such as "Skimo" and "Husky."



## **Inuit**

Dunn defines this term as: “Inuit: Labrador’s native coastal Aboriginal group. See also Eskimo” (Dunn 2002: xiii). The term ‘Inuit’ is now the standard word referring to the group of people formerly known as Eskimo, but is also open to interpretation. At one time there was a clear division between the Inuit and the Settler people of Labrador (see below); now it is common for people with a certain percentage of Inuit blood to refer to themselves as Inuit. This was not always the case. Dunn reports that an informant complained that people didn’t want to be known as “Inuit” even when they had joined the Labrador Inuit Association; instead they identified themselves as “LIA”, meaning they identified as members of the organization but not necessarily as Inuit as their primary identity. Dunn quotes one informant: “I’ve noticed people from the North Coast they won’t say ‘I’m Inuit,’ you know, they’ll say, ‘I’m LIA.’ There’s a difference, right?” (Dunn 2002: 94). This arises in the current terminology as well; some informants asserted their right to be known and considered as “beneficiaries” of the land claims agreement, yet hesitated to claim ownership of the term “Inuit” (Interview Wood 2013).

## **Inuk**

Inuk is grammatically the singular form of Inuit, and is a word in common usage in English. In fact, one can hear the word pluralised as “Inuks,” as when a student commented, “We used to play cowboys and Indians, and we was all Inuks anyways!” It arises as an adjective as well: “He was right Inuk-looking”.

## **Kablunângajuit**

The Inuttitut term Kablunângajuk (Kablunângajuit pl), explained by Dunn as ‘Inuttitut (Inuit) word for ‘partly white person’” (Dunn 2002: xiii), is included in Tim Borlase’s book title, and came into currency during the Nunatsiavut land claims negotiations when a word was required to designate the group formerly referred to as “Settlers,” in order to give them a place in the land claims agreement by virtue of their measure of Inuit ancestry and their long history as residents of northern Labrador. (Kennedy 1988, 1997) People of this classification may use it to acknowledge their lesser quantum of Inuit “blood”; one informant says that he has enough Inuit ancestry to refer to himself as Inuit, but in deference to those who live in the north coast villages he may call himself “Kablunângajuk” instead. As with other subtleties, in the rising generation these have been elided into the general term “Inuit.” Anthropologist Andrea Procter provides us with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada’s definition: “A Kablunângajuk is defined as a person who either has Inuit ancestry, or has no Inuit ancestry but was settled permanently in the settlement area before 1940 or is the lineal descendant of someone who settled permanently in the settlement area before 1940 and was born before 1990.” (Procter 2012:194) This is defined in the “Labrador Inuit Nunatsiavut Land Claims Agreement” (2005: 30-31).

### **Kablunak**

Dunn’s definition is: “Kablunak: Inuttitut (Inuit) word for white person” (Dunn 2002: xiii). This was the term commonly used by Inuit in the nineteenth century for Europeans. Fluent Inuttitut speakers may use this word to refer to non-Inuit people when speaking English. It may carry a negative connotation, as in “Only Kablunaks knock on

doors!” or may be used almost affectionately: “If we all spoke Inuttitut all the time, then our Kablunaks wouldn’t understand us” (Interview N. Tuglavina 2003) but in any case it may be used within an English sentence rather than saying “white people,” and always brings a sense of otherness.

### **Beneficiary**

This term was not yet current when Dunn wrote his thesis, as it entered common parlance with the signing of the land claims agreement and the creation of Nunatsiavut in 2005. (Labrador Inuit Nunatsiavut Land Claims Agreement) “Beneficiary” is a term which simply means someone having the right to vote, but it has grown to be an accepted term for Nunatsiavut members, sometimes in place of “Inuit,” perhaps avoiding the issue of blood quantum. Reporter Julie Green discussed this in her CBC documentary on Beatrice Watts, in which negotiator Toby Andersen said that, “Under the definition section, beneficiary is Inuk” (Green 1997). In this thesis I use the word with a lower-case “b” but it may be that the term is assuming enough currency that it will eventually be written as a proper noun.

Andrea Procter commented on the use of this term in her recent research: “In Upper Lake Melville especially, many people that I talked to rarely use the term ‘Inuit’ to refer to themselves, although there were some exceptions. Both ‘member’ and ‘beneficiary’ describe the legal relationship with the land claim organization or agreement, rather than culture or ethnicity” (Procter 2012:190). In 2015, Labrador people are most comfortable with this term, as it encompasses the entire legal constituency of

Nunatsiavut and does not make claims to linguistic proficiency, Inuit “appearance” or percentage of Inuit heritage.

### **Labradorman**

This old-fashioned term is found in some early articles written by people collecting language examples and by visitors to Labrador, in reference to the people who were permanent residents of the coast (Evans 1930; Carleton 1924). The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Story, Kirwin, and Widdowson 1990:293) gives examples of the term’s usage from Grenfell, Merrick, Tanner and Duncan, all writing before 1948. A related term is “Livyer,” a contraction of “Live Here,” used most commonly for permanent residents of southern Labrador. (Story, Kirwin and Widdowson 1982: 308)

### **Labradorian**

This term is much in use in recent years, particularly since the province added “and Labrador” to its official name in 2001. It is the single unifying term in the territory and is one of the words used to demonstrate geographical and cultural distance from the island of Newfoundland. One informant who is a Nunatsiavut beneficiary indicated that she is more comfortable using this word than “Inuit,” which still seems to indicate that the understanding of “Labradorian” is someone with multi-generational connections to the territory, while others think it applies to anyone who has made Labrador their home. It does have a longer history, though, as seen in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* where a reference to usage in 1863 is noted. (Story, Kirwin, and Widdowson 1990:292). The spelling ‘Labradorean’ is sometimes seen as well, though much less frequently.

## Settler

This term is a complex one and has a specific meaning in the Labrador context, which is different than the use of the word to mean “an inhabitant of one place who takes up permanent residence elsewhere.” Additionally, in recent scholarship “Settler” is used in a way that invests it with a negativity based on the colonization of Aboriginal lands, as seen in this declaration by Amadahy and Lawrence, “Ultimately, to fail to negotiate a mutually supportive relationship is to risk truly becoming ‘Settler,’ complicit in the extermination of those whose lands they occupy” (Amahady and Lawrence 2009:119). In recent Labrador usage, the term meant someone with a long history in Labrador and some Inuit heritage.

Dunn defines the term as follows: “Usually refers to the mixed blood Metis inhabitants of Labrador who have historically identified themselves with their European forebears.” (“Metis” has usually been used to refer to people in southern and central Labrador.) This term is complicated, and perhaps it is for that reason that it is no longer heard in daily conversation. The word “Settler” encodes a great deal of information about a portion of the population that is included in the category of Nunatsiavut beneficiaries today. The term is capitalized in the work of Kennedy (1977), Paine (1977), Kleivan (1966) and Ben-Dor (1966), and this is indicative of the distinctiveness of the people referred to. The naming dilemma was apparent to Tim Borlase when he published his book in 1994 on the history and customs of this segment of the Labrador people, and it led to a somewhat cumbersome title: *The Labrador Settlers, Metis and Kablunângajuit*. The term “Settler” is not actively used in 2015 in this older sense, but the people I

interviewed in 2002-2003 frequently used it, some referring to themselves and others to their neighbours.

My informants in the 2002/3 set of interviews, born before 1940, were of a generation that readily used the term, and, although all were Labrador Inuit Association members, they recognized and displayed the distinction they saw within that population. The following quote illustrates the use of the term “Settler”: “My mother, she was a Mitchell from Adlatok, a Settler we call it, and when she heard tell that there was a komatik come from Hopedale she couldn’t wait to talk Inuttitut to them all the time, she was fluent” (Interview J. Andersen 2003). The general understanding of the term is that it refers to people with a European ancestor who married an Inuit woman. The designation “Settler” was used to refer to the progeny and descendants of these unions, as well as to the original founder of the line. This term is more commonly used on the north coast than in Central Labrador; Michele Wood felt that in North West River, for example, “Settlers” referred to the first people who came from Europe, and that afterwards the descendants would be known as “Labradorians.” Interviews with other informants of this same age group (born after 1950) also indicated that they understood “Settler” to mean the original Europeans only, but the writers of the 1970s (Brantenberg, Kennedy, Bendor) and the people they interviewed presented the same definition as that of my older informants: “Settler” is a term that indicates a certain degree of Inuit ancestry. Kleivan (1966) devotes an entire chapter to this group, classifying them as a distinct group, and uses the word “Settler” as do the Moravian missionaries in their records and, more

importantly, as the people themselves did. (Kleivan 1966:114) The fact that it is no longer used as before indicates the strengthening identification with Inuit ancestry.

Tim Borlase recalls the term being in daily usage in his years in Nain in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and when it changed. As he reported, “The LIA made sure up front that they were called ‘Kablunângajuit’ and they included them right from the beginning, and over time they dropped the ‘Settler’” (Interview Borlase 2013). Words from another informant underlined the continuing sense of difference: “What we called Settlers were the Kablunângajuit, ‘cause like they never spoke in Inuttitut, that’s why we called them Settlers and they didn’t really know how to go off and everything like that” (Interview Anonymous 2013). (The term “going off” is used in Nunatsiavut for travelling on the land and the associated activities of hunting and fishing.) The Inuttitut fluency of this group in Makkovik, where Sarah grew up after leaving Hebron, was clearly different than that of the Nain group as reported by Borlase, giving the example of the church choir: “And that was a curious position to be in because the Inuttitut choir was much more significant than the English choir. And though people in the English choir could speak Inuttitut, because they saw themselves as Settlers, they sang in the English choir, but they could have sung in the Inuttitut choir as well” (Interview Borlase 2013).

The case in 2015 is that all members of Nunatsiavut are referred to as “beneficiaries,” so that the term “Settler” has nearly ceased to be used, but people in Nunatsiavut are well aware of whose ancestry would have once placed them in the Settler category, known largely by surname and by former residence in the bays outside Nain and Hopedale. John Kennedy also refers to “Bay Settlers” and “Nain Settlers,”

distinguishing between those who lived in the scattered bays and those who lived within the mission station communities. In a further complication, the character of the Settler was much different in Makkovik, previously a predominantly Settler community until the relocation of Nutak and Hebron, from what it was in Nain, a largely Inuit community. (Much has been written about the Inuk/Settler divide in essays included in Robert Paine's 1977 collection *White Arctic*, and this will inform the discussion below in terms of language.) In addition, Settlers in the two northernmost communities as well as the resettled one of Nutak were often able and ready to speak Inuttitut, although the Settlers further south did not have this tradition unless they had been brought up further north before moving to Makkovik (Interview J. Andersen 2003; Interview I. Andersen 2003; Interview T. Andersen 2003).

Anthropologists Terje Brantenberg (T. Brantenberg 1977), John Kennedy (1977) and Shmuel Ben-Dor (1966) all wrote extensively on the Settler question, citing the complexity of adding this group to the land claims process of the Inuit; the Inuit voted to include the Settlers in the process, but the pan-Arctic movement and the provincial government of the time both felt this inclusion of Settlers made LIA's claims less legitimate: "The relationship between the various groups, so often a source of tension and differentiation, also became, in the context of Inuit rights, an uncomfortably symbiotic one, as many who were deemed culturally marginal to the process—those of mixed Inuit ancestry—increasingly gained power with the Aboriginal organization" (Procter 2012:101).



A term that is now defunct is “half-breed,” or just “breed,” words used by Hudson Bay Company personnel and by visiting writers, for example Miriam MacMillan (MacMillan 1948:55), though seemingly without malice. Informant Jean Crane spoke of her father, Gilbert Blake, who was a guide to Mina Hubbard on her expedition from North West River to Ungava Bay in 1905. She reports that he very much disliked being referred to as a “breed,” saying that term was the word locally used to refer to dogs (personal communication). Interestingly, Gilbert Blake, who would at present be classified as Inuit, described himself as a “white man” in his reminiscences published in *Them Days*. If identity is formed in terms of “other,” Blake may have referred to himself as a white man in contrast to his nearest neighbours, the Innu.

Further evidence of the lack of use locally of that term is seen in Terje Brantenberg:

It is noteworthy that there is little evidence (except by transient whites) of the use of labels such as ‘half breed’ or ‘Metis.’ The nearest that this is approached in Nain is in the Inuit term of Settler: *kablunângajok* ‘imitation white man.’ At one level, the implication is that Settler behaviour falls short according to both white and Inuit criteria. But at another level, the term has a *double entendre* that encapsulates a way of life as well as the fact of mixed descent: ‘Settlers are *like* white people but they *do* have an Inuit background.’ (T. Brantenberg 1977:342)

### **Metis**

The word “Metis” has, however, seen much use since Brantenberg’s observations. According to Dunn: “Metis: Elsewhere typically refers to Indian-European ‘half-breeds’ or ‘mixed bloods’. In Labrador a political term indicating inhabitants of mixed Euro-Aboriginal (usually Inuit) blood who are ineligible for membership in the LIA by virtue of their birthplace and residence” (Dunn 2002: xiv). Dunn uses this word as a synonym

for “Settler,” showing us that in Labrador it is taken to mean people who have some Aboriginal ancestry, yet “Metis” also has a significance of its own in the Labrador lexicon. Dunn’s comment that Metis are people who essentially failed to make the standards for inclusion into the LIA is telling and would likely be frowned upon by the leadership of today’s NunatuKavut Community Council, which has done much to assert the independence and Aboriginal validity of this group. It is certain, however, that much of the Metis Association’s founding population consisted of people who had been originally included as LIA members but who were then excluded as membership rules changed. Michele Wood comments on this in her interview of 2013: “Metis: in some ways it’s a matter of percentage, which is awful” (Interview Wood 2013). Since the establishment of the Labrador Inuit Association, formal Inuit identity has been assigned based on the criteria of that organization, but for individuals it has evolved based on family narrative and traditional practices. For families who were given and then denied Inuit status, the family history remains the same, but the interpretation and political status depends on the evolving nature of the institutions in place. Much has been written about the Metis of Labrador, particularly during the past five years through the CURA project “Understanding the Past to Build the Future,” which explored many aspects of Metis culture and established the permanent occupation of southern Labrador by the Inuit. (Previously this claim of permanent settlement in the south was questioned by Garth Turner, notably in his article in the 1980 edition of *Études Inuit Studies*. (Turner 1980) Scholars who disagreed with Taylor’s stance took on the proof of permanent southern occupation as a research challenge.)

The Labrador Metis are understood to be mixed-race people (European and Inuit) who traditionally inhabited the southeast coast, though the largest portion of the population is now in Upper Lake Melville. “Metis” is a term that has blossomed and faded within my twenty-six years in Labrador, as that part of the mixed heritage population first formed an association, then declared itself to be a nation, and some years later renamed the group “NunatuKavut Community Council.” The people of the region continue to refer to themselves in 2015 as Metis (personal communication, John Kennedy) but scholars and politicians have recently begun to use the label “Southern Inuit,” a term that has not been completely accepted by everyone in the region.

### **Southern Inuit**

Another loaded political term, this designation has begun to take hold in recent years. Rather than setting up the term in opposition to “Northern Inuit,” the term is probably meant to imply a continuity of identity up and down the coast of Labrador, signifying a common past. The Inuit of Nunatsiavut, significantly, do not use “northern Inuit,” perhaps sending a message that they feel that they constitute the only Inuit population of Labrador. This is a discussion that has been carried out extensively elsewhere and will continue to provide fodder for academics for years to come. One informant for this thesis pinpoints the use of the term as a source of contention between the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and the NunatuKavut Community Council. Although Nunatsiavut beneficiaries concede the existence of Inuit ancestry amongst the latter, use of the word “Inuit” is seen as an encroachment. One informant commented that the term “Metis” was accepted, but that “trying to label themselves ‘Inuit’ with the land claims

being Inuit is sometimes not well received” (Interview 2014). Adding to this complication is the word “native,” now less commonly used. Dunn: “Native: In Labrador may be used by Settlers to indicate mixed blood inhabitants regardless of birthplace or residence. See Aboriginal” (Dunn 2002:xiv). It also has been used by Aboriginals to refer to all Aboriginal groups, indicating a loose confederacy with the Innu of Labrador as well.

### **Identity as Choice or Label**

Elliot Oring challenges us to break new ground in the arena of questioned identity:

Certainly, folklorists need to examine the concept of identity in a more explicit and deliberate manner...situations in which identity is challenged or denied—that is, situations of identity conflict—may prove particularly promising for investigation, as they are the arenas in which the contours of identity become most prominent and visible. (Oring 1994:266)

As the political efforts of the Labrador Inuit have led them into an appropriate position of influence within the region, membership in the group has become a matter of selection and interpretation as well as identification by self and others, leading to what Oring sees as “identity conflict.” The descriptors for those of Inuit and mixed descent have changed several times, each time reflecting a new reality for the group or a new sense of obligation and attempt at inclusion within the group doing the naming. With the change in social mores requiring more sensitivity to previous tragedies and the increased political power and visibility of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, overt racism is less likely to be seen in the present era, particularly in the mainstream media where there is immediate condemnation. (Internet comments are a different matter.) We will examine

the transition that took place in the past few decades, when Aboriginal identity changed from being a status belonging to only a defined group with particular characteristics, and even an identity that gave rise to poor treatment and racism, to the present day where interest and pride in Aboriginal status has greatly increased.

Just as the terms have changed over the years, often prompted by the heads of Aboriginal associations, so too have individuals changed the terminology they attach to their identity, though not perhaps their knowledge of their own family history and their sense of place in the Labrador cast of characters. My interviews in 2002-2003 with Labrador people brought forth remarks that give some indication of how people saw themselves fitting into this cultural puzzle. (The questions on identity I posed in the second set of interviews ten years later asked the question more specifically.) All of the 2002-2003 informants were members of the Labrador Inuit Association.

Eddie and Mary Voisey, the oldest of my informants (born in 1917 and 1927 respectively), revealed their self-identification as Settlers, particularly Eddie when he made reference to “the Inuit” as “they.” He was knowledgeable about his ancestry but clearly did not refer to himself as Inuit, though he said his ancestors “married Inuit people” (Interview E. Voisey 2003).

In the interviews, this discussion of identity and the distinction between Inuit and Settlers came up often in relation to the separate schools attended by children in Nain beginning in 1930. Students were assigned to one portion of the school or the other according to their Inuit or Settler identification, though it is notable that the teachers were the same people for both groups of students and the curriculum did not differ except for

the language of instruction, Inuttitut for Inuit and English for Settlers. In addition, all students lived together in the boarding section. This division happened mostly in Nain where the numbers warranted a separate system. Christine Vincent of Hopedale related during an interview that “The Settlers’ children and us all went to school together when I was going to school” (Interview Vincent 2003). Hilda (Hunter) Lyall attended the Inuit school in Nain and later married Bob Lyall who had attended the English side of the school.

Beatrice Watts (Watts 2003) refers to this era when children were separated in Nain: “They put us in the English school because our parents were considered to be Settlers. And it was called the Settler school--they put us automatically in that one.” She also makes reference to “my dad and his Inuit friends,” showing that in spite of his mixed ancestry her Inuit heritage was seen as drawn from her mother, an Inuk from Okak Bay (Watts 2003). With children taking on the assigned heritage of the father, as in so many societies, this is not surprising. What is surprising is that many of my younger informants were not aware that this system of dual education had existed, and in some cases did not know that people were taught in Inuttitut until 1949.

Watts discussed this choice of terms with CBC reporter Julie Green. When Green asked her which group she identified with, Inuk or Settler, she replied, “Well, both. How can you choose?” (Green 1997). This example is far from unique and shows that this ambiguity was not simply a result of choosing or sublimating one part of one’s heritage; it literally was both confusing and situational.

Much of the scholarship of the 1970s was deeply concerned with this division of the long-term resident population of northern Labrador, as illustrated by the writing of Ben-Dor (Ben-Dor 1966) and later John Kennedy and others, chiefly in Paine's book *White Arctic* (Paine 1977). Their analysis reflects a time when this differentiation was commonly accepted by the participants themselves. Kennedy in "Northern Labrador: An Ethnohistorical Account" gives a thorough discussion of the origin of the mixed population:

HBC personnel were recruited in England, Scotland, Norway and Wales and were required to serve a minimum of five years with the company. They were mostly single men, and our interest is in those who decided to marry native women and remain in Labrador. Still other early northern Labrador Settlers were the sons of men who had come to work for one of the independent British companies operating in southern and central Labrador. Born and raised in southern Labrador, these second-generation Settlers moved into uninhabited areas of the north coast in the mid-1800s. Some married Inuit women, others chose wives from among the few Settler women on the north coast; their progeny, frequently bilingual and bicultural, became the foundation of Settler culture. From the Inuit perspective, first-generation Settlers were probably seen as *kablunak* (white men), whereas the offspring of European-Inuit unions were later called *kablunângojok*, literally half-white or almost like white men. The implication of this appellation is that Inuit viewed Settlers as beings, biologically and culturally, between real Inuit and real whites, and (it is noteworthy) consequently as inferior to both." (Kennedy 1977:273-275)

Ben-Dor worked out the kind of mobile identity Settlers sometimes had in Makkovik and gave an example of one person who made the switch from Inuk to Settler by virtue of marrying into a Settler family. Annie Evans, the daughter of this woman, describes the culture of her family: "My mother, her grandmother grewed her up. They were Inuks, and when her mother died she went with Uncle Jim Andersen's mother, so she grewed up there from the time she was thirteen. On my mother's side they were

Inuks” (Interview A. Evans 2003a). Though Evans does not complete the statement which would seem superfluous to her, the Andersens were regarded as a Settler family, and in both being raised for a certain time by them and then marrying into the family, she made the switch from being Inuit to being Settler. The complex relationships between these neighbouring groups varied widely, depending on the community and the conditions under which they were meeting. Some describe clashes between groups. In other recollections, particularly of Nain, where the Inuit were in the majority and Settlers often spoke Inuttitut, relationships were more cordial:

When I was growing up I remember that all the Inuit and Kallunangajuit did whatever they could to make a living. Everyone got along well and I will never forget the people who were my friends when I was growing up. I remember well the family of Robert Mitchell, who was the father of Albert, because we stayed at their home when we went to Makkovik for Easter services. John Andersen’s wife, the mother of Edward, could also talk in Inuttitut. (Maggo 1999:66)

Jean-Philippe Chartrand has written of the distinct identities held by the groups:

Despite a relative equality of social status, and considerable racial intermarriage, Inuit and Settler identities did not completely fuse together. Their distinct identities were sustained by the Moravians, who believed that the welfare of their Inuit protégés necessitated the maintenance of a basic Inuit identity. In fact, the Moravian Mission preserved what it saw as being essential to Inuit culture: a traditional diet, a hunting mode of production altered to accommodate a trading economy, and Inuttitut, which became the official language of instruction in settlement schools. So while Settlers developed an identity based on bicultural and bilingual features, the Inuit identity was characterized by the retention of key aspects of their traditional culture, and by the acquisition of some powers over the Settlers through their control of rudimentary political offices created by the Moravians. (Chartrand 1987:247)



The Settlers also sought to maintain the difference by insisting on English-language schooling for their children, though the Moravians agreed only reluctantly.

Procter comments, however, on the closeness of the ties:

Moravian efforts to emphasize cultural difference through the control of the land grants, community membership, and trading relationships promoted a general awareness of ethnic identity in the region, but these efforts were constantly and increasingly confronted with the inconsistencies inherent in daily life. (Procter 2012:56)

### **Identity Shift**

Just as the terminology for the Inuit, Settlers, and Kablunângajuit has now migrated generally towards the term “Inuit,” so too has the perception of what that identity is. As mentioned above, the terminology of “Settler” that was once so clearly understood and commonly used is harder for people to define today. The divisions that exist amongst Nunatsiavut beneficiaries are still evident in what is far from a homogeneous population, but current politics produce a terminology that defines everyone as the same under the law. There is clearly a generational difference in the uses of the terms. The question of identity amongst the current youth of Nunatsiavut seems to pose fewer problems than it did to earlier generations. Since the formation of the Nunatsiavut government in 2005 the classification has perhaps been more clear and the sense of belonging more acute. As described by Fiona Andersen, long-time Makkovik teacher:

That came with self-government. When it was the LIA, it was just an association. But all the work was done for the promotion of the Nunatsiavut government. It made it visible and it all coalesced when they got self-government. It became very okay to feel this is it, we can make decisions. Whether or not they’re physically Inuks or white-looking or

dark-skinned, they're all the same now. But I think it's the young generation that thinks that. (Interview F. Andersen 2013)

This sense of belonging has been explored in artistic terms that allow for some scrutiny. The Labrador Creative Arts Festival has presented 39 years of student-written plays, often dealing with difficult issues such as suicide, teen pregnancy and drug addiction. As well, the examination of what it means to be Inuk has preoccupied students over the years, and the shifting complexities of that identity are reflected in the scripts we have seen presented. In 1994, the students at Amos Comenius Memorial School in Hopedale staged a play called *Asiulittuk (Fading Away)* in which students looked at the change in Inuk identity, emphasizing the need to keep the traditions and language of their ancestors alive. The following is the description of the play in the introduction to the published script: "This production centres around the struggle of an old Inuit woman, Sabina, who tries to instill in her granddaughter Susan the value and importance of preserving Inuit traditions and language. This play is written in both English and Inuktitut" (Bolt and Borlase 1994:224). The conflict consists of the rejection of the language and culture by the younger generation who are portrayed as able to speak the language but refusing to do so. The middle generation speaks the language but uses English with the children:

Susan: Mom, I know who Anansiak is. I love her too. But this is the 1990s. None of that language and culture stuff means anything anymore. None of the kids speak Inuktitut. We all speak English and learn French in school. If I started talking Inuk, all my friends would think I'm mental. It's not cool. (Bolt and Borlase 1994:229)

The mother replies with the admonition that her daughter's generation should be grateful that they are encouraged to keep their culture, because when she was their age

she had to go to North West River to finish school, where children were punished for speaking Inuttitut. “Oh yes, and we all learned very fast not to speak Inuttitut. English was the only language we were supposed to use” (Bolt and Borlase 1994:230).

Another character tries to explain the point of view of the grandmother:

Emma: It’s not one word. It’s your culture. Your grandmother is not asking you to start wearing skin boots and changing your language. She just wants you to never forget where you come from. Be proud of your legacy. (Bolt and Borlase 1994:233)

The students who wrote this play were in the paradoxical situation of writing a play about the loss of their maternal language while still equipped with the tools to write part of it in that language. They also present a sense of identity in peril and use a stock set of characteristics to present an idealized Inuit identity in the process of eroding. Contrast this with “*Who Am I?*” presented by Jens Haven School in Nain in 2011. The synopsis reads:

Sixteen-year-old Sam has a big assignment coming up for school. It’s a simple enough question, but Sam is struggling with his response. Follow Sam along his journey of self-discovery, as he looks for answers from a cast of quirky characters (including his family and his best friend) and from his grandfather’s journal. *Who Am I?* traces Sam’s path along the figurative and literal shorelines of his identity. (Labrador Creative Arts Festival 2011:130)

The teacher character spells out what she thinks identity means when she gives the students the following assignment: “Find out about your ancestors, your traditions. Tell me about your morals and your beliefs. Maybe you can discuss your interests and your opinions. I know you’re Sam and you’re from Nain, but who are you, how do you define yourself?” The assignment leads him to find out about what his parents and grandparents did in their early years before the relocation of Hebron, and to discuss how

their community shapes him, but unlike the students in the earlier play, the character of Sam recognizes that identity consists of more than veneration of the past:

Sam: What? Ok, we're Inuk. What does that even mean? I know I'm Inuk, I just am. What does she want me to write about? Oh no—it's not going to be one of those assignments, is it? All political and serious? I am an Inuk. No, I don't eat raw meat—except *kuak* and I don't live in an igloo—but I've been in that one Levi made down Southern Point and I don't drive a dog team—my skidoo is faster and doesn't bark as much. You didn't write that kind of cultural crap, did you? (Labrador Creative Arts Festival 2011:135)

When his friend says he talked about hunting, Sam points out that Jordan doesn't even like hunting and receives this reply:

Jordan: Ok, so I don't like hunting. I'm still Inuk though.

Sam: Of course you are. What else did you write? I suppose you said that you were a drum dancer and throat singer too. And your family comes from a long line of powerful shamen.

Jordan: I guess I can't, but I can't lie either. Being Inuk is a big part of who we are. It's hard to explain.

Sam: Yeah, I know what you mean. Being Inuk isn't something you can separate from your identity. It's not just the typical stereotypes of some guy dressed in fancy furs, standing patiently over a seal hole for hours. It's not all about the boarding schools and relocation either. Sure that's part of where we came from, what our families have been through. But we're more than that. There's more to me than that. But what? What are my qualities? (Labrador Creative Arts Festival 2011:136)

Sam's soliloquy on identity allows him to bring in the usual building blocks of Labrador Inuit identity: hard work, linguistic oppression, the resilience of people, survival, and family:

For generations we have fought for our survival on this shoreline. Today I am continuing that battle. The problems may be different, but I am lucky to have their knowledge, strength and experience to help me through (Labrador Creative Arts Festival 2011:139)

Despite ending on this note, the content of the play allows the students to challenge the stereotypes of Inuit behaviour, to incorporate other practices and views while remaining Inuit, and to use irony and humour when looking at the expectations that the larger society demands of Inuit if they wish to maintain the identity and the perks that supposedly go with it. The sense of an identity linked to loss, deprivation and victimization is much less apparent in this generation than that of their parents, who were the first generation of Inuit brought up mostly in English. The youth of northern Labrador in 2015, according to my observations, seem less troubled as Inuit by the shame and the racism that form part of the narratives of the older generations. Neither is the word “Inuit” difficult for them. At the same time, much of what formerly defined an Inuk may be absent from their daily lives, including the knowledge and use of the Inuttit language. As we see in the writing of Dunn as well as many others, the attachment to place and traditional land usage are seen as central to identity. It is significant that the present generation of youth is removed from their language and culture in terms of traditional practices (although hunting and fishing are still practiced to some extent), yet has developed the confidence to challenge the necessity to behave in a certain way in order to be considered Inuit. This is reflected in the words of Fiona Andersen, above, and in those of her daughter, Catharyn, who confirms that “Pride in being Inuit is much stronger now than when I was growing up” (Interview C. Andersen 2013).

Gerald Pocius has written about the idea of contrast in identity:

The entire issue of national identity brings up first and foremost the question of identity systems. In a sense, all identity deals with the issue of

contrast. We can argue that there can be no identity (individual, regional or national) without contrast of other persons or groups. Identity first centers on the individual and how we experience differences among those in our immediate context. The construction of individual and community identities has as much to do with actual confrontations with “the other” as anything. (Pocius 2001:1)

As Labradorians grew in solidarity throughout the political changes of the 1970s, the “otherness” was transferred to non-Aboriginal authority figures and new incomers, rather than consisting of the gap between Inuit and Settlers. Their fused identity assisted by the LIA made both this union and the sense of distance and political opposition from the people outside Labrador (including Newfoundlanders) a marked feature of the region, and effectively masked the continued sense of difference that lurked beneath. (Kennedy 1997) Inuit pride was reinforced by the cultural markers that became a hallmark of the LIA and then Nunatsiavut, though language continued its decline. The inclusion of the Settler population and the consequent discarding of that term were remarked on by Brantenberg: “Before LIA came into existence, the majority of persons with a mixed ethnic background used to emphasize their white descent, whereas now they made every effort to confirm their Inuit background and identity. Such a change in identity management was positively received by the rest of the Inuit population” (Brantenberg 1977:397). In spite of Brantenberg’s hopeful words and the current solidarity of Nunatsiavut beneficiaries, some doubt remains. Several informants discussed the current composition of Nunatsiavut with the comment that “Everyone wants to be Inuk now!” Younger informants expressed that the establishment of self-government created a divide between people who are now either “in or out.”

## **Expression of Collective Identity**

As discussed, the transformation of identity along the Labrador coast has triggered a change from an expression of differences between Inuit and Settlers to differences between coastal Labradorians (Settlers and Inuit together) and other groups, especially the island population of Newfoundland and other non-native residents along the Labrador coast. But the construction of emblems for this new identity is problematic. In an earlier era, Settlers and Inuit were concerned with representing their populations as unique entities in opposition to each other, but with the emergence of a synthesized Inuit identity for everyone, one set of symbols (Inuit) had to be selected to represent the evolving identity. Today, however, people under the Nunatsiavut banner are politically invested in symbolic behaviour that proves their “otherness” from other residents of the province and sometimes other Aboriginal groups.

In spite of the quietly-expressed views that appropriation of Inuit identity has taken place within the new government itself, such a view is not part of the public presentation of the considerable political force that is the Nunatsiavut government, or indeed the Aboriginal constituency of Labrador. Instead, solidarity is focussed by asserting a separate identity that exists in contrast to other groups present in Labrador. This is discussed by Pocius: “An identity system surrounding an entire nation can be said to be constructed largely in reaction to who is seen as the oppositional force for the particular group. National identity systems, by their very nature, are constructed to deal with oppositional groups outside the boundary of the particular group in question” (Pocius 2001:4).

In the case of the Inuit of Labrador, who is the group in opposition? For Labrador as a whole, the group in opposition is clearly the island of Newfoundland and its government in particular. The central narrative of Labrador is the perceived inequality of benefits flowing to a region that sees its contribution to the provincial economy as vast and unrewarded. This is a recurring theme that is reflected in social media, language, and sometimes in theatre and music. It was expressed most vehemently perhaps by the establishment of the New Labrador Party in 1969 and its brief revival in 2003, but the sentiment is present in daily conversation in Labrador.

Other forces in opposition might be seen as the Moravian church, or the provincial government, particularly the people who ran the schools and established the game laws, or even non-Aboriginal people as a group. But most dangerously the “other” could be perceived as the group formerly known as Settlers. This is the underground narrative that is occasionally brought to light in frank conversations, but its existence threatens the idea of Nunatsiavut. Perhaps perceiving the Settlers, neighbours, relatives and friends as the “other” was too risky, and may go a long way to explain the inclusion of the Settlers in the initial membership of the Labrador Inuit Association. The irony was of course that, once admitted, the Settlers, by virtue of their facility with English and their familiarity with the institutions of the dominant culture, soon gained ascendancy in the management of the organization. This may explain why narratives have changed in the present day to reflect a sense of otherness as represented by the non-Indigenous power brokers, the people who had the power over everything. The generation who grew up after Confederation (Group Two) carries resentment over the treatment of their parents as



well as of their young selves to a greater extent than their own parents (Group One) ever did, if we can seek proof in the words of my older informants. (As seen in Chapter Six, the explanations of language loss delivered by the oldest group make reference to the decision of their elders to request the teaching of English in school, but this narrative is largely unknown to the group born after 1950.)

This younger generation sees otherness in the narratives they tell about language loss, blaming institutions at a remove for the decision made by their own parents' generation to invite the teaching of English into the classroom. Narratives collected from informants born after 1950 usually display the assumption that the Moravian church and the Newfoundland government were responsible for the shift in their culture. This leads to considerable confusion when questions are asked about how language loss took place, as seen in discussion on the set of changing narratives around language shift.

It is significant that the youngest generation of adult Inuit (Group Three), those who produced the 2011 play "Who AM I?" are the ones who can now feel secure enough in their declared Inuit identity to begin to question the outward symbols of its expression, and to treat language as a symbol that does not require daily practice to support Inuit identity.

### **The Place of Language in Identity**

Here we reach the heart of the question: what role does language play in the retention and presentation of Inuit identity? Must one speak the Inuttitut language in order to be considered Inuit? Pocius makes the case for a shifting choice in identity symbols:

Another researcher, Edward Spicer, has pointed out that such identity systems are quite flexible and new features may replace older ones without the collective identity system of the group itself disintegrating. The continuity of particular terms is not important, but rather the adaptive process incorporating new symbolically-meaningful images. (Pocius 2001:1)

This shifting of images denoting identity has certainly happened in Nunatsiavut, where Moravian church traditions and brass band music have been augmented by drum dancing and throat-singing, and as discussed, key words describing Aboriginal groups have been revised. We must consider, however, whether language as a cultural possession can be set aside or replaced in the same way without affecting Inuit identity. Because the older cultural symbols such as the church and musical traditions were seen to have been imported by the missionaries, they can be seen as optional in a generation concerned with decolonization, but language is less easily dealt with, either in terms of hanging on or letting go. The difference is in accepting a cultural act as a symbol rather than a marker of identity; both the Moravian brass band traditions, now in the process of being revived, and the practice of drum dancing, revived through imported instructors in recent years, are practices that proclaim self-ascription as Inuit. Language occupies a different space in the arena of cultural identity and responsibility.

Much has been written about language shift, as seen in Chapter Two. The rapid change in the level of Inuttitut fluency has been examined using the various narratives around language loss and the result is unmistakable; very few people are now fluent speakers and Inuit identity is thus necessarily less connected with the ability to speak the language.

This change occurred in spite of the considerable power of the Moravians, who had managed to buttress the language for centuries due to their philosophy of teaching all their adherents in their native tongue. Procter sees this as a strategy that kept the Moravians in a position of influence with the Inuit:

The use of Inuttitut in all aspects of community life, including education and religion, was maintained through the Moravian adoption of the language. The missionaries' proficiency in Inuttitut had initially provided them with unique skills among Europeans, and had served them well in convincing the British Government to give them the land grants and in developing religious and traditional relationships with Inuit. As long as Inuit were unilingual, it could be argued, the Moravians would have a unique niche as middlemen between Inuit and the "outside world." (Procter 2012:51)

As the influence of the Moravians waned, Labrador went through rapid transitions including the building of the air force base at Goose Bay (1941), Confederation of Newfoundland and Labrador with Canada (1949), and the relocation of Nutak and Hebron (1958/59). Once the language of instruction in school changed from Inuttitut to English, the post-war society opened Labrador to many more outside influences, and mass media began to both require and valorize English, Inuttitut came to take on a role that was symbolic rather than a part of daily life. This is a source of sorrow, especially to community elders:

Today, although we elderly people still get together to tell stories in our own language, Inuttitut, some of the young children around us don't understand our language any more. It doesn't seem to matter whether we talk about simple or serious matters because they don't understand anyway. Everything about us today is different from those who came before us, even our culture and traditions. (Maggo 1999:63)

Yet language is not seen to have been abandoned: informants who were speakers repeatedly expressed that they thought the language was merely lying dormant and could be revived. Johannes Lampe expresses this view:

That's what Rutie and I try to do, we try to help our granddaughters and foster son to break through because they are within a prison of themselves, whether it's language or confidence. We know for sure that the potential is there, that the possibilities are there. It's just that they've become so dependent that they have to hold onto our hand. They have to realize that they have a spirit within them and make them powerful. (Interview Lampe 2014)

Sarah Townley concurs: "It's just in a dormant stage. I think a few years down the road it will come back. There are people that want to learn it, who have a strong mindset" (Interview Townley 2013).

Even for those who do not speak Inuttitut, its importance is clearly expressed, as seen in the writing of Skutnabb-Kangas (Skutnabb-Kangas 2010), who suggests that it is possible to strongly identify with a language in which one is not proficient. Asking this question of informants elicited mostly predictable responses: those who speak the language say it is essential, while those who are not fluent assert that while important, the language is not the only means to express membership in the group. It is important to note that the paucity of Inuit speakers is relatively recent, as discussed in previous chapters, and that the existence of bilingualism amongst Settlers, especially in Nain and north of that community, was quite common. Possession of the language was one marker of identity, but not the only one.

The long-term existence of bilingualism is discussed in Paulus Maggo's book, both in his own words and in the introduction by Brice-Bennett:

Inuit women were hired as servants in mission households and some of them learned to speak German from daily contact with ministers' wives. In contrast, Inuit men fishing for cod around outer seaward islands began learning the English language from contact they had with fishermen from Newfoundland, who appeared on schooners during the summer season in increasing numbers after 1860. (Maggo 1999:32)

Paulus Maggo recalls his linguistic learning experience:

I enjoyed learning English for three months at Makkovik when my parents were able to stay in the village without leaving in that length of time. It was easy for me to learn the English language when I was a child, but I stopped learning it when my parents decided to move to Hopedale to live near my sister after her marriage. When we moved to Nain, English was not used as everyone spoke Inuttitut, even the Webb, Voisey, Edmunds and Winters families; they all spoke Inuttitut. (Maggo 1999:68)

Bilingualism was a fairly common possession of the Settler people, deriving from their co-existence with Inuit families and children either in the more remote settlements such as Nutak or in the boarding schools, where separate classes were offered for Settlers and for Inuit, but where all children stayed in the dormitories together. This occurrence of bilingualism was more common in the northern communities rather than in Makkovik, as evidenced by the words of older informants:

Ed Lyall: "Oh yes, we were with Inuit people, clear of our own people there were no English speaking" (Interview Ed. Lyall 2003).

Christine Baikie:

Well, in our home we talked all English, my family, but my playmates, nobody talked any English in Nutak or Hebron, it was all Inuttitut. And I learned from them. We just learned from play, all Inuit. There was no Kablunaks, only the storekeeper whose kids I babysat. We talked all English, brothers and sisters and grandparents at home. (Interview Baikie 2003)

A bilingual situation existed in Hopedale as well, as described by Miriam

Igloliorte Lyall:

MM: Did most people speak Inuttitut?

ML: Oh yes, they did. Well, Hopedale is an interesting place because I grew up, and most of the kids grew up, with what we call the Settlers. Their main language was English but a lot of them spoke Inuttitut too. But where there were two languages all the time, it was just natural that we spoke either English or Inuttitut.

MM: Did you feel more comfortable in one than the other or did you just speak whatever anyone else was speaking?

ML: No it was, it just balanced out. You could change from one to another in no time like when you're playing with kids. Kids my age were speaking a lot of English and I think too, as I said, Hopedale, even when I was growing up, was a community that spoke both languages very well. Even my dad used to speak in English. It was broken but even the older people that I remember could manage (Interview M. Lyall 2002).

An example she gave regarding the pronunciation of "Sango Bay" reveals the extent of Inuttitut use by Settlers, when she describes their accent: "It's an Inuit name. It's really "sunno," to turn around, that's how it was explained to me, but some Settlers say their sh's so much more than we do in Inuttitut so it became "Shungo" for Settler people" (Interview M. Lyall 2002).

Terje Brantenberg reports on the level of bilingualism in Nain: "Inuit and Settlers meet in public and informal settings common to all the villagers; they can often be seen chatting together on the wharf, in the stores, and on the main road in the centre of the village; Settlers often speak Inuttitut and Inuit occasionally use English" (T. Brantenberg 1977:326). Clearly relationships between the groups were eased because of the shared language, as Paulus Maggo remarked in the earlier quote about the Mitchell family.

The bilingualism of the more northern communities gave way as one moved southwards to Makkovik, where a two-language community existed but in two solitudes,

much as Canada is less a bilingual country than a country of two languages. As people moved further south where Inuttitut was infrequently spoken except by the incoming migrants from the north, the self-consciousness around language and the insidious force of racism influenced the linguistic choices of families. John Kennedy quoted a Makkovik resident:

At Makkovik, for example, virtually all of the Settler population spoke only English and the difficulties created by a sudden influx of non-English-speaking people were undoubtedly considerable. Makkovik Settler children were sometimes openly hostile toward their new 'neighbours.' "They (Settler children) treated us pretty bad sometimes. We used to get drove down to the ground sometimes with rocks. A whole bunch of Makkovik kids used to get at us with rocks and drive us under houses and keep us there; there were only four or five of us [from Okak] you know." (Kennedy 1977:279)

The Settlers may have been the distant relatives of the Inuit but they were not always welcoming, and the memories linger. Poignantly, one informant described the path that their parents made for them so that they could get to school without being tormented by the other children. She added, "It's still there. It's faint, but you can still see it." (Informant 2013) This might be seen as a metaphor for the way relationships amongst the Labrador Inuit can still be traced.

Clara Ford spoke of the people who could speak Inuttitut when she was relocated from Hebron to Makkovik, such as Harriet Andersen, Lavinia Jacque, and Sam Broomfield. These people, like the mother of Jim Andersen, had originally lived farther north and kept their Inuttitut fluency while retaining their Settler identity. However, the majority of people in Makkovik were not speakers and language was a defining factor in

identity. Ben-Dor in “Inuit-Settler Relations in Makkovik, 1962” presents his definition of the two groups as defined by linguistic capability:

An examination of linguistic differences yields more fruitful results. All unilingual persons, without exception, are easily and correctly identified. Those who speak Inuit only are clearly Inuit, and those who speak only English may be accurately placed with the Settlers. The very few who are fluent in both languages can usually be categorized according to the language in which they were brought up. (Ben-Dor 1977:307)

From a situation in which many northern Labrador people were bilingual, whether Settlers or Inuit, a rapid transition took place which discounted the value of the traditional language. Letting go of it was attributed to a number of factors, but it must be considered that the Settlers would in particular have been able to relinquish it, once English was well established as the current language of the communities. As Settlers, they were comfortable with Inuttitut but would not have seen it as a badge of their own identity in the pre-land claims era. The shift in the level of Inuttitut use was dramatic; the accounts given by informants allow us to see how daily use of the maternal language was rapidly replaced by English. This is seen in this statement by Amalia Frieda: “I started to teach them [her children] Inuttitut but they had to go with the times” (Interview Frieda 2003). When I asked Mary Voisey if her children had learned Inuttitut she replied:

Mary Voisey: Well, I never teached mine because there was a lot of –

Ed Voisey: There was a lot of prejudice, eh.

MV: It was terrible. Here, Rigolet, Makkovik, Hopedale, all the same. If you was an Eskimo you was nothing.

MM: When did that start?

MV: A long time ago. Come from another place and they turn you down because you're Eskimo.

MM: So people didn't want to admit they had that-

EV: They wanted to be all white. (Interview E. and M. Voisey 2002)

Sarah Townley recalled:



A lot of people lost their language when they went to the Dorm [in North West River] 'cause they never kept it up. It would happen quickly. I wouldn't speak Inuttitut in the Dorm. I guess we were scared that people were going to make fun of us or we would be bullied. (Interview Townley 2013)

Beatrice Hope assented:

There was a point when people were laughed at for being Inuk and they were disgraced, and it wasn't very good to be Inuk so that's why they stopped teaching their children. It was a disgrace to be Inuk. You were put down and laughed at and so on. Even when I first came up to Goose Bay people used to call me names. (Interview Hope 2013)

### **Reconciliation of Language Loss and Identity**

As mentioned above, informants who were not speakers of the language still considered themselves “beneficiaries,” if not always claiming the term “Inuit.” Yet the latter group also acknowledged that their understanding of being Inuit would be enhanced and made richer with the possession of the language. As Catharyn Andersen said, “Because I don't speak Inuttitut doesn't make me not Inuk, but the more I learned, the stronger connection I had to my culture, my history and my understanding of what our history is about” (Interview C. Andersen 2013). Another informant, aged 24, said that she thinks it is unrealistic to think that not speaking the language takes away the right to be considered Inuk, yet acknowledges that when visiting other Inuit territories where people are still fluent, “It made me feel that they had a stronger solidarity because of their language. And here where the language isn't there—people second-guess you, how do you fit in, and sometimes people question you” (Interview 2014).

Claire Owen questioned her informants on this necessity to speak the mother tongue and received a variety of responses. For example: “She feels that her Aboriginal

identity can absolutely be constructed or ‘performed’ in a sense, through English, indicating that for this particular participant traditional language is not crucial to her identity” (Owen 2011:128). In other cases amongst her informants, language was seen as a tool to establish identity in cases where the participants were of mixed parentage and felt the need to prove their Aboriginality to others in their communities. In those terms, lack of language ability is seen as a barrier to being thought “authentic.”

Nearly everyone interviewed for this project acknowledged that the language is important and should be retained and revitalized, yet the number of fluent speakers continues to decrease. Why has English taken such a strong hold in northern Labrador? The answer lies in Labrador’s history, which has meant cohabitation of Inuit and Europeans for centuries. Not only did the Moravians come and settle amongst the Inuit but, as we have seen, the group known as Settlers were long-established permanent local residents. Unlike the participants in Owen’s study, for example, where all had one Aboriginal parent and one who was not, but all identified as Aboriginal, the case in Labrador is usually that the intermarriage took place generations ago and collective identification has been decided upon by the group, not the individual. Terje Brantenberg reflected on this:

In sum, language performance is both a criterion of ethnic status in Nain, and the means by which offspring of mixed marriages are able to make ethnic “commitment” and affirm an identity. Language performance cannot be safely predicted either on the basis of the individual’s language skills or on the basis of the parents’ language performance, and siblings may make different commitments. (T. Brantenberg 1977:339)

As previously mentioned, one must consider second-language proficiency among the Settler population as an acquired skill. Similar to the fluency in Innu-aimun that

trappers in northern and Central Labrador obtained by reason of interaction with the Innu with whom they had no shared ancestry, the speaking of Inuttitut as a second language would not have been vital to their sense of identity, which at the time of peak bilingualism would ironically have been a Settler, therefore “white” identification. This probably resulted from the usual custom, not restricted to that culture, of taking group identification from the paternal line. We see this markedly in the narratives of Ed Voisey when he says that his ancestors “married Inuit people.”

This led to a “mixed” culture that was the norm for large parts of the population, and therefore part of the complexity of the language question in Nunatsiavut lies in the long history of exposure to English and the intermarriage that has taken place. This, combined with the geographic situation of Labrador being located farther south than the other Inuit territories, has led to Labrador Inuit feeling defensive about their place in the circumpolar world. As Dunn commented, “Many Labrador Inuit feel they are in a lose-lose situation, carrying both the stigma of being Aboriginal and not being Aboriginal enough” (Dunn 2002:187).

Rose Pamack Jeddore addressed this question as well. (Note that Pamack-Jeddore uses a different orthography than other writers about Labrador; this is addressed in Chapter Four dealing with literacy in Labrador Inuttitut.):

Labradorians are often said to be assimilated and no longer Inuit. I feel that this is not true. We still live off the land; we still have traditional skills; we still speak our native language. But we have many other things as well that help us in maintaining our identity and culture as Inuit people. If we had not been trained in the dominant culture, would we have the tools to maintain our land, govern ourselves, and fight for our rights as Inuit people? I think that era was just a part of Inuit survival. We had to learn the dominant language in order to maintain ourselves during those

times. In Labrador, we have Inuit, Qallunaangajuit (Settlers with Inuit blood), Qallunaat (transient whites) and Indians. We have three separate languages. Some speak three; some speak two native languages; some speak a native language and English; very few speak only one language. Would an Inuk growing up in such an environment have different language attitudes than one who grew up in a very isolated community? Would I be praised more if I spoke only one language or would I be considered a slow learner by my peers? Because there has been so much more intermarriage than in other areas and because we have had so much more exposure to other languages and other cultures, it may be true that we are, or rather have become, a little different from other people who have maintained racial purity. (Pamack 1979:88)

Her point that Labrador's long history of contact led to an earlier assimilation of European ideas and language exposure is echoed in Chartrand's discussion of the comparative poverty of language retention in Labrador by contrast with other Inuit regions, which he attributes to the development of a common identity amongst the inhabitants. He asserts that language retention is a dominant factor in maintaining a distinct identity:

If this is the case, then one may reasonably ask why Inuit retention should have dropped so significantly in Labrador and in the western Arctic. In order to properly address this matter, we must consider the differences that separate, on the one hand, the eastern Arctic and northern Quebec from, on the other hand, Labrador and the Western Arctic. In the latter regions, Inuit co-exist with other ethnic groups (Dene and Metis in the western Arctic, Settlers in Labrador). Common conditions of dependency vis-à-vis Whites, and the resulting similarity of day-to-day experiences between Inuit, Dene and Metis in the western Arctic (and between Inuit and Settlers in Labrador), tend to impart a common identity. Paine confirms that this is occurring in part in Labrador, but further states that the development of a common identity is fostered by the mutual recognition of Inuit and Settlers of their need for one another in political negotiations of land claims and self-government. (Chartrand 1987:250)

Although he feels that downplaying cultural differences such as language would be natural in order to cement this common identity, and in fact asserts that this happened

in the western Arctic, Chartrand does not see the existence of Inuttitut in Labrador as creating a division between the groups because historically Settlers were bilingual. (This of course has rapidly changed.) He goes on to say:

Labrador and the Western Arctic are regions in which a purely traditional Inuit identity appears to have been undermined more intensively and for a longer period than in the eastern Arctic and northern Quebec. However, this does not imply that Inuit in these regions are more assimilated than Inuit living in areas of high language retention. This development may result in a downplaying of traditional cultural features that would reinforce a sense of difference between these groups, since they may likely need each other in terms of political negotiations that would seek to redefine their relations with the wider society. Such appears to be the case in Labrador, though additional factors may have shaped ethnopolitical developments in the western Arctic. (Chartrand 1987:251)

Since the time of Chartrand's writing nearly thirty years ago, this common identity has come to be termed "Inuit," and in a curious reverse of circumstances, the shared language is English rather than Inuttitut. The common identity probably also strengthened the ascription of "otherness" that helps to create solidarity in people resisting a dominant group, with the state of "otherness" becoming assigned to the non-Aboriginal outsiders rather than to a Settler versus Inuit dichotomy. This cementing of identity in the 1970s allowed English to function as the *lingua franca* of the newly formed Labrador Inuit Association, even though it was the language of the outsiders; in some sense it could be claimed as local since it was the first language of the Settlers and was acquired by the Inuit in a somewhat intentional way, when one looks at the narratives that see the elders as decreeing that children should learn English. This echoes Michele Wood's words that describe language acquisition as a life skill; whether it be the Settlers learning Inuttitut or the Inuit learning English, survival dictated the necessity: "What I

remember is that Grammy would talk about how people in past generations could speak easily to trappers or to traders or to people within the Inuit culture. So I think she saw it as a multi-faceted skill set that people had, the ability to switch at the drop of a hat from one language to another” (Interview Wood 2014). This was not without effect of course, as Terje Brantenberg observed:

Note should be taken here of the implications of the increasing use of English in community life. Although the ability to speak English is valued by them as a means of monitoring relations between Nain and the outside world, the older Inuit leaders are not only frustrated at not being able to speak English proficiently, but they also feel that their children’s competence is a threat to what they define as the essence of being Inuit. (T. Brantenberg 1977:341)

This continues to be the refrain heard today in Nunatsiavut amongst Inuttitut-speaking elders: their grandchildren cannot speak the language and are sometimes unwilling to try. Johannes Lampe and his wife in Nain continue to use Inuttitut in 2014 with their grandchildren, and hold out the hope that the language can, as Johannes says, “be healed” (Interview Lampe 2014).

We see, therefore, that language is a powerful cultural marker, but scholars have posited that it is not the only one, nor even the dominant one, though it is frequently listed that way when people discuss what makes them Inuit. Dunn, for example, discusses language for five short pages: “A significant cultural practice and identity marker of Labrador’s Aboriginal people is language” (Dunn 2002:143), but he lists it after land, lifestyle, and ancestry. Dunn explores the factors that go into recognition of Aboriginality as he saw it in the late 1990s:

As we have seen, recognition of Aboriginality through membership, defined by a complex formula of factors in relation to one another, has

prevailed in recent years as a primary means of individual and group identification. In that complex formula, no one category has been allowed to emerge as paramount over others. A person may self-identify as he or she pleases on the basis of any single marker or combination of markers, but that in no way guarantees corresponding tribal or group recognition as “Aboriginal.” Place of residence and birth origin, lifestyles, native language fluency and ancestry are all necessary in varying degrees but not alone sufficient in determining identities in Labrador.” (Dunn 2002:167-8).

Procter examines the place of Inuttitut in Nunatsiavut political life:

The connection between language and Inuit identity has also played a large role in Inuit cultural politics. In its Constitution, the NG (and previously, the LIA) required that its President be able to speak Inuttitut, although this bylaw was modified by the LIA Board of Directors in the early 2000s from the “President shall be fluent in Inuttitut” (LIA 1980c, Article VI 10) to the less stringent requirements that the President “be able to understand and to speak Inuttitut” (LIA 2002c:337c) The use of Inuttitut had been widespread in the region, but the mandatory provincial education system established after Confederation replaced Inuttitut with English as the language of instruction, and children lost the chance to learn the language. (Procter 2012:187).

Simplifying language loss to a decision made by government, however important, removes consideration of the other factors involved in the shift which, as we have seen, had much to do with activities that were within the agency of the Labrador Inuit. These included the decision mentioned by the elders to request that the children learn English in order to help the community understand what decisions were being made about it, as reported by Fran Williams (Interview Williams 2002), making this a decision to add English rather than to remove Inuttitut. (Several other informants mentioned the elders’ decision as well, as will be examined in Chapter Six.) The assumption was that maternal language use would continue in the home in spite of the use of English in the school, and

the community probably retained the sense that Inuttitut was not in imminent danger of being lost.

Language possession is an indisputable characteristic in claiming Inuit identity when grouped with other characteristics such as residence in the land claims area, genealogical connections to Labrador Inuit families, and pursuit of the traditional lifestyle that has come to be a strong authenticating factor. When asked what is necessary for one to be considered Inuit, those without the possession of language focussed on traditional skills and lifestyle. There is, however, a sliding scale that is clearly acknowledged by people interviewed, leading to the consideration of some beneficiaries as “more Inuit” than others. Self-identification by a group setting its own criteria for identification may be called into question. As Abrahams has said:

Distinctions are made, for spatial and political purposes, on geographical, linguistic and lifestyle perceptions, sometimes by the group so identified and sometimes by those in power about others who are within their ambit or at its borders. (Abrahams 2003:199)

Labrador Inuit, like all Aboriginal people in Canada, are well aware that racism has taken a new turn in recent decades in the same way in which affirmative action for other minority groups has called forth resentment and fear. Non-Aboriginals can be vocal about what they perceive as the injustice of financial benefits and preference for jobs, scholarships and post-secondary opportunities. In Labrador, where beneficiaries may live outside the land claims area and may never have visited Nunatsiavut, resentment around the distribution of benefits is felt by both non-Aboriginals who feel that the beneficiaries have no more sense of their heritage than their lifelong non-Inuit neighbours, and by the Inuit of Nunatsiavut who have lived a traditional lifestyle in the



heartland of the Inuit territory and in many cases have endured traumatic situations not shared by many of those who now are classified as Inuit. Aboriginal identity, therefore, has brought some belated benefits, but at a price to all the players. These views are commonly expressed in daily conversation, but are not remarks that would be easily made in a public forum. The exception would be a comment by Upper Lake Melville MHA Keith Russell, who dismissed as “mumbo-jumbo” the claim of protestors against the Muskrat Falls hydro development that the area represents spiritual ground to some Aboriginal people (“Spiritual ties” 2012).

Anthropologist Peter Armitage made the following observation: “It’s called ethnopolitics when ethnicity is a strategic resource. It’s virtually a cultural universal that people will creatively manipulate all kinds of traditions when mobilizing history, ethnic symbols, beliefs and practices in support of strategic material interests. None of us are immune from this” (Armitage 2013). (Note again that the use of the term “ethnicity” poses problems for some groups in terms of political status; Armitage uses the term in Oring’s sense of “historically derived cultural tradition.”)

To present this same view from a generation ago we can quote Paine: “We should not assume that ethnicity is above transactions. This transactional component is evident along the Labrador coast even in the earlier period of ethnicity under tutelage, let alone in the contemporary period of ethnopolitics, and it has produced differences in the meaning of ethnicity” (Paine 1977:261).

More recently, Andrea Procter has acknowledged this difficulty: “The practice of cultural differentiation among this broadly-defined group of Inuit is deep-seated and,

although it is often not discussed openly, it invokes very emotional responses when the topic arises” (Procter 2012:186).

As mentioned above, in many of the 2013/2014 interviews with informants I have heard the statement: “Everyone wants to be Inuk now.” This is said with varying inflections, but there is an acknowledgement that in the present climate, Aboriginal people are getting some long-overdue attention. I believe that Labrador people’s interest in and claim to Aboriginal identity is more profound than a desire to claim the benefits that have been made available; the actual decision to apply for membership in the original LIA was prompted by the benefits that were, in the beginning, at the disposal of not individuals but designated communities. The Inuit identity, in this sense, came to predominate in northern Labrador in a functional sense first as a means of obtaining much-needed amenities for communities, and later on to obtain individual medical and educational benefits that would have been out of reach for many dwellers of the coast of Labrador. Kennedy and T. Brantenberg have noted that benefits arrived when communities rather than individuals were designated as Aboriginal, and it was in the spirit of retaining those benefits for the community that Settlers in Makkovik came to embrace their Inuit heritage. Andrea Procter has discussed this tendency of government to address inequality of economic opportunity by awarding funds based on Aboriginal status, so that these benefits did not assume the status of political rights: “Inuit were identified as a disadvantaged group with needs, rather than as a political group with rights” (Procter 2012:75).

It is significant that changes in ethnic identity have come about in part through the establishment of institutions. When the LIA was formed in the 1970s, people applied for membership, making the assumption of Inuit identity a conscious choice. When applications were declined, people sometimes applied instead to the Labrador Metis Association (Later the Labrador Metis Nation and then renamed “NunatuKavut”), identifying themselves with that group, showing that identity has a certain forced fluidity and is situational. Additionally, members sometimes had their membership revoked and then restored, so that their assessment of their heritage had been re-evaluated both by the institutions and by themselves. Because people were on the move looking for work, members of the same family might have different status depending on where they lived, making ancestry and language use subordinate to location in terms of their identity. It is not uncommon at public events in Goose Bay to see a community elder offering prayers on behalf of the Labrador Inuit, having previously done the same thing as a representative of the Metis Nation.

When the land claims process finally led to the establishment of the Nunatsiavut Government in 2005, residents of northern Labrador communities and many in central Labrador and beyond became known as “beneficiaries.” This rendered them automatically “Inuit,” in contrast to the LIA days when membership had to be actively sought by joining the organization. With Nunatsiavut’s founding, identity was ascribed rather than chosen.

Self-identifying as Aboriginal, or joining a group that sets out its own criteria, means that the person or people in question run the risk of having that identity questioned

by people outside the group. This happens both within and outside Nunatsiavut. Andrea Procter commented on this in 2012:

The direct connection between cultural identity and material benefits made through these funding agreements created tensions and socio-economic disparities among many people in Labrador. The agreement was responsible for a new dynamic of cultural differentiation, as one Inuk commented in 1980: “Because of the designated communities idea, people have begun to suffer from an identity crisis. Thus, instead of feeling unity as a people, there is an outside force that dictates who you are or are not.” (Procter 2012:71)

It is significant that during this time of political empowerment and increased interest in being Inuit, fluency in the Inuttitut language was not amongst the criteria listed to be eligible for membership in the LIA, perhaps because such a demand would have rendered many people ineligible, including some of the leadership. Leaving it out as a requirement, whether intentional or not, would have had the effect of downplaying the importance of Inuttitut.

The present concept of Inuit identity developed from discussions in both the kitchens and boardrooms of Labrador, and continues to acquire meaning for people. To understand the significance and function of identity, we can look at it as viewed by folklorists, seeing how language narratives feed the sense of identity in Nunatsiavut. We have already seen how the narrative that tells us that the Nunatsiavut elders wanted the children to be taught in English has fostered the idea of language as an element of a skill set of resilient people, as does the evidence that Settlers frequently learned and used Inuttitut.

What then of the accounts that instead put forward the idea that language was taken from the people, that they were forbidden to use it or even punished for doing so?

This is a sensitive topic, and as discussed extensively in the chapter on narratives about language loss, these accounts have emerged with greater strength in more recent years. The Labrador Inuit are, of course, not alone in bringing forth the hitherto silenced testimonies of abuse and neglect. In an era when the injustices of the past towards members of many minorities are finally receiving some media attention, the narratives of hardship and injustice are seen as the power that prods various institutions toward making restitution for colonial practices. Yet we see through Abrahams' observations what the trajectory of this process can look like: "These projections of nostalgia become politically potent when the story of loss is converted into narratives of victimization" (Abrahams 2003:214). He goes on to discuss the phenomenon of "dolorism:"

With the development of fair employment and equal-opportunity legislation, an environment was established in the United States in which historical and social grievances of the past were regarded as subject to redress in the present. Whole populations could identify themselves not only as being the descendants of an oppressed people but as continuing to experience the after-effects of this condition. The logical next step was to put forward individual claims to cultural identity based on the horrors of this shared past. (Abrahams 2003:215)

Examining Labrador Inuit identity under this harsh light should not and does not negate the very real suffering, injustice, poverty and racism experienced by the Inuit who were removed from their homes in Hebron and Nutak and in other ways robbed of autonomy and subjected to the paternalistic influences of institutions and organizations that were foreign to their practices and values. Yet the Labrador Inuit had a long history of strong participation and leadership in the Moravian church, a particular ownership around literacy, and, in recent years, very high success rates in terms of post-secondary success and employment. To imply that they have received benefits as compensation for

victimization does an injustice to the Inuit by suggesting that there was no agency in a people who had survived the harshest of conditions for centuries. This is evident in Sarah Townley's discussion of the boarding school at North West River, where she attests, both in her interview with me and in her discussion with Elizabeth Yeoman in a recent edition of *Morning Watch*, that although she and her fellow students did not frequently speak Inuttitut at school, it was not because they were forbidden to. Earlier accounts of boarding school life in the coastal communities frequently carry the same message.

Andrea Procter has pointed out that her initial assumption, that land planning processes between Nunatsiavut and the provincial government involved co-opting Inuit perspectives, was challenged by one of her main informants, a Nunatsiavut beneficiary who disagreed with her notion that Inuit were disadvantaged by the planning process. He felt that to make this assumption was to disregard the work done and the knowledge held by the Nunatsiavut participants in the process (personal communication).

Looking at narratives that show that language was either a chosen skill set or the possession of a bilingual people who moved between cultures when necessary, we can see that there was some autonomy for Labrador Inuit in the evolution of language use starting in the mid-twentieth century. Since bilingualism was widespread, first with Settlers and then with Inuit, it is probable that there was little concern that this linguistic state would give way to dominance by the English language. Instead, Inuit assumed that their children would continue to maintain their native language while functioning in the now-dominant English language. To quote Ben-Dor: "The effects of compulsory education and the continued incentive to learn English do not encounter opposition from

the older Inuit. On the contrary, a certain prestige is attached to a knowledge of both languages” (Ben-Dor 1977:317). Naeme Tuglavina mentions that her parents were proud when their children learned English, and pleased when they were able to use a few words themselves. As she said, “Our parents thought us really smart when we knew how to speak Kablunaktitut to Kablunaks and we were conversing and understanding and being able to translate to our parents—proudest kind of people!” (Interview N. Tuglavina 2003)

In Central and Northern Labrador in 2015, it is probably safe to say that Aboriginal identity subsumes all others, meaning that those entitled to the Inuit designation feel that they are defined by it more than by a provincial or national citizenship. So much is at stake in terms of land claims and natural resources, as well as benefits, that making a claim to Aboriginal identity makes sense for anyone who can do so. This has coincided perhaps with a long decline in religious identity, traditional customs and individual commercial fishing or hunting enterprises, so that a sense of belonging comes from an individual community and from the Aboriginal group as a whole. This identity, as Abrahams points out, has an active use: “On the more positive side, ethnic identities have been used in more benign political environments as the basis of official attempts to achieve political, social and cultural equities in plural societies” (Abrahams 2003:202).

If language is not the factor that gives people their entitlement to claim Inuit identity with its current status and benefits, then what has replaced or augmented it? As it became evident in the past few decades that Inuttitut was in decline, efforts to revive the language began to be emphasized, but at the same time identity came to be fixed in other

outward symbols. Several informants spoke of the attachment to Inuit values, crafts, traditional hunting practices and the recently-revived practice of drum dancing as examples of these. In the absence of language, Inuit identity is now projected by a sense of attachment to land and to a way of life, and in reference to “culture,” in the sense of the artistic and symbolic products that are presented as distinctive to that group of people. These are less important to members of a politically dominant group, as explained by

Pocius:

Often the dominant group’s attitude is that identity symbols generated by minority groups are important because they give these minority groups a false sense of power within the political system. In this respect, the majority group feels that its beliefs are not those needed for national identity; its beliefs are perceived as those that govern the world and therefore not in need of symbolic appropriation. (Pocius 2001:4)

Pocius goes on to quote Spicer:

In addition to land and language symbols, common constituents of identity systems are music, dances, and heroes. What makes a system out of identity symbols is not any logical, in the sense of rational, relationship among them. The meanings that they have fit into a complex that is significant to the people concerned. The meanings amount to a self-definition and an image of themselves as they have performed in the course of their history” (Spicer 1971:796, 798). What Spicer is talking about are the kinds of behaviours that folklorists have often labelled as tradition and ordinary individuals often think of as things that make their culture distinctive. (Pocius 2001:5)

Pocius continues:

Folklore used in the formation of a national identity has as much to do with what a particular people perceive at a particular point in time as what is genuine and authentic. Whether items or attitudes have particular time depths, whether they have existed for long or relatively short periods of time does not seem to matter. Whether such items or attitudes were found among a certain ancestral group is also irrelevant; if the populace assumes they characterize the particular group, then their symbolic meaning will be enhanced. (Pocius 2001:9)



Symbols of Aboriginal identity have achieved respect in Canada in a way that mirrors the uninformed but willing respect for religious rituals shown by people who themselves do not practice any religion. (Obviously there is also a minority who may respect neither religious nor Aboriginal symbols, feeling they have no place in modern Canadian society.) The public does not share the history or the feeling of connection attributed to sweet grass smudging or the wearing of traditional headdresses, but acknowledges the rights of others to include these in occasions of importance. It is also true that some of these are recently instituted or revived traditions, but that does not lessen the attachment people feel to them nor the importance of such traditions in celebrating and reinforcing identity. This emphasis on symbols is bound to happen in a time and place where recognition of rights based on culture and traditional practices rather than the inherent rights of political communities means that culture needs to be given a high priority.

Language possession is an obvious cultural marker and a strong proof of Aboriginality in a place where so many have lost it. Acquiring language is not easy or quick and efforts to regain it have been slow, so anyone still speaking Inuttitut is clearly a member of Inuit society on anyone's terms. However, being unable to speak the language does not disqualify a person from being Inuit in the judgment of most people I have talked to. As one informant said (personal interview 2014), "I think when it boils right down to it it's your own sense of self, your connection and your belonging that defines who you are." We need to take into account circumstances that have prevented people from retaining the way of life that we may demand they follow in order to be considered

Aboriginal. For example, following a traditional lifestyle requires money to acquire the wherewithal to get back to the traditional hunting or fishing grounds, and speaking Inuttitut requires a family setting where it is still in daily use. Definitions of culture and limitations on how closely traditional culture can be followed, even by those who would very much like to, are complex and in the process of change.

When I asked informants what it means to be Inuit, they often thought long and hard about the answer. Part of the answer, of course, has been provided to them by the definition of who qualifies for membership as a beneficiary of the Nunatsiavut government. The process to prove qualification requires a number of things, amongst them being proof of 25% Inuit ancestry and a proven connection to a particular community in Nunatsiavut. They had individual ideas of what being Inuit meant to them personally as well, including knowledge of traditional skills, use of country foods, storytelling and drum dancing.

The Labrador Inuit are far from the only group wrestling with the necessity of including language as a marker of identity. Both Robert Klymasz (Klymasz 1980) and Nancy Schmitz (Schmitz 1991) have addressed this issue in terms of a part-time identity, as it were, with Ukrainian Canadians and with the Irish minority in Quebec, examining the symbolic behaviour that came to replace language. The sense of gauging the depth of verisimilitude of heritage identity is dealt with by Heather Sparling (Sparling 2005) in a place much better known to me, the Gaelic community of Cape Breton. Sparling looks at the cultural authority held by Gaelic speakers in the realm of traditional song, where some song forms are more reliant on a deep understanding of the Gaelic language and

accordingly confer a higher status on their performers. Sparling looked to Bourdieu's ideas on cultural and social capital to explain the value placed on these folklore forms, and we might use the same source to examine the place of the accumulated symbols of identity for the Labrador Inuit.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986) expanded Marx's ideas of capital to include forms beyond the economic, namely cultural and social capital. In spite of their less-tangible rewards, he saw that the structure and function of the social world was dependent on these accumulated forms of power, and interestingly was initially drawn to the idea by his observance that the public school system, in spite of its avowed equality of opportunity, did not provide the same benefits to all. His view was that some participants in the system had benefited from the accumulation of cultural capital at home and were therefore more likely to benefit from education received at school.

This idea is not fully congruent with school achievement and language acquisition in Nunatsiavut, at least after 1949 when English became the dominant language, although the cultural capital of the Settler population did allow them ascendancy at that time because of their use of English as a native language. If we look at the possession of Inuttitut as cultural capital, we can see that during a certain period the fact of possessing fluency in Inuttitut was not a mark of prestige and therefore it would have little value, being reduced by the social factors that we have examined. As time progressed and attitudes towards Aboriginal identity changed, we have now reached a point where the ability is seen as a desirable commodity, heightened by its rarity. As Bourdieu reasoned, "The specifically symbolic logic of distinction additionally secures material and symbolic

profits for the possessors of a large cultural capital; any given cultural competence (e.g. being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner” (Bourdieu 1986:para.10). The possession of academic qualifications is one of Bourdieu’s prime examples, and in his view these confer on the holder an automatic recognition of cultural capital not possessed by the autodidact, whose competence is self-recognized and may be called into question.

For the Labrador Inuit (who possess in increasing numbers academic qualifications) we can examine fluency in Inuttitut in the light of cultural capital. Language skill as a cultural commodity is both more difficult to acquire and easier to assess as present or absent than other forms of cultural capital, such as familiarity with traditional skills. Because it is increasingly rare it might be supposed that Inuttitut fluency has become more highly desirable and more infused with prestige than when it was more common, but this is true only to a certain extent. It seems more probable that because language is so difficult to acquire, at least in the case of Labrador Inuttitut where being immersed in the language is not easy, it has instead been relegated to a cultural symbol only. The language has been sidelined by the current institution of power, the Nunatsiavut government, because so many of its leaders do not speak it, relying instead for their identity on the criteria laid out in the land claims agreement, specifying one-quarter Inuit ancestry and a personal connection to a community in the land claims area instead. (“Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement.” 2005: 31)

Among those who do possess fluency in the language, there was a hierarchy or even a competition regarding cultural capital, as evidenced in the narratives of people making fun of others for their mistakes in Inuttitut. Conversely, as one informant reported, fluent speakers were affronted when it was suggested that their possession of the language was an “asset,” saying that their language was not something they had, but something they were.

One informant felt that the importance now attributed to the language is largely on a symbolic level:

They might give a speech where they do the Inuttitut speak-off at the gym here, so they’ll have a little speech about why it’s important to uphold the language and how we shouldn’t lose it, have pride and whatnot, but when you speak to someone day-to-day it’s not front line on the table.  
(Interview Webb 2014)

What the Labrador Inuit do display, in an era where they have been very successful in establishing self-government and in negotiating relationships with other governments, is *social capital*. Bourdieu sees this as the resources “linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group that provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital” (Bourdieu 1986: para. 19). This may be represented by the alumni of a university or membership in a club, amongst other forms, but it is evident that in this instance social capital is the result of qualifying as a beneficiary under the land claims agreement, probably to a greater extent even than was available in the earlier days of the Labrador Inuit Association. When asserting identity, one could claim, as many did, to possess cultural capital in terms of

Inuit ancestry, but still not be awarded the designation of “beneficiary” that would provide the social capital that has changed not only social status but material benefits.

That language has a problematic role in this should not surprise us, given that the formation of the LIA included the Settlers by invitation of the Inuit (Kennedy 1997: 11). Strength in numbers as well as historic connections required the inclusion of that group, and though there was linguistic competence among the Settlers of Nain and Hopedale, such was not the case amongst the communities to the south, nor was the speaking of Inuttitut a primary cultural characteristic to people who considered themselves Settlers and spoke English as the maternal language. Group membership, essentially, is more important than the individual elements required for its achievement, and as Bourdieu himself remarked, introducing new members into a group can adulterate the identity. Therefore the use of the term “Southern Inuit” for the former Metis Nation is bound to cause difficulty, as that group attempts to transform its cultural capital into social capital. Fluency in Inuttitut would be one way to safeguard the purity of Inuit membership, but so few have retained the language that it cannot be allowed to stand as a requirement of entitlement to these valuable forms of capital.

To sum up, the knowledge and use of the Inuttitut language is not one of the Nunatsiavut government’s designated requirements for qualification as a beneficiary (Interview Wood 2014). In fact, collective narratives about language loss have come to form part of the Inuit identity. This metanarration around language forms part of the apology for not speaking the language or passing it on, as well as part of the justification

for not doing so, and carries the function of informing the listener and the speaker himself that the heritage language continues to be important, even to those who do not carry it.

To quote folklorist Elliott Oring, “The study of folklore, once singularly focused on shared and inherited beliefs and traditional practices, now has come to study the production and uses of the stories that a group or its individuals tell on themselves” (Oring 1994:203). Taking this point of view, we can see that the reshaping and retelling of the stories of language loss serve a purpose that is closely connected to the original possession of the language itself. When informants reflect on the stories they have heard about Aboriginal children being prevented from using their language, or remember the sense of language going underground, or no longer being taught in school, they draw these stories into the sense they have of being distant from the authorities who were able to make decisions for them in their homeland. When the Labrador Creative Arts Festival play of 1998 presented characters who had been disenfranchised in terms of language, it mounted a defence of Labrador Inuit and the threats their culture had undergone. By contrast, the play of 2011 with its cast of post-land claims Inuit actors embodied a challenge to the stock characters of Inuit society.

Language is part of folklore, a form of vernacular culture, and therefore subject to change and variation. The consideration of language as a folkloric form concentrates on attributes of language in performance and on metanarration, rather than the existence of a minority language as a cultural artefact. If it is that, then people are free to let it go, and may instead choose to use elements of it inserted into the dominant language as artistic

performance, or may indeed rely on the narratives about language loss to express its importance to their sense of self as Inuit.

Interestingly, it is this loss narrative that has come to represent the Labrador Inuit language identity rather than the healthy possession of the language a few decades ago. By looking at language without the emotional attachment tethered to a possession that gains new value as it becomes more rare, we can look instead at language as a folkloric product, one that has ebbed and flowed in accordance with a tide influenced by ethnopolitics, education, and religion and which, in its absence, has grown to carry more of a weight of identity than in its vigorous presence. We must consider whether non-Aboriginal Canadians expect the Inuit to continue to speak their language because we feel it suits our notion of their traditional life and practice before the arrival of Settlers and intruders. So too should the leaders of Nunatsiavut examine their requirements for identity. This gap is pointed out by Andrea Procter: “Despite the change in anthropological thinking, however, others (such as the LIA) have employed cultural constructs that rely on the bounded and static version of culture that anthropologists have themselves recently abandoned” (Procter 2012:14).

Aboriginal people themselves may see language as unimportant, as did some of Owen’s informants, all living in Ottawa at the time of her research, but my impression from conversations in Labrador today, with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, is that the prevailing view is that the ability to speak an Aboriginal language vastly increases the legitimacy of claims to Aboriginal status and the very real benefits accruing. Terje Brantenberg reported on this view in the 1970s when he noted that the Grenfell



Mission required that people speak Inuttitut to be recognized as Inuit (T. Brantenberg 1977:402) In today's society, the Nunatsiavut government lists language revitalization as a priority, but certainly not one they place above the economy and protection of the environment (Johannes Lampe, personal communication). With self-government established and the Nunatsiavut Government a powerful voice in the present-day development of Labrador, the time may have come to re-examine the place of language. Procter reports a discussion with Nunatsiavut leader Toby Andersen on this subject, as he acknowledges the previous sense of division where Kablunângajuit did not want to be part of the Inuit movement and did not identify as Inuit. Andersen added, "I think as leaders we have to stand and be honest that the efforts we have put towards language and culture in Nunatsiavut have been minimal" (Procter 2012:188). Labrador Inuit, now that they are moving under the one banner, may decide that language is sufficiently necessary as an indicator of identity to begin attempts to revive and sustain the language, or may instead come to terms with the idea that language is not an essential part of what makes them Inuit. Either way, the decision is finally their own.

**Conclusion:**

The examination of shifting terms for identity in Nunatsiavut provides an overview of the process of change in self-perception, where segments of the population who formerly saw themselves as separate now self-identify, and are identified by government, as Inuit. In the process of forging this collective identity, both terminology and symbols to express it have been chosen and replaced over time. Assessing the role of language as one of these symbols leads to a consideration of its importance. While it

remains a central concern and an important component of identity, especially for beneficiaries still on the north coast, the low level of retention means that other symbols and facets of Inuit life such as self-government and connection to the land and traditional practices have taken on a significant role in the presentation of Inuit identity.

## CHAPTER SIX: NARRATIVES OF LANGUAGE LOSS

There is a relationship between language and society that is based on the acknowledgement that language is involved in almost all human activity. When power relationships change in existing socio-political systems, language is affected as well. Words themselves are powerful indeed; they have shaped the way Labrador Inuit have presented themselves, through the land claims agreement of 2005, through the shifting terminology applied to people of Aboriginal status, as described in the identity chapter, and through the narratives that explain the role of the Inuttit language as a marker of identity. In examining how the power of words is amplified into the force that is an entire language, we can see how its shifts and changes have not only reflected but actively affected power dynamics in Labrador society.

The current alarm over language loss world-wide has been a long time developing, but scholars and community members alike are now assessing the impact of a change that communities themselves did not always foresee. In addition, language loss has come to represent the loss of collective cultural identity, assimilation, and an imbalance of power (Owen 2011:53). The change that has taken place in the usage level and domain of Labrador Inuttit has been assessed and discussed in earlier chapters according to the scholarly understanding of the dynamics of language shift. In this chapter we will look at the words and practices of the Labrador Inuit to gain insight into their own explanations and changing understanding of the place of their native language in the post-Confederation era. It is the changes in the narratives themselves that provide

insight into people's attitudes towards language and the level of power they had over the direction it took.

The narratives examined here to understand these attitudes and the role they play in understanding both identity and language loss are those provided through the words of informants, both those of the 2002-2003 "Valuing Literacy" project and those from interviews carried out in 2013 and 2014, as well as through my twenty-six years of observation and participation in conversations on language in Labrador. Much valuable information has also been provided by the transcribed proceedings of the language and education conferences held in Nunatsiavut, as well as further primary sources including interviews from *Them Days Magazine*, transcripts from interviews done by Carol Brice-Bennett for her book on the Hebron relocation, and words from the archival collections of Reverend F. W. Peacock housed at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University.

In the introduction I touched on the usage of the word "narrative," and here I will expand on how I use the word below to describe and analyse the information related to me by my Nunatsiavut informants. "Narrative" is a very widely-used term, and scholars from many disciplines have made use of it to describe verbal or written accounts which they have analysed to various ends. Often the word "stories" is used to refer to these accounts, but I have chosen to use "narrative" as a term that does not carry the implication of fiction or imagination, and that removes the possibility of seeing these accounts as something merely told for entertainment. Although what others have called "narrative" and I will call "subjective accounts" are used effectively by writers to explore

the personal perspective on a wide variety of subjects, I reserve the word “narrative” for the kinds of accounts I am presenting below, which are stories not only presented by individuals as personal experience narratives, but are also *passed along* from one member of a group to another with variations and with the assumption of truth. In this way, I regard the explanations for language loss as folkloric products that take their place as a form of legend in the current cultural repertoire and indeed cultural capital of the Nunatsiavimiut. It is my contention that these narratives are used allegorically, as Amy Shuman puts it (Shuman 2005) and that this transition from their use as personal experience narratives to larger explanations of language loss is at least partially due to the shift in Labrador Inuit language use and identity since the mid-twentieth century.

In this chapter I present the narratives I collected from Nunatsiavut beneficiaries and a few non-Inuit long-term community members, explaining why the use of Inuttitut has diminished. It is my intention to arrive at some explanations for that loss, but also to understand what function the narratives themselves serve for the people who tell them.

After eliciting these explanations from people during interviews and conversations, I found that they fell into certain categories, which I list below. Some of these categories, and some of the narratives within the categories, conflict with each other, and this was often a product of receiving information from people who were of different age groups with different life experiences. When I received stories that differed from the more common contemporary versions offered by political leaders, or following accounts seen as explaining language loss in other Aboriginal groups in Canada or elsewhere, I termed them “counter-narratives.” In this I diverge from the usage of that

term by Amy Shuman, who sees the existence of a set of stories that challenge the dominant narratives of history by presenting an alternative version of events coming from the suppressed voice of a minority culture:

Claims for storytelling as subversive often pit the narratives told in everyday life (the repressed voice of the oppressed people) against the dominant narratives of histories. In these claims, the life histories of ordinary (and especially oppressed) people are considered to be counter-narratives that might undercut the discourses of those in power (Shuman 2005:9).

The counter-narratives I present here are different from Shuman's use of the term in that both the narratives and counter-narratives are produced by members of the same group, and in that the differences between the accounts are the product of a difference in the ages of the narrators as well as a shift in the political power of the Inuit and the uses to be made of their narratives.

The explanations given for the loss of language are readily provided, but they differ from one informant to another and from one generation to another. The heart of the question examined here is how language forms part of a sense of Inuit identity in Nunatsiavut, and how both narratives and counter-narratives inform the place of language amongst beneficiaries. In brief, the explanations given for language loss differed according to the decade in which I asked the questions and the age of the people interviewed, but in addition, contradictory explanations were sometimes offered. What I am calling counter-narratives are the alternative explanations for events that co-exist with the dominant stories, those that have become simulacra in the saga of language loss.

Teresa McCarty, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Ole Henrik Magga (McCarty 2010) rightly observe that language is affected by power relations, and Nicholas Ostler (Ostler

2005) has demonstrated in *Empires of the Word* that this is true over time as well as space, with certain languages dominating conquered peoples for long stretches of time before ceding pride of place to the next wave of domination. Indeed, we can—and below I do—look at the usage of language as an indication of the influence of dominating powers in Labrador over the course of the past three centuries. Nonetheless, it would be simplistic to look at its decline or even its revival as a barometer for measuring the autonomy of the Inuit. Rather, the narratives and the commentary on them reveal the agency Inuit often had in working within a system they did not create, to manage and shape social institutions, often to stamp them with their own cultural motifs, and most importantly to make them function to fit their own requirements.

These include, most notably, aspects of the Moravian church's practices, such as the elders' council, which allowed respected Inuit to supervise their communities and sanction erring community members. Additionally, while their earlier religious traditions had been largely replaced by Moravian customs and beliefs, syncretism was in evidence when Inuit adapted and transformed many of the church's customs, including confirmation rituals and feast days, so that they came to function as Moravian Inuit rites of passage invested with cultural features that gave them ownership over these important events (Ben-Dor 1966). As discussed in Chapter Four, literacy, and narratives about its long duration in Labrador Inuit society, also showcases the power of the Inuit in domains that were created by outsiders but were in time rendered Inuit-controlled arenas.

Much discussion has taken place in the work of anthropologists over the changes in Labrador Inuit society, from the discussions of tutelage in the work of Paine *et al*

(Paine 1977), through the educational work by Flanagan (Flanagan 1984) and later Grant (Grant 2003), and Dunn (Dunn 2002), Procter (Procter 2012) and Evans (Evans 2013). All have made valuable contributions in examining social change amongst the Labrador Inuit and have provided a good continuum of historical examination of these social changes. Language, while mentioned in passing, seems however to have been an area of small concern amongst the earlier writers, as it did not appear to be in danger, and not much more amongst the more recent writers, when it may have been seen as too far gone to be reclaimed.

Looking at identity shift through the lens of language is the focus of this thesis in each of its chapters. To get to the heart of what happened to Inuit and how people felt and feel about it, we turn in this chapter to the words of the informants. Within these accounts we see that acquiring a second language, once seen as a strategy for coping with changing times, has turned into the raw material for the many narratives of loss experienced by the Labrador Inuit.

Loss is sadly a keynote of the human condition, and is a refrain in the oral history of many cultural groups. The grand sagas of massive shifts and dislocations (the Irish Potato Famine, the Highland Clearances, the Expulsion of the Acadians, First Peoples' stories of eviction from their traditional lands, and many more), provide a backdrop for more personal individual narratives of family loss and misfortune. In the earlier global tragedies mentioned above, these historical events are enshrined as part of family history, with the individual details lost in the shared narrative of displacement.



For the Labrador Inuit, loss beyond language is encapsulated predominantly in the haunting tales of the 1918 Spanish Influenza epidemic that destroyed entire communities and left children as displaced orphans, and in the more politically motivated loss sustained through the relocations of Nutak and Hebron (Budgell and Markham 1985; Brice-Bennett 2000). These acts of dislocation are a heritage of loss and, though individual details are well known and have been recorded by those who lived through the events, the composite and collectively-owned narratives will eventually stand alone as a metaphor for the interference of the outside world to the detriment of the Inuit, who were not only displaced by external events but also had their world changed by outside agents.

Language loss, however, is less easily framed than these historically documented events of death and relocation by timelines and policies, and as such has become subsumed in the other narratives of loss. It does not lend itself to the concept of a single story of loss presiding over a society's identity, such as exists for the Acadians, but instead displays itself in accounts that are complex and at times contradictory, and which have changed over time.

In the case of Labrador, there exist a number of uses for language: the daily function of communication, including specialized vocabulary; the terms and usages that denote a distinct identity for the Labrador region as a whole; and the use of both language possession and loss as markers of Aboriginality and of an ancestral sense of belonging. At present, only about 10% of the population is still capable of speaking the language, which can now be classified as moribund as there are no children speaking it on a daily basis in the home (C. Andersen 2005:14; Crystal 2001:20).

We will look at how the narratives recounted about the loss of Inuktitut function in the community, what they say about the changing sense of identity amongst the Inuit and those formerly known as Settlers, and how the performance of the narratives is used to demonstrate solidarity, to protest current social conditions, or to claim a place in the larger citizenship of Canadian Inuit. It is worth noting that language maintenance amongst the Labrador Inuit exists in contradictory terms, where those with the greatest experiences of loss, those in the northernmost communities, at the same time had the strongest maintenance of language.

*Narratives provided:*

The primary question I asked in both sets of interviews was what had caused the decline in the use of the language. The answers I received varied widely, but this response from Toni White, language coordinator with the Torngâsok Cultural Centre, gives an indication of the spectrum of causes accepted today amongst the Labrador Inuit population as the major ones:

TW: Well, there's many things. The government, when Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation, had an impact on what was taught and how the language was passed on. There was also the influx of more people from away coming in and the use of English becoming stronger. There was racism and looking down upon the language, people thinking that you were less if you spoke Inuktitut, there was the schools, if you were forced to go away. Some of our boarding schools were Inuktitut-speaking schools which was great, but some weren't and that affected the language. Also, once we got radio, once we got TV, then it just kind of pushed it down ever further. So those are the ones that come to mind right away. (Interview White 2014)

In addition to these vernacularly-recognized factors, Peacock mentions the establishment of the American military base in Goose Bay and the radar site in Hopedale,

as well as the availability of mail order catalogues as examples of outside life invading the hitherto sheltered life of the Inuit (Peacock 1984:9). The categories of narratives that follow introduce specific accounts of these previously-acknowledged factors as well as explanations that have more recently emerged. In older informants, the stories appear as first-hand accounts or personal experience narratives, while in the reports of younger people we see a folkloric process at work, with informants presenting explanations as truths inherited from the recent past.

The stories I call “narratives” are those that reflect the currently accepted explanations for language loss in 2015 and include shame, prejudice, government interference, church influence, punishment for minority language use and attendance at boarding schools. By contrast, the counter-narratives consist of stories less often told in 2015, including the elders’ decision to have English taught, the use of Inuttitut as a second language, punishment for using English in school, the Moravian mission’s use of Inuttitut and a variety of practical reasons for letting go of the language. Both forms are recounted below with extensive examples. Because there are contradictory accounts within each category, I have not grouped them into separate lists of narratives and counter-narratives, but have presented and analysed each category separately.

### **Elders’ Decision**

Interviews I carried out in 2002 and 2003 amongst people in Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik provided various explanations for language decline, and frequently the explanation was that the elders in the community had requested that the children be taught in English, as they felt that they would need this skill in the changing world of the

mid-twentieth century. As will be shown below, however, the narrative has now changed, and it is quite frequently stated by the present adult generation (ages 40-60) that their parents were in fact forbidden to speak the Inuttit language and were punished for doing so.

There is no doubt that the educational decisions of the Moravians and subsequently of the Newfoundland government impinged on the learning traditions of the Inuit. The custom of the Moravians, which dictated that children should be taught in their own language, and the later edict by the Newfoundland government that the children were to be taught in English, had absolutely predictable results on the use of the spoken language. However, the narratives collected on the reason for this change are conflicting and represent differing views on the autonomy of the Inuit. Those interviewed in 2002-3, mostly speakers of the language, had an explanation that constitutes one of the more frequently expressed narratives about language loss. Here Fran Williams of Hopedale, who grew up in the 1940s, recounts the point of view that it was the elders in the community who decided that the children should learn English:

From what I've heard, when Newfoundland joined Confederation, from what I've been told, is that the elders, like Jerry Sillett when he was still alive, the older people decided that we should be taught in English in the schools so that when they [the English-speaking authorities in the community] were gossiping about us, we'd know what they were saying. That's what I was told. So they'd know what the decisions affecting the community would be. (Interview Williams 2002)

In a 2003 interview, Nain resident Naeme Tuglavina had this conversation with interviewer Mary Webb:

MW: Who decided that you should be taught in English?

NT: I'm not too sure but I remember, I'm not sure what year it was, our community elders had a meeting and they decided that the children needed to speak and understand English. So the government wouldn't...

MW: So they wouldn't have control?

NT: No, so that we would know what was really happening. (Interview N. Tuglavina 2003)

The same opinion was expressed by Ed Lyall, who grew up in Voisey's Bay in the 1940s and later went to boarding school in Nain. I asked him if Inuit children were discouraged from speaking their language:

EL: I think the church minister and the teachers was looking at it as "Times are changing and they're going to have to learn English." And I know there was one year they had a meeting, they had all the church elders, all the community elders at the meeting, the community elders called the meeting with the teachers and the ministers and said if they wasn't going to teach the children the English language they were going to need, they wouldn't be sending their children to school that year. They said if you aren't going to teach them the English language, if you're to teach the same way you always did, we're not going to send them to school because times are changing and we need to change.

MM: What year would that have been?

EL: That was before I left Nain, '45 or around there.

MM: Was it a good thing that they started to teach them in English?

EL: Uh, well, yes. Because look where they're to now, they're getting into, getting their own self-government and everything, the way the school was run before they weren't learning much, reading and writing, a lot of Bible lessons. I could stand up and rhyme off every book in the Bible one time. (Interview Ed Lyall 2003)

Miriam Lyall's version of the narrative was that people were asked around the time of Confederation whether they wanted the children to be taught in English or Inuttitut, and they chose English. When I asked her about why the change took place, she replied:

ML: I don't know why they would change that. After speaking with some of my age group, too, sometimes we discuss it, I think it was after 1949 when the Newfoundland government came into being. One of my brother-in-laws who's much older than [my husband] Ron, I was asking him one

day and he said at the time when they were going to teach, decide whether to speak in Inuktitut or teach English, he said families used to go up in the bays 'cause that was the way of life, and when September came round some of the students were going back to this boarding school, I think it was in Nain, and he said by that time the parents were gone away up in the bays, and before they left they were being asked whether they would want to have Inuktitut or English instruction. And a lot of them said English, because it would be better for them for education further along the way. And that was the one reason why they were starting to speak in English, because the parents thought it would be better for the child to know English if they were going to further their education. (Interview M. Lyall 2002)

Abel Leo gave this explanation during the 1987 Labrador Inuit Education

Conference:

Back then, we were not allowed to speak English in school. If you spoke English in school, you would probably get a slap for it. The Elders tried for years to get English taught in the schools without any success and finally, after Confederation, they did have the opportunity to see English being taught in the schools. This was something they had been looking for, an opportunity to have the kids taught in English in the schools. They found then that this went a little bit too far. After a number of years they realized that they had made a mistake and that it was only English being taught in schools, and the kids were losing their Inuktitut language. There were kids learning all English and no Inuktitut at all. This went too far and people began to realize it only after a number of years, even though it was the community Elders themselves who wished to have English taught in the schools in the first place, because they hadn't had the opportunity to learn English when they were going to school. Now there has been a change again where we see that the Inuktitut language is being taught in schools again. (Labrador Inuit Association 1987:20)

This account of the community's request was supported by a teacher of the time,

Brigitte Schloss, who worked in the coastal schools from the late 1940s until 1980:

BS: It was the parents. The elders demanded that the children be taught in English.

MM: So did they make a formal request at some point? What year?

BS: Well, it was all community-based and I know for a fact in Nain, and probably in Hopedale too, that the parents demanded that their children be

taught in English. And they felt it was holding them back. The elders, the parents, they demanded that the children be taught in English. But that didn't mean not to use Inuktitut. Because when I got there they already taught them in English but they used Inuktitut the whole time. The idea was never to lose the language, just so that you'd be ready. (Schloss 2002)

Ted Andersen gave this version of the decision:

TA: That was [decided by] the elders of the time. So the story was told to me, because it was a mission school, naturally the Moravians taught the Inuit language to the children, and I guess it was spoken more in homes. And then Confederation came along. Well, I was told that the elders said they might as well be taught in English because if we have to talk to the government we have to speak in English.

MM: So it was better for the kids.

TA: Yes. But it was a mistake. I think things were changing so fast. How I know it was the elders in Nain who suggested the English, I didn't attend the meeting but a good friend of mine did. They had a meeting in Nain and Mary Sillett was quite strong on having the Inuit taught Inuktitut in school and I think that she said it was the government that forced us, but someone from the government was there and produced a letter from the village elders which Mary didn't know about. (Interview T. Andersen 2003)

Beatrice Watts was the subject of a CBC radio documentary produced by Julie

Green where the question arose:

Another government deal changed Beatrice's life fifty years ago. Newfoundland joined Confederation and control of education passed from the Moravian missionaries to the new provincial government. The language of instruction also changed. Elders in Nain requested English be taught in the Inuit school, just as it was in the Settler school. They reasoned people would be better able to understand storekeepers, doctors and government officials if they spoke English. It was a radical decision. English was then a foreign language to most people in Nain. (Green 1997)

Rose Pamack Jeddore gave her account in an article she wrote:

I was educated during the 50s and 60s, a period that Inuit refer to as the decline of the Inuktitut language in Labrador. We have been told that our elders agreed to the change in language because not knowing English became a handicap and knowing Inuktitut became a handicap. (Jeddore 1979:87)

This account of the Inuit themselves requesting English instruction in order to facilitate their relations with non-Inuit people also appears in the words of Diamond

Jenness:

Nevertheless it was apparent, after the First World War, that the Eskimos had become highly conscious of the importance of learning to speak fluent English, because it so greatly facilitated their relations with whites....It was about this time, indeed, that a number of Eskimos suggested to the mission that it drop from its schools all instruction in the Eskimo tongue and teach even the little children in English only. (Jenness 1964:64)

To the elders of the time, much as with immigrants to a new country, the necessity to have someone in their family with the ability to interpret and maybe influence the community power brokers seemed obvious, and they could not have foreseen how the decision would threaten their language of daily use. Christine Nochasak, who grew up in Makkovik in the 1960s, was the child of resettled Inuit from Hebron, and it was her task to serve as interpreter for those people living in what was known as the “Hebron end” of Makkovik (Interview Nochasak 2014).

It was known to the Inuit that Settlers often spoke both languages, and in some parts of Labrador people also picked up the Innu language to assist in trapping and trading matters. As Michele Wood explained, Labrador Inuit were used to devising survival tactics of all kinds; arranging for instruction in a language that was clearly the possession of those in charge was an addition to their set of skills. Naeme Tuglavina in the previous chapter described the pride that the parents took in their children’s ability to converse with the Kablunaks.



## **Sent Outside**

Another factor that may have been at work in language loss as the English language began to take hold was the practice in some families of sending children out of the room when adults were having discussions amongst themselves. It had the effect of removing children from a sphere in which they would have honed their language skills. Miriam Lyall described this norm of sending away the children, as did another informant, born around 1965, who attributed the decreased language ability of herself and her siblings to her grandparents' urging of them to "go away." They were also discouraged from asking questions of their elders, and this accounts for the lack of knowledge some informants had about their parents' educational background.

Ernestina Tuglavina (Mary Webb interview):

ET: I was born in Hebron, then there was a big relocation and my parents moved here. I was six years old. That was in 1959, I would say I mostly grew up in Nain, I went to school in Hebron, Kindergarten.

MW: Oh, they had Kindergarten in Hebron?

ET: Yes, they had school over there. We was only taught in Inuk. Kate Hettasch was the teacher.

MW: Do you know if your parents went to school?

ET: I wouldn't know because I wasn't questioning them. (Interview E. Tuglavina 2003)

John Jararuse, born in the 1940s, mentioned the same thing in an interview with Carol Brice-Bennett in 1993:

CB-B: You said that before that people weren't allowed to ask the older people who they were, or what their names were or something?

JJ: Even my older sisters, they don't know what her [mother's] last name was because we were not supposed to ask questions to older people, who their parents were and who their names were and who their surnames were and who their father's and mother's name were.

CB-B: But who told them that they weren't allowed to ask questions?

JJ: You mean the kids? It was the parents who always used to tell the kids not to listen when they're telling stories and things like that. When we were growing up, we were not supposed to ask people. Like older people about their names, because before Inuit people respected their elders. That's why they were not supposed to ask them about their names. We missed a lot of stories, old stories about what used to happen before. We missed a lot of the things that used to happen before. I myself would have known more stories than I do already. I would have known if they had let me listen while they were telling stories, but sometimes they used to tell stories, especially men, amongst themselves behind closed doors. (Brice-Bennett 1993:1)

Seona Karpik, also born in the 1940s, spoke of the same situation. (The interview was in Inuttitut and was interpreted for me by Miriam Lyall. We visited Seona together.)

SK: They had books in Inuktitut. The hymn books and the Bible.

MM: Would your parents read them to you?

ML interjects: It's the same thing that I hear all the time. Because we were told not to bother anyone we didn't bother them.

MM: The older people?

ML: Yes.

MM: Was that a way of life?

SK: Yes, it was like that. Yeah, like we weren't allowed to ask questions or pay attention, and it was like that when we were growing up too.

(Interview Karpik 2003).

Salome Tuttauk from Hopedale (born 1930s) reported that in her family, children were told to leave the house when older people came, as did Sarah Townley, born in the late 1950s:

M: Would parents tell kids to go away and play?

ST: Yes, that happened a lot to me too, especially when our elders would gather, they would say, "Go outdoors and play now, because we're going to have a talking session or storytelling or whatever." (Interview Townley 2013)

Selma Suarak Jararuse added her experience to this:

When I was growing up we weren't supposed to ask questions so I guess I didn't ask no questions, like did you go to school. The only information I know about them was what I heard from them. It might not be the full

thing I wanted to know but I just had to accept what I heard. We were in the way, seems like nobody had time to really sit down and ask questions. I don't understand why. (Interview Jararuse 2014)

Other accounts of Inuit life certainly show the pattern of learning life skills and oral traditions from elders in the community that is familiar in Newfoundland culture, as well as many others. This form of cultural continuity also took place in Nunatsiavut, but it appears that enough accounts of people's memories of being told to go out play elsewhere are told that we can assume it was a practice that also existed, perhaps in times either of significant discussion on community matters or at a time when women, for example, wanted to talk without children in earshot.

Sometimes children learned in spite of this directive, such as Beatrice Watts:

MM: How did you become so fluent?

BW: My mother spoke Inuktitut and I was a nosy kid. I wanted to know what the women were talking about. My mother used to tell me to go outside. I guess you just picked it up, you're just immersed in it. They would be sitting and talking. (Interview Watts 2003)

Conversely, some activities promoted the use of the language, bringing in the aspect of domain. Beatrice Hope reported that her brother was much more fluent in Inuktitut than his sisters, because it was the only language used during hunting trips and he picked up the language in this kind of informal immersion program, "I know from my brother who is passed away, he says when the hunters go off on the land, that's all they speak is Inuktitut. But when they come into the community, back to English." (Interview Hope 2014)

## Second Language

One of the common narratives provided by the older generation of informants was the high incidence of bilingualism in the communities of Nain and Hopedale. As noted in the previous chapters, previously residents identified as either “Settler” or “Inuit,” and earlier writers have considered the role of language in this ascription of identity. Many of the stories that follow deal with the ways in which each group picked up the language of the other.

Louisa Webb Frieda was from Hopedale, born approximately 1910. She told interviewers at *Them Days*:

There was lots and lots of Eskimos up around Nain, they couldn't speak English them times, not like now, but my mother could speak Eskimo all the time, just like me. There was no English schools, no English services, only all Eskimo. That's how we came to learn it. Most all of we families could speak it, learned it from they. We didn't used to talk English when they was in the house 'cause some of the people used to think we was talkin' about them if we talked in English. (Frieda 1978:26)

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the boarding school at Nain, established in 1930 through a donation from Donald MacMillan, was run by Kate Hettasch until 1947, and provided instruction in both languages. Ed Lyall grew up in Voisey's Bay in the 1940s and recalls his schooldays in Nain. His comments on language use are derived from his educational experiences there:

So anyway after I moved here [North West River] I heard a big uproar about the people losing their language and they wanted—this was after the Newfoundland Department of Education got in on the school, they wanted to bring back their language in the school. In the school day we [Settler students] had no contact with the Inuit children during the school hours. They were over in the other building and you know those fellows picked up the English language on their own, they never had no instruction, they

were never taught any grammar, but look at them now, they can talk English a lot better than I can. (Interview Ed. Lyall 2003)

A number of the other informants went to the boarding school as well. There were two schools there, one for Inuit children and one for Settler children, and they all lived together in the boarding section, which was where the informal learning of Inuttitut (and presumably English) took place. Beatrice Watts reported that in some other students' families, the Settler parents didn't speak Inuttitut but the children learned it from their fellow boarders when they got to school. She said that the Settlers (her term) such as the Fords, Voiseys and Webbs, learned the language as they grew up and mingled with Inuit people. They would, of course, have had Inuit ancestry, but her account seems to indicate that the source of their knowledge was this custom of picking up the language from their friends and neighbours. Beatrice Watts explained how the school worked:

BW: Well, it was a different set-up, the Nain school was, we had the English school for English-speaking children and Inuktitut school for Inuktitut-speaking children. And I was in the English-speaking school but we all lived together in the boarding school part of it, but our classrooms were separated.

MM: Which language would you speak when you were with the other kids?

BW: Everything. You know, Inuktitut a lot because that was the dominant language in the whole of Nain at that time and in order to survive you had to speak Inuktitut.

MM: What language did your parents use with you?

BW: English. (Interview Watts 2003)

Beatrice Hope confirmed this style of learning, talking about her mother's generation: "In my mother's era where they lived together they really taught each other so they learned easily because they always spoke it" (Interview Hope 2013).

Christine Baikie, born in 1931, described a similar situation in an interview conducted by Mary Webb:

CB: Well, in our home we talked all English, my family. But my playmates, nobody talked any English in Nutak or Hebron; it was all Inuktitut. And I learned from them.

MW: But your parents never taught you?

CB: We just learned from play, all Inuit. There was no Kablunaks, only the storekeeper whose kids I babysat. We talked all English, brothers and sisters and grandparents at home.

MW: Was it only you and Jessie who learned Inuktitut?

CB: Fred did but he wasn't as bilingual as Jessie and I, but he's not too bad, but the rest didn't seem to bother because by the time they were growing up the Inuit children were speaking English.

MW: Do you think when they stopped teaching it, it made it decline?

CB: The Inuit language went down a lot after they stopped teaching it in school, because the missionaries used to teach all in Inuktitut. I don't know if they had a mixture, I think they must have, I think my brothers and sisters had mostly English and the Inuit children had Inuktitut too. And it needs to come from home too, if they had it at home from infants. That's how I learned it. I was an eager beaver too. (Interview Baikie 2003)

She recounted the story for *Them Days* as well:

I was born in 1931. We had a big family. Well, I'm the oldest of ten brothers and sisters. We worked hard, but there was no school where I lived. And myself and my sister next to me, Jessie Ford, we never, ever went to school. But we both learned to read and write, in both languages. We just sort of picked it up on our own. In our house 'twas all English speaking, but I always spoke Inuttitut outside. My friends were Inuit children and they never talked English. But I learned to talk Inuttitut from playing with them. I grew up with two languages I spoke, really, but not in the home. (Baikie 2010:48)

Ed Lyall, of a similar age to Christine, also described this kind of language learning:

MM: Did you speak Inuktitut growing up?

EL: Oh yes, we were with Inuit people. Clear of our own people, there were no English speaking.

MM: So you learned pretty much the same things in English. Do you think that was a good idea, having the separate classes? Did it make people feel they weren't part of the same community?

EL: I didn't feel it mattered much because once we got out of school—you were in the classroom in the school, well if you had a mixture of Inuit and English in the classroom you still wasn't allowed to look over that way! (Interview Ed Lyall 2003)

Sam Andersen attended at the same time and recounted this in *Them Days*:

Even though we were all still in the same building, there was another building right next door to us where we went to school. Well, when we were in the boarding school you used the one language, Inuttitut, all the time. But then again, when you were going to school in the daytime, you weren't allowed to talk Inuttitut. You had to talk English all day. Strange! (S. Andersen 2010:40)

Rose Voisey Ford Spurvey had this account of the arrangement:

We used to go to school, used to be about fifty Inuit and only about twelve Settlers and it used to be so hard. 'Cause when I was in boarding school we used to have to go to school in the morning and learn what you're supposed to learn in English, and then when you come out, you'd have to talk Inuttitut, learn how to speak Inuttitut, so it was really complicated, you know. It was hard 'cause you had to talk Inuttitut, that's the way the teachers told us to talk, Auntie Katie and Mrs. Hettasch...I don't think I really learned anything in boarding school, didn't have time. We went to school, you learned what you had to learn, come out and speak Inuttitut and then you had to do all your work. (Spurvey 2010:41)

Naeme Tuglavina from Nain, born around 1950, had the same account:

MW: And here in the boarding school there used to be Settler and Inuit children together?

NT: Yes, all of the time. Kablunak and Inuttitut. But I don't know if they were taught Inuttitut, but we always used to speak our language, eh, Kablunaktitut when we had to. (Interview N. Tuglavina 2003)

Katie Winters, born in the 1930s, also spoke of the school language experience:

MM: Did she [Kate Hettasch] teach you in Inuktitut?

KW: Yes, mostly we learned our own language in the school, Inuk, and among ourselves. And there used to be children who couldn't talk English, not one word, and we used to try to talk to them in English and

they'd answer in their own way. I used to try to talk to this woman, she's way out to Kuujjuaq now, Natalie Lidd she was, we used to ask her to play with us and she would stare at us, and she'd talk her language and I'd stare at her and get going like that and after a while we'd understand. (Interview Winters 2003)

Jim Andersen, born in Makkovik in 1919, spoke about the linguistic capacity of Inuit students Susie and Mary Mitsuk who attended school with him in Makkovik in the 1930s, where instruction was given for Settler children and where some Inuit children attended as well.

MM: Did they speak English when they came to the school in Makkovik?

JA: Gosh yes, those two, they were fluent, though they were Inuit.

MM: Were there some who couldn't?

JA: No, they could all manage English, oh yeah.

MM: Did they learn when they got here?

JA: No, they learned before they come. I never seen no school children come here in my time that couldn't talk English. Only the older ones, you used to see people from Hopedale, Nain of course, who had to ask someone, couldn't talk English.

MM: Did you ever learn to speak Inuttitut?

JA: No, I didn't, and I've been sorry I didn't the last sixty or seventy years. My mother, she was a Mitchell from Adlatok, a Settler we calls it, and when she heard tell that there was a komatik come from Hopedale she couldn't wait to talk Inuttitut to them all the time. She was fluent.

MM: Where did she learn it?

JA: Well, Hopedale was all Inuit people and my uncle Willie and them talked Eskimo and Indian too because Indians used to come out to Adlatok them times. (Interview J. Andersen 2003)

I questioned Annie Evans, who went to school in Makkovik in the late 1940s:

MM: Did Inuit and Settler children go to school together?

AE: Yes, we had children from Hopedale, we learned Inuktitut from them, and I remember Rev. and Mrs. Harp were fluent in Inuktitut and they would always pray and say the Lord's Prayer in Inuktitut. (Interview Evans 2003)

Jessie Ford (sister of Christine Baikie), born in 1932, recalled learning Inuktitut:



I never ever went to school because there was no school where we lived. I can speak Inuttitut; I understands almost everything. We learned to talk Inuttitut on our own, we didn't get taught. We learned to talk Inuttitut when we was growin' up because there was a lot of Inuk families where we lived. There was hardly any that talked English. We always talked English in our own home, but we always played with little Inuk kids. We learned like that. (Ford 2010:47)

Michele Wood, born in 1970, sees this kind of linguistic versatility as an example of the range of skills acquired by the Inuit to deal with the demands of their environment:

What I remember is that Grammy would talk about how people in past generations could speak easily to trappers or traders or to people with Inuit culture. So I think she saw it as a multi-faceted skill set that people had, the ability to switch at the drop of a hat from one language to another and she thought that was interesting. (Interview Wood 2014)

As we have seen about the time period leading up to the middle of the twentieth century, the people who were fluently bilingual were the Settlers rather than the Inuit, and it is evident as well that they regarded Inuttitut, no matter how fluently spoken, as a second language. This is obvious from their descriptions of the way in which they learned it (Christine Baikie, Sally Voisey, Jessie Ford, Louisa Frieda) and also in their affiliation with Settler life rather than Inuit life, as demonstrated either by community ascription (Beatrice Watts) or by enrolment in one school over the other (Hilda Hunter Lyall versus Ed Lyall). A number of Settlers spoke Innu-aimun as well, and they regarded this as a language of trade. In spite of their recognition of their own Inuit ancestry, their ability to speak Inuttitut was not linked at the time to a direct identification with the Inuit, whom they saw as a separate group, with distinct settlement and lifestyle patterns. This means that the Settler people did not see the threat to the continuation of Inuttitut as a threat to their own identity, nor would they see a need or responsibility to

reclaim that language. Pre-Confederation, there would have been an existence of two distinct groups, in which the Settlers were the ones who were bilingual. We can see in the writing of Rev. Peacock that the Settlers had enough mastery of the language to have what was considered their own form of Inuttitut:

The writings and speech of the missionaries has led to the preservation of what I call “Classical Inuktitut.” But along the Coast dialects developed and the Settlers created their own brand of Inuttut. Many of them had ancestors who were of the Inuit race and some of the present day Settlers have married Inuit. (Peacock 1985:13)

As mentioned in reference to the word “Sango,” Miriam Lyall also related that the Settlers had their own ways of pronouncing certain words in Inuttitut (personal communication). This indicates that the incidence of bilingualism was high and that the notion of using Inuttitut as a working language in the community, obtained through informal means, gave it a status as a second language that had more to do with utility than identity.

### **Ridicule**

The former narrative of Inuttitut as a second language indicates the existence of bilingualism in the community. However, another narrative serves to see this dual use of language as diglossia rather than bilingualism, a state wherein one language is viewed as of lesser status and is confined to the domains of the home and the church rather than the world of business, government and education. When Inuttitut moved out of the official spheres of community life and retreated into a shadowy world of lower status, it was accompanied by the ridicule that is one of the most pernicious effects of racism and the

reason for people's abandonment of their first language as a survival tactic, as well as an internal struggle over the place of the language.

Speakers of Inuktitut were placed in a difficult position as English began to dominate daily life in Labrador. On the one hand, they were made to feel ashamed of their ancestry and language; on the other, when trying to regain the language they underwent ridicule from their own community for their errors in their receding native language. Additionally, as Toni White suggests, English became the higher-status language: "I imagine some of it would have been the media inundation, which made it seem cooler for the kids to want to speak English instead of Inuktitut" (Interview White 2014). Consequently, the passing of time allowed for a change from a bilingual community to one where some of the Inuit group were in the position of understanding but not speaking the language. Many of the narratives that developed support the recognition of a sizeable group of passive bilinguals. Also known as "receptive bilinguals," this is the portion of the population that understands a language but does not speak it. This was remarked upon by Marina Sherkina-Lieber, who studied the status of passive bilinguals in Nain:

A serious problem in Labrador Inuit communities, as visitors and community residents report, has been the negative attitude towards non-fluent speakers' attempts to speak Inuktitut. (Johns 2007, personal communication) Until recently, most older fluent speakers laughed at or reacted in other negative ways to dysfluent speech in Inuktitut, and this likely discouraged many non-fluent speakers from trying to speak. At present, the attitude seems to be changing both ways, as the community members realize how endangered their language is (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:38).

Miriam Lyall commented on this unfortunate circumstance:

And in Inuktitut we are taught to say it correctly, if you don't want anyone to laugh at you, you try to learn, try to cope. It's someone else's loss who laughs at you, because that way I can say, "Well, they're not trying to teach me." So I would be saying it correctly or just different. So, it's too bad, that's the system we grew up in too, people would laugh at me who knew more words than I did (Interview M. Lyall 2002).

As Toni White put it:

A lot of people are afraid of messing up, basically. There's a disconnect between knowing it in your head and being able to say it. I know one person here in the office, he considers himself a passive bilingual. He can understand a lot more than he can speak. When we were developing the Labrador Inuktitut Training Program, that was one of the ideals, a target group, the passive bilinguals, we just need to give them more opportunities and a safe place till they feel able to put it to use. Bridging that gap. (Interview White 2014)

Beatrice Hope, whose parents were bilingual, described a situation that is probably quite typical. Born in 1960, she grew up outside Nain until her family moved into the community so that she and her siblings could attend school. Her mother spoke English to her but, living within the community where much Inuktitut was still spoken, Beatrice classes herself as one of the passive bilinguals:

I can understand a lot more than I can speak. There's different factors. For me, I was just so self-conscious and I didn't want to make mistakes. I didn't even want to try, I had so low self-esteem. (Interview Hope 2013)

Beatrice is now bringing the language back for herself and for her grandchildren, as several people I spoke to hope to do. "It took a long time because even when I had my own children I wouldn't tell them the words I know, because I didn't think I knew enough. It's only now I can tell my grandchildren some words" (Interview Hope 2013).

As people became more self-conscious about their speech, they preferred to answer in English rather than risk making mistakes for which they would be ridiculed.

This led inevitably to a point where grandchildren and grandparents could no longer speak to each other (another common observation) and recognition of the existence of a language loss situation became apparent. Naeme Tuglavina commented on this: “I heard a lot of them do that because they’re ashamed of the way they talk when they talk in Inuktitut. The other people or their peers laugh at them” (Interview N. Tuglavina 2003). Though English was becoming the dominant language, not only through the change in the educational system but through the influence of popular culture in the community, there was clearly still a desire to maintain Inuktitut, but this was hampered by the conditions that had turned Inuktitut into the cultural possession of the older generation who wanted to hear it spoken but also wanted to preserve its accuracy and fluency.

The ensuing alarm over the decline of Inuktitut led not only to measures designed to regain the language, including the education and language conferences and the establishment of the Inuktitut immersion program, the Inuktitut Curriculum Centre, and the establishment of the Torngâsok Cultural Centre. It also led to an evolution of language loss narratives that sought to explain the loss in terms of accountability and even blame.

### **Shame and Prejudice**

The story of people ridiculing others for their inadequacy in Inuktitut is the counter-narrative to the more commonly expressed narrative around racism, which also played a very strong part in the desire to relinquish the language, or at least to replace it with facility in the dominant language. A sad and frequent narrative is the shame people felt about their heritage when transplanted to the community of Happy Valley-Goose

Bay. Mary Adams, born in the early 1930s, spoke of this when she presented to the panel on low-level flying, describing the segregation that went on in the new community when the Inuit were directed to settle on “Eskimo Island,” an island in the Churchill River, rather than on the river bank with the other members of the new community:

It was hard to talk with people because as Inuit we were made to think of ourselves as inferior to Kablunaks. All of a sudden I started to feel out of place as an Inuk. The only employment that we would get was the jobs that the Kablunaks didn't want or wouldn't do. I had to fight hard by myself to keep my language and to find a way to fit in Goose Bay. (Adams 1994)

For those who had some Inuit ancestry and some command of both languages, it seemed strategic to abandon their Inuit side in the face of the racism they feared would affect their children. Ed and Mary Voisey spoke of this when I asked them if their children had learned Inuttitut:

MV: No, I never teached mine because there was a lot of-

EV: There was a lot of prejudice, eh.

MV: It was terrible. Here [Goose Bay], Rigolet, Makkovik, Hopedale, all the same. If you was an Eskimo you was nothing.

MM: When did that start?

MV: A long time ago. Come from another place and they turn you down because you're Eskimo.

MM: So people didn't want to admit that they had that-

EV: They wanted to be all white.

MV: But Fort Chimo wasn't like that when we left. Never was. They always kepted their language. It's sad. They have to have a school for that, when they could have learned their language when they was small. I could have teached mine too but I was foolish because I used to be called down because I had [Inuit relatives] on my mother's side and a bit on my father's side too and I thought, I'm not going to learn my kids because I don't want them to feel like I did. I should never have thought that. I could have easily learned them. Oh yes, I always speak to people when I can. (Interview E. and M. Voisey 2003)

Sarah Townley also reported the phenomenon of not sharing the language with her children, but making an effort later with her grandchildren. The element of shame was strong even in those who continued to use the language:

ST: My middle one [learned some Inuttitut] when my mother was still alive. She used to speak Inuktitut to him, along with my older one, but these are the ones who understand but don't speak it anymore. I didn't pass it down because I was ashamed of being Inuk and passing down the Inuktitut language, so I didn't pass it down to them. But it's starting to reverse now where I'm speaking Inuktitut to my grandson. But I used to speak to other people in Inuktitut when we went to different communities. I would always speak to younger people, older people, my cousins, in Inuktitut. It didn't really die away but with my own children it did. I guess people didn't like us speaking Inuktitut, as far as I know. And if we spoke it or did something culturally different they would make fun of us or do something. To avoid all that we just stopped speaking in Inuktitut. That's what I did to avoid all the problems that came with speaking Inuktitut.

MM: Did that ridicule come from other people in your community? Teachers and outsiders or people that already lived there?

ST: People that already lived there.

MM: Since the ministers taught in Inuktitut, who would have prevented them from speaking?

ST: It was their own teacher, who could speak Inuktitut! Sad but true. As far as I know, people from outside were supportive. Lots of people supported me if I wanted to speak Inuktitut. (Interview Townley 2013)

When I asked Selma Suarak Jararuse, born in 1960, about why people stopped using the language so much, she replied:

SJ: What I think from my experience, all I can say is being put down, made fun of. Thinking that you were dirty, you were different. That was it for me. And I think a lot of people too thought it was cool to be speaking the white language, I guess it was how we looked at it. I guess it was shame. We moved here [Goose Bay] in 1989 and that was a big thing, a lot of prejudice, lot of name calling and physical hits. But in Nain I don't remember ever having to think that I'd better speak English. I think I just thought that it would be cooler if I could only speak English and not Inuktitut anymore. And where we came here and stuff started happening to my kids, they didn't want to hear it even though I was speaking it at home. Because it was causing a lot of problems for them at school, being

picked on, put down, name calling...taking their coats and books. So one of my kids said to me, "You should stop speaking Inuktitut." And at that time where I wasn't proud of my language I just said okay. (Interview Jararuse 2014)

Beatrice Hope had similar reflections:

MM: People are proud of their heritage now. Did that change at some point?

BH: Yeah, 'cause there was a point when people were laughed at for being Inuk and they were disgraced and it wasn't very good to be Inuk, so that's why they stopped teaching their children. It was a disgrace to be Inuk. You were put down and laughed at and so on. Even when I first came up to Goose Bay people used to call me names. But it switched. It's like, you know the people who relocated from Hebron, in the communities they went into they weren't accepted, they were harassed and everything else. So now people are talking about what happened, so it's like, not retaliation but they're expressing what happened, people that weren't nice to them, they're feeling really bad now from getting told off what they done. Right now it's not very good because the Inuit are mad at the Settlers who are embracing the Inuit culture now, and before they didn't want to be any part of it. (Interview Hope 2013)

Another informant (anonymous, born in the early 1960s) reflected on the change in the status of Inuktitut in the years that followed Confederation:

The better English you spoke the better off you would be. Stronger English, more socially accepted. A lot of times people said they were ashamed. Language has been influenced by social determinants [Here she makes the comparison of the use of Inuktitut with the attitude of people thinking breastfeeding was for poor people.] Trauma and addiction plays such a huge role that it's hard not to look at the language loss through that lens. (Interview 2014)

This account of the decision to stop speaking Inuktitut due to the negativity and racism people faced is one of the most poignant and most common accounts to be heard in 2015 all across the country, and constitutes one of the dominant narratives. Because it is not tied to a particular historical event or place but to a pervasive sense of domination



and mistreatment, it is an enduring narrative with many concrete individual accounts to sustain it.

### **Confederation and Government Influence**

Almost fifty years ago, Helge Kleivan reported on the large-scale changes that took place when Newfoundland joined Canada, bringing Labrador along in its wake:

Besides these new developments there is nothing in the change after the war which has had a more far-reaching cultural perspective than the adoption of a completely new school system. During my stay in Nain, in the summer of 1955, I was already able to ascertain a marked aptitude among Eskimo school children for communicating in English. There can be no doubt that bilingualism, in the course of some years, will be the rule among the Eskimos. Whether Eskimo at long sight can hold its place as the principal language in the homes against the attack to which it is daily exposed from school, film and radio appears to be doubtful. (Kleivan 1966:88)

In current thinking amongst the people I interviewed, the strongest theme was that which attributes responsibility for the loss of Inuttitut to the provincial government for changing the language of instruction in schools in northern Labrador. This decision is well-documented, and no doubt was the source of a great upheaval that has reverberated to this day. At the same time, some of the narratives show that, in spite of the official change, some teachers continued to use Inuttitut to ease the children into the dramatic shift from the language of home to the language of school. There is a lack of clarity on when and why this happened, so that some informants saw it as an abrupt change while others recall being taught in their own language as a transition. Because the Moravians continued to run the schools until 1968 when jurisdiction passed to the newly created Labrador East Integrated School Board, the long tradition of teaching in Inuttitut did not

immediately disappear, and seems to have been dependent on the personal ability of the teacher at any given time.

Toni White was one of those who blamed the provincial government:

MM: Whose decision was it to stop teaching the language in school?

TW: I don't know of a specific person but I would say that it was the provincial government who made that decision.

MM: What do you think the community's response was to that?

TW: I'm sure it must have been disappointment to some extent, and I'm sure that at the time people were thinking that English was the way of the future, and so for their kids to understand English it would mean that they would have a better chance of getting a good job, being able to continue their education, so a combination of outrage and acceptance. (Interview White 2014)

Confederation is cited by Dunn (Dunn 2002) as the source of many of the problems that came to be encountered by Inuit, but the actual idea of joining Canada was firmly supported by Labrador people. While discussion of the effects of Confederation continues amongst the population of Newfoundland to the extent that it appears to have been a defining event in the identity and history of the island, Labrador people did not feel the same sense of loss of their autonomy, and in a practical sense enjoyed some of the financial benefits that came along with Canadian citizenship (Borlase 1993:272-274; Green 1999). The negative effects consisted of the change to English instruction and the requirement for the children to attend school in order to receive family allowance benefits. (See Julie Green's CBC documentary on Labrador and Confederation, 1999 for a discussion of Labrador people's feelings about Confederation.)

Whether they knew from the beginning what was in store in terms of reorganization of the school system is another matter. Johannes Lampe quoted the late Jerry Sillett several times, saying "1949 came too fast" (Interview Lampe 2014). Many

recognized, after the fact, the contribution to language loss that the change in language of instruction had wrought.

Hilda Lyall spoke of how people felt about the change:

HL: After I left it was Confederation, I guess about 1949, and that's when I heard that there was no more Inuktitut teaching in school.

MM: And how did people feel about that?

HL: They said it was a really bad feeling. A lot of people were hurt, and I guess they weren't able to defend themselves because of so many things. I don't know what, but I heard afterwards that you're giving up something that's part of you, right? I think it was the first day of the language starting to downfall in its entirety, the whole, when they stopped it in the school. (Interview H. Lyall 2003)

Fran Williams also made reference to the effects of Confederation:

FW: As a child I spoke only in Inuktitut but then when we went to school we were all taught in English. See, Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949 and that's when we started being taught in English. Before that the Moravian missionaries used to teach, do all the teaching in Inuktitut in schools.

MM: I wonder if when people started being taught in English would that have been a gradual thing or would they have started one year and taught in English. Was it a policy?

FW: I think it just happened all at once, all of a sudden, you know. It wasn't a gradual thing, it just happened. Throwing all this English stuff at you. (Interview Williams 2002)

Tabea Murphy confirmed this:

What it was, when Newfoundland and Labrador became part of Canada, we had to be taken to English-speaking school because they completely shut off the Inuktitut-speaking classroom. (Interview Murphy 2003)

In spite of these accounts of the abrupt change in the language of teaching, we see that Inuktitut did continue in an informal way, according to people who were taught well after Confederation. Selma Jararuse, who started school in the mid-1960s, speaks of being taught by Mary Andersen in Nain:

MM: What year did you start?

SJ: 1966? Or '67? I'm not sure if I was five or six.

MM: You were taught in English then, were you?

SJ: No, not right away. When we started school we had an Inuk teacher, And later on—I'm not sure, it might have been first year—not first year, 'cause I can remember learning only Inuktitut at school, and then I'm not sure if it was the second year or third year that they started teaching us in English. (Interview Jararuse 2014)

One of the narratives shows children interpreting for others; Zippora Hunter and Tabea Murphy both mention having older children helping them. Much later, in the 1960s, Christine Nochasak interpreted for other students and their parents in Makkovik after the Hebron relocation. This also happened earlier on in the Makkovik boarding school, as described by Manasse Pijogge from Hopedale:

I went to school in Makkovik, the old people wanted me to learn English. That's where I learned my English, from Makkovik. Only thing first year I went up I couldn't talk English at all, so we used to have an interpreter, one what could talk.

Who was your interpreter?

One of the children, I don't know who it was now. I learned a little bit in Inuktitut, in writing and that. So I could write my ABCs and numbers and all that. I didn't mind that, after the teacher wrote it down I used to try to do what I could, that's all (Interview Nochasak 2010:44)

Dianne Grant (Grant 2003) treats Moravian education in Nain in a very thorough historical examination, and she contends that the Newfoundland government in fact restricted its influence on Labrador schooling to a financial contribution only for a long time. "Moravian schooling was *not* radically altered by Government at Confederation, despite the introduction of several changes to the schools in 1952" (Grant 2003:75). Officially, schooling became English-only, with compulsory attendance and conforming to the Newfoundland curriculum, but in reality there were several contradictions. On the one hand, Doris Peacock had been implementing the Newfoundland curriculum since

1942, and the practice of regular attendance had been customary for the Inuit since very early days in Moravian schooling. On the other hand, the continuing influence of the Moravians until 1968/69 meant that when the need for the Inuktitut language presented itself it could sometimes be accommodated.

## **Church**

To add to the factors listed, the Moravian church was sometimes indicated by informants as an active agent in the language change decision. Annie Evans, born in the late 1930s, reflected on this:

MM: Who decided that children should be taught in English?

Annie Evans: The Moravian minister, 'cause they used to get teachers from England and Germany and one time they had to have Moravians. And some of them learned it, like Auntie Katie [Hettasch]. Learned Inuktitut, she was fluent, and Mrs. Hettasch taught in Hebron in Inuktitut, but they had to have teachers and they had to have them fast, I suppose, so they got them from Germany, Switzerland and England. (Interview Evans 2003)

Silpa Edmunds spoke of the reason she was sent to school:

When I was seven years old, Mr. Hettasch came and said to my parents that I had to go to Makkovik to learn English because we did not speak English in Hopedale. We were all Inuktitut-speaking people. No Settlers then. So I had to leave my parents on the *Kyle* to go to Makkovik to learn English, which I never was very good at. (Edmunds 2010:51)

Beatrice Watts, when questioned on this point, said that the Department of Education and the Moravian church were involved in the decision around language change, but she displayed no animosity towards either institution for the decision. She was of the generation that was aware of the elders' role in the decision, which would have helped to support the policy.

BW: I guess it was a combination of the Department of Education and the Moravian church, I would say. There wasn't a lot of talk about it, but then as children we wouldn't have been involved in the decision-making, but to us it just happened. I was gone then, up here [North West River] going to school. And I think some of the people interesting to talk to are the people who went straight into the English-speaking system from the Inuit system and they had a really hard time. (Interview Watts 2003)

In a generation that saw its parents defer to the missionaries and that now sees a much diminished role for the church in daily life, people are willing to see that institution as the force that made a calculated attack on its culture. In contrast, Peacock proposed in many of the essays he wrote about the Labrador Inuit that it was the church that had safeguarded the language of the Inuit, responding to the concern over language loss that began to be expressed in the 1970s:

And the Church, the only institution whose members spoke Inuktitut and the only institution which had worked unceasingly to preserve the Inuit tongue, was blamed for the passing of the language. That is, the missionaries who for over 200 years had striven to preserve Inuktitut by the compilation of grammars, dictionaries and other teaching aids were accused of being the destroyer of Inuktitut not only by young Inuit but by white academics who knew little or nothing of the Inuit language. I was not slow to point out the injustice and the error being perpetuated by these folk. (Peacock 1985:4)

The Moravian church saw itself for centuries as the guardians of both the people and the language, but because the institution of the church itself was becoming less meaningful to people as the twentieth century moved on, the language may have suffered from being closely associated with the Moravians and their religious institutions at that point. As Cornelsen observed,

As Inuit began to use English in dealing with outsiders while continuing to worship in Inuktitut, a cleavage between the culture of the religious sphere and the culture of the daily economic and social transactions was introduced. Church became the repository of things traditional, while

daily and economic and social life came to represent things modern.  
(Cornelsen 1991:62)

With this mismatch between the way the church authorities viewed their role in preserving the language and the way in which people saw their paternalistic approach as having encroached upon it, the positive effects the Moravians had had on its retention were being seen as aspects of their colonizing attempts, because in spite of their participation in language retention they were also claiming ownership over its orthography. They also ended up in the position of being agents of the government's educational policies and of the Elders' desires for English education, but the years elapsing between the changeover of language and the realization that Inuttitut was now threatened meant that they were being held accountable for both the restrictive policies of the past and the later loss of the language they had championed.

### **Residential/Boarding School Narrative and Counter-narrative; Punishment**

#### **Narratives**

As Darnell and Hoem (Darnell and Hoem 1996) say, writing about education in circumpolar countries, “[a]mong Indigenous minorities the proper use of Native language in school is the most emotional issue in education. It is also the most political” (Darnell and Hoem 1996:179).

The authors go on to say:

Cases of harsh punishment as a means to eradicate Native languages have been documented in all countries that we cover. Certainly, criticism of extreme measures to enforce language policies in the early years is valid, but it needs to be kept in mind that most teachers took their assignments because they were motivated to help the children, not destroy them. What they were doing was trying to improve what was a desperate situation, and

doing their best according to what was right in their time. Of course, such practices are no longer tolerated, both because classroom management practices have changed and because they are now recognized as being morally wrong. (Darnell and Hoem 1996:179)

As presented earlier by some informants, even after the change in instruction came about, there was a period during which some Inuktitut was used in the classroom to help in the transition to the new and dominant language. However, other informants felt that language was one of the many things taken from them or their families in their boarding school days. In the succeeding generation, people felt that their parents had been subject to this experience even when documented history tells us differently. For example, when I mentioned to one informant that the Moravians had taught in Inuktitut up until Confederation, she told me that I was the first person she had ever heard say that. Additionally, some of the counter-narratives reveal that it was English that students were forbidden to use, and that punishment was meted out for that offence as well. As Patrick Flanagan reports in his 1984 thesis on schooling in Nain:

One of the most significant, though unwritten, policies of the school was that Inuit children were punished for speaking English, although the Settlers were allowed to speak Inuktitut. The perceived division between Inuit and Settler was thus maintained as a dominant ideology in the school, right up until the 1950s. (Flanagan 1984:65)

Tabea Murphy related an account of her school days in *Them Days*:

Far as I could remember, it was mostly Inuit children when I started going to school, and before that, only Inuit students. In those days the Settler people used to have their own place where they stayed year round, and of course they would take their children with them. So the boarding school was only in Inuktitut for a long time. Some children didn't go to school until Newfoundland and Labrador became a part of Canada, and then everybody, Settlers and Inuit, had to go to schools. It got hard when everybody had to go to boarding school.



Before that we was not allowed to speak English, that was what old man Hettasch and his daughter said. They were very strict about that. Anybody who learned to speak English used to get punished. Punishing meant a leather strap, maybe a foot long, real thick, used on the children just for saying a word in English, for learning it from the Settler children. (Murphy 2010:15)

The story is also recounted by Lucas Ittulak in *Them Days*:

I also had old seal skin sleeping bags and pants during the two years that I was in school. I could not wear my regular clothing and as soon as I tried to listen to somebody speaking in English I was strapped with a rubber strap on the palm of my hands. That was very hard for me, so sometimes I think I should get compensated for the way I was treated. (Ittulak 2010:60)

(The *Periodical Accounts* record a couple of instances of English being introduced to the Inuit students in the early part of the twentieth century, after a conference in which the idea was proposed but with the caution that English language instruction should not displace Inuttitut. There is a brief mention by Rev. Walter Perrett of a few students learning English, but the idea seems not to have taken root to a large extent. The accounts of students being forbidden to use English are from students who attended at a later date, ironically closer to the date at which they were abruptly required to learn English. (*Periodical Accounts* 1914))

The opposite narrative appears as well; another informant who went to school in Hebron immediately following Confederation and said the teacher told them to speak English and slapped them or hit them with a ruler if they spoke their own language:

MM: Did she [teacher Kate Hettasch] speak to you in Inuktitut and help you in English or did they speak all the time in English?

Sometimes she used to talk Inuktitut and English.

MM: Both?

Yeah, and she used to tell us to talk English when we talked Inuktitut and she used to get kind of mad when we used to talk our language. She was hard old teacher... once she slapped me across the face. (Interview 2003)

Two informants who worked as native teachers in northern Labrador schools gave conflicting accounts of the demands made on them in terms of language usage, probably due to the differing communities where they attended school. (They were interviewed together.) One went to school in Nain in the 1950s and 1960s and was told to speak Inuktitut, while the other, who attended in Makkovik in the 1960s, recalls being upset when she was told to speak English.

Nain informant:

When we was taught Inuktitut we were not to talk English in that way. We was supposed to talk Inuktitut all the time. That was after we finished Kindergarten and went up to Grade One to Five they started teaching us how to talk Inuktitut only and read Inuktitut.

MM: Your teacher taught you in your language?

Yes.

MM: So in the beginning they taught you in English and when you were older they taught you Inuktitut.

Not always Inuktitut, there used to be a break in English. That was when Katie Hettasch was our teacher.

MM: So she taught you in Inuktitut?

Yes. She was always teaching us how to sing and read and talk in Inuktitut only but anytime you skipped and talked English you'd get slapped all the time.

MM: For speaking English? I thought it was the other way around?

No

MM: What year was that?

Fifties, sixties, I think. (Interview 2003)

The Makkovik informant gave another account of going to school in the 1960s:

I went to school in Makkovik and I started when I was five year old, and like I didn't understand English and wasn't allowed to talk Inuktitut at school and I used to cry and cry to go home.

MM: Were you allowed to talk to the other kids in Inuktitut?

If there was an Inuit person there, we were talking on the sly.

MM: But not in class?

No, so I didn't hardly understand English.

MM: What was the reason for that?

Because there was no Inuk teacher and they didn't understand I guess.

Some kids used to be throwing rocks at us, they was putting us down.

(Interview 2003)

Bertha Holeiter (born 1951) lived in Hebron until she was eight, and was relocated with her family to Nain. She did not speak any English, but recounted that she was helped by the teacher, Sarah Lyall, who was from Nutak and spoke Inuktitut. This is another example of the blurred timelines regarding the change in the language of instruction. When asked whether they were allowed to speak Inuktitut, this was her story:

We were not allowed to talk Inuktitut at recess at the beginning. That was nothing, we were not told, we were not punished. When they started to teach English the first time, long before we went to Nain, there was a boarding school where they were taking children basically from everywhere and putting them in the boarding school and once they were inside they were told they had to speak only in English or only in Inuktitut. (Interview Holeiter 2014)

Her account of boarding school life did not carry the corporal punishment narrative, but the hand of the missionaries superseding the wish of the parents is evident in her story of the kind of manipulation that was used to keep children in school. Bertha recounted how she and her brother were prevented from spending the winter in Okak Bay with their parents by a last-minute visit from the teachers, who said the family would not get the family allowance if the children did not stay in the boarding school. This account of this threat is frequently heard in conversations about language loss and could probably be considered another language loss narrative. Bertha has maintained the language well and insists that Inuit people she knows speak to her in their own language.

Another informant, born in 1960, is not an Inuktitut speaker. She recounts the experiences of her grandmother:

MM: And your grandparents talked to you in English?

In English. It wasn't till I was fourteen that my grandparents regretted not teaching us because she got whipped for speaking Inuktitut when she was young.

MM: Where?

Just outside of Nain. Her parents died in the Spanish flu, and they only spoke in Inuktitut. And they were all separated, her and her sister and brother, even though they didn't want to be, but when the dog teams came to get them the people didn't speak Inuktitut and they couldn't understand what they were saying. They never saw each other again till they had children of their own. So she was put on a dog team with Dick Pamak, who was her first cousin, and he could only speak Inuktitut. So they had conversations together, and they would be punished, but it took them a while to find out why they were being punished. Because they didn't understand English, so with her children and grandchildren she didn't encourage us to speak.

MM: But she kept on herself?

Yes, but she just spoke English to us. She understood how important school was. She wanted us to go to school so we wouldn't have a hard life like she did. (Interview 2003)

Mary Voisey and her husband, Ed Voisey, went to boarding school in Makkovik in the 1930s and discussed language use there:

MV: But in Makkovik school, you could talk Eskimo, you could talk English, it didn't matter.

MM: They didn't prevent you from speaking?

MV: They let you alone. If there was someone from Hebron that couldn't talk English they could talk Eskimo.

MM: That was all right with the teachers?

MV: Yes.

EV: And you'd help them till they learned.

MV: Yes, because the minister, he could talk Eskimo. (Interview E. and M. Voisey 2003)

This collection of narratives indicates that those who had first-hand experiences in the schools recall a freer expression of Inuktitut than the informants who reported on the

experiences of their parents and grandparents. The boarding schools where children were sent were sometimes taught in Inuttitut (Nain) and other times taught in English (Makkovik and North West River).

Boarding schools were established in many remote locations in Canada starting in the late 1870s, continuing until the late twentieth century to offer an education to the maximum number in centralized locations, and much has been heard of the difficult conditions and abuse of power experienced by children removed from their homes at a young age (Barker 2012:np). It would be an incomplete account, however, without the acknowledgement that many students felt that they had received an education they would otherwise have gone without. While students of residential schools across Canada have testified that language loss was one of the abuses they suffered, the Moravians were exceptional in that they did teach children in Inuktitut in the Inuit communities, with the exception of the boarding school in Makkovik, which was established for those who were considered to be Settlers. Some Inuit children did attend this school as well. The “Dorm” at North West River was not a Moravian school but was established by the Grenfell Mission. This meant that it was under the jurisdiction of an organization that did not have the same commitment to the Inuttitut language for instruction, because the school took in children from other parts of Labrador who had English as their first language. North West River would have been considered an English-speaking community at the time.

These stories that recount experiencing the loss of language as a punishment within the school system are difficult to disentangle. Both church and government are

held liable in some of the narratives around Labrador language loss in schools, and these may owe some of their force to the national attention paid to the exposure of abuse in the Canadian residential school system.

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador was not included in the apology or compensation provided to survivors in other provinces, and some former students have proceeded with their own class action lawsuit. This is contested territory and informants have weighed in on both sides. Teachers I spoke to asserted that the children in boarding schools were not prevented from speaking their language (Joan King, Brigitte Schloss, Beatrice Watts). Sarah Townley also spoke about this, saying that in her experience the Inuttitut language was not used at the school in North West River as a language of instruction but that students were not forbidden to use it. Rather, the negative experiences of racism and the feelings of isolation were what caused people to abandon the language (Interview Townley 2013).

When asked if children were prevented from speaking their first language, the older informants (Group One) for the most part felt that this had not been the case. In some accounts, school was seen as a place of refuge, providing warmth and food. Parents sometimes felt that sending them to the Dorm was a financial necessity for the family to survive, much as they might have preferred to keep them at home. Other children experienced great loneliness and difficulty.

Amalia Frieda was interviewed in Hopedale by David Igloliorte for our 2002/3 project about her school days in Nain:

DI: What language did they teach you in Nain?

AF: They was teaching us Inuktitut and Kablunângitut, eh.

DI: And did they stop teaching in Inuktitut altogether or was it just English and Inuktitut all the time?

AF: They was mostly teaching in Inuktitut I think, I don't remember proper. I didn't mind the boarding school cause they used to have good food, good old pipsik [dried char], eh. I liked it there, I didn't mind. (Interview Frieda 2003)

Tabea Murphy, born in the 1930s, also went to school in Nain, her home community, as did her mother:

MM: Did some people go to Makkovik to boarding school?

TM: That was something else, that was all English, that boarding school in Makkovik. So only the people who have Settler, English-speaking parents, only those were taken. A few Inuit Hopedale children went, not that many.

MM: I wonder why they did?

TM: I don't know why they did. Maybe the parents wanted their children to learn the English language. But then here in Nain it was different. No way. No way for any Inuit children to learn English. (Interview Murphy 2003).

The generation (Group Two) that followed these earlier students has a less charitable view of the intentions of the missionaries and teachers. People born around 1960 represent a transitional stage; they were the last to attend boarding school (in North West River at that stage) and were not generally Inuktitut speakers, either by reason of an earlier decision by the families to let the language go, often because of their own negative experiences, or because as members of Settler families they had a less direct link to the language. There exists some uncertainty as to where and when an English-only policy would have been imposed, but the story is one with considerable force. Toni White (born in the 1970s) was not sure where it was that they were not allowed to speak Inuktitut. When I suggested that the Moravians had taught in Inuktitut she said, "Certain ones of them. I'm just speaking from what I understand. When they came here the initial

communication was in Inuktitut but they were not probably all good people, but I don't have anything to back that up" (2014). The belief has grown over time that students were not allowed to speak Inuktitut in school, but the exact circumstances of this situation appear to be unknown, as we see from the following account.

Another informant (anonymous, born in the 1960s) reflected:

Three generations of us [went to boarding school]. My grandmother went to the Moravian boarding school, and myself [in North West River] and so did my mother. There was a time during boarding school when children were forced into speaking English only, even when they spoke Inuktitut, because it was seen as something that would be keeping them behind and it was perceived to be socially less if Inuktitut was your language.

MM: Didn't the Moravians teach in Inuktitut?

Informant: Some of the time. There was a shift when they taught only in Inuktitut because they didn't want the children to mix. But yes, they did a lot with the language, the Moravians, and with preservation, when you look at the Bibles and hymnbooks, that's all translated. But it wasn't always just that way, and I've heard stories from residential school and talk about that whole experience when they were beaten if they spoke their own language.

MM: When did that happen?

Informant: I don't know...there's a period where they only wanted them to learn English, and somewhere in a time frame where they only wanted them to speak Inuktitut. That segregated the community. It's difficult to know where and when. I must ask my grandmother. I can't remember if she ever mentioned ill treatment. (Interview 2014)

An account of education in a more southerly community [Central Labrador]

shows the disincentives provided by an itinerant Newfoundland teacher, as reported by

Michele Wood:

MW: When a yardstick is cracked over your hand you quickly learn that your language is inferior.

MM: Where did that happen?

MW: A lot of the teachers that would go up and down the coast in boat around the islands. Grammy used to tell me stories about when she was a young girl and she was not only this little dark girl who was of Inuit culture but she was left-handed. And she hated school so she always had



that yardstick broken over her fingers. So you weren't allowed to say any of the words that they couldn't understand, and they forced her to write with her right hand. (Interview Wood 2014)

Hilda Lyall went to school in St. Anthony and describes her school experiences there:

MM: Did you lose your Inuttitut when you were there [St. Anthony]?

HL: At that time I was only going home in July when the ice, when the boat come in. Everything was English, so gradually we were really diverted to another language. In four or five years I was going back and forth and it ended up that I had to think about my Inuk words, I had to think to remember what word I'd use, that's the way I was becoming. We were using English so much that our Inuktitut was being put on the shelf and used only after them eight months we were out there. (Interview H. Lyall 2003)

Beatrice Hope reported the following:

I've heard people say that they weren't allowed to speak their language but when I was going to school there were some classes where we were taught Inuktitut. I remember Rev. Hettasch used to teach us, but it wasn't very much, mostly simple songs.

MM: You were encouraged to keep the language. When people say they weren't allowed to, was that a different place?

BH: That was a different time, maybe earlier on at the boarding school time? I know some people, either my parents, or John Lyall's generation, probably weren't allowed to speak. That was in Nain. (Interview Hope 2013)

The inconsistencies in the stories about permission and punishment around the use of English and Inuttitut are confusing and provide both narrative and counter-narrative. There can be no doubt that people were taught in Inuktitut for many years. In addition, there was no dominance of the English language in earlier years because most of the missionaries themselves did not speak English as a first language, many being German. As Fiona Andersen pointed out, "I can't say that I ever heard my contemporaries or their parents say 'We weren't allowed to speak Inuktitut' because the

missionaries spoke it and wanted the congregation to speak the word of the Lord. Why would they have denied this?” (Interview Andersen 2013). This comes through in the earlier stories, but it is also evident that the decision to remove Inuktitut as the instructional language affected people profoundly and negatively, with long-lasting consequences. Yet many informants were clear on the fact that they were not actively prevented from speaking to each other in their own language.

MM: Were they discouraged from speaking Inuktitut?

Beatrice Watts: No, never, I’m pretty sure they weren’t discouraged from speaking Inuktitut, never, in all the time there, but a lot of kids do say that they were *discouraged*. [felt discouraged generally] I think that they were the ones who had teachers who couldn’t speak the language, which would be understandable. I’ve heard my students tell me that they couldn’t understand their teacher and they had a hard time and that made them feel that they had to speak English, because the teacher couldn’t understand them and their teacher didn’t want them talking in the language because she didn’t understand them. Which is normal, I can understand anyone saying that, it’s nothing like the teacher was standing over you with a whip saying you must not speak your language, I don’t think it came about that way. Rather they would say ‘I can’t understand what you’re saying.’ (Interview Watts 2003)

Ted Andersen spoke of the schoolchildren who came to Makkovik from the northern communities, asserting that they were permitted to use their language amongst themselves.

Miriam Lyall spoke of the matter as well, interpreting for Seona Karpik:

ML: She’s talking about someone who was beaten in school. She was talking about a pupil who was being beaten quite a bit when he was being taught and she can’t forget about that, so she was trying to be always-

MM: Someone who had to learn English?

ML: Both languages I think. That’s what used to happen, they would be beaten trying to learn either language, to learn whatever language they were being taught. (Interview Karpik 2003)

Brigitte Schloss came as a Moravian teacher to Nain in the 1940s, where she remained for several years:

MM: Would the kids speak English when they came to the boarding school?

BS: Not a word, not a word. Well, the Settlers would. And of course in Makkovik, the Settlers would, but the Inuit, no, and you wouldn't hear any English around the place you know. In recess time, outside the school and often in class they just used Inuktitut. Now morning prayers we'd have in English, next morning in Inuktitut and it was quite acceptable for them to answer in Inuktitut.

MM: Were they discouraged from speaking Inuktitut?

BS: No, they said, "Why did you try to keep us isolated from the outside world and keep us from speaking English?" It is not true that we ever discouraged them. Not when they were there during those years there, we never discouraged them from speaking Inuktitut. In fact when they were bored with the lesson they'd say, "Brigitte, do you know how to say this and that in Inuktitut?" and they knew I would bring out my little book and start writing. (Interview Schloss 2002)

Hilda Lyall spoke of her school days in the 1940s, both in an interview with me and in another one with her granddaughter, who interviewed her grandmother for a paper she submitted in a folklore course she took with me. Although Hilda continues to speak her language and to work as an interpreter/translator, she faced a similar challenge to many others when as a child she was sent to school in St. Anthony. Although she and her fellow Inuit could and did speak their language with patients from Labrador in the hospital, they had to learn English to study at the school there. Hilda says they were allowed to speak their language and they continued to do so within their small group of friends, but felt uncomfortable because "people would give them a hard look and ask what they were saying" (Interview Lyall 2003). It was not forbidden, but it was uncomfortable to speak their language around people who didn't speak it. "We weren't told not to speak Inuktitut. I was never told not to, but it was cut off and we had to speak

English. Children all spoke English in school” (Interview Lyall 2003). Hilda did say she was proud of her language and continued to speak it whenever possible, but even that measure of preservation was greater than that reported by informants who went later to the Dorm in North West River and felt that they risked ridicule from community members there for speaking their own language.

The privations of boarding school were more than the loss of language, of course, and many of the accounts of that life involve loneliness, inadequate food and hard physical labour, especially in the Nain and Makkovik boarding schools. Ed Voisey and others talked about this in a special issue of *Them Days* devoted to education, wherein they criticized the food, the hard labour they had to do and the poor relationship they had with teachers (*Them Days* 3:1).

Other people reported more positive experiences, in spite of their acknowledged loneliness, or perhaps because of their stoic point of view, including Miriam Lyall, who went to school at the Dorm in North West River:

I didn't ever go to a boarding school, not in Makkovik, only to the dormitory. It's the same as a boarding school but it was always the "Dorm" in North West River. I enjoyed North West River. I have no regrets about going to school in North West River. A few years later I was hearing things, like students [later] had the best of everything, they could go home for Christmas holidays. Because when we went to the Dorm, when we left late August or early September we didn't get home no more till late June or early July. And no telephones, nothing, the only time I saw my mother or any of my family members was when they came up to North West River hospital, because North West River was the place to go to when patients had to come up. And these students... we were younger when I was going. They could go home for their Christmas and Easter holiday if they wanted. And then they were complaining because the food was not good. I know we all to an extent lost some of our language, but I don't regret having to go to school in North West River, because I had good years there. I made good friends, the Dorm kids are like all one

family, my peers especially. We're really good friends and most of them are around here and whenever I see someone from the North Coast I went to the Dorm with, it's so exciting to see them, how they're making out. It's one big family. I have no regrets. I know some people who have, but I have another friend who said, "You know, Miriam, I didn't regret having to go away from my family and community. It was the best thing that happened to me because I got the education I needed." And there are others who are saying, well, the food was very bad. Very negative. I know we had to be disciplined. I didn't mind the disciplinary actions, there was not very much to me. I didn't regret it, not one bit. (Interview M. Lyall 2002)

The counter-narratives of being forbidden to speak English, rather than Inuttitut in school, and of a laissez-faire policy post-Confederation towards children speaking their own language amongst themselves are accounts that are much less commonly-heard in 2015 than the stories of punishment. While the class action lawsuit regarding Labrador residential schools continues to work its way through the court system the history is incomplete, but the counter-narratives stand as words of the people themselves to demonstrate that some level of agency existed and needs to be recognized as part of the complex history of language use in Labrador.

Not only community elders took the position that children should be taught in English, according to many of my older informants. Whether through their own sense of the changing times or because of the advice of outsiders coming into the communities, often in positions of authority, parents made the decision that they were giving their children an advantage by insisting on them learning English, often feeling that they were assisting in the process by no longer speaking to them in their own language. In the post-Moravian era, teachers shared this view. Brigitte Schloss reported that in her days of teaching on the north coast in the 1950s and 1960s she and her colleagues taught in

English but had prayers in Inuttitut and had no objection to the use of Inuttitut, but that a changing attitude was brought by younger teachers:

Afterwards they started to have a lot of teacher turnover. I'm not pointing a finger at the teachers, but this is what happened. They said, "It holds the children back if they speak the native language," which is absolutely nonsense because it isn't true. Any child that can learn to speak can also learn to function in a second language. And the children still spoke Inuktitut at home and fit very well in school. But when they had to start going to North West River for high school those years they were made to feel ashamed. The teachers that went to the north coast said, "You're holding them back," and the parents didn't want that. So between them feeling ashamed of being Inuit, native people, and the parents not wanting to hold them back...I was totally shocked when I went back after so many years and it was a little while before I went back to Nain and all the pre-schoolers talked some sort of English and they couldn't talk to their grandparents anymore. (Interview Schloss 2002)

Katie Winters concurred:

MM: When did they stop teaching kids in Inuktitut?

KW: Not too long ago, before this school building, they started teaching English.

MM: So someone decided to teach them English instead?

KW: Because they said it was easier than Eskimo, long old words.

MM: So that was the teachers, or the parents?

KW: No, the parents, you can't get any Eskimo out of them, the Eskimo language is going to die out soon. They said their own language was too long, they'd rather they just talked English, all their parents too, just like we, they don't talk Eskimo anymore. I talk both languages, never changed, because my husband he doesn't talk English, hardly at all, he talks in his own language. (Interview Winters 2003)

The question of whether Inuttitut was actually forbidden or not may not be clear given the contrasting narratives presented, but there is no doubt that eventually it was generally less and less used. When students went to the Dorm at North West River, English was the only option in terms of classroom instruction. This was certainly a time when language use declined amongst young people. Sarah Townley recalls her three

years there, where there was no possibility of telephone contact, so she kept in touch with her mother by writing letters in Inuktitut:

ST: A lot of people lost their language when they went to the Dorm, 'cause they never kept it up. It would happen quickly.

MM: How would they talk to their parents when they went home?

ST: I have no idea. They couldn't really converse. But for me it was through letter writing, I was able to keep it up that way. I wouldn't speak Inuktitut in the dorm. I guess we were scared that people were going to make fun of us or that we would be bullied. I had a lot of relatives there but we still didn't speak Inuktitut.

MM: Were you told not to?

ST: I think it was just more us decided not to. A lot of us 'cause we went through that in our communities. 'Cause in Makkovik if I spoke Inuktitut and they didn't understand you would get degraded. (Interview Townley 2013)

Sarah Townley reported on this as well in an interview with Elizabeth Yeoman, when asked about the attitude toward the use of Inuktitut:

ST: We couldn't speak it. It wasn't discouraged or anything but we just never spoke Inuktitut. I have no idea why we didn't. Maybe when we were in groups we might have, just coming back from the dorm or things like that. I think it was encouraged, but we weren't really sure. But there were people in the community who didn't really like people from the coast in North West River so I think we kind of kept it away. But I worked in the hospital and used to talk to Inuit who were in the hospital. They didn't have a translator back then, so I used to go see them, see how they were making out, if they needed anything. If I had anything I would give it to them. That is how I mostly kept my Inuktitut. (Townley and Yeoman 2013:63)

Tim Borlase lived and worked in Nain in the 1970s and 1980s, collaborating with Beatrice Watts on programs to retain Inuktitut. He reflects on the changes he saw in language use at that time.

MM: Did you ever hear people say that they weren't allowed to speak the language or was it more just...

TB: I heard people say that more recently. I never heard that then. Except maybe a number of kids who went to the Dorm in North West, but I think

even there it was a matter of the teachers not understanding them, it wasn't so much that they weren't allowed. They were probably told not to speak because the teachers didn't understand. (Interview Borlase 2013)

Other factors were also in play, as Toni White reflected:

Another impact on the language was relocation into the [year-round] communities. People weren't being nomadic anymore, so they weren't going to their summer homes or winter homes. Our language is often termed a language of the land, so when you're stuck in a community perhaps that had some impact. When you look at the Innu and how strong their language has stayed, that was due to their nomadic life and continuing to live as they had. (Interview White 2014)

This parallels Beatrice Hope's account of her brother learning Inuttitut from their father because it was the language of hunting. Not only does Inuttitut offer important vocabulary connected to a land-based culture, but the practice of traditional life on the land literally incorporated the active use of the language.

Michele Wood offers an explanation that derives more from the central Labrador experience as recorded by Lydia Campbell in her widely-read autobiography:

MW: I think the biggest one that I've heard since I was maybe ten, and it's always stuck in my mind, was how the trappers, the Settlers that came to North West River, to the North West Islands, married Inuit women, how the women kept them alive, but they were not good enough to marry till they could say the Lord's Prayer or till they could say their name in English or were given English names. That to me speaks volumes. And I've even heard horrible histories where women were beaten if they tried to speak Inuktut to their children or to show them traditional ways. How dare they?

MM: Was this in Lydia Campbell's book or in other stories as well?

MW: Different families, yes, just "Grandmother wasn't allowed to do this, and grandmother couldn't smoke her pipe, and that kind of stuff."  
(Interview Wood 2014)



## Secret Language

Many informants repeated a story that appears in other minority language accounts: that of parents using the maternal language to keep secrets from the children (Susie Dicker, personal communication). For example, Annie Evans, interviewed by Nancy Flowers in Makkovik, relates this:

NF: What language were you taught in?

AE: English, Unfortunately. My mother was fluent [in Inuttitut], she and our aunt used to talk, but it was mostly only when it was something she didn't want us to know. (Interview Evans 2003)

Albert Flowers recalls this about his parents, in an article in *Them Days*:

My mother had ten children. She was Clara Webb before she got married. The old man got her down to Nain. And they could talk away in the Inuttitut language. We never learned it, but I like to hear 'em talk it. I only know a few little short words. Around Christmas time, they'd talk to each other in Inuttitut. They'd talk about where to hide the presents, I suppose. Pretty good too. Yes sir, pretty good too. We wouldn't know, see, because we children, we couldn't talk it, but they could, you see. That's how they tricked us. (Flowers 2010:28).

The secret language idea extended to literacy as well; Sarah Townley recalls her mother sending her to neighbours with a note that was written in syllabics rather than Roman orthography so that Sarah wouldn't be able to read it (Interview Townley 2013). When Inuttitut became viewed as a relic of a past era and was seen to have novelty value more than everyday usage, it was losing ground. These particular accounts also indicate that the older people saw diglossia as perhaps unfortunate but inevitable. It is significant, though, that the above accounts were offered by families that would have been considered Settlers, therefore supporting the idea that they saw Inuttitut as a second language, not central to their identity.

## **Pragmatic Approach**

Naturally, many informants gave very practical reasons for the loss of the language, including the lack of instruction in the schools when people relocated to Goose Bay, and their own busy lives. Very often people recounted that they had taught their older children to speak but gradually fell away from the practice; others said the children could speak if they had contact with a grandparent, but otherwise not. As Fran Williams said, when you were a working person and used English all day, you'd go home and it was just easier to speak English. (Interview Williams 2002)

These explanations seem to stray outside the parameters of what Claire Owen discovered, when she reported about her informants in Ottawa, "On the surface, however, participants' attitudes towards their traditional languages are manifested in two different types of discourse: one relating to social mobility and the other to cultural continuity, including, for some, the notion of self-determination" (Owen 2011:79). The words of the Labrador informants seem to indicate that they made their decisions based neither on the desire to integrate into the dominant culture, nor on the need to reassure themselves about their own culture. Rather, the agency Labrador Inuit showed in their decisions around education, literacy, church traditions, and eventually the formation of the Labrador Inuit Association is reflected in the practical wisdom they saw as appropriate for the situation in which they found themselves.

Miriam Lyall speaks of her decision not to pass along the language when I asked about her children's understanding of Inuttitut:

ML: My children? Unfortunately, no, only a few words. I'm not going to make any excuses; they just never learned it. Mom and Dad would speak

to them in Inuktitut when they were both living, and I just never got into it and especially after we came up here. And they haven't been on the north coast for a long time. So, they don't.

Beatrice Dickers: Where I grew up here [Happy Valley-Goose Bay], lots of times it was looked on as not...people would almost make fun.

ML: Oh yes, not almost—they would make fun. But I don't think that was one of the reasons why I never taught them. I think it [English] was easier spoken. And because I've been speaking it for such a very long time, just spoke English like my grandmother. My grandmother and Mom would always speak to us in English, my grandfather and Dad in Inuktitut. That may have been one of the reasons. And there were no schools here that were teaching Inuktitut language, so they did not speak any Inuktitut. (Interview M. Lyall 2002)

Hilda Lyall talked about her children:

I tried to teach my children, but they lost it because it wasn't spoken in the school in Happy Valley. My husband and I didn't talk it to one another. Even when my mother stayed with us, we talked it but the kids didn't. We were in the workforce and everything was English and that's why it wasn't taught in our family at all. My kids don't speak, only a few words. They were all born here and they went to English school, so there was no one to talk to except when Mom came up for hospital or a visit, it was very limited time. Between myself and Bob, it was English, their homework...we had eight kids and...Trying to bring up the kids and the language was really forgotten about, Inuktitut. But now I regret that I never got them to speak fluent Inuktitut. (Interview H. Lyall 2003)

In a conversation with interviewer Mary Webb, Naeme Tuglavina addressed the reason that her children have less knowledge than she would like of the language:

NT: They spoke only Inuktitut before they started school.

MW: And then they went to school and learned English?

NT: Yes, and now most of them hardly understands me. They're losing it. My oldest children can understand me, but they're finding it hard to speak.

MW: Do you think changing the language of instruction sent Inuktitut into decline?

NT: No, I think it was just a matter of having Kablunaktitut reading or speaking and it was introduced to our people and it got into their way of living, I guess, a lot of us lost most of our language that way. Even our parents were happy to be able to say "Hello." They started changing over to Kablunaktitut. It made them feel proud to be able to respond. More advanced like. And children too, children are not speaking their language

like we did when we were small and the parents are finding it harder to speak to them normally, so they are picking up English this way.  
(Interview N. Tuglavina 2003)

Bertha Ford, interviewed by Nancy Flowers, gave her school story, showing that parents didn't feel that being taught in English was likely to affect the children's ability to speak Inuttitut:

BF: I started in Nain and then we moved up here [Makkovik] .

NF: And how old were you when you started?

BF: Nine, in 1954 or 55.

NF: What language were you taught in?

BF: English. We spoke Inuktut home but English in school. That's the only thing that was taught.

NF: Who decided that?

BF: Probably the missionaries?

NF: How did the parents feel about that?

BF: I don't think my parents minded because they spoke Inuktut anyway.  
(Interview B. Ford 2003)

Other informants related similar accounts: Seona Karpik said that the storekeeper in Hopedale said they should learn English, while Sophie Ford's parents were told by the teacher not to teach the children Inuktut. Ted Andersen, not a speaker himself, said that the Inuit requested they be taught in English so they could converse with the government. This attitude of pragmatism comes through in conversation with Beatrice Watts, who spoke both as a teacher and a former student. She related that her children didn't learn very much Inuttitut, that it just didn't seem important at the time to teach them.

MM: I wonder how the parents felt about their children having to speak English?

BW: Well, as I remember, the parents were really happy, because from everything they could see, the ones that got jobs were the ones who spoke English. So they wanted their children to be able to speak English to get jobs too when they finished school. So everyone wanted them to.

MM: Did they speak Inuktut at home?

BW: Oh yeah.

MM: So there must have been a generation of people that had both languages pretty well.

BW: You know, it was never talked about and it's funny. Parents weren't that involved in the school at all. Only when I talked to the parents separately they would be interested. The setting too, they felt, "You're the teacher, you teach my child."

MM: There must have been instances where grandchildren and grandparents couldn't talk to each other.

BW: In their teens, you often hear stories like that. And yet I always felt that the grandparents let it go as well, some, not all. Some stick with it, they didn't give into English. Others felt it was their place to help their children learn English. (Interview Watts 2003)

Christine Vincent of Hopedale shared her story about the end of Inuktitut

instruction:

CV: Well, when I finished school in '60...wait now...1959 or 60 when I finished school, they were still teaching in Inuktitut [in Hopedale]. Not a lot but they were teaching a few students who could speak Inuktitut. The teachers was still holding up as much as they could.

MM: So they changed to English but they still taught some in Inuktitut? That's interesting, I hadn't heard that. Would that be because the kids were not fluent in English?

CV: That I don't really know. I don't know if they were asked to teach the Inuktitut or if the kids at the time could not speak English, I'm not sure.

MM: So your family spoke all Inuktitut?

CV: All in Inuktitut, yes.

MM: Did you find that different, when you started school?

CV: Yes. I suppose it's not so much going to school, it's like Mom and Dad got sick so we had to be shipped to St. Anthony, and we spent the year in St. Anthony, gone a year to school out there, and that was the biggest problem, I find, because it was nothing but English out there, right, so we sort of lost our tradition of speaking Inuktitut. My brother at the time was four, that's my eldest brother, he spoke nothing but Inuktitut, but when he came back he didn't know a word of Inuktitut so it sort of broke off our language. With our parents as well. They did speak to us in Inuktitut but there were some things we didn't understand so they'd tell us and from there I guess it gradually went. The language went.

MM: Do you think if they had kept teaching in Inuktitut the language would have stayed longer?

CV: I think so. It wouldn't have died off so much as it did if they kept talking Inuktitut. Well, us children are as much to blame as the parents, 'cause we didn't keep talking it. But then again, when you go somewhere

out of the community and you hear nothing but English, who do you talk Inuktitut to, right? And especially in our case where we were in St. Anthony and it was only English speaking there, and then we went to North West River another year because they had to be close to a hospital, so the little bit of Inuktitut we spoke with them...and then to Goose Bay for another year, so it was '57 when we came back. And by that time it was all English spoken so we didn't really pick up the Inuktitut that we lost. (Interview Vincent 2003)

When children and adults were forced to leave their communities for long-term health care, usually due to tuberculosis, they went to the St. Anthony hospital, where the medical personnel were unable to talk to them in their own language. In some cases, such as that of Hilda Lyall and Fran Williams, the most academically promising students were sent to St. Anthony to go to school. Fran Williams recalls losing and regaining her language twice under these circumstances:

I lost my language totally, a couple of times, you know. Because I was in the hospital with TB when I was five years old. I was in hospital for a year. I lost it then, and then when I was eleven years old I had TB and I was in hospital in St. Anthony for two years and I lost it then. So I had to keep regaining my language. (Interview Williams 2002)

It was through visiting Inuit patients in the hospitals in St. Anthony or North West River that some students kept their language; this story was recounted variously by Sarah Townley, Beatrice Watts and Hilda Lyall. The pragmatic approach that parents took, not objecting to English instruction, was to some degree due to their assumption that the children would continue to use their own language at home and would not lose it in the way that was most significant to them. It was this bilingual generation that saw the true extent of the loss as they realized that their own children were not going to simply pick up the language in the way they had themselves, as the pressure of English merely by its presence ensured a daily life conducted in that language.

## **Media Exposure**

When social change, and the resulting cultural change, came to Labrador, it came rapidly. Flanagan records this wave of exposure to new technology: “Indeed, in one month in 1975, the population of Nain was introduced for the first time to television via satellite, direct telephone service (which replaced the radio phone) and a hotel opened with the first (and only) licensed bar in the village” (Flanagan 1984:129).

The effects were instantaneous, as Beatrice Hope remarked: “The first thing is the TV, when TV came in ’74 or ’75 everybody just stayed in and watched TV” (2014). Not only did this inhibit the use of Inuktitut and expose people to a constant stream of English; it fed the notion that somehow the outside English-speaking world was superior, leading Inuit to feel discontented with their own lives, as seen by Tim Borlase:

I think part of the challenge at that time was that a lot of the Inuktitut language related to life on the land and going off [traveling away to hunt and fish] and that was happening less and less in the communities, the resources were depleted, less people had access to hunting and fishing, more access to TV, and it became more beneficial to young people to speak English than to speak Inuktitut. (Interview Borlase 2013)

The effects of media at the present time are, of course, far more pervasive than in the 1970s no matter how much of a change television represented then. Social media is used widely in Nunatsiavut as elsewhere in the world, but does have potential for encouraging the use of Inuktitut if people choose to use it. The Rosetta Stone language program is also available in Inuktitut and has provided another opportunity for refreshing people’s access to language training.

## Passive Bilinguals

As mentioned previously, when people underwent these crises of relocation and illness, the population shifted so that many people were no longer able to speak Inuttitut fluently. Many fluent speakers died during the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918, and orphans were sometimes taken in by families who did not speak Inuttitut. Family relationships are often key in language retention, and some of the strongest speakers attribute their language ability to being brought up by grandparents, making them in some ways culturally members of an older generation. Marina Sherkina-Lieber reports that: “Residents of Nunatsiavut report that there are many Labrador Inuit who understand speech in Inuttitut, and can even translate from Inuttitut to English but do not ever say anything in Inuttitut; typically, these were raised by Inuttitut-speaking parents or grandparents” (Sherkina-Lieber 2011:3).

Johannes Lampe (born 1956) discussed this in an interview:

MM: You hear people saying, “I can understand but I can’t speak. Do you hear that a lot?

JL: Yes, I can say that that’s happened because of experiences of residential schooling or traumatic experiences. Yes, the language within is hurt. The person with the language within is hurt and so I believe that we need to heal Inuktitut, work on healing the language. That way, we can get the confidence, you know. That’s what Rutie and I try to do, we try to help our granddaughters and foster son to break through because they are within a prison of themselves, whether it’s language or confidence in order to be able to socialize. We know for sure that the potential is there, that the possibilities are there. It’s just that they’ve become so dependent that they have to hold onto our hand. They have to realize that they have a spirit within them and make them powerful. We try to encourage and empower the children and even our peers. (Interview Lampe 2014)

The gap this created between generations provides another narrative, as seen in this conversation with Salome Tuttau:



MM: Could your father speak English?  
ST: Not really.  
MM: So he wouldn't have been able to speak to the grandchildren.  
ST: No, he talked Inuktitut to his grandchildren.  
MM: And did they answer in English?  
ST: They'd answer in English. (Interview Tuttauik 2003)

Seona Karpik reported on this through her interpreter:

ML: Like Amos [adopted son] now, she said he should have been learning Inuktitut as long as she was alive but he didn't, so he doesn't know how to speak. He can understand but not speak.  
MM: How old is he?  
ML: Fifty-plus, fifty-whatever. She had other adopted children too, two girls and two boys.  
MM: And they didn't learn Inuktitut?  
ML: It seems like they all learned in English, eh. I'm just using the example of my two brothers. That's how it is, they understand but they can't answer you.  
MM: But you can.  
ML: I can. I learned it over again and I never forgot it. When I went to work in the Paddon Home I picked up a lot from the residents from Nain and Hopedale.  
MM: Was it because they stopped teaching children in Inuktitut that they stopped speaking it?  
ML: I think she said yes, you know. I don't want to put words in her mouth, but when she was trying to teach her grandchildren to speak Inuktitut they said it was hard so she just said that's okay. So it was hard. But she says as long as you can understand in Inuk that's okay if you don't answer.  
MM: So it's good even if you can just understand.  
ML: She really would like it. Amos finds it hard that he never learned it because she had looked after him. I think what he's saying is, "You looked after me and I should be able to speak Inuktitut." Because he was little when his mother left him and she adopted him. (Interview Karpik 2003)

Hilda Lyall also discussed this situation in her family, in which her younger siblings were not as proficient in the language as she is.

HL: Oh yeah, I never thought about that but when I was home the last couple of years my brothers were still home, they weren't married or anything, they were still home. I remember my mother talking to them in

Inuktitut but they never spoke the language back to my mother, they never answered in Inuktitut, only in English. She talked to them and they replied in English. She talked to them in her language. They never talked Inuktitut. They understood it, it was with them, the Inuktitut language, they understood everything she said, but they never ever used the language. (Interview H. Lyall 2003)

Tabea Murphy faced another situation in a home where she was eventually the sole Inuktitut speaker, as her husband was an American teacher in Nain.

TM: My oldest child was perfectly bilingual. And my next child was bilingual, because they spent a lot of time with their grandmother. But once the grandmother was gone, the home had to be English-speaking because their father is from outside, and the harder part is for younger people, younger than I am, those who haven't been to boarding school, all what they learned was English. And it's difficult. Even though they are bilingual, their children are no longer bilingual, because too much English is spoken. The problem is the school from all Inuktitut into English. (Interview Murphy 2003)

Irene Mazurkewich discusses this change in the place of Inuktitut, noting that a population shift occurred when Settlers were obliged to move into the communities so that their children could attend school under the new compulsory schooling regulations. This naturally shifted the dominance to English, and that language took over. As she says, "The complex ethnic characteristics of the population contribute to language loss in Labrador" (Mazurkewich 1991:58). She points out that an important function of the language or dialect of a community is its role as a symbol of identity and cultural solidarity, and under the new circumstances, Inuktitut lost this status because English was regarded as the prestige language in Labrador, necessary for communication, education and jobs (Mazurkewich 1991:66).

The existence of passive bilinguals in the communities of Nunatsiavut is what gives hope to those who would like to revive the language, because they are seen as the

strongest pool of potential speakers. However, as discussed earlier in the chapter on language shift, their proficiency varies widely and their grammatical knowledge can be faulty, leaving them with a lack of confidence in their ability to truly regain the language that is no longer their first.

### **Lying Dormant**

A final and more hopeful repeated narrative around Labrador Inuttitut is that it is “lying dormant,” waiting for revival. This point of view and precise phrase was actually used by Beatrice Watts, Johannes Lampe and Sarah Townley. There is some optimism amongst those who work with the language, such as Fran Williams:

FW: We’re trying to get it back. I belong to this language committee at the Torngâsok Cultural Institute where they’ve started this program, it’s called language nests where you’re teaching babies, you expose them only to Inuttitut environment because that’s where you pick up your language skill, when you’re a baby. And it’s working. As parents and as adults we have the responsibility to try to keep it alive at home. That’s where we failed terribly. I was in Postville about five years ago and I was talking about our language and culture, and you know, we can’t depend on the schools to teach the language or depend on anyone else, we’ve got to do it ourselves. (Interview Williams 2002)

Sarah Townley shares this point of view:

There’s a lot of people that still can speak it and are just not using it so much as before. Sad, but still—I still can converse with the elders and that’s the main thing. If we want it back we can get it back—it’s just dormant right now, just needs to be woken up. (Interview Townley 2013)

The danger in this point of view is that the process of “waking up” does not seem to be happening as quickly as is necessary to regain the language, nor is there a recognized process for making that happen. Although the pride in language is evident,

the intention and activity to actively reinstate it is so far insufficient to restore Inuttitut to its place as the primary language of Nunatsiavut.

All of the above narratives exist as a means of understanding and defending language loss, and are listed and described with examples at length in order to demonstrate that they are narratives, in the sense of accounts that are passed along by word of mouth from one member of the Nunatsiavut community to another. As narratives in the folkloric sense, they serve the function of reinforcing the collective view that language is important but that it disappeared for reasons that have become part of the oral history of the people. As we will see below, the difference between the narratives and the counter-narratives shows the extent to which people felt they had some input into what happened with the language, and also shows the effect of the larger national Aboriginal consciousness of being the injured parties in the actions and decisions of the dominant culture. Both the narratives and the counter-narratives have characteristics that make them eligible to be classified as legends, and this will form part of the following analysis.

### **Analysis**

We will now consider the use of these narratives in the maintenance of language and Inuit identity, and look at the variations amongst the stories to see how their functions have changed. The source of these accounts is largely the sets of interviews that took place ten years apart, providing us with the thoughts and memories of three generations when the informants are grouped together.

The 2002-2003 interviews were done with people born between 1919 and 1940. When this generation (Group One) considered the causes of language loss, they were

curiously pragmatic about it. Interestingly, they as speakers of the language saw less of a sense of betrayal than did the next generation (Group Two), who for the most part never spoke Inuttitut. Those informants, born after 1955, were much more likely to attribute blame to either missionaries or government officials for actually taking away the language; even the use of terms such as “taken” rather than “lost” show the assumption of intent.

From the point of view of this middle generation (Group Two), people whose parents and grandparents were speakers, blame must be laid for the loss of the language, and this blame is assigned to institutions that they saw as colonizing forces. The transition in viewpoint was rapid. When I spoke to informants of the middle generation about the Moravians’ policy of teaching in Inuttitut, they were frequently surprised by this information. Their most commonly-expressed accounts were more likely to support the idea that children were prevented from and punished for speaking their own language. This is part of the larger common description of Canadian residential schools, and probably also derives from the negative memories some children in Labrador, particularly the very young ones, had of leaving their homes on the boat in the fall to be taken to school. The living conditions, strictness and poor food were frequently subjects of reminiscences, and these may have come to be conflated with the language deprivation stories told about other institutions in Canada. We see also the first-hand accounts some told of coercion to speak either Inuttitut or English in Labrador boarding schools.

This middle generation, Group Two, is the first to constitute a set of Labrador Inuit who lack their native language to a significant extent, while at the same time being

of the age to have been actively involved in land claims negotiations, meaning that questions of colonization and self-government formed part of their political education. They were able to receive a high school education, but in order to get it had to leave their communities. They were the first to be exposed to mass media within the communities. They experienced the empowerment of Labrador, and also witnessed the loss of much traditional behaviour. They have established their right to their identity by fighting for it in the halls and courtrooms of the dominant society, and have replaced their linguistic heritage with a greater degree of awareness of Aboriginal rights than the generation that came before them. Therefore, their narratives have an edge born of the determination it took to reject the Moravian church and to challenge the provincial government. The narratives they embrace are those of resistance to the authorities that took for granted their right and indeed obligation to superimpose their institutions on the Inuit.

The younger generation (Group Three) born after 1985, is experiencing the full flower of self-government and is now in a position to redefine what it means to be Inuk. Being two generations removed from possession of language fluency and being free from the Settler/Inuk dichotomy have allowed people in their twenties to re-examine cultural identity and to plan for the place of language in its future. The experience of loss is behind them historically, though its legacy of trauma and addiction keeps the realization of its effects alive, and the suicide rates are a wake-up call to anyone who thinks that resolution of the past has been completely achieved. Nonetheless, Group Three represents a set of different experiences; these people completed school in their own communities rather than leaving home for boarding school, and were the beneficiaries of

post-secondary support funding allocated by the Nunatsiavut that assisted them in pursuing the post-secondary education that has equipped them to take on leadership roles in their communities. Group Three consists of people who may not believe that Inuktitut is essential for Inuit identity, but they are also free from attaching a stigma or fear of racism to the language that they would all like to reclaim.

Nowadays the stories told of language deal with the assessment of its symbolic value and necessity for Inuit, and what has perhaps replaced it as tangible markers of the current Inuit identity. Young people would like to speak the language but perhaps feel that it is possible to generate and propagate a respectful Inuit identity without the requirement of Inuktitut fluency.

This chapter has provided numerous examples of the differing narratives offering explanations for the changes in language usage in Nunatsiavut. Examining them in light of what they demonstrate about Inuit identity and the sense of agency that was present in the evolving history of Inuktitut, we must reflect on how they exist and function in terms of the narrative format itself.

I am considering these explanations of language loss as narratives because they are accounts that have been passed along in oral tradition and serve a function of explanation for language loss. The most important qualifications for their consideration as narratives, and indeed as legends, are the process of transmission that has kept them in oral tradition, and the element of believability with which they are told. Amy Shuman has looked closely at what she calls “entitlement claims” for personal experience narratives, noting that the stories are sometimes appropriated by others for the creation of

empathy (Shuman 2005). In the process of telling someone else's story to create news or to gain support for a problem shared by a group of people, individual stories become allegorical, and take on a significance for the entire group. As Shuman has pointed out, once the stories become allegorical, their essential truth cannot easily be challenged: "Further complicating the disputed virtues of subjectivity or objectivity and the rights they accrue, however, is the use of stories to represent not just individual, but collective, experience. The more a story represents a generalized, shared or even human experience, the higher the stakes in asserting or challenging illegitimacy" (Shuman 2005:4). Shuman deals with the issue of who has a right to tell a certain story, and this is a question to be addressed in terms of language loss narratives; they are told as the collective possession of the Labrador Inuit, but are the personal experience narratives of only some of the people who tell them. Additionally, some of the narratives have been promoted as explanations that were gleaned from the personal experiences of people in other Inuit communities, making the concept of entitlement to the stories still more complicated.

Some of the counter-narratives, such as the accounts of people being punished for speaking English rather than Inuttitut, derive from personal experiences but are not being transmitted to the same degree because they do not fulfill the function of assigning responsibility for the loss of the language to outside forces. In this sense, the counter-narratives are not the challenge to the dominant narrative that Shuman sees (Shuman 2005:19), but rather set up an explanation that issues from the same group of people who tell the dominant narratives. The difference between the two is the sense of agency employed by the Inuit in actively sidelining their own language in order to give an



advantage to their children. The point here is that the allegorical telling of personal experiences as collective truths is made possible by the transmission of certain accounts and is not the result of a conscious interpretation. This differs from some subjective accounts (called narratives elsewhere in a different sense than the folkloric) that can be used for different ends, such as in refugee hearings or in truth and reconciliation hearings (Barker 2012 n.p.).

The examination of the differing narratives offered by members of the same group, albeit of different generations, leads us to realize that the front-page stories of any culture merit a deeper investigation to discover the multiple layers of narrative and the functions they serve. I suggest that what we see in the contradictory accounts of language loss among the Labrador Inuit is what I call “counter-narratives”: stories that run counter to the better-known and politically expedient explanations of language loss, and which provide information that is surprising and perhaps unsettling to other members of the folk group. These exist in counterpoint to the more commonly accepted and re-told explanations for language loss and indeed for other kinds of loss and community trauma.

The fact that the counter-narratives that give a prosaic explanation for the loss of language are unknown to the younger generation is significant. These stories do not fit with the discussion of language loss as part of colonization and lack the kind of qualities that make narratives likely to be passed on as allegorical experiences, because they do not seek to create empathy. These accounts do fulfill the role of “story-telling” in the Labrador understanding of that word, where reminiscences of days gone by are considered to be stories. These accounts are not used to entertain, being stories of loss,

nor necessarily to educate, though they function as part of oral history and can therefore be instructive. The message behind some of these accounts is a re-telling of hardship which carries a therapeutic intention and supports the identity of Labrador Inuit as a resourceful people, doing their best with the resources at their disposal, including their language.

When looking at how these narratives function in Labrador Inuit society, I am struck not only by the widely diverging accounts of language loss, but by the seemingly contradictory nature of the stories. Although a rigorous examination of earlier Labrador Moravian education exists in the scholarship of Hans Rollmann, the twentieth-century accounts have been less discussed in scholarly literature, and are also open to interpretation as oral history accounts.

Therefore, we see that recorded history tells us that 1949 was the watershed date that effectively stripped Inuttitut of its power as the formal language of education in northern Labrador. However, we know that some instruction in Inuktut continued, as the Moravians were the *de facto* providers of education even after Confederation, and presumably continued to embrace their philosophy of first-language teaching in a place where they knew it was still required. We see from accounts from Bertha Holeiter, Naeme Tuglavina and Selma Jararuse that Inuttitut continued to be used, at least for the youngest children, up until the mid-1960s. This was not in resistance to the dominant language but instead was a practical response from experienced teachers who themselves had command of the language due to their informal second-language learning as members of Settler families. As we have learned from Dianne Grant (Grant 2003), the

government that wished to leave responsibility with the Moravians was forced by its own policies to discard their involvement and the bilingual teachers who had provided education to that point.

Accordingly, language use up until some point in the 1960s was a question of practicality and not of politics. That point of view came later on, as we see in Peacock's 1985 account of the young Inuit of the 1970s who challenged the "classical Inuktitut" he favoured and concurrently blamed both the mission and the government for language loss amongst the Inuit:

In my early days on the coast of Labrador the Inuit children in schools were taught in their own language. However, in the early 1950s the Inuit Elders demanded that all their children should be taught in English. This demand arose because of the White influx and the feeling that some of the White "intruders" were taking advantage of the lack of English among the Inuit. Perhaps this desire to learn English was a good thing, but it should have been taught as a second language and the Inuit children should have been trained to be bilingual. But no, it was to be English or nothing! Since many of the children were in boarding school and the parents steadfastly refused to speak English, a barrier was erected, for the children had little contact with their own language except in church. So among the young there was a steady erosion of the Inuit language. (Peacock 1985:4)

How do we explain both the sudden language loss and the rise of awareness that it was in danger? Like all the examples above, we have narratives and counter-narratives that reflect the politics of the time. As mentioned, the 1970s were an era of great change in Labrador, rivalling the post-World War II period for response to outside events and social influence. In Labrador people were exposed to television, and saw a world that they wanted to inhabit. The effects, as with media everywhere, were a loss in traditional interaction and an increase in the influence of the dominant language, English. New institutions in Labrador such as the Combined Councils, the Labrador East Integrated

School Board, *Them Days Magazine*, the Labrador Creative Arts Festival and the Labrador Winter Games, as well as the Labrador Party and the invention of the Labrador flag, brought people together and gave them a sense of a collective Labrador identity. While their pride in their heritage was highlighted, the commonality of the institutions was for the most part expressed in English. Additionally, a sense of empowerment came about through the establishment of the Labrador Inuit Association and the push for the land claims agreement, though the LIA included Settlers amongst the members and through force of numbers therefore guaranteed that English would become the common language of the negotiations and eventually of the membership. The power of the Inuit increased but the power of Inuttitut itself did not. And in reaction, the generation whose parents had sacrificed the language at least in part through their own decision to improve the lives of the children, responded by selecting and relaying the narratives of forced sacrifice.

The uses of oral history are different for folklorists than for historians who use them as corroboration for published and archival sources; the folklorist seeks the version that represents truth and validation for the user. It is in this sense that these narratives are being examined here.

Having placed these accounts in the category of narrative, it is possible to look more deeply at what kind of narratives they constitute. These explanations provided by three generations of Labrador Inuit about language loss have taken on some of the aspects of legends, informing us, as Philip Hiscock explains, “about contemporary

understandings of the past over time, ‘real worlds’ as they appeared to successive generations” (Hiscock 2002:196).

For folklorists, legends have a very particular meaning in spite of the difficulty scholars have long had in defining or categorizing the genre, which has a flexible form and is embedded in everyday life. The telling of legends, as well, takes place within a less formal context than the delivery of the folktale genre. Their development is a response to stressful situations or to answer an implicit or open question (Dégh 2001:99). The essential element is that a legend by any of the many definitions contains a requirement of belief to some extent, as Dégh contends: “Explicitly or implicitly the legend must make it clear that its message is or was believed by someone, sometime, somewhere” (Dégh 2001:140). The language loss accounts here are not the kind of legends that are delivered in a performance venue, as we see with supernatural or contemporary legends. Rather, they fit more closely into the category of personal experience narratives or personal legends based on first-hand experience. As previously mentioned, they have expanded beyond the first person and have grown into collective stories delivering meaning to an entire group. The repeated motifs of the stories, such as the description of the elders demanding that children be taught in English, indicate the formulaic nature of the accounts.

Context also must be considered when deciding if the language loss narratives can be considered legends. The many accounts I delivered here were collected during interviews and arose in response to direct questions about language loss, or came from sources such as *Them Days*, which also obtains information through interviews, and were

therefore not performance venues. Yet such stories also arise in groups when language is being discussed, or when people are sharing stories of loss. In the category of personal narratives, everyone is a performer with no special expertise required, and consequently anyone may be expected to perform. In the case of these narratives, the requirement is not so much for a performance style as for the possession of a life experience that places the informant in the category of expert, as one who has lived the experience. In doing so, the individual performer contributes to a collective narrative that reflects the values of the group and can be retold as a collectively-held story at another performance event.

The narratives presented here diverge in the middle generation (Group Two) into a form more closely resembling legends than first-person experiences, as they are accounts that informants are providing from the experience of their parents or community members, rather than their own. Legends, of course, fulfill much more specific functions, and as Elliot Oring has suggested, their main purpose is to create a story that requires the audience members to examine their world view and their sense of what is normal and natural (Oring 1986:125).

In an effort to further define and shape investigation around personal narrative, we have guidance from a number of sources. Barbara Allen supplies a basic definition:

In addition to the highly structured and dramatic narrations of heroes and their exploits recounted in myth and tales, folklorists are concerned with briefer, more loosely organized accounts of personal experience. These stories are often embedded in conversation and may be conceptualized and conveyed by their tellers as “information” rather than “Art.” (Allen 1989:236)

The historical development of this narrative form corresponds in time to the shift in narratives we see in the Labrador Inuit population:

Personal narrative came to prominence [as an object of study] in Western society after World War II. It emerged from at least four contemporary movements: the “narrative turn” in the human sciences; the “memoir boom” in literature and popular culture; the new “identity” movements spanning United States cultural and transnational emancipation efforts, and the burgeoning therapeutic culture. Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities, and “get a life” by telling and writing their stories. (Langellier 2001:1)

The counter-narratives seen amongst the Inuit in explanation of language loss go below the surface of the generic accounts of political oppression and victimization and the earlier stories of epidemics and betrayal that constitute what Langellier calls the “master narrative” which cast the Labrador Inuit in a passive and vulnerable light. When we examine the counter-narratives that show the elders pre-emptively deciding to have the children taught English, or the Settlers acquiring Inuktitut as a second language, or parents using Inuktitut as a secret language, we see the same sense of agency and decision-making that governed the Inuit’s refashioning of Moravian education and customary behaviour into elements that were distinctively “Moravian Inuit.” These stories that display agency and creativity and show the Inuit as people in charge of their own society, as we saw with their usage of literacy, should be the ones that are transmitted to the next generation. Even narratives that show the Inuit to have been injured parties (a term I choose deliberately instead of “victims”) have elements of redemption, such as the stories of the Inuit who went to the World Fair to be exhibited but returned, or made the trip as Abraham Ulrikab did in order to pay his debts to the mission.

Why, then, have only the narratives emphasizing colonization and victimhood remained in the canon of language loss narratives? This has much to do with the contexts in which they are told. Barbara Allen observes that because personal experience narratives are not “traditional” and can be told by anyone, their meaning depends on the conversation in which they appear, and they occur in response to other narratives of a similar theme:

While not all personal experience narratives are told as second stories, they are always responses of some sort to the ongoing interaction. Beneath the topical and correlational levels already discussed, personal experience narratives are responses to the nature of the social setting as mutually recognized and defined by the participants and to the relationships that exist between the participants. (Allen 1989:240).

When Barbara Allen refers to “second stories,” she is talking of the tendency of people to tell a story that follows the theme of one just recounted by someone else, often to confirm the point of view being expressed. This solidarity is an expression of core values. We need to be aware of the arena in which such narratives may be told in Labrador, at events such as language, education or elders’ conferences, where participants may be invited to speak of a deceased member of the community, or of someone whom they feel best represents the values of the Inuit community. In the present day, an arena for narratives around language loss is likely to be within a reconciliation meeting or a healing circle, in which the opportunity is provided for people to deal with the pain of the past. In such a setting, the chance of a counter-narrative emphasizing the independence and agency of the group is not likely to occur. As Feldman and Amquist say, “Narratives have become an increasingly important mode of inquiry and analysis for studying the ability to garner public support for public projects.



Narratives and storytelling play a critical role in conveying an ideological position and in gaining political legitimacy” (Feldman and Amquist 2012:208).

Cultural resources, narratives amongst them, are created by a group and then are available to individuals to construct their personal reality (Stahl 1989:10). Narrative is seen as a vehicle for personal values or world view, where the choice of a personal narrative can express a covertly held value without needing to declare it. When we look at the narratives of Inuit, they are often transmitted to give a unified voice to injustices or concerns, and are seen as a collective voice.

What then are we to make of these co-existing versions, the counter-narratives that are unknown to people born after 1955? Philip Hiscock proposes the existence of “semiological binaries” (Hiscock 2002:197) to acknowledge the existence of widely diverging elements in a legend. In the case of these narratives, we have separate accounts that tell contradictory versions of the reasons for language loss, but they sometimes have parallel structures and similar motifs. For example, the punishment stories tell that children received corporal punishment for speaking the forbidden language, but in the narrative it is Inuttitut and in the counter-narrative English, indicating that the structure of the story had been heard before.

Inuttitut fluency in Inuit society was automatically a requirement for Inuit identity until very recent times, and as discussed above, this sense of identity has changed drastically with progression from one generational group to the next, and on to the next. The correlation that is important to remember is that identity in some sense conflates with specific values and world views, meaning that people may feel that to be Inuit requires

the ability to speak Inuttitut. Therefore, people who cannot speak the language may need to justify this acknowledged deficiency by presenting reasons for the lack of the language in their lives, and the narratives serve as a means to this end, as seen in Bamberg's statement:

With regard to what is special about narratives, it is commonly held that narratives serve the purpose for passing along and handing down culturally shared values, so that individuals learn to position their own values and actions in relationships to established and shared categories and, in doing so, engage in their own formation process as a person. (Bamberg 2012:103)

When contradictory sets of values are present, counter-narratives counterbalance the primary narratives, but gradually, as one dominant presentation of historical or political events takes hold, the counter-narratives are no longer passed along and cease to be a source of the presentation of history and identity.

Abrahams urges us to look at the uses to which people have put their folklore, their personal narratives perhaps more specifically than anything else in their cultural repertoire. The badges of minority status worn by many different groups, including the Inuit in this thesis, may have become a source of pride, including their language and their narratives, but before they were marks of special status they were often characteristics that set people apart and marked them as subordinate or inferior, products of colonialism, disempowerment and marginalization. And as students of the expressive culture of such groups, scholars need to examine their own place in representing themselves as "intermediaries or representatives of the dispossessed" (Abrahams 2003:207) Language loss narratives place the responsibility for the loss on the community elders in earlier times or on teachers or clergy in more recent narratives, but the source of the loss is the

very existence of Inuit cultural identity and language, seen as inadequate or inferior in a time when English was popularly thought to bring more prosperity and status.

In recent times the language loss narratives among the Inuit reflect another kind of division between groups, in that outsiders in the role of church and government are seen as the perpetrators of language loss, reinforcing the sense of pride and solidarity amongst the Inuit. In all the narratives and counter-narratives we have examined, language shift took place because of a lower value being placed on Inuit identity, even if the community members themselves felt obliged to let the language go. Separating the Inuit themselves from the action of language loss is important in asserting a sense of pride and solidarity.

The recounting of loss and displacement narratives as a method of addressing trauma, the intergenerational experiences one of my informants referred to as “inherited grief,” is an example of the differing functions for storytelling even within the same group. Francesca Polletta (Polletta 2012) examines this in her reference to the organizers of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who saw the function of storytelling in that context as therapeutic, so that people could speak of their experiences and be able to let them go. Instead, the people who presented their narratives thought of the process in terms of bringing villains to justice. These conflicting expectations are present in the telling of Labrador narratives as well, particularly when people speak of experiences in boarding schools. That these exist is not in question, but such a forum leaves no place for the counter-narratives told of the practical reasons people sent their children to the Dorm, or the bonds created there, or the acknowledgement that Inuttitut

use was not forbidden but was strategically avoided. It is the narrative performance space and context that dictates the story told. This is in contrast to a forum like an issue of *Them Days* on education or language, where individual stories provide the elements of a themed presentation and the static published form can more easily present fixed accounts than is possible in an orally-generated forum such as a conference.

Formula stories, similar to the “master narratives” Langellier talks about dismantling, get organized around accounts of unique people who are offered as prototypical characters. We see, for example, how the personal experiences of some get expanded through re-telling into allegorical stories that are regarded as common experiences so that they eventually become a metaphor for the kind of loss or issue that is being discussed. Amy Shuman notes this in relation to stories told at refugee hearings, for example, where applicants are being tested for eligibility on the narrative they present. (Shuman 2005: 58) The narratives I collected appeared as first-person stories, such as Ed Lyall’s story of not being allowed out of the boarding school to see his family, and Zippora Hunter’s story of having to go to school so that the family would not lose the family allowance. These were their own accounts of their own experiences, but in succeeding generations these accounts are told as generalized examples of loss and subjugation without any particular names being attached to them, implying, probably with a great deal of truth, that they happened to many people.

Such narratives in Labrador may be presented as both individual and collective experiences, but they also can be attached to individual people. There are “stereotypical” Inuit characters that may have developed out of the life stories of real people.

(Essentially with the population of Nunatsiavut there are no strangers.) Figures of authority from the past such as Martin Martin, Jerry Sillett, and Nathan Frieda have become people who have taken on legendary characteristics in terms of their leadership ability, musicianship, or ability to hunt. The prototype stories that develop give an individual gloss to what have become collective narratives, and the words of these people give verisimilitude, so, for example, those who spoke of the Hebron relocation many years after became the voices that prompted the apology and reparations fifty years later. But when language loss, which as an ongoing process is different from an isolated historical event no matter how significant, is framed in the same terms, the informative subtleties of the counter-narratives can be lost. The message delivered by the currently-circulated set of narratives is one that emphasizes the injured-party status of the Inuit rather than the independent decision-maker representation of earlier accounts.

Accounts in oral history, as in written history, inevitably have some gaps in the information offered, and what is left out is as significant as the information highlighted. It is difficult to ascertain when Inuttitut was finally abandoned as a language of instruction, as we see that it went on considerably longer than the Confederation cut-off date. There are gaps in the written records as well, so that knowledge of the Moravian educational practices of the mid-twentieth century is less solid than that of two centuries before. For example, Kate Hettasch's series of diaries does not include volumes from the crucial years of language change upon Confederation.

In another sense the gaps are in the transmission of the story of language in northern Labrador, and interestingly it is the narratives themselves that reveal these gaps,

when we see that succeeding generations have no notion of the earlier explanations given. When members of Group Two have no idea that their elders were taught in Inuttitut or that elders decided to insist on English instruction, we have more than a lack of information. This gap tells us that Group Two, now in their 50s, may not know that their parents' generation exercised its autonomy and considerable agency to make decisions on its language that they saw as expedient in order to make life easier, as they thought, for their children. Not knowing this not only confines them to the narrative that sees language loss as imposed by outsiders, but shapes their view of their own culture as one that had no control over how they lived and learned.

Francesca Polletta speaks of the tension between a story that is unique and one that evokes commonality (Polletta 2012:244). Is storytelling authoritative or deceptive? What does it mean if we say that there are two sides to every story? For a folklorist it means that there is the narrative and there is the reason for telling it, which is a second story. It may be, as Meider says of proverbs, that it is not possible to generalize a world view or uniformity of values (Meider 2004:34). But there is, in a sense, a uniformity of narratives, and the importance of the existence of that uniformity lies in its ability to provide answers to questions about what aspects of culture people hold most dear, and how much of their personal identity they are willing to subsume in order to feel truly a part of the collective narrative. Going further, if we challenge a uniformity of narratives through questioning that provides us with alternative explanations, the counter-narratives, we literally have two sides to the story. In terms of the Inuttitut language loss stories, we have the accounts of language loss that show some elements of agency in relinquishing

language or in considering it a second and optional language, and the accounts that display instead the forces of colonization through forced suppression of it. Both are represented as true stories by members of the Labrador Inuit. And both kinds of narratives serve the purpose of confirming identity, not only through the identification of language as vital to a sense of cultural authenticity, but through the shared sense of identity through the loss experienced. These narratives of loss with the Inuit confer a sense of identity in the same way that people of Irish descent know about the Potato Famine or people with a Scottish background recount their ancestors' fate under the Highland Clearances; they are not only stories of loss but of continued survival as a people. With language loss in any group, however, there is a sense of a responsibility to reverse it, or to collectively transmit a narrative to explain why the language has reached its current state.

The power of language is strong. It cements the sense of identity of a group and helps it retain its common purpose. The power of a lost language is a political one that also serves to unify the group, becoming a rallying cry for the restoration of rights and the recognition of injustice. In the third generation, it may be that language has become a symbol to convey meaning and identity in a ceremonial way, leaving room for other practices to convey identity. Even when lost as a spoken form a language may retain considerable power, as Ostler has demonstrated in regard to Latin (Ostler 2005:526).

These Nunatsiavut narratives and counter-narratives coexist in a society that has forged a new sense of collective identity through its self-government. It celebrates being Inuit while it redefines what that means. In the new spirit of independence represented

by the educated youth of Nunatsiavut, Inuttitut may be taking a new place as a life skill again, one that provides an advantage in the larger forum of the circumpolar world.

The contradictions co-existing in these accounts, and the gaps within the narratives, are as significant as the narratives themselves. What happened to the explanations given by Group One? Was there an appropriation of someone else's narratives in Group Two, or was there more freedom to discuss the effects of colonization as time passed? Does Group Three in the post-land claims era see a need for a narrative on language loss at all, as it finds its cultural identity in sources outside language? Does it see a need for the language itself?

Looked at as a form of cultural capital, in Bourdieu's terms, we can see that the uses of language go beyond communication into the realm of identity and into other directions as well. There may be other forms of culture that can replace the currency of language when seeking to prove Inuit identity, but we can also see language as the currency of imperialism. This is evident in the use that the Moravian missionaries made of Inuttitut when they learned it in order to shape the religious life of the Inuit. In the present day, language fluency is once again currency, in that Aboriginal people who do not speak their native language are obliged to devalue the significance of it in identity construction in order to deal with the deficit they face in national gatherings, for example, when they are obliged to use English to communicate.

Just like actual currency, the value of language capacity goes up and down depending on rarity and market desirability. And just like many another natural resource, fluency in a maternal language is seen as something that needs to be safeguarded and



protected. Is this not a burden placed upon Aboriginal people, pressuring them to retain something that they may not want and which costs them something to save? Much as the world is horrified when heritage buildings are lost in order to create something else, art is sold in order to finance critical infrastructure, or television replaces traditional storytelling forms, so too do people outside those cultures feel that speakers of minority languages have a responsibility to hang onto these to fit our picture of linguistic biodiversity. If people own their linguistic and cultural currency they should be free to spend it as they wish—to save it, give it away, or exchange it for something that makes their lives work in the way they find beneficial for themselves, their families and their communities. The counter-narratives in this collection of language loss accounts shows that in the early twentieth century Inuit did make those choices for their communities and families, and that part of the reason for the decline in language was the autonomy that the Inuit used in deciding to educate their children in English, or to place them in boarding school, or to accept the people they considered “Settlers” as part of their Inuit communities. They were not to know that continuing to function in two languages would be difficult and would adversely affect the maintenance of Inuktitut.

It would be short-sighted to lose the perspective on language that people may have actively chosen to learn English, rather than to invest in the narrative that they lost Inuktitut. If it was theirs to put away, it is theirs to retrieve, without the assistance or permission of the dominant society. The counter-narratives behind the politically motivated stories are the ones that reinforce this agency and autonomy.

## **Conclusions:**

The language loss narratives presented here are metanarration around the Inuttitut language and have come to represent Inuit language identity to an increasing extent as the language itself diminishes. The accounts themselves are often contradictory, representing both the dominant explanations for language loss and the lesser known ones. These personal experience narratives have expanded into allegorical stories or legends that encapsulate the world view of the Labrador Inuit, and permit a glimpse into the shifting views on language and identity over the generations of the people interviewed. In addition, these accounts demonstrate the control Inuit had over their education and language use in spite of the intrusion of European life.

There can be no doubt about the power of Inuttitut as a cultural symbol for the Labrador Inuit, but the language is still spoken despite its decline and holds emotional significance for the people who still use it. Selma Jararuse spoke of the “heart-to-heart connection” when she speaks Inuttitut instead of English. These continuing and deep connections are what give hope for the revival of the language. When I asked Johannes Lampe about his expectation for the revival of Inuttitut, he replied:

Well, I’m still here, and so are others out there, and [my wife] Rutie and I, we believe that we can help our granddaughters to speak Inuktitut and to help others. Well, it’s been here for 10,000 years and I didn’t learn it by myself, you know, it’s been taught over the centuries, either the spirit or the culture. (Interview Lampe 2014)

If a revival is to take place, understanding all the explanations offered in both narratives and counter-narratives will be a useful foundation for the planning ahead.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

This study was undertaken to examine the narratives told by Labrador Inuit about language shift in their communities and families, in order to see what these accounts revealed about the change in the use of Inuttitut and how these changes reflected or affected the sense of identity past and present in Nunatsiavut.

While linguistic research has been carried out on grammatical aspects of Inuttitut, and suggestions have been made in recent years for revitalizing it, language attitudes have for the most part been elicited through surveys. This study explored the changing explanations for language loss through qualitative methods and during two time periods separated by twelve years, allowing for a range of ages and communities to be represented. The study sought to answer these questions:

1. What caused the decline in the use of Inuttitut? Was there a formal decision not to use it and if so, who made the decision?
2. How does the change in language usage cause people to feel about their identity as Inuit?
3. What do the actual narratives reveal about language attitudes and the knowledge of the way language changed?

In undertaking an interdisciplinary study I consulted the works of linguists on the phenomenon of language shift, but chose to take the lens of narrative in examining language loss not as a linguist but as a folklorist who sees language as a cultural artifact used in identity formation. From the perspective of a folklorist, language can be regarded as not only a folklore genre but a folkloric product, and can be subjected to the same

functional analysis that has served us in other studies, looking at the classic four functions (Bascom 1965), which are education, entertainment, social control and maintaining world view.

It is clear that maintenance of a language in a living daily form requires domains in which the language is essential not only to a sense of identity but to the maintenance of culture and daily forms of expression. English has taken over these domains amongst the people of Nunatsiavut, due to a number of historical factors that have been outlined in previous chapters. An examination of the language use and identity formation of the group of people known till recently as “Settlers” forms a significant part of the research carried out here.

### **What is the nature of language shift and its particular characteristics in Nunatsiavut?**

The investigation of the idea of language shift and its particular place in Nunatsiavut set the background of the study. The view of many scholars is that language shift is a form of loss akin to the extinction of species in the natural world, both intrinsically sad and potentially destructive. Taken one step further, this view brings us to the idea that knowledge is embedded in language and that the loss of any particular language means a potential absence of some forms of cultural property that will consequently be forever lost. Balancing this view is one that is much less often expressed but which deserves consideration as well: that language endangerment has become the subject of discourse that links it to political movements and human rights issues, and that

developed nations once seen as responsible for the loss of some languages are now pressing for their preservation.

There is a discourse around language change that puts responsibility for its recovery on the speakers. Those speakers, in Nunatsiavut as in many other places, may express the idea that language is important and must be preserved but, in terms of actual practice, the language is not being passed on in the home to the extent it needs to be to maintain it, and people are not taking up the opportunities for revitalizing. There are many reasons for this. The struggle between the difficulty of sustaining a language and the sense of responsibility for it leads to the adoption of other forms of cultural symbols to express identity and to a number of explanations for the language's demise, which are emergent in the narratives collected. In 2015 these explanations largely hold institutions outside the culture responsible for language loss.

### **What was the role of the Moravian education system on language retention?**

The Moravians' view of education is discussed at length here because of their long influence on the Inuit in Labrador. Their educational approach across both time and space was that the "heart rather than the head" needed to be emphasized in teaching as well as in religious practice, and this perspective led to an influence that was somewhat different from that of other religious missions to the north. The Mission's objective was to keep the Inuit in their own place and away from other European influences, and to get them to read the Bible and participate in public and private worship. The most significant result was the teaching that was conducted in Inuttitut until Confederation with Canada in 1949, and even beyond this date in a less formal manner. This led to the employment of

native teachers and the necessity for missionaries to speak the language and eventually to translate the Scriptures and other religious literature. The resulting legacy to the Inuit, of strong literacy skills in their own language, probably fostered respect for and retention of the spoken language as well. Although the missionaries were providing an education that was geared towards a population destined to remain in Labrador (at least pre-twentieth century), it is too simple to say it was just religious learning, as it also offered instruction in geography, elementary mathematics, music and life skills and provided the basic education that could be built on with further training, for example in nursing and teacher education.

Because so much of what we know about the Moravian educational system comes from their own records, we are given to understand that the Inuit welcomed these opportunities, and readers must balance this perspective with the knowledge that any outside influence also changed the way of life for the people and imposed a value system that was new and not easy to resist.

Within the realm of education and the Moravians' accounts of it we are also exposed to the parallel population to the Inuit known as the Settlers, and their attitude towards education and the Mission itself, which showed less enthusiasm for learning and more independence than that of the Inuit population. The institution of boarding school, which had different motivations for the people and the missionaries, is examined to see its influence on language rather than to discuss the social effects it had on the Inuit, a topic deserving separate treatment elsewhere. This form of schooling had effects on Inuit retention in that the school in Nain was bilingual and the Makkovik school

English, reinforcing the division between Inuit and Settlers, and yet promoting unofficial bilingualism in the boarding school dormitory. In later years (after 1955) English became the only language used in education, until after a twenty-year gap some efforts were made to reinstate Inuttitut when its value was once again recognized by educational authorities and supported by community members. These attempts did not succeed in recreating a vibrant language community. It may be possible to conclude that twenty years is a sufficient period of time for language to lapse when out of the schools, but other factors were certainly at work as well, and these will be discussed below.

Literacy was an important factor in language retention and identity formation with the Labrador Inuit because they took these skills and used them for correspondence, diary writing and the development of a generally literate culture. Although literacy can be seen as part of the colonizing attempts to eradicate culture, in Labrador the effect was to create a tool that was picked up as a skill set and used independently of the education system, becoming a source of pride (Fagan 2010:54). That literacy was a historic possession and a cultural value that may not have migrated into English in the northern communities is a topic that may need further investigation.

It can be argued that the end of education in Inuttitut coincided with a number of historical factors that caused the Inuit language and identity to be devalued, such as increased resource development, the waning power of the Moravian church, the development of the Goose Bay air force base and the influence of media and technology. Once non-Inuit people became more numerous in the Labrador communities and outside influences began to be felt, Inuit experienced a power imbalance that told them that their



own heritage and achievements were less valuable. The relocation decision that not only deprived Inuit from Hebron and Nutak of their homeland but forced them into communities where they had no wherewithal to earn a living or continue their cultural norms, and where they were seen as outsiders and ghettoized, rendered cultural identity still more problematic. The Settlers were not yet identifying themselves as Inuit and therefore maintained a physical and cultural distance, and Inuttitut eventually became one of the identifying badges of a socially disfavoured identity. Shedding the language became a mechanism of control over the self-perception of the Inuit, particularly when people moved to Happy Valley and felt their minority status even more keenly. Once the people were devalued, so too was the language. Those who remained in Nunatsiavut also underwent a language shift, even though Inuit were in the majority. Lawrence Smith in a personal communication (2014) cited a number of reasons for the language shift, which included exposure to television, perception of English as a language of opportunity, and most interestingly, his impression that the Inuit in Nunatsiavut felt that the use of Inuttitut excluded participation in the community of those who spoke only English. This generous inclusion of those who lived a traditional lifestyle and were considered part of the community was the attitude that later led to inviting Settlers to be part of the Labrador Inuit Association. Therefore, education was an important part of the language shift process but was by no means the sole factor.

**What were the transformations in identity perception in the Nunatsiavut population? How are these changes related to language?**

People who form part of majority populations may spend very little time thinking about what constitutes their identity, particularly regarding their cultural heritage. Identity becomes a more central concern when it is contested or when there is something to gain or lose by its establishment. The transformation of identity in Labrador from the concept of Settlers and Inuit to the amalgamated identity forged under the banner of the Labrador Inuit Association and the formation of Nunatsiavut is central to this thesis. The related question is about the extent to which personal identity is subsumed to a collective cultural identity, and how that is expressed in the language loss narratives.

Since identity is also formed through the sense of another group in opposition (Bauman 1971), it is important to view the events that shifted this outsider status from the Settler people to the non-Aboriginal newcomers. Added to this is the developing autonomy of First Nations and Inuit peoples in Canada (and elsewhere) that has finally allowed the examination of historical injustices to Indigenous people. The development of an Inuit identity that is inclusive of people of mixed ancestry and challenges the necessity of static symbols of culture for Inuit identification is evident, particularly in the world view of the young people who saw the birth of self-government in their teens.

A question to consider is whether language can be let go as one of these symbols, since people no longer have their identity designated by the language they speak, as was more evident when Ben-Dor and Kennedy observed group divisions in Makkovik in the

1960s and 1970s respectively. The need to reconcile this loss of language with a continuing Inuit identity is handled by Inuit in a number of ways, one of which is to see language loss as a temporary state. This is where the belief that language is only dormant and not moving towards extinction is useful. The downplaying of language as an essential feature of Inuit identity was very likely a result of the formation of the LIA when Settlers were included as full members, because although many in the Nain area could speak Inuttitut, others could not, especially those in the more southern regions, and language ability therefore could not be included as one of the requirements for membership. The initial ascription of Aboriginality to communities rather than to individuals has also played a part in the current concept of what is or is not Inuit.

With a resurgence in status for Aboriginal languages, competence in Inuttitut is a form of cultural capital that would seem to be worth investing in, and attempts are being made in Labrador to interest individuals in regaining the lost language, but the commitment required to do so seems to be often beyond the time allowance, and sometimes the perception of their own ability, of those who would ideally like to speak the language. Instead, cultural is represented with a range of symbols that includes some cultural forms such as traditional clothing and the revived drum dancing tradition, but is likely to also reflect a traditional lifestyle and a known connection to a particular community. The continued tradition of spending time on the land is tremendously important to people's sense of belonging to the Inuit community, and many informants listed this as a vital component of Inuit identity.

This does not mean, however, that all people are intimately acquainted with their own history, and this circumstance is not peculiar to the Labrador Inuit. The importance of that form of cultural capital has been buttressed with social capital, which consists in part of the rising status and power of Aboriginal groups in the province and the country, despite continued challenges. This means that the focus of the energy of most Aboriginal groups is on improving infrastructure and resource development, dealing with social problems and advancing education, rather than on undertaking the challenges of reviving language.

In her discussion on the omission of Labrador Inuit art from the scholarship on Inuit art, Heather Igloliorte points to what she sees as a generally-held assumption that Labrador Inuit were so assimilated that they hardly constituted an Inuit population at all (Igloliorte 2014). This idea of assimilation, presented as the goal of early policy makers in Canada, is a complex one and has implications both for language and identity. I think that the Moravians, who were the dominant colonizing force in Labrador, would have seen assimilation as the last thing they wanted for the people they had come to influence. Their policy of teaching in Inuttitut and their discouragement of fraternization with outsiders, including the Kablunângajuit for some considerable time, demonstrate that they wanted “our Eskimos” to continue to live in a state of innocence apart from the rest of the world and educated them to remain in their current place and lifestyle. Additionally, until the twentieth century these educators were not English speakers themselves and would have had no ability to force the English language on the Inuit. By the time the provincial government reluctantly took over “responsibility” for the Inuit it was the second half of

the twentieth century and the concept of “taking the Indian out” was a nineteenth-century federal idea whose force had passed; indeed, this was the era when UNESCO was advocating for the retention of Aboriginal languages and the post-war examination of human rights had begun. This is why the boarding school experiences of the Labrador Inuit, though causing deprivation and social loss, differ from those in the rest of Canada, because the Labrador schools retained the Aboriginal language in the areas where Inuttitut was the dominant language, rather than aiming for assimilation.

The issue of language shift has much to do with the interwoven question of identity. Because the Labrador Inuit population contains a substantial number of those once considered Settlers, who had a strong European background along with their Inuit ancestry, that earlier history has shaped both identity questions and language retention. While the Settlers in the north could and did speak Inuttitut, it was not their first language and was not seen as a marker of their personal identity. To the south, the community of Makkovik was largely a non-Inuttitut speaking community until the relocation of Hebron and in central Labrador the people who are beneficiaries, apart from those who moved from the north in the mid-twentieth century, also had a strong connection to their European past and had no living memory of Inuttitut as a daily language in the home. A significant portion of Nunatsiavut beneficiaries have their roots in central Labrador, which had a different history in terms of European influence. Those Europeans who intermarried with Inuit were not representative of colonizing agencies but instead arrived as individuals who married Inuit women, resulting in a society that was less clearly divided racially and that led, in the view of Kristina Fagan, to less racism in that era than

was experienced elsewhere in Canada (Fagan 2010:57). The traditional lifestyle lived by the Europeans and their Settler descendants was the same as that conducted by the Inuit, both in central Labrador and the bays outside the northern mission stations.

Therefore, the Inuit identity and population as it exists at present includes a sizeable number of people who did not grow up with any first-hand exposure to Inuttitut. The portion of the population who would be in a position to pass it on is quite small and the burden of continuing that tradition is a heavy one. Essentially, the Labrador Inuit population is far from homogenous, as can be said of any cultural group.

The other aspects of identity such as knowledge of their genealogy, affiliation with long-established communities and familiarity and attachment to the land and traditional use of it are very strong and constitute the elements of the Labrador Inuit identity as it stands today. This has been reinforced by the grassroots organization of the LIA which shared membership with Settlers, and through a land claims process that took thirty years of tireless effort to define and assert what the Labrador Inuit needed and wanted in order to continue their life on their own territory.

### **How do the narratives told around the loss of language function for Labrador Inuit?**

Stories told about the change in Inuttitut use are “stories” in the sense that the word is used in Labrador, to mean accounts of days gone by. They were told to me when I specifically requested the information, but did not generally appear in the contexts in which I heard other reminiscences, such as at elders’ conferences or in the storytelling tents at the Labrador Winter Games, for example. This is probably because they are mostly a story of loss and not accounts proving ingenuity, resilience and triumph over

hardship, which are the usual elements of the recounting of memory presented as a story. The language loss narratives are metanarration around language, and have themselves come to largely represent Labrador Inuit language identity, since the former fluency in the language has diminished to such an extent that it is not part of the daily life of the people of Nunatsiavut.

A change in language use can be seen as an indicator of power shift, but this is complex in Nunatsiavut. The shift of power that became evident with the formation of the LIA in the 1970s and the beginning of the lands claims process was not accompanied by a resurgence of the language. In fact, the period of pride in Labrador as a whole that began at this time was expressed in English. This would have been the most effective time to begin such a process, with a large number of fluent speakers still active and a sense of autonomy beginning to grow. However, the very existence of a critical mass of speakers was probably a deterrent to the sense of impending extinction needed to galvanize the community, and the number of issues to deal with in the land claims process continued to take precedence over language reclamation.

Language loss for some in Labrador, particularly the speakers, symbolizes loss of cultural identity and the road to assimilation, but the rise and fall of language is not an indicator by itself of Inuit autonomy. As a form of loss, it is also more complex in terms of influence than the historical actions that constitute loss such as the Hebron relocation. The language narratives and companion accounts of other symbols function to demonstrate identity, to protest current and past conditions, and to sustain claims to be part of the larger Inuit community in Canada, both in stories of loss and of former

fluency. These accounts are also coloured by personal experiences and by the transmission of other people's experiences. Sometimes they are contradictory, and any ethnographer knows the challenge of hearing two completely inconsistent versions of the same event. In that case, the researcher seeks the reason for telling the account, and the time and circumstances under which it was told.

This has led me to divide the many accounts I heard into narratives and counter-narratives, believing that the explanation for language loss may reside somewhere in the background stories while the better-known accounts are those that become the stories uniting Labrador Inuit to their fellow Inuit. Chapter Six examined these sometimes contradictory accounts to see how they have developed into legends through the expansion of personal experience narratives into the allegorical stories that hold and exhibit the world view of the Labrador Inuit.

What I am calling "counter-narratives" are the alternative explanations coexisting with the dominant stories that have become the more accepted form of the explanation for language loss. These counter-narratives were generally offered by the older generation of informants from their personal recollections and consisted of ideas that have been less frequently expressed in recent years. Examples of these are the accounts that the community elders requested education in English, that children were not encouraged to ask questions of their elders, and that Inuttitut was used as a "secret language" to hide discussions from children and was also spoken fluently in some cases by Settler people. These accounts point to a greater degree of autonomy experienced in the past by the



Labrador Inuit than is generally recognized now, though it is important not to lose sight of the injustices that were genuinely experienced.

The dominant narratives of language loss are those more frequently recounted by the post-1950 generation, and these include stories of racism, corporal punishment, and government interference in education. Other accounts deal with the difficulties of maintaining the language in the face of the dominance of English in the communities of Labrador where people had relocated, with the powerful influence of the media, and with the resistance of children to speak Inuttitut even when they could understand it. All of these accounts were the product of the transmission of information from one member of the group to another, but selection has evidently taken place as one group of narratives has risen to dominate the collective understanding of language loss.

As a classification in folkloric terms many of these accounts are certainly personal experience narratives, but they also display the characteristics of legends, particularly the accounts that are not limited to the Labrador context. The stories of punishment and shame are the same recounted about other minority language experiences, including those I collected in the 1980s about Acadian French and Cape Breton Gaelic. That is to say, they are expressed as stories that are believed to be true and are located in a recognizable time and place, and serve to illustrate a truth held by the group relating them. They are also stories that point to a continuing state of events, as the action is not necessarily complete in the narrative itself, pointing to a condition that was of long standing and might be expected to continue. It is also characteristic of legends that they emerge in response to new problems in society, and it is this quality that makes the legend an

appropriate category of narrative in which to place the language loss accounts. As the change in language began to be identified as a problem rather than a practical response, collectively-held explanations needed to emerge to make sense of the shift in this vital aspect of Inuit identity.

Examining these accounts as a series of narratives and counter-narratives allows us to see that oral history can offer us explanations in addition to the best-known stories of loss in the Labrador Inuit communities. The forced relocation of Hebron and Nutak and the Spanish Influenza epidemic significantly precipitated language loss in terms of the number of speakers who died or were moved to positions of powerlessness in the new communities where they found themselves. These “master narrative” stories are often told in a way that encapsulates the helplessness and victimization of the Inuit, leaving no room for the nuances of their own resistance and agency throughout their history.

The capacity to resist the popular narrative of oppression cannot easily be displayed in a setting designed to allow people to express and address their feelings of injury, and therefore the collection of these narratives and counter-narratives through personal one-on-one interviews, particularly with older informants who lived through the years of language shift, was important in examining the multiple reasons for this cultural change.

It is the counter-narratives that show the power and agency Inuit used to survive and thrive in the world that had been changed by the intervention of outsiders, but at the present time these are less often recounted in a group situation or in response to media interest in current social issues experienced by Aboriginal groups (and other minority

groups) across the country. These may be personal experience narratives, but they still reflect aspects of a group's worldview. It is important to note that both narratives and counter-narratives have been presented by members of the same group and that they must all be considered as part of this worldview. Much as we may desire a uniformity of narrative to provide us with the truth about language shift, the reasons for telling these multiple accounts has to remain the point of the inquiry.

My findings are based on the words of the Labrador Inuit whom I interviewed, and those words showed the generational shift in the community's perspective on language loss. The older generation of speakers, born before 1940, felt that the language diminished due to a need to provide themselves with the survival skills to cope in the modern world. The middle generation, young adults in the 1980s, living in a time when Inuttitut was fading but when the rise of consciousness of Inuit pride and identity was becoming apparent, cast about for explanations for the loss of the language and found an answer in the larger Canadian narratives of residential schools and forced abandonment of the language. The co-existence of narratives and counter-narratives is a product of an incompletely understood history, which in turn is a result of a lack of communication due to a break in language transmission and a change in social values. In addition, membership in the wider world of Inuit and First Nations people is based to some extent on a mutual understanding of the very real hardships caused by racism, as described by Claire Owen regarding one of her student informants in Ottawa, "For her, then, Aboriginal identity (or at the very least, solidarity) is tied to a shared history of colonialism and social oppression" (Owen 2011:126).

The third and rising generation, born after 1985 in an era of self-government and increasing autonomy and respect, sees less need for the language as a marker of identity and instead uses symbols that remain accessible such as traditional skills or modified forms of cultural expression. Even more tellingly, their generation has the confidence to question whether these conventional images are true or even necessary for their continued identification as Inuit.

On a level both strongly felt and less often expressed, the narratives reveal the feelings people have about what is undoubtedly a serious loss. There are still many speakers alive and using their language and these are the members of the population who feel great sorrow and alarm at the loss. The response to that loss and to the question of responsibility for the language is the revitalization efforts that have taken place. But recovering full fluency comes down to a personal project of sustained commitment for every individual who is not a young child. Both historical factors and a lack of complete knowledge of these factors play into the struggle that goes on in all Inuit who feel that the language is something for which they are responsible.

Midway through my research for this work I felt that the most significant conclusion I had come to was that the Inuit, far from being the victims portrayed in some recent scholarship and in the popular media, were in fact people who displayed considerable agency in their use of literacy for their own purposes and in the way they had taken the introduced educational system of the Moravians and turned it to their own account. Additionally, they made considered decisions about the use of the English language and its possible benefits to them. It became apparent of course that I was far

from the only person making this conclusion. For example, Peter Evans (Evans 2012) examined this sense of agency to great effect in his treatment of the Inuit as middlemen and brokers and showed that the elders' councils, while initially organized by the mission, were a powerful force in communities until the reorganization of society in the post-war/commencement of Confederation period.

Tom Gordon at the 2014 Inuit Studies Conference spoke of a “reverse acculturation” in Labrador Inuit society when looking at the use they made of European music traditions, not only becoming expert in choral and band music but rewriting the traditional tunes so that they took on a flavour of their own as they were transcribed over the centuries. Heather Igloliorte (Igloliorte 2014) has examined Nunatsiavut artistic traditions and sees the ornamentation of clothing as a form of artistic practice that represented individuality and identity. Mark Turner has looked at the long tradition of Labrador Inuit self-reflecting through film production (Turner 2014).

Added to these achievements, of course, are the long land claims agreement process and the establishment of self-government in Nunatsiavut, and the economic successes such as business partnerships and benefits negotiated for natural resource developments. The high rates of post-secondary education and the advances in the social science and health research agendas of the Nunatsiavut population are all indicators of a society that is almost defined by agency, and further distinguished by adaptation.

And yet, when we examine the language question, it is seen as a vital symbol of identity and a treasure to be safeguarded and nourished, while at the same time the number of actual speakers dwindles and the revitalization efforts seem to make only

small differences. We live in an era and a country where the use of multiple languages is admired and where Aboriginal people at long last and through their own efforts are beginning to get the recognition and respect they deserve. So why has language restoration not been one of the successes that Labrador Inuit agency can create?

I believe that the narratives I have collected give the answer to this question. Much as the Labradorimiut of today are making decisions that will give a better quality of life to them and their children, the community elders, a force to be reckoned with pre-Confederation, made the decision to request and even demand an education in English for their children whom they saw as belonging to a new generation needing facility in English as a skill for survival. They had no way of knowing that the usual pattern of a minority language is to gradually give way to the dominant one, or that societies who can carry on life in multiple languages are those in which the languages involved are dominant in adjacent countries and are maintained within the power structures. In no narrative did I hear that the elders wanted to replace their own language with that of the dominant society.

Added to this is the cultural makeup of Labrador, which means that the long settlement history added European ancestry to most family trees at an earlier date than in other Arctic communities. Finally, the sense of agency that led to many of the Inuit's adaptation and success in western terms derived from their educational achievements, which after 1949 were attained in the English language.

Language shift is a result of many complex historical factors and decisions. In attaining the goal of self-determination, people have asserted the right to do as they will

with what is theirs, and in the usual process of tradition that constantly undergoes change, people may have asserted their right to no longer use their Aboriginal language. It is their language and that is their right. It is also their right to use the same determination that achieved land claims, education, and economic development to take steps to retrieve that language if they so desire. Language, after all, is a product of culture and not the other way around.

Grenoble and Whaley point out that most language revitalization efforts to date have not been successful (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: ix). This does not point to the inadequacy or irresponsibility of the people who used to speak minority languages, nor necessarily to the machinations of the incoming dominant group. The state promotion of English caused people to look at the dominant language as a passport to socio-economic success and effective political participation, and eroded equally the language that represented the past, the country, and the people without power. So while the privileged group did increasingly better in the society they created, the minority constantly received the message that what they were and did was wrong and inadequate. The state may have had no intention of diminishing the language, and several informants pointed out that they were always permitted to speak it. Nonetheless, a powerful message is received when those speaking English are also those who excel in school and are seen to be in possession of the most material goods and the highest social status, as was evident in post-Confederation northern Labrador schools. As Grant points out, "Submitting to linguistic domination can be a rational and conscious move for a dominated group" (Grant 2003:156).

Parents have always made sacrifices for children, and the narrative of deciding to give up a language to make life easier in some ways for the family is a commonplace though sad story. The goal may be economic and social advancement, but even if—and this is a big if—this is achieved, the cost is high in isolation and alienation from the culture, particularly in the transitional phase. Even in a bilingual state, one language may be seen as the preferable and higher-status one, and the resulting diglossia can be seen more as a product of the expression of power by the dominant group than the acquiescence of the subordinate one. The Moravians were far from blameless in manipulation of the Inuit, although their reasons were based in what they saw as the greater good. So, perhaps, were the motivations of the provincial government, but once language was a commodity that could be dispensed with in order to bring northern Labrador into the wider aspirations of the province, it became a casualty.

Language shift scholarship shows us that the state and pattern of the decline of Labrador Inuktitut is similar to many other examples that can be drawn from both Aboriginal and other minority populations. Although other historical factors are at work in other places, it seems to be a sad truth that languages continue to decline. However, research in other places might show promising examples of ways to sustain language. I think that a useful study of language loss narratives could be done in a community that is close in proximity to Nunatsiavut, either in terms of language or physical location. The Quebec territory of Nunavik is physically close to Labrador and the populations of the two territories have frequently met and interacted, but the maintenance of Inuktitut in that territory is at the other end of the spectrum from Nunatsiavut. A comparative study of



history and development as well as language attitudes might reveal much about the forces that pushed these language communities to the two extremes. Likewise, a comparative study along the lines of Thorburn (Thorburn 2006; Thorburn 2014) of the language vitality of Innu-aimun compared to Inuttitut, languages co-existing in Labrador, would show us much about the differing historical forces that were at work in the same region, bringing forth much different rates of language retention. (Jennifer Thorburn has studied both the Innu and Inuit language traditions.) The future of language retention among the people of Nunavik and the Innu is uncertain. Although young children in Sheshatshiu can for the most part still communicate in their native language, local Memorial University archaeologist Scott Neilsen has observed parents urging them to use English, feeling it will be of more benefit to them, suggesting a cultural/linguistic shift very similar to that reported in this thesis with regard to Labrador Inuttitut a half-century ago (Personal communication 2015).

To sum up, language is affected by efforts to change power relations in society. This was evident when the Moravians arrived and took over the management of life for the Inuit for the next two hundred years. As the Inuit have reclaimed authority over their world, this power shift has not as yet been reflected in reclamation of the language. This is due in part to the transformation over time in the Labrador Inuit population, when the critical mass of people necessary to maintain the Inuit culture was bolstered by the addition of the Settlers, which in turn led to a mixed culture. This is seen not as a misrepresentation or dilution of Inuit culture but a variant on it. And this variant was sustained through the actions and identity of a heterogeneous group of people who

currently self-identify as Inuit, and who are recognized both personally and legally as such. Thus language could be reclaimed to be a cultural possession of the entire group, as all share Inuit ancestry, but in the present era there are many other elements that validate Inuit identity, not least of which is the above-mentioned legal standing in Canadian law.

Non-Aboriginal Canadians are in an evolving relationship with the First Peoples of our country, and have an interest in the north that is a response to both current political conditions and a deep sense of identification with the concept of Canada as a northern nation. As Nancy Wachowich posits, “Popular and political imaginings of the north replace images of strife or welfare colonialism with affirmative tales of a strong and sovereign Canadian Arctic” (Wachowich 2006:132). In Canada, academics thankfully are no longer in the position of acting as “mediaries of the dispossessed” (Abrahams 2003:207), but ongoing curiosity and regard for our collective linguistic heritage should keep us inquiring into the paths that Labrador Inuttitut may take.

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