The fundamental laws which governed the growth of culture and civilization seem to manifest themselves conspicuously, and the chaos of beliefs and customs appear to fall into beautiful order. But investigation goes on incessantly. New facts are disclosed, and shake the foundation of theories that seemed firmly established. The beautiful, simple order is broken, and the student stands aghast before the multitude and complexity of facts that belie the symmetry of the edifice that he had laboriously erected…

The phenomena, as long as imperfectly known, lend themselves to grand and simple theories that explain all being. But when painstaking and laborious inquiry discloses the complexity of phenomena, new foundations must be laid, and the new edifice is erected more slowly. Its outlines are not less grand, although less simple. They do not disclose themselves at once, but appear gradually, as the laborious constructions continue.

Franz Boas
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Foreword

This is a grammatical description of Central Alaskan Yupik (CAY hereafter), an Eskimo Language spoken traditionally in small villages in Southwest Alaska, but now also in major Alaskan cities outside the traditional Yupik-speaking areas, by those people who have moved to or, in an increasing number of cases, been born in the urban areas among dominantly English speakers. Yupik, pronounced as [yúppik], is the self-designation of the people, meaning a ‘real person’ (yu-p’ik person-genuine).

Of CAY dialects, of which there are at least five (as given in § 1.2), General Central Yupik (GCAY), as it is called, is the target of this documentation, which is basically a largely revised and expanded version, with extensive remodeling, of the same author's “Sketch of Central Alaskan Yupik, an Eskimoan Language” (Miyaoka 1996) in the Smithsonian's Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 17, Languages. More or less heavier emphasis is laid upon the Kuskokwim, Coast area, and Nelson Island dialects, followed by the Lower Yukon (see below for the dialects).

This, however, comes with an important caveat. Like any living language, CAY should never be considered as a single stable or monolithic entity. It is very often the case that each village or small local area is perceived (and clearly pointed out) as having its own dialectal characteristics by which it is easily discerned from another. It is full of generational and idiolectal variations and vacillations within itself, in addition to dialectal differences, particularly in matters lexical. This may particularly be the case with a language such as CAY, which has not only a very wide area of distribution and is experiencing very rapid acculturation and decline under the strong pressures of the predominant language (English) and culture (American), but which has been further influenced by different degrees of outside influences, depending upon family and individual history, intermarriage and school education, etc. See § 1.3 for post-contact and current status.

i) It cannot be over-stressed that the Yupik people tend to be reluctant to generalize things in their environment (social, natural and supernatural), to say nothing of their language. Crude generalizations in matters linguistic may be easily doubted and flatly rejected, as is the case with their non-linguistic culture. Their traditional teaching of children in general is based on concrete illustrations and telling stories rather than abstract explanations, very much unlike teaching in American schools. Morrow and Mather (1994: 40), long-time non-Native and Native collaborators in matters anthropological, speak of the ten-
dency of the people to ‘avoid generalized analyses of meaning and motivation’ and to ‘see the academic predilection for critical analysis as leading people from meaning toward discord and confusion’.

This applies all the more so to the language in such matters as acceptability of lexical items of wide range and some grammatical usages (due to their rapid decline among non-conservative speakers). Most conspicuous to the speakers, however, is nothing but lexicon instead of grammatical patterns. A remarkable fact is that Yupik people are very sensitive to lexical differences in actual speech of other persons even among one’s own family, so it is frequently observed that people argue against one another either for fun or seriously. They may also be very much aware of some phonological differences of their (sub)dialects (but hardly of grammar). Not surprisingly, Yupik speakers often let slip that there seems to be neither such a thing as a coherent language (as CAY), a typical dialect (as GCAY or even Kuskokwim), nor a ‘representative’ speaker (either of the language or a dialect).

ii) Fully aware that neat and easy generalizations about a language are doomed to fail, this writer has taken care, within practical (individual or social) limitations, to avoid hasty generalizations by constantly cross-checking any piece of information obtained with as many speakers as possible. Accordingly, everywhere in this description, utmost cautions are taken to avoid hard and fast generalizations or inflexible conclusions in all instances, which some readers might prefer to have. Every speaker, however, may readily find many examples (words or sentences) cited in this grammar that he or she openly claims are not ‘my language’ or just say ‘no’. It would not be surprising to find many Yupik illustrations acceptable only to a portion of CAY speakers and subject to disagreements (responding ‘no’) from other speakers, since acceptability in general varies, empirically speaking, to a considerable extent according to speakers, not only between regions, but even within families – moreover, meaning of ‘no’ by speakers needs to be correctly judged with the utmost care, since it may not necessarily be grammatical or idiolectal/dialectal, but may be pragmatic/contextual, a mere personal preference, etc. Modest experience with the language will lead one to conclude that it would be practically impossible indeed to find a ‘representative’ speaker of CAY or a single speaker who will accept (nearly) all the Yupik examples in this documentation without reservations. Asterisked Yupik illustrations (with beginning *), either words or sentences, mean that, although given for the purpose of discussion or comparison, they are ungrammatical or unacceptable. Ones with ? are questionable or hardly acceptable.

Added to differences between old or ‘conservative’ and younger or innovative speakers, the most difficult areas to handle with this widely fluctuating and
rapidly changing language may include numeral expressions and some transitive constructions, in particular, aside from vocabulary.

iii) CAY is a very rich and expressive language with fine grades of semantic and functional distinction made within words. Although I have striven to examine the subject as assiduously and comprehensively as my abilities and opportunities allow, this grammar is necessarily far from an exhaustive or a definitive treatment. Yupik examples, which are chosen to be as illustrative as possible of the point under discussion, are reduced to the minimum for this book under space limitation. Accordingly, the grammatical description presented here may hardly be anything but an abstraction (which the people dislike). Even aside from the speakers’ different responses, which are to be duly expected, this is inevitably another grammar which “leaks” (Sapir 1921: 39). There is of course a multitude of points that will need correction, revision, and deeper understanding. As such, even after many years of studying CAY, this book admittedly remains a merely preliminary stage for a fuller grammatical documentation and explanation. It must be so, given that ‘a hundred linguists working a hundred years could not get to the bottom of (fully document and explain) a single language’ (Krauss 2007: 16).

iv) Obviously this is an old-fashioned grammar that is not ‘fortified’ by recent theoretical formulations. However, it is not a beginners’ school grammar either and demands a certain extent of linguistic background. It is intended to be something that will be of interest not only to non-speakers (either linguists or not) who are interested in the current language, its depth and subtleties, but also be of some help to the present and future speakers who will appreciate the beauty, richness, intricacy, and orderliness of the language. Despite some possible prejudices among speakers against an academic grammar, this will, I hope, be something to help understand the language and serve to ‘explain’ part of the fluent speaker’s inner (unconscious) knowledge of it. In addition, proper awareness of phonological rules (§ 7) will help to avoid easy etymologizing or metanalysis of words (morphemes), which the simple phonological system (with only four vowels) of the language may tempt ones to do. (A “deep root” may be not more than a conjecture.) The last thing I want is to produce more material only for theoretical ‘tinkerings’ or dilettantish hasty hypotheses.

Based upon my comprehension that the genuine object of linguistics is a “word” (§ 2), this is a morphology-based description, which does not mean that syntactic phenomena are slighted. In this language particularly, to my perception, morphology and syntax are too interwoven to validate separate treatments (cf. Part 1 Preliminaries). The foregoing documentation consists of a fundamental grammar as its main part, accompanied by a suffix list and references, together with (recorded) sources for the language. However, it remains nothing
Foreword

but an ever on-going work subject to constant correction and revision. Any
comment and suggestion, factual and interpretational, would be fully appreci-
eted.

Three different writing systems co-exist in this publication: phonological
and phonemic representation (both in academic symbols) as well as the current-
ly adopted “practical orthography” (as explained in § 3). What may seem re-
dundant, especially in early chapters, will, I hope, serve to help propagate the
orthography currently enjoying a greater acceptance and usage in traditional
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Two-letter abbreviations of speakers’ names (first and last) are given as the sources of information.

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July 15, 2012
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Contents

The Grammar consists of fifty-four chapters (§ 1 through § 54) in ten parts.

Footnotes and examples are respectively referred to as, e.g. “fn. 4” and (24), within one and the same chapter, while ones in a different chapter (e.g. § 10) are referred to as, §-10-fn.4 and § 10(24).

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