

REVIEWS

version of the work first appeared as Ewers's doctoral thesis at the University of Giessen under the guidance of Professor W. Viereck, who has long been known for his own contributions to the study of English dialectology, including the language of American slave descendants. It is with considerable pleasure that I can commend this book to the novice or the experienced scholar; both audiences will find that they are well served in this comprehensive volume, which has the potential to be included among the very finest studies of African American English.

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LOUIS-JACQUES DORAIS, *La parole inuit: Langue, culture et société dans l'Arctique nord-américain*. (SELAF, 354; Arctique, 3.) Leuven (Belgium) & Paris: Peeters, 1996. Pp. x, 331. Pb BEF 1200.

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This volume on Inuit speech follows the evolution of a native language of the North American Arctic, from its historical roots to its present-day linguistic structure and patterns of use from Alaska to Greenland.¹ Drawing on a wide range of research from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and sociology, Dorais integrates these diverse perspectives in a comprehensive view of native language development, maintenance, and use under conditions of marginalization due to social transition.

Dorais brings more than 25 years of experience as a researcher and teacher of the Inuit language to this ambitious task. In this volume he documents the changing role of the Inuit language in Arctic society, examining the relationships between native language status, local institutional policies, and language attitudes within speech communities. At the same time, he seeks to make explicit the unique

expressive power of the language, as well as the intellectual and cultural heritage it embodies.

The initial chapters provide an introduction to the ethnological, geographic, and historical context for the language. In Chap. 1, Dorais describes the traditional life of the Inuit as a society based on subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering. He then chronicles the contact between Inuit populations and whites in Greenland, Canada, and Alaska – pointing out major social and economic changes that took place as a result of territorial invasion. He brings the reader up to the present with an examination of the economic and political status of the Inuit in contemporary Arctic society. In the past few decades, native associations and corporations have been formed throughout the Arctic for the advancement and protection of native rights.

Chap. 2 gives a survey of the dialects and speech groups that comprise the Inuit language, with details concerning geographic distribution and the demography of the speakers. Dorais assesses the relative situations of language shift among the various speech groups, based on statistics taken from census data on the number of native-language speakers per community.

In Chap. 3, the historical linguistic research on the origin of the Eskimo-Aleut language family is briefly reviewed. Dorais uses archeological and linguistic evidence to sketch what is known of successive ancestral migrations and their relation to the emergence of contemporary speech forms. He concludes this chapter with a discussion of the phonological system, grammatical features, and lexicon of Proto-Eskimo – the postulated ancestral language from which the Inuit, Yupik, and Sireniki languages developed.

Almost a third of the book is devoted to the linguistic structure of Inuit; in Chap. 4, Dorais offers a broadly comparative view of the phonology, morphology-syntax, and lexicon. He strives to present a unified picture of the language groups, abstracting away from phonological variation to stress general similarities in the grammar and lexicon across speech forms, in spite of certain regional differences.

Dorais then traces the diachronic development of the Inuit language to its present-day dialects. In Chap. 5, evidence about earlier forms of Inuit speech is taken from historical texts, such as word lists collected by early explorers and linguistic descriptions provided by missionaries. Comparing current speech forms with the historical linguistic records, Dorais notes changes in the phonology, morphology, and lexicon – attributing differences to regular processes of linguistic change, as well as to changes induced by evolving social conditions. In general, the eastern dialects diverge more significantly from their earlier linguistic form than do the western dialects. In eastern dialects there is, for example, widespread assimilation in consonant clusters, and the loss of certain word-final consonants has led to the restructuring of some grammatical forms.

Chap. 6 offers a closer examination of the social and cultural representations encoded in Inuit linguistic expression. Morphosemantic analysis affords an interesting perspective on the lexical coding of semantic classifications in the lan-

guage. Here Dorais discusses such areas as humanity and kinship terms; the expression of time as movement through space; the use of anatomical metaphor in technology, numeration, and the natural world; and the ways emotional expression reflects the importance of harmonious social relations. He also reviews studies on the taxonomy of colors, plants, and animals.

The impact of social and cultural changes over recent decades can be seen in the modern lexicon. Words referring to outmoded ways and concepts have been lost, and new words to describe the changing world have appeared. Dorais notes that Inuit speech forms show a preference for the creation of new lexemes to accommodate new concepts rather than relying heavily on semantic change or borrowing.

Here Dorais also provides a brief treatment of various forms of oral literature and their functions in traditional culture and society. Myths, legends, chants, and magic formulas are modes of transmission of Inuit cultural and intellectual heritage whose survival is seriously threatened in the current social context.

The remainder of the book addresses a range of social and cultural issues that surround Inuit speech in contemporary Arctic society. In Chap. 7, Dorais documents the development of literacy and its contribution to the small but growing body of native literature. He also assesses the impact of the media on the native language – contrasting the role of radio, which figures significantly in most communities as a form of native-language expression, with that of television, which remains primarily a source of English and other non-native language input.

Chaps. 8–9 describe the challenge that the native speech forms face in the current situation of bilingualism and diglossia in Arctic communities, correlating the relative functional status of the native language in different regions with the language policies adopted by local educational, economic, administrative, and legal institutions.

In Chap. 10, Dorais addresses the issue of language and identity. The role of the native language in Inuit communities is shown to be much more than that of a symbolic marker of ethnic identity. Daily speakers of the ancestral code perceive it as communicatively superior to the non-native languages prominent in Arctic communities (English, French, and Danish) for the fullest expression of their thoughts, feelings, and ideology.

By providing extensive geographic, social, and cultural background for the range of Inuit speech forms, Dorais documents a fascinating contemporary situation in which the native language is nourished in some contexts but neglected in others. The communities of Greenland claim a number of native language speakers ranging from 80 to 100 percent of the population – robust figures that Dorais attributes to factors such as native language educational policies and the attainment of a certain degree of native political autonomy. In contrast, figures for certain Inuit speech communities in Alaska and Canada locate the proportion of native speakers between 20 and 40 percent. The comparative view of native language in Arctic society that Dorais sets forth constitutes thought-provoking ma-

terial for the examination of which social conditions foster language survival and which lead to language decline and death.

It is difficult to argue for any addition to the already extensive number of topics covered in this book; however, it would be illuminating to see a discussion of code-switching in these Arctic communities. Common in multilingual speech communities, code-switching practices provide an informative perspective on the social and ethnic relations that accompany situations of linguistic inequality.

Clearly, this work is broad in scope, and thus it is above all an inclusive generalized survey of an aboriginal Arctic speech form. Within his over-arching goal of synthesizing wide-ranging themes, however, Dorais enriches the book with carefully selected illustrative detail. Readers seeking a more in-depth treatment of any of the topics addressed will find this book a useful source for further references. Those already familiar with Dorais's work will note that this volume incorporates some of his research published elsewhere (in English), notably Dorais 1993, 1996.

In sum, Dorais's book is an absorbing, comprehensive study of the Inuit language and the multitude of factors that have contributed to its current status in the North American Arctic and Greenland. The book is a valuable resource for scholars of Inuit language and culture. It also speaks to a wider audience of all those interested in the issues surrounding the development and survival of a minority speech form in the modern world.

NOTE

¹The term "Inuit" is used here in its narrow sense, which excludes the other Eskimo languages, Yupik and Sireniki. It is sometimes used in a broader sense to cover all Eskimo languages, to avoid the stigma that can be associated with the term "Eskimo."

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Originally published in French as *Les langues autochtones du Québec* (Québec: Conseil de la langue française, 1992), this edited collection contains four sec-