CHAPTER TWELVE

RELEARNING ATHABASCAN LANGUAGES IN ALASKA: CREATING SUSTAINABLE LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES THROUGH CREOLIZATION

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By some estimates all eleven Athabascan languages now spoken in Alaska are moribund, that is, they are no longer being actively acquired by children (Krauss 1998).[1] Without radical efforts to reverse this trend, maintenance of Alaska Athabascan languages seems extremely unlikely. However, the conventional view of language maintenance which underlies this conclusion assumes a static view of language. While Alaska Athabascan languages may be unlikely to be maintained in the same form and with the same range of uses, it may nonetheless be possible for these languages to be relearned in new forms for new purposes.

The process of relearning language is perhaps better viewed as one of creating a new form of language rather than as one of maintaining an existing form. While all eleven Alaska Athabascan languages are spoken today, new pathways of transmission are emerging. Children are no longer acquiring indigenous languages from their parents as first languages. Rather, young and middle-aged adults must seek out language learning opportunities in the form of classes, mentor-apprentice training, and self-study. These second language learners are often only marginal participants in the current community of first-language speakers and hence often develop new ways of speaking which differ from those employed by elder fluent speakers. In most Alaska Athabascan communities where language relearning is in progress, the new form of language is radically different than the old, both in structure and domain of use. This change reflects more than just linguistic evolution; rather, relearning language involves a

deliberate, if not always conscious, effort to repurpose language for certain ends.

This paper discusses ways in which current efforts to relearn Alaska Athabascan languages can be encouraged through explicit efforts to evolve new language varieties. I describe several essentially independent but related efforts to relearn Athabascan languages in Alaska. These efforts include organized community classes, mentor-apprentice programs, online discussion groups, telephone meetings, field camps, and university classes. In all cases a crucial component of these efforts is the creation of what Golla (2001) has called secondary language communities. The boundaries between these communities are rather loosely-defined and overlapping, but in each case the language in question is being (re)learned for use within this specialized community. In one view the language of these communities is radically reduced and thus might be taken as evidence of language attrition. However, the case studies examined here provide evidence that the language of these new communities is quite vibrant and sustainable. If we persist in defining language maintenance as the continuation of existing forms of language in diglossic situations, then Alaska Athabascan languages may be prematurely condemned to oblivion. However, if we include the relearning of new forms of language within the scope of language maintenance, then Alaska Athabascan languages may indeed have a bright future for some time to come.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The second part presents a summary of current revitalization efforts. The third part examines some of the barriers to revitalization and language learning. The fourth part begins by noting the resemblance between general creolization processes and current processes of language change among Athabascan language learners. Based on these observations, a possible scenario for further deliberate creolization is suggested. The paper concludes with a discussion of how creolization may aide the creation of sustainable language communities.

Athabascan Language Revitalization in Alaska

Alaska is home to two of North America's major language families: the Eskimo-Aleut family, which occupies the coastal area from eastern Siberia to Greenland; and Athabascan, which occupies the interior of Alaska and western Canada, as well as part of northern California and the southwestern United States. Of the twenty indigenous languages spoken in Alaska, only two—Central Yup'ik and Siberian Yup'ik—are being actively transmitted to children. All of the eleven Athabascan languages of

Alaska are moribund. For most Alaska Athabascan languages the youngest speakers are in their fifties; for many of these languages the youngest speakers are more than eighty years old. English has replaced Athabascan as the dominant language in all Alaska Athabascan communities. English is the language of education, the language used in the home, and the language of everyday communication.

The shift from Athabascan to English began relatively recently.[2] During the period of Russian colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most Athabascan communities had little contact with colonists. Some coastal Dena'ina Athabascan communities used Russian, especially in religious contexts, but there was no widespread shift away from Athabascan. No official colonial policy on indigenous languages developed until a few decades after the purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867. Just as American colonists began to penetrate the interior Athabascan region, an American education policy developed which promoted the use of English and actively discouraged the use of indigenous languages (Alton 1998). This policy was abetted by the forced removal of indigenous children to residential schools, effectively severing indigenous language transmission. Shift to English then accelerated dramatically with the introduction of mass communication to rural Alaskan villages in the 1960s and 1970s. Krauss (1995) has noted a strong correlation between the degree of language shift and the introduction of television to rural communities. By the 1980s only a handful of children were learning and using Athabascan languages, and the break in transmission was effectively complete.

Efforts to revitalize Alaska Athabascan languages began with the passage of the *Bilingual Education Act* by the State of Alaska in 1972. This legislation created bilingual education programs within Alaska's rural schools and founded the Alaska Native Language Center to support documentation and teacher training efforts. Early efforts at revitalization focused on bilingual education programs within public school classrooms. These programs generally lasted half an hour or less per day, often totaling less than one hour per week. The content generally focused on repetition of set phrases and word lists. There is no evidence that any children acquired fluency through these programs. Indeed, it was predicted some twenty years ago that "institutionalized bilingual programs will not be sufficient to retain Dena'ina [Athabascan] as a viable means of communication in the community setting" (Ellanna and Balluta 1992:3-5).

One of the problems with institutionalized programs is that they do little to create a community of speakers. Children may learn a few rote phrases, but they have no venue in which to use them. Many of the

revitalization efforts in the post bilingual education era in Alaska have thus focused on creating communities of learners which could foster the growth of new language communities. One example of these efforts is the development of audio-conference language classes for the Deg Xinag language (Taff 1997). Deg Xinag presents an extreme example of geographic barriers facing Athabascan language revitalization in Alaska. It was originally spoken along the lower Yukon and Innoko rivers by a small population. Today, both speakers and learners are scattered across rural and urban communities in Alaska and beyond, with the result that learners find it difficult to access speakers or to maintain contact with other learners. Through the use of audio-conference technology, the Deg Xinag class has facilitated a virtual community of learners and speakers.

More recent efforts to revitalize Alaska Athabascan languages have attempted to incorporate sound principles of second language pedagogy, focusing on training Native language teachers and teachers' aides. These efforts have encountered difficulties because most persons of an age to teach in the classroom are not fully fluent in the language. Thus, prospective teachers must be trained not only in language pedagogy but also in the language itself. To address this problem training programs have incorporated elements of the mentor-apprentice approach, pairing fluent elders with younger classroom facilitators (*cf.* Hinton et al. 2002). The team of elder speaker and younger facilitator brings complementary skills to the classroom. Ideally, the elder provides language expertise, while the facilitator provides sound pedagogy, though in practice, not all such teams are able to harmonize effectively.

These efforts have been strengthened by periodic workshops and summer language institutes held initially on the campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and were embedded within the structure of university courses and degree programs. Annual meetings at the university eventually devolved to the regions, resulting in founding of programs dedicated to single languages rather than to a group of Athabascan languages. An example is the Dena'ina Language Institute, a three-week language course held annually at Kenai Peninsula College. Since 2003 the annual institute has served as an anchor for community language revitalization efforts (Gaul and Holton 2004). These annual gatherings and supporting workshops bring together speakers and learners from diverse regions providing a focus for continued language learning throughout the remainder of the year.

As with the Deg Xinag language, learners and speakers of Dena'ina are scattered across a wide geographic region and have few opportunities to gather in person outside of organized workshops. To meet this need for

contact learners have developed an email listserv which serves as a virtual community in which learners can exchange words, stories, poems, and recordings. Since the subscribers are almost exclusively second language learners rather than speakers, the listserv provides a safe community in which language can be shared freely without risk of criticism by elder speakers. The listserv has become the primary domain in which learners interact with one another as a nascent speech community.

Barriers to Learning Athabascan Languages

In spite of the current efforts to revitalize Athabascan languages in Alaska, there remain significant barriers to learning and using them. Many, if not most of the barriers to learning them are not at all specific to Athabascan itself but are the same affective and cognitive barriers faced by any second language learner. The situation is further complicated by the lack of access to the target language since few active communities of Athabascan speakers remain. However, this in itself cannot completely impede Athabascan language learning, since second language learning can and clearly does occur in contexts well removed from the target language. Economic and political factors also impede language learning. As in most endangered language situations, there is no economic incentive to learn an Alaska Athabascan language. There are no jobs available for those with expertise in these languages, and there are no venues which require fluency in them. Politics also presents a barrier. While Athabascan language is mentioned frequently in the rhetoric of cultural revival, indigenous organizations and individuals often work behind the scenes to block language programs which they view as politically threatening (*cf.* Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998).

Still, there exist barriers to Athabascan language learning which, even if not unique to Alaska, do present significant challenges to revitalization efforts there. Some of these barriers are arguably inherent in the language itself. Others derive from the high value placed on variation and creativity by Athabascan speakers. And still more barriers derive from conservative or "puristic" attitudes toward language change and new language varieties. These barriers are discussed in more detail below.

Language Structure

One obvious barrier to language learning is the complex grammatical structure of the Athabascan language—one which is radically different from that found in the dominant English language. Some of these

differences are fairly typical and are not unlike those faced by second language learners for any language. These include such things as differences in word order, differences in the sound system, and differences in morphological typology. Interestingly, while such differences appear to be most salient to Athabascan language learners, they actually pose no real barrier to language learning. For example, new language learners in university-level Athabascan classes often complain about the difficulty of learning to produce and recognize unfamiliar sounds such as ejective stops and lateral fricatives. However, these difficulties are usually overcome within the first week or two of class. Students also quickly become accustomed to the synthetic nature of Athabascan verbs, whereby a single word may serve as a translation equivalent for an entire English sentence. Much more difficult for learners are the complicated morpho-phonology and the subtle semantic differences between English and Athabascan.

A classic example of the latter can be found in the so-called classificatory verbs, in which a different verb root is used to describe handling of different types of objects: compact, flat, contained, etc. Thus, to convey the English form "Give it to me!" in Athabascan one must know what type of object is being given. A selection of Tanacross classificatory verb forms is given below.

(1) Tanacross classificatory verbs

k'á' ntl'ághíhtąą "I gave you the gun"
gun
ts'ěd' ntl'ághekchúuth   "I gave you the blanket"
blanket
tuu ntl'ághihkąą "I gave you (a glass of) water"
water
tthee ntl'áníhłeeyh   "I gave you the rock"
rock
łiigaay ntl'ághéktęę "I gave you the puppy"
puppy

Another difficult part of Athabascan language structure is found in the system of verb stem variation. Different verb stem forms are used to indicate situation and viewpoint aspect according to a complex two-dimensional system. For a given situation aspect, each verb stem can occur in one of four different viewpoint aspect forms (called "mode" in the Athabascan literature). While there is a certain historical regularity to the system, the synchronic phonological rules governing verb stem variation

can be extremely complex, requiring learners to memorize a large set of suppletive forms. In some cases, verb stem variation is signaled by a change in vowel quality or a modification of the stem-final consonant. Thus, the imperfective, perfective, future and optative forms of the Dena'ina stem for "run, walk quickly" are *-gguk*, *-gguk*, *-ggex*, and *-ggix*, respectively. Variation across situation aspect yields still more forms. The following are examples of the Koyukon verb "to cut" paired with various situation aspects.

(2) Koyukon aspectual stem variation
>   yeghit'uts'   "he cut it repeatedly" (repetitive aspect)
>   yizt'es   "he gave it a single cut" (semelfactive aspect)
>   yeghit'ets'   "he gave it a series of cuts" (consecutive aspect)
>   yet'us   "he is cutting it" (momentaneous aspect)

The stem variants shown above at least share a common stem-initial consonant. However, this is not always the case. For example, the Tanacross imperfective stem form for "handle multiple objects" is *-łeeyh,* while the perfective form is *-dlah*.

Variation and Creativity

Variation and creativity are an essential part of Athabascan language competence. Yet this variation itself can be a barrier to language learning by blocking efforts at standardization. While the number of Athabascan root morphemes is relatively small, complex word formation rules result in a number of slightly different ways of forming what is essentially the "same" word. For example, the following Dena'ina words based on the stem *-ch'ey* all have something to do with windy.

(3) qanich'ey   "it is windy"
>   qadich'ey   "it is drafty"
>   nudnanich'ey   "wind is blowing across"

These examples are but a few of the literally dozens of forms referring to wind which can be derived from the root *-ch'ey*. Speakers manipulate these forms with mastery, choosing different prefix strings to convey subtle differences in meaning.

Complicating this issue further, in spite of the small number of Athabascan verb roots, there are often several root forms corresponding to a single English verb. A rather transparent example of this—the

classificatory verb roots—was mentioned above. The classificatory verbs describe different ways of handling objects (for example, liquid in an open container is handled in a different way than a flat, flexible object), and hence these verb forms can be readily understood in terms of the object being handled. But the classificatory roots are only one example of mismatch between Athabascan and English verb meaning. Many verb roots occur in pairs in which one member of the pair refers to an action carried out in a careful, controlled manner, while the other member of the pair refers to an action done carelessly. Distinguishing between these meanings can be quite difficult. For example, the Dena'ina roots -*yu* and -*gguk* can both refer to walking. In isolated contexts speakers conventionally distinguish the former as "walk" and the latter as "run," but in connected speech the distinction is not so simple. Thus, *duninyu* and *du'ilgguk* can both be used to mean "he came in."

Speakers exploit these semantic subtleties in creative ways. While creating completely novel neologisms is implicitly discouraged, speakers make full use of existing word formation rules to create unique utterances wherever possible. In a conversation, rather than repeat back the same utterance, an Athabascan speaker is likely to describe a situation in a slightly different way, thus asserting a unique identity to their own speech. So if a language learner asserts *nutashchitl'* "it is starting to snow," a speaker might reply *nututchił* "it might snow." The difference between the inceptive ("starting to") and the optative (modal) form is encoded both in the prefix string and in the verb stem form. In the corresponding English the word "snow" can be easily recognized in both forms. In contrast, a Dena'ina language learner may not even recognize these two forms as being related. She cannot be sure whether the speaker is correcting her pronunciation or making a new assertion. Of course, the speaker could assist the learner in this hypothetical situation by repeating the same form *nutashchitl'*, but such a choice runs counter to an Athabascan speaker's natural emphasis on linguistic creativity.

Linguistic creativity of this sort is highly valued. In extreme cases particular expressions may be associated with particular individuals. Use of those expressions may even evoke certain memories or connotations, thus providing additional layers of meaning to the utterance. I recently heard a speaker remark upon hearing a certain word: "That was my grandmother's word." Such additional layers of cultural and social meaning are an important part of Athabascan linguistic competence, and yet these are precisely the parts of Athabascan language which are most difficult for today's learners to acquire.

Purism

Perhaps the greatest barrier to language Athabascan learning is what Dorian (1994) has called "purism." As she notes, conservative attitudes towards language change are by no means restricted to endangered languages. No language is without its share of elders bemoaning the way young people are learning to speak. These youngsters then grow old only to complain about the speaking styles of the next generation of youth. And so it goes, as Old English evolves to Middle English to Modern English and so on. A basic fact of human language is change over time.

For large language communities puristic attitudes toward language change have little effect. Evidence of this abounds in English. Standardized orthography may slow the change from English "going to" to "gonna" or from "am not" to "ain't," but orthography cannot stall the ongoing semantic coalescence of "nauseated" and "nauseous" (no matter how many times my sister-in-law reminds me to distinguish these meanings). Furthermore, in large communities purism can do little to block the adoption of new words through coinage and borrowing. Borrowings such as *le email* have crept into French in spite of official efforts to ban such terms.

Within small, endangered language communities the effects of purism can be much more severe. Endangered language communities are by definition bilingual. Endangerment results from the threat of a shift to (often) a non-indigenous second language. This second language provides a natural avenue by which potential language learners can circumvent the strictures of indigenous language purism. Where shift to a dominant second language has already advanced to the point where those of child-bearing age no longer speak the indigenous language, purism can be an effective barrier to revitalization and maintenance.

There are several reasons for this. First, purism effectively bars the language from the modern world by blocking the adoption of new word forms and borrowings from the dominant language.[3] In Alaska most Athabascan speakers express extreme resistance to the use of English borrowings. Unfortunately, coinage is not always a viable alternative, and efforts to develop new terminology often fail. For example, at a recent Tanacross dictionary workshop, several elders discussed potential terms for "computer" but failed to agree on a suitable coinage. Among the competing alternatives were word forms based on the stem for "think" and "strike," each with various prefix combinations. As the discussion progressed the elders came to the conclusion that there was no word for "computer" because computers were simply not a part of Tanacross

culture. Ironically, this conclusion was reached in spite of the fact that we were seated in a room in Tanacross village in which Tanacross people were using computers. Clearly computers are a part of Tanacross culture today. What the elders meant was that computers were not a part of traditional Tanacross culture prior to the onset of language shift. Of course, computers were not a part of *any* culture at that time. The elders' refusal to acknowledge the need for terminology to refer to computers thus serves as a restraint against the language moving into the modern world.

Athabascan language is often described by both speakers and heritage language learners as being closely connected to the land, and indeed, the language does provide a rich array of faculties for talking about the land. But purism has the effect of restricting the domain of Athabascan language use to traditional activities which are not part of the dominant culture. Purism thus deprives Athabascan language of an important venue for language use. Lacking terms for everyday items such as "computer" or "cell phone," language learners are forced to choose between three equally undesirable options: limiting conversations in Athabascan to pre-contact topics; using English borrowings and thus speaking "bad" Tanacross; or not speaking Tanacross. Unfortunately, most heritage language learners are leaning toward the third choice.

A second reason that purism can have a greater effect on endangered language communities has to do with the rapid pace of recent language change. The break in inter-generational transmission has deprived potential language learners of two important requirements for language learning. First, models of the target language are few and occur sporadically. Second, learners lack a coherent language community in which to develop language skills. In other words, potential language learners have few opportunities to hear Athabascan language and few opportunities to speak it. In many cases learners have developed a kind of fossilized interlanguage which differs radically from the language spoken by the older generation. Elders are extremely aware of this gap in language ability, noting that young people speak "easy language." Learners are thus faced with a dilemma. Not only is their speech not good enough to permit them access to the current speech community, but in addition the elders refuse to accept their evolving interlanguage as a valid learners' language.

Toward an Athabascan Creole

Intolerance of new language varieties can have a severe restraining effect on language revitalization. Although new language varieties are currently emerging within Athabascan language revitalization programs,

these new varieties are generally not accepted as valid. Elder speakers laugh mercilessly at their grandchildren's efforts to learn, and learners in turn become quickly discouraged. The elders are acutely aware that the language being learned today is not the same as that spoken in the past. As Dorian has noted, "a common challenge for language revitalization and language revival is to limit the restrictive role which puristic attitudes are likely to play in the communities in question, or to channel such attitudes into forms which are useful rather than harmful" (1994:481). As a first step in this direction we must recognize that language change is a natural part of any revitalization process.

Indeed, it is a fundamental fact of human language that languages change with time. Children grow up to speak a form of language which is slightly different from that of their parents, a fact bemoaned by grandparents since the beginning of time. These small changes, compounded over many generations, can result in fairly radical changes to language structure and pronunciation. For example, Old English language spoken approximately one thousand years ago is unintelligible to Modern English spoken today by descendents of Old English speakers. Traces of the old language can sometimes be glimpsed in the spelling system (words such as *though* or *knight* were once pronounced much like they are written) or in old ways of conjugating verbs (*sing*, *sang*, *sung*). But for the most part the language has moved on: it has evolved.

The rapid evolution associated with language shift in Alaska is much more radical than that exemplified by the history of English. Learners have less than constant contact with speakers and hence more room in which to evolve the language. Learners are also fluent in English, resulting in significant first language transfer effects. As a result, the language change currently occurring in Alaska Athabascan languages is in many ways more akin to creolization than to *in situ* diachronic evolution. As in the creolization process, Athabascan language learners are drawing vocabulary from the dominant language (English) and are in the process of building new grammatical structures.

Creolization in Language Learning and Teaching

Many of the processes which we recognize from studies of creolization in other languages are already occurring within the domain of Athabascan language revitalization. One of the most frequently-cited such processes in Alaska is the "simplification" or reduction of verbal morphology.

Most Athabascan language revitalization programs in Alaska today rely on a cadre of language teachers who are themselves also language

learners. That is, languages are being taught by individuals who themselves have incomplete knowledge of the language. The teachers' knowledge is supplemented by the presence of elders in the classroom. This situation inevitably leads to simplification of verbal morphology for instructional purposes. For example, some Athabascan languages require a noun class (gender) prefix which must agree with the absolutive argument. Thus, the choice between the following Tanacross forms depends on the noun class of the object being handled.

(4) ntl'á'íh'aayh "I am giving/handing it to you" (Ø-gender)
    ntl'áníh'aayh "I am giving/handing it to you" (n-gender)
    ntl'ádíh'aayh "I am giving/handing it to you" (d-gender)

Since the choice of noun class prefix is not always obvious and there is no a priori way to determine whether a verb requires a noun class prefix, these prefixes are generally omitted in Tanacross language classes.

    Simplification is itself a natural part of language change. In fact, it is arguably the primary force driving all language change. Wyman's work with Central Alaska Yup'ik documents extensive simplification in a non-Athabascan Alaska language. Wyman cites the following example comparing standard and modern Yup'ik forms (2004:184):

(5) Standard (older) Yup'ik
    meq-sar-tur-yug-ng-aunga
    water-go-water VERB 1SG:INDIC
    "Can I go drink water?"

(6) Modern (newer) Yup'ik
    meq-sar-yug-ng-aunga
    water-go-VERB-1SG:INDIC
    "Can I go water?"

The postbase (suffix) -tur is omitted in the modern language. In general, Wyman notes that young people use fewer morphemes when creating words than do older speakers. This observation applies equally well to today's Athabascan language learners as well.

    Outside the classroom creolization is occurring among an emerging group of Athabascan writers, particularly in Dena'ina. These writers make use of an unpublished technical dictionary manuscript (Kari n.d.) to translate from English to Dena'ina. However, since these writers lack full knowledge of the subject conjugation patterns, they often choose not to

inflect verbs for person. This has the effect of creating an uninflected verb form which would be interpreted by elder speakers as a third person form but is used by these younger writers for all persons.

Another area of verbal morphology which is being quickly lost is the system of aspectual variation, as described in (2) above. Athabascan verbs encode two different sorts of aspect: viewpoint (or inflectional) aspect and situation (or derivational) aspect (*cf.* Axelrod 1993). Of these, viewpoint aspect is far easier for learners to grasp conceptually. They may struggle to learn the forms, but learners are generally able to master the viewpoint aspect categories (imperfective, perfective, future, optative) by mapping them to known categories in English. Still, learners often level distinctions in viewpoint aspect, especially where the forms show no difference in the stem shape. For example, the imperfective and perfective stem forms for the verb "to work" in the durative situation aspect are both *-nu*. The distinction between imperfective and perfective is signaled by the prefix *ghi-* in the perfective. Thus, *gheshtnu* "I am working" versus *ghigheshtnu* "I was working." Learners typically use the form *gheshtnu* for both imperfective and perfective viewpoint aspects.

The situation aspect categories are yet more difficult, even though they may have periphrastic analogues in English. For example, consider the Dena'ina verb "cut, slice quickly." In the perfective viewpoint aspect, this verb may occur in at least three common situation aspects, each with a different stem form. The momentaneous perfective form is *-chut'*, semelfactive perfective *-chet*; and consecutive perfective *-chet'*.

(7) yiłchut'	"he cut it up"
    yiłchet		"he sliced it (once)"
    yeghiłchet'	"he sliced it repeatedly"

These variations in situation aspect are extremely difficult for a learner to master, ostensibly because they are tied to subtle variations in stem form. Most learners, and indeed most language classes, make no attempt to distinguish forms such as those in (7). For example, one learner recently used the phrase *Kahtnu q'angheshduk* with the intended meaning "I went to Kahtnu (Kenai)." This verb form uses the standard stem *-duk* "singular goes" together with the appropriate first person singular subject prefix *sh-* "I" and the perfective viewpoint aspect. However, the verb is in the perambulative situation aspect, as signaled by the presence of the prefix *q'a-* and the particular form of the stem. The perambulative would translate more appropriately as "I was walking around."

Learners also tend to reanalyze complex verb forms. For example, the word *k'idikich* "too much" was recently posted as a word-of-the-day on the Dena'ina listserv. This word shows evidence of reanalysis on several levels. The standard Dena'ina word would be *k'idiki*. On the listserv the word was presented along with the example sentence *k'idikich k'ulqet'* "we ate too much," which is itself a reanalysis of the standard Dena'ina *k'idiki ch'k'ulqet'* where the prefix *ch'-* marks the first person plural "we" subject. The listserv form reanalyzes *ch'-* as part of the adverb, while also dropping the glottalization (signaled by the apostrophe). Learners naturally analyze the listserv form *k'ulqet'* as the verb. However, without the *ch'-* prefix this verb in standard Dena'ina means "he or she ate." But the listserv form demonstrates more subtle reanalysis as well. In standard Dena'ina the concept of overeating, doing an action to too great an extent, would be expressed through the use of verb prefixes, rather than through the use of an adverb. Thus, in standard Dena'ina the form *nuch'k'nalqet'* "we overate" would be more likely than *k'idiki ch'k'ulqet'* "we ate too much." This example thus demonstrates a general tendency among language learners toward reduced verb morphology and greater use of periphrastic expressions.

One of the major differences between the language learning situations within the classroom and outside the classroom concerns dialects. Within the classroom dialect homogeneity is emphasized. This is most evident for Dena'ina, a language with significant dialect variation. Most of the speakers at the Dena'ina Language Institute speak the Inland dialect; hence, there is significant pressure during the Institute for classes to use Inland dialect forms. Outside the classroom dialect merger is the norm, as language learners draw from a variety of dialects. While this practice is derided by native speakers, language learners are often unaware of dialect variation unless it involves common words with pronunciations which are significant to non-native speakers. For example, the Dena'ina word for water is *minłni*, *vinłni*, or *binłni*, depending on dialect. Language learners readily recognize and distinguish these forms, because the initial labial obstruents are phonemically distinct in English. But language learners are less likely to be aware of more subtle differences, such as the dispreference for the form *nuqujeh* "they are running about" in the Inland dialect. It is not uncommon for written Dena'ina produced by language learners to contain a combination of forms from several dialect regions. Hinton (2001) notes that such merger is a natural result of language revitalization efforts, as speakers from different dialect regions work together toward the common goal of language revitalization.

Creolization and Language Engineering

In a natural process of language evolution, paradigm simplification and dialect merger such as that currently being experienced in Alaska Athabascan languages would result in true creolized language varieties. That is, these new forms would be reified as a new language variety which would serve as a model for future learners. However, the process of change in Alaska is far from natural. Language change is not occurring within an active speech community; rather, change is occurring in the speech and writing of individual language learners in isolated contexts. In particular, the nascent community of language learners is not yet large enough or dynamic enough to generate the communicative pressure necessary to overcome the puristic pressure by native speakers toward conservatism. And yet, the most significant progress toward language revitalization is seen among those language learners who are pursuing personal fluency in spite of puristic pressure. Where learners have confined themselves to conservative versions of the language, less progress has been made. In this sense, creolization is clearly aiding the language revitalization process itself.

It is thus natural to ask how much this sort of creolization can be facilitated by language activists for the purposes of promoting language learning. That is, to what extent can we use our knowledge of the natural processes of creolization in order to influence the type of creolization which is occurring among language learners? There are several ways in which Athabascan language could be actively creolized by drawing on creolization processes known to exist in other languages and on those which already exist among some Athabascan learners in Alaska. In the remainder of this section I outline some features of an engineered creole, drawing on Dena'ina as an example. The proposal for this Dena'ina creole is constrained by several sometimes competing principles. The first principle is that verbal morphology should be simplified to the greatest extent possible. Second, real Dena'ina words should be used wherever possible. The third principle is that backwards compatibility with the standard language should be maintained. This principle is to some extent a corollary of the second principle.

I have identified four strategies for creolization which address these principles. The most radical of these strategies is a proposal for eliminating verbal inflection. The second two strategies involve limiting nominal inflection and reducing complex nouns. The final strategy addresses dialect variation and standardization.

Eliminate Verbal Inflection

Verbal inflection serves two primary purposes in Athabascan: marking person and number of subjects and objects, and marking aspect. Verbal inflection is also extremely complicated, relying on complex phonological rules and a high degree of verb stem suppletion. For both person/number marking and aspect marking, the system of verbal inflection co-exists with periphrastic marking of these categories. In the case of person/number, while pronominal arguments must be obligatorily marked on the verb, independent pronouns may also occur as adjuncts, usually with an emphatic reading. Thus compare *nghesh'an* "I saw you," where the second person singular object is marked by the prefix *n-*, with the more emphatic *nen nghesh'an* "I saw YOU," where the second person is marked both by the prefix *n-* and the adjunct independent pronoun *nen*. Similarly, while aspect is obligatorily marked on the verb via inflectional morphology, it can be additionally marked via adverbials. Thus, *(q'u) qgheshnak* "I (already) spoke." Some of these adverbial elements are traditionally written as part of the verb word, while others are written as separate words. In either case, the existence of periphrastic strategies for person/number and aspect marking provides a natural route for creolization in Dena'ina.

Marking for subject and object can be readily accomplished via the use of free pronominal forms. Marking of aspect can be accomplished through the use of standardized adverbial particles to indicate perfective, future and optative modes. To see how this would work it is illustrative to compare creole and non-creole forms together. The first example is a single word in standard Dena'ina consisting of six morphemes.

(8) standard Dena'ina
    nuntghesh'ił
    nu-n-t-gh-esh-'an
    again-2SG-FUT-FUT-1SG-see (FUT)
    "I will see you again"

In this verb *-'ił* is a suppletive stem corresponding to future. The creole version of this could be conveyed with five monomorphemic words, as follows.

(9) creole Dena'ina

  shi   nen   nu   ghi'an kih
  1SG   2SG   again see   FUT
  "I will see you again"

In the creole version independent pronouns are used to refer to the subject and object participants. As noted above, these independent pronouns already exist in the standard language but are of limited distribution, usually having an emphatic reading. The creole pronouns are arranged in a subject-object-verb order, following standard Dena'ina word order. The verb form *ghi'an* is an actual verb form in standard Dena'ina, namely, the zero-subject (third-person singular) perfective form. In the creole it is treated as an uninflected bare stem meaning simply "to see." The future tense which is conveyed in the standard language by the suppletive stem allomorph *-'ił* is in the creole conveyed by the postverbal adverbial particle *kih*, which in standard Dena'ina has the meaning "later on, in the future." The iterative situation aspect conveyed by the prefix *nu-* is in the creole marked by the preverbal particle *nu*. In standard Dena'ina *nu* is not a free morpheme, but it has such high token frequency in standard Dena'ina that it makes a natural choice for a new adverbial particle in the creole.

Note that to a large extent the form suggested above follows the guiding principles for creating a Dena'ina creole. First, the verb is completely stripped of inflectional morphology. The form *ghi'an* in (9) is treated as an uninflected form meaning "see." Second, all but one of the five words in (9) is an actual word form in standard Dena'ina. The verb *ghi'an* is the third-person imperfective form "she/he sees OBJECT." The forms *shi* and *nen* are independent pronouns in standard Dena'ina. And the form *kih* is a particle in standard Dena'ina, as in the following example.

(10) kih du sh-egh nu-t-gh-i-d-yuł?

    FUTURE Q 1SG-to ITER-FUT-FUT-2SG-CL-walk/go:FUT
    "Will you return to me in the future?"

In this example the future tense is marked by the particle *kih*, by two verb prefixes, and by the future stem variant *-juł*. The distribution of *kih* is by no means restricted to phrase-initial position, so standardization as a postverbal particle in creole Dena'ina seems entirely reasonable. The only form in example (9) which is not a word in standard Dena'ina is the form *nu*. This occurs in standard Dena'ina as the iterative prefix *nu-*. The iterative prefix is one of the most productive derivational prefixes in the

language. It adds the meaning of returning, or doing something again. Since this prefix normally occurs toward the left edge of the verb in standard Dena'ina, it would of course be possible to write it as part of the verb word in creole Dena'ina: thus *nughi'an*. This approach would retain some derivational morphology in the creole verb but would have the advantage of not innovating a form (*nu*) which is not a word in standard Dena'ina. However, this approach has deliberately not been followed here, because the use of the iterative prefix may also trigger other morphological changes in the verb word, necessitating the addition of complicated derivational rules in order to consistently maintain creole forms which are words in the standard language.[4] In attempting to balance the competing desires to simplify verbal morphology and to use actual words from standard Dena'ina, the approach taken here has tended to place greater value on the former constraint, at the expense of the latter. The standard form in (10) would thus be rendered in creole Dena'ina as follows.

(11) shi   egh   nu   niyu   kih?
     I/me   to   again   walk/go   future
     "Will you return to me?"

In this form the independent pronoun *shi* is used in lieu of the prefixal form *sh-*, and the tense is marked with the postverbal particle *kih*. The form *nu* is treated as an independent word. The verb itself is simplified to *niyu*, which in the standard language is the n-conjugation perfective momentaneous zero-subject form, meaning "she/he arrived." That is, *niyu* is an actual verb word in the standard language, though in the creole its meaning is bleached to "walk/go."

The creole aspect marking described above refers only to inflectional viewpoint aspect, not situation aspect. Since each verb form generally occurs in one of four inflectional aspects, it is relatively easy to standardize periphrastic analogues of these aspects. No attempt has been made to standardized the more complex derivational situation aspects. As noted in the previous section, learners already struggle to differentiate between various situation aspects, so the loss of standardization in this area is not a great handicap to learners. In any situation aspect can still be marked via additional adverbial particles if desired.

In order for such a system to work effectively the particles used to mark situation aspect (imperfective, perfective, future, optative) would need to be standardized. Using existing Dena'ina forms gives the creole an authentic feel, but in many cases there may be more than one particle in

the standard language which could plausibly be chosen as the future marker. To a certain extent this choice is arbitrary, but the choice must be standardized. The forms *q'u* "already," *kih* "later," and *da* "should" are suggested here to mark the perfective, future, and optative respectively in the creole. The imperfective is unmarked. In contrast, no provisions have been made to standardize situation aspect in the proposed creole. This approach is consistent with the current practice among learners of avoiding the use of situation aspect. Note that this does not mean that creole speakers do not have resources to express situation aspect. The periphrastic strategy using adverbs remains available. For example, the customary situation aspect may be expressed with the adverb *ch'qeyan* "always."

Eliminating aspectual inflection has the effect of obscuring historical connections between verbs. For example, the standard Dena'ina verbs for "cut, slice object quickly with knife," "fish, water mammal swims quickly," and "tremble" are closely related. The first requires a classifier morpheme *ł* immediately preceding the stem *-chut'*, while the second form requires a plain *l-* classifier. The word for "tremble" requires a *d-* gender prefix, an *l*-classifier, and a different stem form *-chet'*. Choosing the simpler stem forms *chut* and *chet* as the basis of a creolized form the three words can be rendered *łchut*, *lchut* and *delchet* respectively. Written this way, the forms would not even necessarily occur next to each other in a dictionary, but of course, there is no reason they would need to be. The etymological questions can be left to those curious enough to explore them, just as etymological questions concerning standard Dena'ina nouns such as *tułchuda* "muskrat" and *chutl'a* "stomach."

Limit Nominal Inflection

Though less complex than verbal inflection, nominal inflection in Dena'ina still presents challenges for the learner which could be leveled in a creolized Dena'ina. The creole variety proposed here would eliminate possessive suffixation in favor of a prefixation-only strategy. In standard Dena'ina, possession is marked by a combination of a possessive suffix and a pronominal prefix indexing the person and number of the possessor. Both affixes attach to the possessed noun, and the possessive prefix does not co-occur with a full NP (noun phrase) possessor. The form of the possessive suffix varies across dialects but is generally of the form *-a* or *-'a* in for example, *gech'* "gloves" vs. *shgech'a* "my gloves." The possessive suffix may also trigger alternations in laryngeal setting in the stem-final consonant, as in *gega* "berries" versus *shgek'a* "my berries."

However, many obligatorily possessed nouns do not exhibit this suffix (*e.g.*, *shtsi* "my head"), and many nouns do not take the suffix (*e.g.*, *qenq'a* "house" vs. *shqenq'a* "my house").

When the possessor is other than third person, possession can readily be indicated via the possessive prefix. For third-person possessors referenced by a full NP, the possessive suffix may be the only morphological indication of possession, since possessive prefixes do not co-occur with full NPs in standard Dena'ina. Thus, *vegech'a* "his or her gloves," but *kił gech'a* "the boy's gloves." For the creole Dena'ina, we would like to drop the possessive suffix, but we still have at least two options for handling the prefixes. We could abandon the prefixes in favor of independent pronouns. However, since the independent pronouns are not case marked, we would have no way to distinguish subject/object pronouns from possessive pronouns. Moreover, the possessive prefixes are well-established within the community of Dena'ina learners today. Indeed, the possessive prefixes are one of the few areas of morphology which many learners have mastered. To discard them would remove an important measure of success in language learning. A better option is to retain the possessive prefixes while adopting the non-standard use of third-person pronouns in conjunction with full NP referents. The standard and creole versions of possession are compared below.

(12)   standard Dena'ina   creole Dena'ina
        gech'   gech'   "gloves"
        shgech'a   shgech'   "my gloves"
        vegech'a   vegech'   "his or her gloves"
        kił gech'a   kił vegech'   "the boy's gloves"

The creole possessive marking is entirely regular, marked throughout the paradigm by a possessive prefix. This is true for nouns such as *gech'* above which take regular possessive suffixes in standard Dena'ina, as well as those which do not. In the latter case the creole forms may be identical to the standard forms, as shown below.

(13)   standard Dena'ina   creole Dena'ina
        shtsi   shtsi   "my head"
        qenq'a   qenq'a   "house"
        shqenq'a   shqenq'a   "my house"

The creole possession strategy could be further regularized by eliminating the regular pattern of voicing alternation which affects stem-initial

fricatives. In standard Dena'ina stem-initial fricatives are regularly voiced in possessed forms. Thus, *łik'a* "dog" but *shlik'a* "my dog." This alternation is entirely predictable, and it can certainly be eliminated from the orthographic conventions without any loss of meaning. Learners wishing greater backwards compatibility with standard Dena'ina can simply apply the possessive voicing rule and pronounce the possessed form *shłik'a* with voiced lateral consonant.

Reduce and Standardize Complex Noun Forms

Underived basic noun stems in Athabascan are generally monosyllabic. While these nouns may occur with a suffix and perhaps a prefix, they are generally much less morphologically complex than verbs. However, not all nouns are derived from basic noun stems. A common process of word formation is nominalization. Through the use of one of several verb phrase enclitics, a noun can be derived from just about any verb phrase. Nominalized forms vary greatly in their degree of lexicalization. Some forms are morphologically transparent, while others remain opaque and unanalyzable. Still other nominalized verbs are morphologically transparent yet nevertheless highly lexicalized. This tends to be the case with neologisms, which are commonly represented by nominalization. For example, the Inland dialect word for "vehicle" is *veqatl'ah niqak'dulggeshi*, literally, "the one whose soles move around in circles." Dena'ina thus has an eight syllable word for an object which is pervasive in modern Dena'ina culture, whether referring to the automobile used in the city or the four-wheeler used in the village. It is clearly desirable to simplify such a complex word for an everyday item.

Languages do this naturally through clipping. The English word "auto" is a common example of a clipping, derived from the word "automobile." One way to accomplish this in Dena'ina is to omit the postpositional phrase *veqatl'ah* (literally, "its sole") from the nominalized verb, resulting in a shorter word *niqak'dulggeshi* to refer to "vehicle." Omission of postpositional phrases from nominalized verbs can be used to simplify a number of Dena'ina neologisms. For *veł tunk'elya'i* "washing machine" (literally, "the one with which one moves things through the water") we can generate a clipped form *tunk'elya'i*. Similar examples are given below.

(14)   standard Dena'ina   creole Dena'ina
        viq' qenach'delgheshi   qenach'delgheshi   "telephone"
        veł qak'diltesi   qak'diltesi   "screwdriver"
        veł q'ank'dalquxi   q'ank'dalquxi   "sewing machine"

Another way to simply complex Dena'ina nouns is to make greater use of borrowing. In earlier times borrowing from Russian was an accepted method of coinage for neologisms, a process which resulted in hundreds of Russian borrowings for common, everyday objects, such as *chasga* "cup," *sdul* "table," *velida* "stove," *vargas* "boat," *branigi* "cookies," and *gufi* "coffee." Borrowings from English are much less common. There has been particular resistance to English borrowing in recent years as bilingual speakers strive to distinguish Dena'ina language in a time of rapid language shift. But today's learners may be more open to English borrowings, just as speakers of previous centuries have been open to Russian borrowings. Proposed English borrowings could be nativized by writing them in the standard Dena'ina orthography, just as previous Russian borrowings were nativized. Thus, the three-syllable borrowing *telefun* could be used instead of the five syllable clipping *qenach'delgheshi* proposed above. Careful transliteration could give borrowing a native Dena'ina feel. For example, "computer" could be written as *qumputer*, using the Dena'ina high back vowel *u*, which is automatically lowered following the uvular stop *q*.

Standardize Across Dialects

Dialect leveling is a normal part of the language creolization process, and efforts to engineer a creole should of course strive toward decreasing dialect variation. Phonological variation across dialects can be eliminated through the use of standardized orthographic conventions. In some cases this has already been achieved in the practical orthography. For example, the major Dena'ina dialect division involves the merger of stem-initial *ts-* and *ch-* in the Upper Inlet dialect. Newer materials write these consonants as *ts-* and *ch-* in Upper Inlet, even though these sounds are not distinguished there. This practice would be followed in the creole as well. Learners wishing to affect an Upper Inlet pronunciation could pronounce these two sounds alike.

In other cases, the practical orthography represents actual phonological variation across dialects. For example, the labial consonant *b* in Upper Inlet corresponds to *v* in the Inland dialect and *m* in the Outer Inlet dialect. These are written with three different consonants in the standard practical orthography, according to dialect—ostensibly because these sounds are distinguished in English. In the creole these could be standardized to *v*, as in the Inland dialect. Speakers wishing to affect an Upper Inlet or Outer Inlet dialect could easily substitute a *b* or *m* pronunciation, accordingly. The correspondence is so regular that writers could even substitute *b* or *m*

in written work when wishing to affect a particular dialect. The choice of Inland dialect form as the standard in this case reflects the greater availability of pedagogical materials for this dialect and the greater number of Inland dialect speakers.

In some cases the practical orthography actually amplifies differences in pronunciation across dialects. For example, the word for "small" is written *gguya* in Inland and *gwa* in Outer Inlet. The difference in pronunciation here is actually quite minor, certainly less than the difference between the careful and fast speech pronunciations of English "want to," a difference which is not represented in English orthography. In this case standardization to the Inland form *gguya* should present little problem, as learners of the Outer Inlet dialect can readily affect the alternate monosyllabic pronunciation.

Where the phonetic correspondence between dialects is more noticeable but less transparent, it may be desirable to maintain orthographic differences, particularly for high-frequency items. For example, the high front vowel *i* in the Inland and Upper Inlet dialects often corresponds to the high back vowel *u* in the Outer Inlet dialect.

(15)   Outer Inlet   other dialects
        chuda   chida   "grandmother"
        shi k'u   shi k'i   "me too"
        łuq'a   łiq'a   "fish"

Similarly, in some kinship terms the Inland dialect has *t* where the other dialects have *k*.

(16)   Inland   other dialects
        shuntda   shunkda   "my mother"
        shtutda   shtukda   "my father"

Given the high frequency of these lexical items and the difficulty of predicting the phonetic variation, it is desirable to maintain these orthographic differences between dialects in a creole variety.

In fact, it may not be desirable to eliminate dialect variation entirely. It is also important to recognize that dialect variation is also an important marker of identity. This is particularly true in cases of lexical variation across dialects. High-frequency and culturally significant words can become markers of local identity, as with *chuda* and *chida* in (15) above. Learners are aware that these words are markers of dialect identity and will specifically choose them in order to assert that identity. This is

particularly true when the variation is not just phonological but entirely lexical. For example, the word for "thank you" in the Inland dialect is *chin'an*, whereas in the Outer Inlet dialect it is *chiqinik*, based on an entirely different stem. This is an extremely high-frequency word for today's learners, and learners of the Outer Inlet dialect tend to use the Outer Inlet variant exclusively, to the point of rejecting the form *chin'an*. Some Outer Inlet learners have even expressed the sentiment that *chin'an* is "not our word." Learners are especially sensitive to dialect variation in the names for animals, as in the following examples.

(17) Inland   Outer
      nini   qanchi   "porcupine"
      chu   k'nuyi'a   "beaver"
      jija   dałishla   "duck/waterfowl"
      chulyin   ggugguyni   "raven"
      k'uhda'i   dnigi   "moose"
      k'qushiya   shq'uła   "marmot"

Even adverbial elements may be important signals of dialect identification. For example, the distinction between *q'ayteh* (Inland) and *tl'adu* (Outer Inlet) for "yesterday" is often remarked on by learners. Most learners (and all speakers) are familiar with more than one dialect variant for these common words, just as English speakers are likely to be aware of dialect variants such as "pail" and "bucket." Including lexical dialect variants in the proposed creole will increase learners' willingness to adopt and use the creole, while adding minimal complexity to the language.

Summary

The above sketch of desiderata for a Dena'ina creole draws on grammatical features which are either already evident in the speech of current Dena'ina learners or are common to other language creolization processes. The third desirable criterion for a Dena'ina creole is backwards compatibility. That is, we want words from the standard language to be able to be used freely in the creole language. In many ways, this is a natural consequence of the choice to use real Dena'ina words wherever possible. Thus, when a creole speaker learns the form *niyu* "to walk," she has also learned a standard Dena'ina word which means "s/he arrived (n-perfective momentaneous)." Further, by retaining words which do occur in the standard language, it is possible to admit other words from the standard language as unanalyzable wholes. Thus, the word *nuntghesh'ił*,

though it does not follow the rules of creole word formation, can be learned and used by creole speakers as a unit meaning "I will see you again." In other words, there need be no sharp line dividing creole and standard language. Learners can incorporate as much standard Dena'ina as they choose, thereby using the creole variety as a bridge to the standard variety.

While the engineered creole grammar proposed above is based upon natural processes, it is unclear whether such a creole would arise naturally without conscious intervention by current language learners. As already discussed, puristic attitudes present an enormous barrier to the emergence of new language varieties. Conscious adoption of an engineered creole needs to be viewed as a pathway toward revitalization, not as a rejection of the standard language. Learners of a creole variety will go on to appreciate and maintain a commitment to Athabascan language. Learning an engineered creole needs to be viewed as an additional pursuit, not an alternative. Certainly some learners may choose to pursue the creole variety at the expense of the standard one, and this could be viewed as furthering the demise of the standard language. Whether this is or is not desirable ultimately comes down to a question of sustainability.

Toward Sustainable Athabascan Languages

Alaska's eleven Athabascan languages are at a crossroads. For some of these languages fewer than ten fluent speakers remain. Even for the larger languages children are growing up with parents who themselves did not learn Athabascan. Nowhere in Alaska are Athabascan languages being actively acquired by children as mother tongues.

Efforts to revitalize Athabascan languages through adult language programs have met with limited success. Students are making progress through individual work with language mentors and through classroom work in dedicated language workshops, but the language forms resulting from these language learning efforts differ strikingly from the language spoken by the elder generation. In some sense these new forms exhibit characteristics of a creole, including reduced inflection, analytic sentence structures, and reduced aspectual derivation. The question which must now be asked is how to address this gap in performance between the standard language of Native speakers and the "creole" being acquired by language learners. We can continue to assist learners to achieve native-like fluency by providing more training and more opportunities for interaction with elders. Or we can assist learners to more fully develop a standardized

creole form of the language which can be readily used for communication. There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach.

The first approach has the advantage of historical accuracy. It maintains a close connection between the old language and the new. Yet if this approach is followed exclusively it will by its very nature restrict the size of any potential revitalized language community. There are few adults now who are capable of sacrificing the time and effort necessary to pursue a mentor-apprentice program or attend a summer language institute. And of those who are able, few if any have gained sufficient fluency in the standard language to carry on anything more than the most basic conversation. Language learning takes place on an individual level, and the community of learners is scattered, separated by dialect divisions and idiolectal preferences. By demanding that students develop ever greater ability to manipulate and recognize complex grammatical forms, we risk alienating existing learners and deterring new ones.

In contrast, the creole approach forsakes historical accuracy in favor of creating a sustainable language community. Forsaking historical accuracy would of course be anathema to many linguists, speakers and learners. Change is a natural part of the human experience, but rapid change is almost always resisted. We have no reason to expect a different reaction to rapid language change. But it is nevertheless interesting to explore the potential advantages of encouraging the development of creolized language forms. Most significantly, a standardized, creolized language form provides a known and achievable target for learners. Since it would differ so radically from the standard language it could escape the purism of elders, who in spite of their fluent command of the standard language would not be well positioned to provide puristic corrections to creole forms. By leveling dialect divisions and differences between individual speakers, a creole would encourage the development of an active new language community. Reference and teaching materials could be quickly developed, and a simplified grammatical structure would ease adoption and mastery.

These two avenues need not be mutually exclusive. A creolized variety can be encouraged and can co-exist side-by-side with the standard variety. Learners can use their knowledge of creole forms as a kind of boot-strap into the standard language, so that learning of the standard language can continue while the student at the same time has full mastery of the creole form.[5] In effect this is a question of how high to raise the bar. Do we require nothing less than full mastery of the standard language, or do we allow students to learn a simpler form? If the bar is held too high, we risk creating a barrier that no one will overcome. On the other hand, in

allowing—even encouraging—the development of creolized forms, we open the door to the development of sustainable secondary language communities. The door of opportunity has already been unlatched through the efforts of current language revitalization efforts. We must now choose whether to re-close the latch or open the door fully.

Notes

1. The eleven Alaska Athabascan languages are Ahtna, Dena'ina (Tanaina), Deg Xinag (Deg Hit'an, Ingalik), Holikachuk, Upper Kuskokwim, Koyukon, Lower Tanana, Tanacross, Upper Tanana, Han, and Gwich'in (Kutchin). See Krauss (1997) for a discussion of current status and viability.

2. The term Athabascan more properly denotes a language family, not a language. In this paper the unqualified term "Athabascan" refers to any of the eleven Alaska Athabascan languages. Where reference to one specific language is intended, a specific language name is used.

3. Note that this resistance is largely limited to recent borrowings. Tanacross speakers have no problem with old borrowings such as *ldiil* "tea" (from French, through Slavey Jargon). Dena'ina contains nearly four hundred Russian borrowings, many of which, such as *chasga* "cup," are not recognized as such by modern speakers.

4. An example of this can be found in the word *nutghidyuł* above. The stem *-yu* "walk" normally requires a Ø-classifier. However, in this case the iterative prefix triggers changes from Ø- to d- classifier.

5. Alan Dick (personal communication) has compared the difference between creole and standard forms of language to "limited edition" and "pro" versions of computer software. Learners can quickly master "limited edition" versions of software which provide reduced but sufficient functionality. This knowledge can then be applied to learn the full "pro" version.

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