

New Words Added to Alutiiq Language

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How do you express modern concepts and terms in an endangered Native language spoken fluently by few people? Each month, elders from around Kodiak meet to tackle that question, developing new words in Alutiiq for English words such as "computer" and "Internet," in order to help the Alutiiq language evolve with the times.

The New Words Council is a major component of the Alutiiq Museum's Alutiiq Living Words Project, an extensive project designed to increase knowledge and revitalization of the language. The council met last week in Old Harbor. April Laktonen Counciller is the Alutiiq Language manager at the Alutiiq Museum and also the project manager for the living words project. She said the project involves mostly fluent Kodiak elders with the assistance of semi-fluent second language speakers.

-- (Counciller 1 35 sec. "The council is made up of ... a way to start the discussion.")

According to Counciller, Alutiiq words usually consist of a root word with any number of suffixes attached. She said the new words the council creates tend to be literal, either based on function, what the word sounds like or a direct translation. The council created and debated a number of such new words at its most recent meeting.

-- (Counciller 2 46 sec. "We created a new word for ... rules of the language.")

Counciller said elders create about five new words each time the council meets. Other recent additions to the language include Alutiiq words for credit card, barista, ketchup and television. However, she hasn't heard many of the new

words being used regularly, at least not just yet.

-- (Counciller 3 38 sec. "I think the elders see ... the things that are around them.") Counciller said
Council has been meeting since 2007 when the project was first funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation. She said that with a year left on the grant, the future direction elders on the council choose to take has yet to be determined.

-- (Counciller 4 45 sec. "We'll probably be deciding ... other different purposes.")

Counciller
estimates that there are about 56 fluent Alutiiq speakers on Kodiak Island or from Kodiak and now living elsewhere. She hopes to compile a comprehensive list of fluent speakers in consultation with elders within the next year. The Alutiiq Living Words Project is funded by the National Science Foundation's Documenting Endangered Languages program. The Alutiiq Museum's web site features project and language updates, along with audio clips, and the museum plans to launch a new online language learning tool soon.

I'm
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