

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY: SOME INUIT EXAMPLES

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Abstract / Resume

The author outlines differences between cultural and ethnic identity among Canadian Inuit and assesses the relative importance of language (with special emphasis on Native language education) in defining these identities. Data are drawn principally from interviews conducted with Igloodik (Nunavut) and Quaqtq (Nunavik) Inuit in 1990-1991. The research suggests that cultural identity and ethnic identity are indeed different, and that language, without being essential to the definition of Inuit identity, nevertheless plays a crucial role within contemporary Inuit culture.

Cet article essaie de mettre en lumière la différence entre identités culturelle et ethnique chez les Inuit canadiens, et de mesurer l'importance relative de la langue (en mettant l'emphase sur l'éducation en langue autochtone) dans la définition de ces identités. Les données sont principalement tirées d'entrevues menées avec des Inuit d'Igloodik (Nunavut) et de Quaqtq (Nunavik) en 1990-1991. La conclusion montre qu'identité culturelle et identité ethnique sont réellement différentes, et que la langue, sans être essentielle à la définition de l'identité inuit, n'en joue pas moins un rôle crucial dans la culture inuit contemporaine.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, relationships among language, culture and identity have become a favourite topic in social science. Questions that keep popping up concern, for example, the difference between cultural and ethnic identity (cf. Abou, 1986; Lipianski *et al.*, 1990; Eriksen, 1993; Meintel, 1993; Dorais, 1994). Are both types of identity really the same or should they be conceptually distinguished? Similarly, scholars such as Roosens (1989), Dorais (1991) and Stairs (1992) hold diverging views on the role of language in defining one's identity: can a culture or ethnic group be considered unique if it does not possess its own language or, at least, its own version of a common tongue?

The present paper will examine how some Inuit from the Canadian Eastern Arctic perceive and express their linguistic, cultural and ethnic identities. For the purpose of this examination, I will define as "cultural" these people's attitudes and practices toward language, while the term "ethnic" will denote the political role played by Inuktitut in contemporary Canada.¹ The distinction stems from the fact that collective identity, which may be roughly defined as the specific way a group of human beings perceive and define their own place in the world, is most often discussed, as far as the Inuit are concerned, in connection with two interrelated, but well-defined phenomena: Aboriginal culture on the one hand, and territorial rights on the other.

In this context, *cultural identity*, may be defined as the basic consciousness of one's own group's specificity amongst other peoples, in terms of living habits, customs, language, values, etc. Formerly, this specificity was often expressed as a contrast between humans ("Us") and non-humans ("They"). The traditional Inuit for instance established a clear distinction between themselves, the "persons" (this is what the word "Inuit" means), and the other—at least partly rational—creatures with which they were in contact: the animals (*uumajuit*), the spirits (*tuurngait*, *ijiqqat*, etc.), the Indians (*allait* or *itqilgit*), the Europeans (*qallunaat*), etc. (Dorais, 1988).

Whether expressed in terms of humanity or otherwise, cultural identity is universal, because all people in the world are conscious of some sort of specificity that sets them apart from others. By contrast, *ethnic identity* (or ethnicity) only seems to occur within complex societies (i.e. societies with a state apparatus, social classes, etc.), when it appears functional to divide people into categories based upon something other than gender, age or occupation (Simon, 1983; Elbaz, 1985). Ethnicity is linked to cultural identity, because in order to categorize people, one must often refer to some of their cultural, linguistic or religious specificities. But it is also fundamentally different. Ethnic classifications may be based upon totally

non-cultural criteria (such as physical appearance (or “race”) or place of origin). One of the prerequisites of such classifications is that all “ethnic” groups interact within the same broad social structure, whether it be a national society (Canada for instance), or the contemporary “global village”, where all of the world’s peoples entertain permanent contacts.

Ethnic identity generally operates as a way to gain access to, or be alienated from, some economic, political or cultural resources. This is why it cannot occur in less complex societies (such as that of the traditional Inuit), where all resources are, presumably, equally available to everybody. Ethnic identity is thus strongly linked to politics, defined as the power to control and regulate the availability and distribution of resources.

Language and Cultural Identity

In the Canadian Eastern Arctic, the language of the Inuit is still very much in use. Canadian census statistics show that in 1991, it was the mother tongue of more than 85% of the Aboriginal populations of Nunavut (the northeastern part of the Northwest Territories) and Nunavik (Arctic Quebec). As we shall see, Inuktitut is highly valued by most of its speakers, both as the easiest way to express their feelings and inner thoughts, and as a symbol of who they really are.

Language Behaviour and Linguistic Values

Research conducted by the author in Igloodik (Nunavut) and Quaqtq (Nunavik), in 1990-1993,² explored Inuit attitudes and practices toward language, knowledge and culture. Both villages are small communities (Igloodik has some 800 residents, Quaqtq 250), where hunting and fishing activities play an important part in daily life, even if the economy now relies principally on wage work. In both locations, Inuktitut still constitutes the main language of ordinary communication, but due to the presence of southern-style education since the late 1950s, almost all individuals under 40 years of age also speak English³ with varying degrees of fluency.

In Igloodik, out of a sample of fifteen individuals (7 men and 8 women⁴) with whom in-depth interviews were conducted⁵, six were unilingual in Inuktitut and nine were Inuktitut-English bilinguals. With one exception, all bilingual respondents were born after 1950. Among those born before that date, only one man (born in 1934) had some fluency in English, a language he had learned during a three-years stay in a southern hospital. Gender did not seem to have any bearing on the degree of fluency in either language.

Naturally enough, all unilingual individuals read exclusively in Inuktitut (mostly magazines and religious texts). The older bilingual man also read Inuktitut only, as his knowledge of English was admittedly elementary. Among younger bilinguals, only two persons (both born during the 1950s) declared that they regularly read in both languages. The other six read exclusively in English. As far as electronic media were concerned, everybody listened to the local radio, which broadcast mainly in Inuktitut, but all bilingual respondents, with the exception of the older man, preferred to watch English television, which they deemed much more interesting than the few weekly hours of Inuktitut programming.

It thus seems clear that in Igloolik, Inuktitut-English bilingualism is directly linked to formal schooling. The vast majority of the bilingual individuals were born after 1950, which means that they were of school age when southern-style education became available in their village. As this education was provided exclusively in English at first, and later (beginning in the early 1970s) in English with a start (kindergarten and grades 1 through 3) in Inuktitut, it planted and reinforced the English language within the community. This led to the above mentioned result: a clear preference for English television and reading materials among bilinguals, and a strong tendency among younger people to speak more English than Inuktitut with their peers and siblings (cf. Dorais, 1989).

Native and second languages thus occupy different positions in the local culture. Spoken and written English is preferred by younger generations to communicate with the outside world and, at least to some extent, to chat among themselves, while spoken Inuktitut is used for dealing with older people and, as shall be seen below, to express feelings and thoughts linked to their cultural and local identities.⁶ As for written Inuktitut, its use seems to be limited to the classroom and the church (cf. Shearwood, 1987 for a thorough study of literacy in Igloolik). By contrast, for the older generation, spoken and written Inuktitut still constitutes the principal—if not the only—means of communication and, consequently, unavoidable elements of their cultural identity.

When invited to voice their opinions about the relative weight of the two languages in their community, informants' answers stressed the contrasted position of each tongue. All fifteen respondents for instance stated that Inuktitut was important, as a symbol of Inuit identity (6 answers); as the principal conveyor of Native culture (5 answers); as a tool to communicate with Elders (3 answers); and as the preferred way to express one's inner feelings (one answer). Our informants thus considered their Native language as a weighty element of self-definition.

As important as it was, however, this element was not deemed essential to Inuit identity. Fourteen of the fifteen respondents stated that any

person whose parents were Inuit, and/or who was himself or herself living the Inuit way, should be considered an Inuk, even without any knowledge of Inuktitut (though, to quote some, such a person would be a “bad little Inuk” or “a very ignorant individual”). A few respondents gave the example of the Mackenzie Inuvialuit, who still remain fully Inuit, even if they have now lost their language. The respondents nevertheless thought that it was legitimate to teach Inuktitut at school, as it could help the children to preserve their language. Some of them even added that the Inuit curriculum should be improved and extended to all grades and topics.

All informants declared that English was also important, but for different reasons: to learn new things in order not to be left out (7 answers); to be more competitive on the labour market (5 answers); to communicate with the outside world (2 answers); “because the Inuit are now following the Qallunaat (Eurocanadian) ways” (one answer). Only one respondent (a bilingual male in his late thirties) expressed some restrictions, stating that English is not necessarily important to everybody; unilingual Inuit should be able to gain access to all of the opportunities offered in the North, without having to know English to do so.

In Igloolik then, the values attributed by our informants to the two languages in practice betray the roles attributed to each of them. The importance of Inuktitut lies primarily in its power as an agent and symbol of identity. Even if one may be an Inuk without speaking the language, Inuktitut is a privileged instrument for conveying traditional culture, communicating with the Elders and thus helping preserve one's own deepest identity. In contrast, no respondent identifies with English. It is rather seen as a tool, necessary to compete efficiently in the modern world, but not good enough for the adequate expression of one's inner feelings.

Such a contrast between the two languages indicates some ambiguities. As seen above, the actual language practices, influenced for a great part by the overwhelming presence of English at school, in the media and in public life, seem to disclose, at least among the younger generations, a neat predominance of the non-Native language. There thus exists some degree of conflict between what people do (English is increasingly used in the community) and what they think (Inuktitut is greatly valued, and most respondents are confident that it will survive into the next generation).

This conflict, this dilemma, also exists in Quaqtaq (Nunavik), where, besides English, French is also used as a second language. Inuktitut, however, still retains its status as the principal language of the community (Dorais, 1991). It is almost the exclusive mean of communication in all Inuit homes, on the street, at church, on the local radio, as well as during hunting and fishing expeditions. Inuktitut is also commonly heard in the work place, except in the case of linguistic interchanges with non-Inuit co-workers,

when English is used regardless of the mother tongue of the interlocutor. Even in the six families whose father is not an Inuk, the children speak Inuktitut among themselves and with their mother. The Native idiom thus seems a bit more dominant than in Igloodik.

As a rule, all Quaqtqaq Inuit under 40 years of age can speak some English and, among several younger ones, some French also. A few children may try from time to time to address their parents or grandparents in English, but they are normally answered in Inuktitut. People belonging to the generation aged 25 to 40 years old, schooled exclusively in English, tend to mix this language with Inuktitut when speaking to their peers. This is not the case with the older generation, who had practically no schooling, nor with the younger one, who attended schools where, as in Igloodik, some Inuktitut was taught.

All Quaqtqaq Inuit, whether schooled or not, are able to read and write Inuktitut in syllabic characters, albeit with varying degrees of skill. Those who are bilingual, but have not received much schooling, can also read English, but Inuktitut is easier for them. For those with a little more formal education—typically, people who have completed elementary school—Inuktitut is easier to write, although they may read more easily in English. Finally, those Inuit who have completed or gone beyond high school find it easier to read and write English, but they are also able to get along in syllabics.

The linguistic situation thus appears as stable—as it also does in Igloodik—but this stability may be challenged by the overwhelming presence of the two foreign languages, English and French. Even if the school operates in Inuktitut and teaches this language up to grade 2, it is also a privileged locale for exposing the children to the non-Aboriginal tongues, as from grade 3 on English and French become the principal teaching media. Besides the school, all external activities (television, regional politics and administration, etc.), including contacts with the headquarters of Nunavik's Inuit organizations, are dealt with in English or, to a much lesser extent, French. As in Igloodik then, the use of Inuktitut is limited to local and family affairs.

In relation to French, English clearly operates as the dominant speech form. It is the only second language understood by the Quaqtqaq Inuit over 25 years of age; within the community, all published advices, by-laws, etc. are bilingual (Inuktitut-English) rather than trilingual; apart from a limited amount of Inuktitut programming, northern television broadcasts exclusively in English; the only available video cassettes are in English; and with the exception of the French teachers, all non-Inuit individuals, even those of French Canadian extraction, communicate in English (rather than Inuktitut or French) with the Inuit residents.⁷

The Quaqtq people are conscious of this situation. All of them agree on the importance of knowing English and/or French. For two-thirds (12 respondents) of a sample of eighteen in-depth interviews (8 men and 10 women aged between 15 and 68 years old) conducted in 1990, these languages are necessary if one wants to find a suitable job or make one's own way in life. Four other respondents stressed the fact that northern society has now become bilingual or trilingual, and that the Quaqtq Inuit must follow the stream.

Our informants insist, however, on the fact that Inuktitut must remain the first language of the Inuit, and that English or French should only be learned as second or third languages. All respondents consider the knowledge and use of Inuktitut as indispensable to northern Native people. For twelve of them, the Aboriginal language is intimately linked to their most basic self-definition.⁸ The others insist on the fact that the Inuit need their mother tongue, because they feel more comfortable when speaking it. As in Igloodik then, Inuktitut is the language of identity—12 Quaqtq respondents even assert that one cannot be a real Inuk without speaking the language—while English and French draw their importance from their practicality and usefulness.

Such assertions about the respective weight of Native and non-Native languages reflect underlying assumptions about the interface between traditional culture and contemporary life. In Quaqtq, this is expressed by way of a metaphor—which would also be valid in Igloodik—contrasting *maqainniq* and *kiinaujaliurutiit*. *Maqainniq*—going on the land for hunting, fishing and trapping—is the activity most essential to the preservation of Aboriginal identity. The majority of our respondents assert that without *maqainniq*, Inuit would not be Inuit any more. *Maqainniq* is taught to the children and young people within the extended family, and it is conducted in Inuktitut.

Nowadays, however, *maqainniq* does not enable economic survival. Thus one must also learn about *kiinaujaliurutiit*, the “means for making money”, i.e. the qualifications necessary to obtain wage work. These do not stem from Inuit culture. They are rather introduced, taught and controlled by the Qallunaat. This is why the best place to learn them is at school, whose prime function is the transmission of some useful *kiinaujaliurutiit*. As the *kiinaujaliurutiit* are basically Qallunaat affairs, the Qallunaat languages, English and French, are two of the most useful “means for making money”. It is thus considered normal that the main school languages be those of the non-Inuit.

But like the Igloodik people, the Quaqtq Inuit also agree that Inuktitut should be taught in the school, and maybe for a longer period than is now the case. We are thus brought back to our original dilemma: the conflicts

between identity and practicability, representations and practices, traditional culture and contemporary life. Education stands at a crossroads in this dilemma, as one of its principal loci of occurrence, but also, hopefully, as the place where the conflict may be resolved.

Language, Culture and Education

In both Igloodik and Quaqtq, many residents perceive a neat dichotomy between traditional learning and the modern school. For them, Inuit education is—or was—a family or camp affair. The children learned by imitating their parents and the other adults. At a very tender age, they started participating in domestic and hunting-gathering tasks. The girls were thus introduced to sewing, fishing, cooking and childcare, while the boys went hunting and trapping with their fathers. Special rituals celebrated the first accomplishments of the young people.

This type of education was based on example rather than words. The adults did not give many oral explanations, the children being expected to learn through participant observation.⁹ Young people thus acquired some knowledge about the *inuusiit* (“living habits”, i.e. the social and moral rules that govern community life, and about *iqqanaijarniq* or *pinasuarniq* (“working”), the various techniques linked to *maqainniq*. Education was thus geared toward the moulding of *inumariit* (“full individuals”), that is socially and economically responsible adults able to survive in the arctic environment.¹⁰

By contrast, as mentioned above, the school is seen as a place where one learns how to make money. Instead of *inuusiit* and *iqqanaijarniq* (*pinasuarniq*), it teaches some useful *kiinaujaliurutiit*. This teaching is conducted in a systematic way, and it relies upon words. The teacher explains verbally what she or he seeks to transmit to the children. Contrary to traditional education, which required the active involvement of the youngsters, school education is perceived as generating passivity: the pupils just have to sit down and listen to their teacher.

In the eyes of many respondents, such passivity entails problems. When the kids had to learn by themselves, they were more autonomous than they are now, and they depended less upon the external world. Those who did not go to school turned out to be better workers than those who went. The extent of the children's knowledge, though, was rather low, but their overall morality was high, because their parents obliged them to abide by relatively severe regulations.

Such a perception explains why several informants assert that formal education should not jeopardize the transmission of the traditional *iliqqusiit*

or *piusiit* (“customs”). For them, both types of knowledge are equally essential. A few people even think that it would be better if Inuktitut were the only—or at least the principal—school language, as it would facilitate the learning of culture. More generally, all respondents state that going on the land plays an important part in education, as it is the best way to learn about nature, survival techniques, the Inuit language and traditional values.

For many Inuit then, education seems to have a double function. On the one hand, it is meant to explain the present-day world to the young people and, hopefully, to help them acquire the skills necessary to earn a decent living in the midst of this world. On the other hand, though, education is also perceived as being geared toward the transmission of what are deemed to be the traditional Inuit *iliqqusiit* (*piusiit*), *uqausiit* (“words”), moral values and social customs.

As principal provider of *kiinaujaliurutiit* and systematic knowledge in general, the school is seen as the main instrument for fulfilling the first function of education. But it also has a role to play in the transmission of Inuit matters, as most people consider it useful for the teaching of Inuktitut and for some traditional techniques. The main tools, however, for fulfilling the second function of education are family life and the *maqainniq* activities. Modern education thus seems to be perceived as a combination of both formal teaching and informal community instruction. It is this combination that should ensure the preservation of Aboriginal culture and identity, in the context of the present-day world.

Some Inuit educators and parents are now trying to devise a way to operationalize such a linkage between traditional and Qallunaat forms of education. In Igloolik for instance, school activities are occasionally taken into the outlying camps by the Native teachers. In that kind of setting, school often operates in very traditional Inuit terms, using person-to-person learning.¹¹ In both Igloolik and Quaqtqaq, elders are regularly hired to come into the classroom to teach their skills to the younger generations, or the kids themselves are brought to the land for a day or two by their teachers. Such initiatives, also found among other Aboriginal groups, might well constitute a third way of educating Aboriginal children, a way that would go beyond the dichotomy between *maqainniq* and *kiinaujaliurutiit*.¹²

Language and Ethnic Identity

The Inuit have now become full-fledged citizens of Canada. They participate in most of the country's economic, political and administrative organizations, and they belong to the same Canadian society as any other citizen of this country. But the Arctic Aboriginal people remain Inuit. Their inclusion within mainstream institutions has not obliterated their basic identity. This work has examined some cultural aspects of this identity, in relation to language and education.

Cultural identity is not sufficient, though, to ensure the specificity of the Inuit. As members of the Canadian society, they must also define themselves as an organized collectivity. Canada is now commonly considered as a mosaic of peoples who interact among themselves within the framework of Canadian institutions (cf. Dorais *et al.*, 1994). These interactions are ethnic in nature, i.e. they involve culturally or linguistically defined groups that vie for access to various resources. If, in the case of the French Canadian, Anglo-Quebecer and immigrant minorities, these resources are mainly cultural and symbolic, or serve as goals for the politicians' personal power trips, they become much more concrete—involving political autonomy and self-managed economic development—when it comes to the Aboriginal nations.¹³

The contemporary Inuit should thus be considered as an ethnic group within the Canadian multicultural mosaic. As such, they possess an ethnic identity, or ethnicity, which, as mentioned in the introduction, is not necessarily congruent with their cultural identity. As ethnicity is largely political, its public definition is often left to the organizations that struggle collectively for the recognition of Aboriginal rights.

These organizations are quite numerous. In addition to the national associations (e.g. Inuit Tapirisat of Canada), they include a number of regional and thematic (i.e. cultural, economic, educational, etc.) corporations that cater to more specific interests. To justify the existence of the Inuit as a *bona fide* Aboriginal ethnic group, the associations must often put forward some cultural and other characteristics that symbolize and define the specificity of Arctic Aboriginal people within modern Canada.¹⁴ Language is one of these characteristics (Dorais, 1991). The discourse of the national or regional Inuit organizations generally insists on the fact that Inuktitut is very important to Arctic Aboriginal people because it constitutes a privileged instrument for conveying their most basic world view.

Such an assertion is perfectly true. As seen in the preceding sections, both our Igloodik and Quaqtq respondents view their language as an essential component of their identity. But for most Arctic political and economic organizations, the celebration and the preservation of Inuktitut

do not constitute goals by themselves. Rather than being linked to its intrinsic value, the importance of the language lies in the fact that it stands as a symbol for the collective rights of the Inuit, whether these be territorial, economic, political or cultural. The use and transmission of Inuktitut are publicly encouraged, because such encouragement is useful to the management of ethnic identity. But when it comes to assessing the relative weight of language and culture among the priorities of most Inuit associations and corporations, they very often come in last position, far after economic development and political power, with the consequence that many linguistic and cultural projects undertaken by the arctic organizations do not last for long and do not produce many social and/or educational results.

In view of all this, it becomes evident that the priorities of the basic population, in terms of cultural identity and practical linguistic and educational needs, do not always coincide with those of the Aboriginal organizations, which are geared more toward politics and the definition of Inuit ethnicity within Canadian society. As far as language is concerned, a majority of the Eastern Arctic Aboriginal people seem to view the Inuktitut/English dichotomy (or Inuktitut/English/French trichotomy) as one opposing identity and practicability. On the other hand, most Inuit organizations appear to consider Inuktitut as a mere symbol of Aboriginal rights and ethnicity, while English would be the language of real life, the only tool effective enough to induce economic development.

Beyond this discrepancy between the population's interests, mainly linked with cultural identity, and those of the political elites, who think more in ethnic terms, one should not forget that the whole question of language and education is in itself politically grounded. According to such authors as Mallon (1979), Street (1984; 1993) or Langer (1987), the mere fact of bringing literacy and formal education to a given society is a political act.¹⁵ Far from being a purely technical phenomenon, literacy is embedded within an ideology that gives a specific value to reading, writing and school education. When the newly literate language is a minority tongue, one which is dominated by a seemingly omnipotent majority speech form, the social practices associated with language use cannot but reinforce the unequal power relations within which the society operates.

This is clearly the case with Inuktitut, whose position in relation to English is that of an ethnic symbol or, at best, a value-laden element of cultural identity, but which is not generally perceived as a really useful means of communication beyond the limits of the home and community. As far as literacy is concerned, the Igloodik and Quaqtak examples show that English (or, to a lesser extent, French) constitutes the principal reading and writing medium of the younger generations, written Inuktitut being

confined to very narrow—mainly religious and low academic—tasks. The English language thus retains its dominant position within Inuit society, together with the concepts, discourses and practices it conveys, even if most people attribute a high sentimental and cultural value to Inuktitut.

Conclusion

In such a context, it seems that the existing dichotomy between identity and practicability will only be resolved when the Inuit elites realize that linguistic, educational and cultural questions are worth their attention, as their political weight is equal to that of economics and politics *stricto sensu*. If there is a concerted effort to increase the use and visibility of Inuktitut at the regional and, even, national levels,¹⁶ then the Aboriginal language should regain some measure of social power, and, besides English and French, become a *kiinaujaliuruti*, a “means for making money”. In this way, it would be perceived as laden with both identity and practicality.

The preceding pages have shown that the distinction drawn between cultural and ethnic identity is in fact useful, as it enables light to shine upon—and explain—the contrasting discourses which the basic population and the elites respectively hold about language and culture. We also suggest that, even if Inuit identity might conceivably endure in the absence of the Aboriginal language, Inuktitut nevertheless stands as an important identifying factor. That identity could possibly erode very rapidly without the active and useful presence of the language.

Notes

1. This follows Barth (1969), Elbaz (1985), Breton (1991), Eriksen (1993) and most contemporary social scientists, who consider the genesis and expression of ethnicity as indissociable from the economic, political and social relations within which people are involved.
2. Titled “Native Education as Cultural Brokerage”, this research project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I express my thanks here to this council, as well as to Dr. Arlene Stairs, my co-researcher, whose insights and suggestions were particularly useful.
3. In Quaqtq, a few younger individuals speak French in place of, or in addition to, English.

4. They were born between 1910 and 1939 (3 respondents), 1940 and 1949 (4 respondents), 1950 and 1959 (5 respondents) and 1960 and 1969 (3 respondents).
5. The interviews were conducted in Inuktitut in both Igloolik and Quaqtaq, through an interpreter in the first location, but not in the second, where the dialect was more familiar to me. I assumed the task of transcribing and translating the interviews.
6. One of the main ways of expressing local concerns, the locally produced radio programs use Inuktitut almost exclusively.
7. Taylor and Wright (1989) describe a similar situation in Kuujuaq, Nunavik's biggest community.
8. A typical statement is: "The Inuit are characterized by their language".
9. Some skills could even be learned individually. Syllabic literacy, for instance, was often acquired by browsing through the Bible, without outside help.
10. These adults were either male or female. Most informants state that with a few exceptions (girls brought up as boys for instance), each child was educated according to the specific tasks he or she would have to perform as a grown-up man or woman.
11. Such individualized learning is congruent with the second part of Taamusi Qumaq's definition of the word "school" (*ilinniavik*), in his Inuktitut dictionary: "A school is a house managed by Qallunaat, where many things are learned through words. One person alone can also be a school, by observing him/her when he/she is working, by considering it important to work together [with this person]" (Qumaq, 1991:50).
12. The ideas and examples found in this paragraph were suggested by Arlene Stairs (personal communication).
13. The question of resources is also more than symbolic for the so-called visible minorities (e.g. African or Asian Canadians), who were—or still are—denied access to several sectors of the labour market and public life in general. In their case, multiculturalism and affirmative action hopefully entail some measure of social equality.
14. Without such a justification, this specificity would risk being questioned by public opinion (and the mainstream politicians), who could argue that because of the demise of hunting-gathering activities, the Aborig-

inal residents of the Arctic are not real Inuit any more and, in consequence, are not entitled to any special economic or political status. The necessity of defining Inuit ethnicity in cultural terms is also compounded by the fact that Aboriginal elites—in contrast to those in mainstream society—do not own the economic and political capital that could otherwise provide them with a solid enough power base (Anne Douglas, personal communication).

15. The position taken by these authors is in contrast with that of scholars such as Goody (1977), who consider literacy to be a neutral process, more concerned with the development of logic than of the social order.
16. This can be achieved through various means: using Inuktitut as the principal teaching medium from kindergarten to the end of high school (as is currently done in Greenland); facilitating its use as the language of administration; developing community-level schemes for increasing the language's public visibility (cf. Prattis and Chartrand, 1984); etc. Generally speaking, it should be realized that effective bilingual education is, of necessity, cross-cultural, and that in order for it to benefit the language and culture of the students, it should adapt to the local cultural and social context (Saravia-Shore and Arvizu, 1992).

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