

# LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN LABRADOR: TRYING TO HOLD THE LINE

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## ABSTRACT

*This is a work in progress on language maintenance amongst the Inuit of northern Labrador. It focuses on the bilingual development of young Inuit children who are being educated in a First Language Program; that is, they are taught in Inuttut from Kindergarten to Grade 2, at which time a switch to English as the primary language of education takes place. The preliminary results indicate that the chances of their ancestral language being maintained are in doubt. As well, there is a brief discussion of the historical decline of Inuttut from the time of contact with the first Europeans to the present. The paper outlines the complexity of the ethnic relations in this region that have evolved, and describes the growing influence of English in the native population.*

## INTRODUCTION

The process whereby a shift to a national language by an indigenous people accompanied by language loss of their ancestral language has become an increasingly familiar phenomenon in many countries of the world. The shift usually involves a majority/minority language situation in which the majority language dominates and the status of the minority language is in jeopardy. The aboriginal languages of various countries seem to be particularly vulnerable to attrition. Rigsby (1987: 359) attributes the cause of language loss in general to 'the colonial expansion of Western European peoples around the globe and to subsequent reactions and developments as the modern world system and new multi-ethnic states have emerged'. He claims that the number of indigenous languages surviving in Australia (Friends of Bilingual Education 1986) as well as in North America has been at least halved. Romaine (1989) citing Hughes (1988), for example, reports that the aboriginal population of Tasmania numbering around 3-4000, who had inhabited the land for some 30,000 years, was all but exterminated within less than 75 years of white settlement. In North America there are a number of studies reported in the literature which discuss cases where the viability of aboriginal languages is threatened or has already disappeared (cf. Miller 1971; Hill 1983; Robinson 1985).

The case I will focus on in this paper concerns language loss amongst the Inuit of northern Labrador. Compared to the Inuit of the eastern Arctic and the northern Quebec region of Canada where the indigenous language has shown little loss, and that of the western Arctic where the language has shown some weakening, the Inuit of Labrador have experienced the most dramatic effects of attrition (Chartrand 1988). The shift from Inuttut – the dialect spoken by the Inuit of Labrador – to English began more than two hundred years ago when contact with the first white settlers to the Labrador coast was established. However, this process has accelerated during the past 40 years, and the possibility of the language soon becoming extinct has become glaringly evident. In an effort to prevent the disappearance of Inuttut and to try to reverse some of the effects of the shift that has already taken place, a First Language Program has been introduced into the educational system whereby Inuttut is the language of instruction in the early years of schooling. I will briefly outline some of the historical and sociological events that have led to the loss of Inuttut in Labrador, and will discuss the preliminary find-

ings of a study of children in the First Language Program in Nain, a community in northern Labrador.

#### HISTORICAL DECLINE IN THE USE OF INUTTUT IN NORTHERN LABRADOR

The complex ethnic characteristics of the population contribute to language loss in Labrador. The two major ethnic groups are the Inuit (Eskimos), the aboriginal people of this region, and the Settlers, descendants of the first Europeans that settled in Labrador in the eighteenth century. The latter group was originally comprised of single men, some of whom married Inuit women but who, according to Kennedy (1982), continued to view themselves as Europeans. Few of them, for example, learned the language of the indigenous population. To the Inuit, on the other hand, these newcomers were *kablunak* (white men).<sup>1</sup> As Kennedy points out, it was only 'with the second generation, the offspring of these European-Inuit unions, that the category 'Settler' or *kablunangojok* (literally meaning 'half-white' or 'almost like white men') emerged... [T]hey were usually bilingual, they were physically mixed, and were, of necessity, neither fully European nor Inuit in lifestyle' (Kennedy 1982: 23).<sup>2</sup> As a group, the Settlers in time became culturally very similar to the Inuit in contrast to the lifestyle of the transient Newfoundland fishermen and traders who came later to this region. A third category of 'mixed' persons is also distinguished; these include children of ethnically mixed marriages, with one parent who was Settler and the other an Inuk. However, they did not develop into a distinct socially relevant group, as the children of such unions would, in time, choose to identify with either the Settler or the Inuit group (Ben-Dor 1966; T. Brantenberg 1977). The prevalent social or ethnic background, or the language environment in which the child had been raised, was and continues to be the determining variable in making this decision.

The Christian religion was brought to the Inuit of northern Labrador by the Moravian missionaries (*Unitas Fratrum* – the Unity of the Brethren, a Protestant sect founded in 1457), who established their church in Nain in 1771. For the Moravians, education had always been an integral part of religious conversion and they built mission schools in Labrador in which they used Inuttut as the language of instruction to Inuit children from the earliest days.<sup>3</sup> Providing education for children of the first European settlers, mentioned above, was more problematic. The settlers came mainly from England and Norway and they were also Protestants but of a different sect from the Moravians (cf. Kleivan 1966; T. Brantenberg 1977). These families tended to live in areas removed from the mission stations, but English language instruction was provided for the children who did attend mission school and this service was made available to them as early as 1905 in Nain. However, A. Brantenberg (1977), in her description of the Nain school of this period, mentions that the Moravians kept the two groups segregated and as the Inuit children far outnumbered the Settler children, Inuttut remained the predominant language used in school and was the language most frequently spoken outside of school.

<sup>1</sup> There is some variation in the transcription of Inuttut. Present day Labrador dialects demonstrate consonant assimilation; thus Jeddore (1976) uses *Kallunaak*.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed history of the people of Labrador, see Kennedy (1982) and Ben-Dor (1966). The focus of their research centred on the coastal community of Makkovik, located south of Nain, which demonstrated some special features due to the resettlement of Inuit from villages further north in Labrador. They provide a historical framework within which their anthropological research was based. The conclusions they arrive at clearly underscore the seemingly inexorable language shift that has resulted in this region.

<sup>3</sup> For a description of the ethnohistory of the Moravian church and its establishment in Labrador, see Kennedy (1977) and the sources cited therein.

The Moravian mission schools functioned in this area until 1949 when Newfoundland and Labrador joined the Canadian confederation and educational responsibility was assumed by the provincial Department of Education. This new political development brought enormous changes for the Labradorian community. For example, education became compulsory for all children between the ages of seven and fourteen so that the Settlers, who lived apart from the established communities, were now obliged to move into them in order that their children could attend school. The changes in education were even more severe for the Inuit children; they had to learn to function in a school environment in which English became the language of instruction. It was an abrupt change that was introduced with no special accommodations made for those who did not speak the language. Furthermore, the local school committee had no input into this or other matters concerning the curriculum to be used in the schools; they were simply imposed on the schools in Labrador. But changes of this kind were not unique to this region as similar actions that appear to be motivated by a common attitude toward aboriginal peoples were taken the Federal government in other parts of the country. Chartrand (1988: 249) in his discussion of the Inuit of Arctic Canada claims that '[T]he major tool for assimilating the Inuit was the development, by the Federal government, of a formal centralized southern-style education system'. Thus, for Labrador, as it happened elsewhere, this meant that classes were conducted exclusively in English without any regard for the mother tongue of the students; teachers were hired who were not sensitive to the culture of their students or, indeed, were not even knowledgeable about it. Many of them had difficulty in adjusting to a northern lifestyle and this, predictably, resulted in a high turnover of teachers recruited to teach in the north. Furthermore, they were required to teach a curriculum that was not appropriate to the community. The cumulative result of these changes was disastrous, especially for the language.<sup>4</sup> Inuttut, the language that had been the major language of communication of the Inuit in this region, went into decline and rapidly became in danger of disappearing altogether.<sup>5</sup>

In characterizing the process of language death, Dorian (1989, 1981) suggests that there is a peak or 'tip' which, if reached, signals the ultimate decline. She metaphorically describes the process as a 'gradual accretion of negative feeling toward the subordinate group and its language, often accompanied by legal as well as social pressure, until a critical moment arrives and the subordinate group appears abruptly to abandon its original mother tongue and switch over to exclusive use of the dominant language' (1986: 75).<sup>6</sup> It seems that the metaphorical 'tip' is well suited to the context of the Labrador Inuit and can primarily be traced to 1949 when the responsibility for education was assumed by the provincial government whose approach to education was consistent with the prevalent policies adopted by the Federal government towards Native peoples in general.<sup>7</sup> The changes in the medium used in the schools contributed to this end, but there were other factors such as the influence exercised by the media that must also be

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<sup>4</sup> See A. Brantenberg (1977) for details of her research on the educational system in Nain in the period 1969-1971.

<sup>5</sup> An anonymous reviewer suggested that the negative effects of this formal Southern style centralized educational system must have also been conjugated with the unique social structure in Labrador settlements, and, possibly, with other factors as well. However, the imposition of the same type of schooling in many other Northern communities did not seem to trigger such a rapid language shift; for example, in the Cree and Montagnais Indian communities in Northern Quebec. I am grateful for having this point brought to my attention.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the papers in Dorian (1989) which discuss a number of cases of language attrition, as well as Dorian (1986, 1981) where she examines language loss among the Gaelic-speaking people of East Sutherland in the Scottish Highlands as well as among the secular Dutch of Pennsylvania. She identifies the crucial 'tip' factors that led to the attrition of these languages.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the situation of language use from the point of view of a Labradorian Inuk see Jeddore (1979).

taken into account. Radio has always been an important source of communication in Labrador. Although the national Canadian station broadcasts mainly in English, there is a local station in Nain that broadcasts in Inuttut. Most of the programmes on television, on the other hand, are in English. Until recently, there has been only about one hour per day of programming in Inuktitut.

#### INUTTUT LANGUAGE RETENTION IN LABRADOR

The profile of the history of language loss of the Labrador Inuit can be seen in the Census of Canada Statistics given in Chartrand (1988) who compared the data from the 1971 Census with that of 1981. He reports that the total Inuit population of Newfoundland (Labrador) for 1971 was 1,055, and 1,365 for 1981, and the language retention ratios he cites are as follows:<sup>8</sup>

Year	% of Inuit for whom Inuttut is the mother tongue	% of Inuit for whom Inuttut is the home language	% of Inuit who use Inuttut as home language	% of Inuit who only speak Inuttut
1971	78.7	75.0	72.0	17.0
1981	63.7	57.5	37.3	7.7

Chartrand suggests that there would be a good chance that those individuals who report Inuttut as their mother tongue would also use it as the home language. Although column one of Table 1 indicates that there is a 15% decline in Inuttut as a mother tongue from 1971 to 1981, the percentage of Inuit for whom Inuttut is a home language shows only a 3.7% difference for 1971 when one compares columns one and two, and a 6.2% difference for 1981. The salient statistics are indicated in column three which shows a severe decline in the proportion of individuals who actually *use* Inuttut as a home language; that is, from 72.0% in 1971 to 37.3% in 1981. Chartrand argues that these figures roughly quantify the risk that results from bilingual speakers switching from Inuttut to English as a home language, even in the case of the Inuit for whom Inuttut is a mother tongue.

The more recent 1986 Canadian Census reports that there are 730 Inuit in all of Labrador. In Nain which has a total population of 1015, 470 (46.1%), report Inuttut as the home language; that is, a drop of 11.4% in the home language compared to the 1981 census figures. The 1986 Census does not, however, report the statistics on the actual language use in the home or on the percentage of monolingual Inuttut speakers.

<sup>8</sup> These statistics are taken from Table 18-3 in Chartrand (1988). I have used the dialect name Inuttut, which is used in Labrador, rather than the term Inuktitut used in the original Table.

## ETHNIC RELATIONS IN LABRADOR

The Census of Canada data reports on the Labradorian Inuit population as a whole but they do not reflect the complex social situation that has emerged in Labrador. Terje Brantenberg (1977) investigated ethnic relations in Nain in 1970/71 and reported the distribution of language ability among Inuit-Inuit, Settler-Settler and Inuit-Settler families on which the following Table is based:

**TABLE 2:  
LANGUAGE USAGE AND ETHNICITY IN NAIN, 1971**

	English	Inuttut	Bilingual
Settler-Settler	40 (53%)	—	35 (47%)
Inuit-Inuit	—	214 (45%)	260 (55%)
Inuit-Settler	42 (45%)	3 (3%)	49 (52%)

Brantenberg defines a bilingual person as one who possesses an elementary skill in the second language, either Inuttut or English, sufficient for conversing on common local themes. Under this definition, Table 2 indicates that approximately half of Nain's population was bilingual in 1971.

The following Table has also been adapted from T. Brantenberg (1977). He excludes the Settler-Inuit Household statistics and, concentrating on the Settler-Settler and Inuit-Inuit Households, showed the breakdown of language skills amongst the Inuit and Settlers according to age:

**TABLE 3:  
LANGUAGE SKILLS ACCORDING TO AGE AMONG INUIT AND SETTLERS  
NAIN 1970**

Age Category	English Only	Bilingual
3-30	30 (99%)	3 (1%)
30+	10 (24%)	32 (76%)
<b>Settlers of Settler-Settler Households</b>		
Age Category	Inuttut Only	Bilingual
3-30	96 (32%)	206 (68%)
30+	118 (69%)	54 (31%)
<b>Inuit of Inuit-Inuit Households</b>		

The figures in Table 3, which reflect the post-1949 linguistic changes in Nain, show a dramatic difference in the distribution of language skills between the younger and older genera-

tions among both the Settlers and the Inuit: the Inuit are becoming increasingly bilingual while the Settlers are rapidly losing their bilingualism. By 1989, when this study was begun, there were no Inuit children in Kindergarten who had not acquired some English. Most of them had acquired sufficient English to enable them to function in the language by the time they started school. This was the case even with children chosen for this study who came from households in which Inuttut was the primary language of communication.

### THE FIRST LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The possibility of Inuttut becoming an endangered language had been of concern to the Labradorian Inuit for some time. This subject was discussed at an education conference that took place in Nain in 1977 and the feasibility of establishing a First Language Program was considered. Ten years later the First Language Program was introduced with Inuttut as the main language of instruction in one of the Kindergarten classes. There was, as before, another Kindergarten class with English as the language of instruction. Parents had the option of enrolling their children in either class. The First Language Program was soon expanded to Grade 1 and then to Grade 2, with English gradually introduced. That is to say, the Kindergarten children are taught in Inuttut 80% of the time, and English language instruction is provided for 20% of the time. In Grade 1, Inuttut is used 70% of the time, and English 30%; in Grade 2 Inuttut is used 60% of the time and English 40%. The transition to English as the major medium of instruction takes place in Grade 3, but Inuttut continues to be taught as a subject in order to ensure that the children become literate in the language. The Moravians had originally adapted the Roman alphabet for writing in the Inuttut dialect so the children, who learn to read and write in Inuttut first, did not have to change writing systems when they started to learn English.

### EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

A study of the children's development in both Inuttut and English was carried out in Nain in 1989-91. Its purpose was to investigate the acquisition of the lexicon and grammatical structures in both Inuttut and English of the children in the Program in order to assess their progress in the two languages.<sup>9</sup>

### THE SUBJECTS

Two children in each of the Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 classes, as well as two children in Grade 3 who had been enrolled in the First Language Program but who had now entered the English stream, were selected for the study. The parents or guardians of these children speak Inuttut as their mother tongue and some of them also speak English. Inuttut, however, is the main language of the home environment. This was confirmed by the Assistant Principal at the school who suggested suitable candidates for this study and was reinforced by my observations in the visits we paid to the families. Although Inuttut was their first lan-

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<sup>9</sup> I wish to thank the Labrador East Integrated School Board for permitting me to carry out this study and especially Beatrice Watts who is the Program Co-ordinator for Native Education. She deserves much credit for her work in the setting up of the First Language Program; many of the Inuit materials used in the Program have been developed by her. I am also grateful to the principal and teachers at Jens Haven School in Nain and especially the parents and children who participated. I also wish to thank Mary Webb for her valuable assistance. I am indebted to Lynne Drapeau for discussions on language shift. This study was funded by an SSHRC research grant which I gratefully acknowledge.

guage, all the Inuit subjects in this study<sup>10</sup> had nonetheless acquired some English by the time they entered Kindergarten, primarily from television and older siblings, or by playing with other children in the community who spoke some English. As well, two Kindergarten children enrolled in the English stream were also tested. These children have bilingual Inuit mothers and English-speaking fathers, with English being the dominant language of the home. English is the first language of these children but they have a passive comprehension of Inuttut. These children were included in the study as the English spoken in Labrador is a nonstandard dialect and it was considered important to gather data on their use of English that could be used as a comparative norm.

## ELICITATION PROCEDURES

Five data samplings were taken over a period of two years. The data were elicited by means of a naming and a story-retelling task and all the subjects were tested using the same materials. In the naming task, the children were presented with pictures and simply asked the names of items such as body parts, animals, and familiar objects in the northern environment, activities, etc. In the story-retelling task, each child was shown illustrated stories and was asked to tell what was happening. The first stories used in the elicitations were ones that had been used in class and the children were familiar with them. The stories used in the subsequent elicitations were unfamiliar to the children. The materials were first shown to the children before the elicitation began in order to indicate what was expected of them. The testing was carried out in English and a few days later the same interview was carried out in Inuttut. The English interviews were done by this author after she had spent some time in the school and had gotten to know the children first. The Inuttut interviews were carried out with the assistance of a female Inuk student teacher whom the children knew well and felt comfortable with. The third interview session was carried out with the help of a male Inuk teacher as the female teaching assistant was unavailable to do the testing. The male assistant taught Inuttut at the high school level and although the children knew him well, they were less at ease with him than with the female student teacher. As far as possible, the same children were used for all the sessions during the two years of testing. However, the data sets from some of the children are incomplete because of sickness or some other reason. All the interviews were videotaped.

## THE RESULTS

The analyses have not yet been completed but, in general, the testing showed a pattern of language use that was clear. The Kindergarten children responded primarily in English in both interviews; that is, they spoke English to the English-speaking interviewer, and English to the Inuttut-speaking interviewer. They demonstrated a striking reluctance to speak Inuttut, even during the Inuttut interview. When the Inuk interviewer, whom the children knew very well, attempted to encourage them to speak in Inuttut, they either persisted in speaking in English or else they fell silent.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the study does not indicate productive competency in Inuttut in the Kindergarten children as the testing procedure failed to elicit responses from them in the language. The only Inuttut utterances they produced involved a few high-frequency

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<sup>10</sup> What is also needed is a longitudinal study on Inuit children in this area to determine when and how the development of English emerges. Over the two year period during which this study was carried out, this author noted that very little Inuttut was used by even the youngest children playing outdoors in the community.

<sup>11</sup> In order to verify this finding two other Inuit children who were in the Kindergarten class of the Inuttut stream were tested using the same materials used in the first data sampling. It was found that they behaved linguistically in much the same way; the majority of their replies in the Inuttut interviews were in English.



words, such as *kattak* (to fall) and *iqaluk* (fish). They seemed to have little difficulty understanding what was being said to them in Inuttut indicating that their comprehension was good, but their production data was minimal under this testing situation.

The children in Grade 1 also demonstrated a similar reluctance to speak Inuttut but not to the same degree as found in the Kindergarten children. They responded approximately 30 to 40% of the time in Inuttut in the naming tasks. In the story-retelling task, on the other hand, their Inuttut responses tended to be monosyllables or else short phrases. The Grade 2 children showed a better knowledge of Inuttut use compared to the Grade 1 or Kindergarten children. They were able, for example, to name nearly all the required items in Inuttut. However, in the story-retelling task they behaved much like the Grade 1 children in that they also responded using single word replies or short phrases.

None of the children showed any inclination to converse in Inuttut with the Inuk interviewer. Thus, the elicitation method used to obtain spontaneous speech that would demonstrate their spoken competency in their ancestral language was unsuccessful. It may be that they were intimidated by the Inuit interviewers but their linguistic behaviour in other circumstances suggests there are other factors at play here. For example, the children were observed to speak English to a great extent in their Inuttut classes; they were not reprimanded for doing so but were often encouraged to respond in Inuttut. As well, they generally spoke English in the school halls, and in the playground during recess. The children would, of course, be obliged to speak to their monolingual parents or guardians in Inuttut, but it appears that the switch to English in other situations, such as at school, is extremely pervasive. It must also be pointed out that the Inuit teachers and teaching assistants, who are all bilingual speakers, do exhibit a tendency to switch from Inuttut to English in the classes, especially in Kindergarten, but this seems to be less the case in Grades 1 and 2. This may explain some of the linguistic behaviour of the children, but it does not account for the extreme reluctance to speak Inuttut they demonstrated.

It may be that the children had observed the pattern of language use in the wider community which they simply emulated. Nonetheless, their increasing responses in Inuttut elicited by the naming task and the short answer responses in the story-telling task by the Grade 1 and 2 children suggest that the First Language Program is having some success in convincing them that Inuttut is an appropriate language to use in the context of the school. 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. Although the reluctance to tell stories in Inuttut may stem from their limited knowledge of appropriate repertoires that govern language use, it is more likely that it results from their limited experience with a story-telling format of this kind at home. Moreover, there are very few books available in Inuttut for those families who might want to read to their children.

The data elicited in English show that the Kindergarten children demonstrate a developing knowledge of the language. They did not know all the names of the items they were tested on, and their vocabulary was somewhat limited. Preliminary analyses indicate that the Kindergarten children had only a tentative grasp of the language and produced features of the language commonly found in learners at the early stages of the acquisition of English as a second language. For example, they had not yet acquired certain functional categories of English, as evidenced by their omission of definite and indefinite articles, auxiliary verbs and prepositions. Inuttut, a polysynthetic language which assigns case to nominals, does not make use of some of these grammatical features. Their acquisition in English thus takes time, as it requires a good deal of input for both first and second language learners to master these features. (Radford 1990). All else aside, what is remarkable about their linguistic behaviour is that



they would choose to speak the language of which they had only a tentative grasp instead of their first language.

The Grade 1 children showed a comparatively good command of English; they knew more of the lexical items in English than the Kindergarten children did. The Grade 2 children showed an even better knowledge of the vocabulary items of English. The children in all three grade levels tended to respond with short answers in the story telling task. Although they were somewhat inhibited, from time to time they did offer spontaneous remarks about themselves or about the pictures in the story books and commented on other topics. This type of spontaneity was seldom exemplified during the Inuttut interviews.

#### EXAMPLES OF LEXICAL BORROWING AND CODE MIXING

Testing showed that the two languages influence each other. A number of Inuttut lexical items have been incorporated into the English lexicon of Labrador, for example *kammitik* 'dog sled', *kamik* 'Eskimo skinboot', *iqaluk* 'fish', *katak* 'to fall or drop', etc. The children usually used the Inuttut word *aupaluttak* rather than the English term *red*. There are English inflectional endings that are attached to Inuit words, such as the plural *-s* (for example, *iqaluks*). Ben-Dor (1966) mentions the use of the English plural on the Inuttut word *nayaluks* 'a non-believer or heathen'. Also, the English aspectual marking *-ing* is attached to Inuttut verbs as in *pulaaking* 'visiting'. This was recorded by Ben-Dor (1966) who also noted Inuttut words replacing common English words – *katimavik* for 'church'. There are also examples of English words that have Inuttut case endings, for example, *duckmik*. Ben-Dor also gives a few examples of this process – for example, *tipatik* 'teapot', *pantik* 'punt', and *satanik* 'Satan'. German words that were first introduced into the Inuttut language by the German-speaking Moravian missionaries, for the days of the week, the names of the month, and the telling of time, continue to be used although the English equivalents are beginning to replace them.

#### DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

What accounts for the preference for the use of English by these children? It may be that their comprehensive and productive abilities were better in English than in Inuttut. The testing indicates that this is not the case; their comprehension in Inuttut is at least as good as, and probably better than, their ability in English although there are gaps in the vocabulary. Unfortunately the testing, as mentioned above, did not elicit sufficient data to allow us to comment on their productive abilities in Inuttut. These children come from Inuttut speaking homes but they manage to acquire a good deal of English even before they start school. In fact, the amount of English that is acquired through incidental learning is remarkable. 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. It clearly takes time, at least a year, to convince them that the school is also an appropriate domain for Inuttut. But the use of Inuttut as a language of communication within this domain must be nurtured. One other serious problem that needs to be addressed is the development of a wide variety of appropriate materials in Inuttut that can be used by the students. Curriculum development requires consultation with monolingual speakers of the language and this is an ever-diminishing group. They tend to be almost exclusively the elders in the society whose expertise in Inuttut is respected and sought by others in the community, such as bilingual speakers who are insecure about their intuitions and knowledge of Inuttut and seek out advice of such informants. But the increasing scarcity of individuals in this group means that a recognized standard norm that is needed to reinforce language use was no longer readily available even by 1981.

What are the prospects for success for the First Language Program in maintaining Inuttut? Will it be able to prevent the disappearance of the language or at least to slow down the process? To answer this question we will first have to examine the general causes of language shift and language attrition. In his classic paper on the study of language maintenance and language shift, Fishman (1964) points out that, when people speaking different languages are in contact with each other, what must be considered is the relationship between change or stability in the use of language on the one hand, and the psychological, social and cultural processes on the other. Language shift can occur where a monolingual community becomes bilingual through contact and a shift to one of the languages, or even the death of one of the languages, may result. Fishman is careful to point out, however, that it is not the case that all bilingual situations will lead to language attrition, as exemplified in the Canadian French/English bilingual situation that is one of stable bilingualism. Rather, there is a potential for language loss where a language shift obtains, as in the Labradorian situation.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the second question, there are many factors which have been suggested as vital for language maintenance. Romaine (1989) cites external factors such as the extent of exogamous marriage, attitudes towards a majority/minority dichotomy and patterns of language use as being important. The complex ethnic Inuit/Settler relations and the dominance of English as a majority language clearly indicate the importance of these factors within the Labradorian context. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) also consider that an important function of the language or dialect of a community is its role as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity. They suggest that factors such as institutional support, language status and demographic concentration are crucial for maintaining the vitality of a language. Regarding their first point concerning institutional support, the recognition of the rights of the Inuit to education in their own language and the support for the First Language Program by the Department of Education is a positive endorsement of Inuit values and of the need to keep the culture alive. The Program is presently operating on a small scale and will have to be expanded. Its success vitally depends on the training of Inuit teachers so that the bilingual program can be extended to higher grades. Not only will more teaching materials have to be developed, but a wider range of materials is also required.

Concerning the question of numerical concentration for language maintenance, it has been argued that a high concentration of speakers in a community does not guarantee the maintenance of a language. For example, Ambrose and Williams (1981) state that Welsh is not 'safe' even in places where over 80% of the population speak the language. To cite another example in Ireland, the much more numerous Irish speakers were unable to halt attrition of their language, and Irish gave way to English which, as Macnamara (1971) points out, was the language of the ruling elite and a prerequisite for social mobility. A number of studies have investigated the process of language shift from an ethnographic point of view (cf. Gal 1979; Gumperz 1982, and others). The question of *who* rather than *how* many speak the language is the crucial factor. English is unquestionably regarded as the prestige language in Labrador; it is the principal language of education and of communication in a wider context and is required for jobs in the community such as in the communications, tourist and travel industry, for jobs in construction and

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<sup>12</sup> Lanoue (1991) discusses a situation where the shift to another language can have a unifying effect. The particular problem he addressed was why the Sekani of Northern British Columbia speak English in spite of the minimal contact they have with English speakers, and despite the apparent lack of any particular advantages in doing so. He suggests that English provides a 'camouflage for the traditional and modern systems of self-identification and organization' (p. 112) that they have been forced to adopt. It is a code that they appear to have adopted as a means of uniting several Sekani communities which had previously been antagonistic to the notion of forming a new association.

at the local fish plant, in the government store, post office, nursing station, etc. So far as the Inuit community is concerned, the importance of maintaining their language for cultural identity is far more pressing. In his discussion of the use of schools for language maintenance, Edwards (1988) argues that they can do little in this regard when they act in isolation, but that they can and should be used to promote tolerance for cultural and linguistic diversity. For a wide-ranging discussion of these and other aspects of language maintenance, see Taylor (1991).

At present, there is intergenerational continuity of Inuttut transmission in the Inuit community of Labrador and children are still learning Inuttut as a mother tongue. However, this may well be the last generation in which this is possible given the rapidity with which Inuttut is disappearing as indicated by the census statistics. The prognosis for language survival is not good. In order for the First Language Program to succeed in helping to maintain the language, a great deal more effort on the part of the school board and educators, as well as by parents and guardians will have to be made. Whether there is a strong desire on the part of the majority of Inuit in this area to maintain the language or not is an open question.<sup>13</sup> One indication about their feelings as to the effectiveness of the Program can be seen in the decision of families in Nain to place more and more of their children in the Program rather than in the English stream. This appears to be based on their growing confidence in the Program as a result of the performance shown by children who were first enrolled in this stream. Their reactions to the First Language Program are positive, but it will have to be sustained if Inuttut is to survive in this region.

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<sup>13</sup> See Fishman's (1990) recent discussion on how language shift can be reversed.

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