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Item 11 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda

WRITING SYSTEMS

- (a) Transfer of names from one writing system into another
  - (i) Into a single romanization system

Canadian policy with regard to the standardization of recently collected Eskimo toponyms according to the Lefebvre-Gagné orthography

Paper submitted by the Government of Canada\*

The Eskimo population of Canada is growing rapidly. Approximately 16,000 Eskimos live scattered over the Canadian arctic regions. They are mostly concentrated in the Northwest territories but can also be found in northern Quebec (3,200), Labrador (1,250) and the northern part of the Province of Manitoba (365).

In the last few years the education of Eskimos has become extremely important. Everything relating to their culture, especially their language and geographical nomenclature, is regarded as part of the national heritage and a public asset.

This paper describes the phonological system of the Eskimo language according to the official orthography. The writing system reflects the structure of the Eskimo language and uses the unified orthography recently adopted by the Canadian Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Geographical Board of the Province of Quebec. It is an inter-dialectal orthography which the Eskimos, unlike the syllabic script, readily understand.

The Eskimo language, at least as it is spoken in the eastern Arctic, has a phonological system consisting of 18 basic sounds: 15 consonants and 3 vowels.

\* Prepared by J. Poirier, Secretary of the Quebec Geographical Board.

Both consonants and vowels can be short or long (geminate). The distinction between short and long phonemes is extremely important in that it determines differences of meaning both in lexical items and in grammatical forms. For example, in the case of vowels, the difference in meaning between /kiina(q)/ "face" and /kina/ "who?" is based on a difference of length. In the case of consonants, the difference in meaning between /ikiq/ "passage between the two shores of a bay" and /ikk<sup>ik</sup>iq/ "gum" is based on the distinction between a single consonant and a double (geminate) consonant.

It is important to point out that the Eskimo language, especially in the eastern Arctic, is passing through a stage in its development which favours increased gemination. This trend, which for some time has been spreading from east to west, has been singled out by experts as a characteristic of the modern Eskimo language. W. Thalbitzer, the Danish eskimologist, made this observation as early as 1928 at the Twenty-Third International Congress of Americanists.

The standardized inter-dialectal orthography takes this development into account and recognizes only a rather limited number of consonant clusters consisting of two different elements. This leaves a large number of geminates, but only where they are essential, i.e. where they result from assimilation of one consonant to another within clusters. This system, which is well-founded and logical, differs from the earlier fantastic transcriptions which varied according to how travellers heard them.

To form some idea of the arbitrariness of the old-style "phonetic" transcriptions, one has only to compare identical words written in various ways depending on the transcriber, the region and the year. It is essential to avoid referring to the same thing by different names. Variants like Taserk, Tessik, Tassik, Tasiq, etc., all meaning "lake", should not be tolerated. The Eskimos would appreciate it. A cursory examination of the map of New Quebec easily provides examples of such annoying but avoidable contradictions.

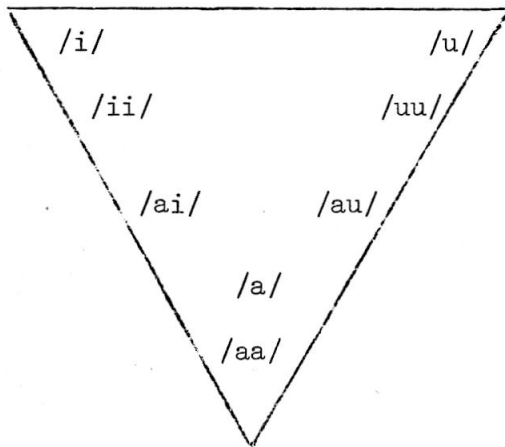
Let us briefly summarize, in tabular form, the sounds of Eskimo and how they are written.

### 1. Consonants

	<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Dental-alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Uvular</u>	
					("guttural")	
	(voiceless)	(voiced)	(vl. - vd.)	(vl.-vd.)	(vl.-vd.)	(vl. - vd.)
Stops	/p/	/t/		/k/	/q/	
	/pp/	/tt/		/kk/	/rq/	
Nasals		/n/		/ng/	/rng/	
		/nn/		/nng/		
Fricatives		/s/		/j/	/g/	/r/
		/ss/		/jj/	/gg/	/rr/
Laterals		/l/				
		(fricative)/ll/				

## 2. Vowels

In Eskimo, there are only three vowels, which may be simple, geminate or complex ("diphthongs"):



(a) Two degrees of opening:

- (i) Open: /a/
- (ii) Closed: /i/, /u/

(b) Three points of articulation:

- (i) Front: /i/
- (ii) Back: /u/
- (iii) Central /a/

### Remarks

It would be tedious and not serve our purpose to illustrate all the combinations of letters - single, digraphs and trigraphs - which in the past have been used to represent the basic sounds of Eskimo. Heretofore there has been no system which consistently represented the same phoneme by an invariant symbol or letter. Today we have a system of graphemes which is very faithful from the standpoint of pronunciation, simplicity and the inherent structure of the language. This simplification has been achieved by means of the standardized orthography adopted by the Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; with its 18 letters (including the digraph /ll/ representing the lateral fricative), the system clearly reflects the phonological and grammatical structure of the language both in the transcription of oral texts and in the recording of place names.

The following are a few examples of the unintelligible combinations and fanciful graphic representations used for certain phonemes which are among the most common or most important in the language:

1. "bl", "dl", "pl", "gl", "kl", "sl", "shl", "hl" = /ll/ (the lateral fricative). There are several reasons for this proliferation of symbols containing "l", i.e. dialectal variation, the faulty hearing of investigators and incomplete assimilations. This phoneme, which is represented as a digraph, is very important as it serves to distinguish words: /alaq/ "sole" - /allaq/ "book".

2. "kr", "k", "ch", "c", etc. = initial /q-/: /qimmiq/ "dog";  
"rkr", "rgr", "gg", etc. = medial /-rq-/: /tarqituq/ "he hides";  
"rk", "c", "k", etc. = final /-q/: /inusiq/ "life".

The velar /k/ must not be confused with the uvular /q/ since the distinction is meaningful: /kimmik/ "heel" - /qimmiq/ "dog".

### 3. Vowels

The phoneme /a/ is frequently written "e" before "s" and "l" and "o" before "k". /i/ also appears as "e" when it is lowered. /u/ appears as "o" before /k/ and in the open position, i.e. before a consonant. The same effect is produced by a following /q/.

It is very difficult, as we have said, to trace all the possible representations of the 18 phonemes in the welter of graphic representations. We would hope that our brief survey of the matter has demonstrated the need to represent the toponymic and other elements of the Eskimo language by an invariant system based on an accepted phonemic chart. We believe that we have succeeded. Let us now take a look at the consonant clusters (mostly digraphs which are permissible in the standardized system.

#### 1. Geminates

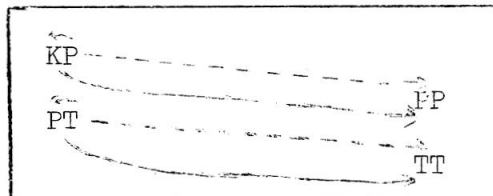
/pp/, /tt/, /kk/, /mm/, /nn/, /nng/\*, /vv/, /ss/, /jj/, /gg/, /rr/, /ll/.

#### 2. Non-geminates

/rp/, /rt/, /rq/, /rm/, /rn/, /rv/, /rs/, /j/, /rl/ = realization of the phoneme /-q-/ (in the stem or elsewhere) in the environment of a following consonant: assimilation does not occur. To these clusters should be added the two nasal phonemes /ng/ (velar) and /rng/ (uvular or "guttural").

#### Note on assimilation

Assimilation operates regressively, i.e. from the last or second consonant to the first. For example, the underlying cluster "kp" is assimilated to "pp"; the underlying cluster "pt" is assimilated to "tt" and so on.



When working with a transcription from field notes, the first procedure is to derive the underlying forms from the assimilations according to the system indicated above. This procedure works except in the case of /r/ in the environment of other phonemes (/r/ or /q/).

The simplified Lefebvre-Gagné orthography adopted by Canada is used for transcribing recently collected Eskimo toponyms. With its 18 letters (including the digraph /ll/ representing the lateral fricative), the system clearly reflects the phonological and grammatical structure of the language both in the transcription of oral texts and in the recording of place names.

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