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# **The Alaskan Arctic Coast Inupiat Eskimo Project of the Summer Institute of Linguistics**

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The Alaskan Arctic Coast Inupiat Eskimo Project of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Of the numerous Eskimo languages and dialects distributed across the Arctic regions from Siberia to Greenland, a fairly well defined linguistic subgroup is represented by the settlements along the Arctic coast from Point Hope, Alaska, in the west to the Mackenzie River delta area across the border into Canada in the east. The largest concentration of population in this area is at Barrow, the northernmost town in the United States.

The work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics was initiated there in 1959 under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Webster, Canadians from Ontario. Language analysis, the development of a practical orthography, and subsequent translation efforts were carried out in close collaboration with Rev. Roy Ahmaogak, an Eskimo Presbyterian pastor. The New Testament was published in 1968, a few months after the untimely death of Rev. Ahmaogak.

The work of the Websters in northern Alaska coincided with a period of awakening to the need of bilingual education and cultural enrichment programs in the schools. They took an early leading role in efforts to introduce Eskimo materials into the school curriculum and were instrumental in the preparation of a number of booklets for use in the schools. In addition to a number of introductory primers and readers, the Websters authored several instructional booklets such as Let's Learn Eskimo and assisted in the production of A Teacher's Guide for Teaching English to Native Children of Alaska. An Inupiat Eskimo Dictionary co-authored with another SIL linguist was published by the University of Alaska in 1970.

The Websters, together with other members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics working in Alaska, have maintained close cooperation with Dr. Michael Krauss and others at the University of Alaska who are concerned with bilingual education. Recent support from the Alaskan state legislature and grants from federal agencies give promise of vigorous bilingual education programs in Alaska's schools where there are significant numbers of students whose mother tongue is other than English. The work of the Websters with the Arctic Coast Inupiat Eskimos provided a firm foundation for subsequent efforts in literacy and bilingual education.

In 1970 the Websters terminated their work in Alaska and accepted an assignment to the Ivory Coast in Africa. Before leaving Alaska, however, they had left an impressive number of publications in the Eskimo language and had distributed this material across the arctic coast of Alaska, at one time making use of an airplane to move from village to village. Material left in these villages included not only printed publications but also taped instructions for home study.