

INTRODUCTION TO DENA'INA LANGUAGE

Anthropology 325

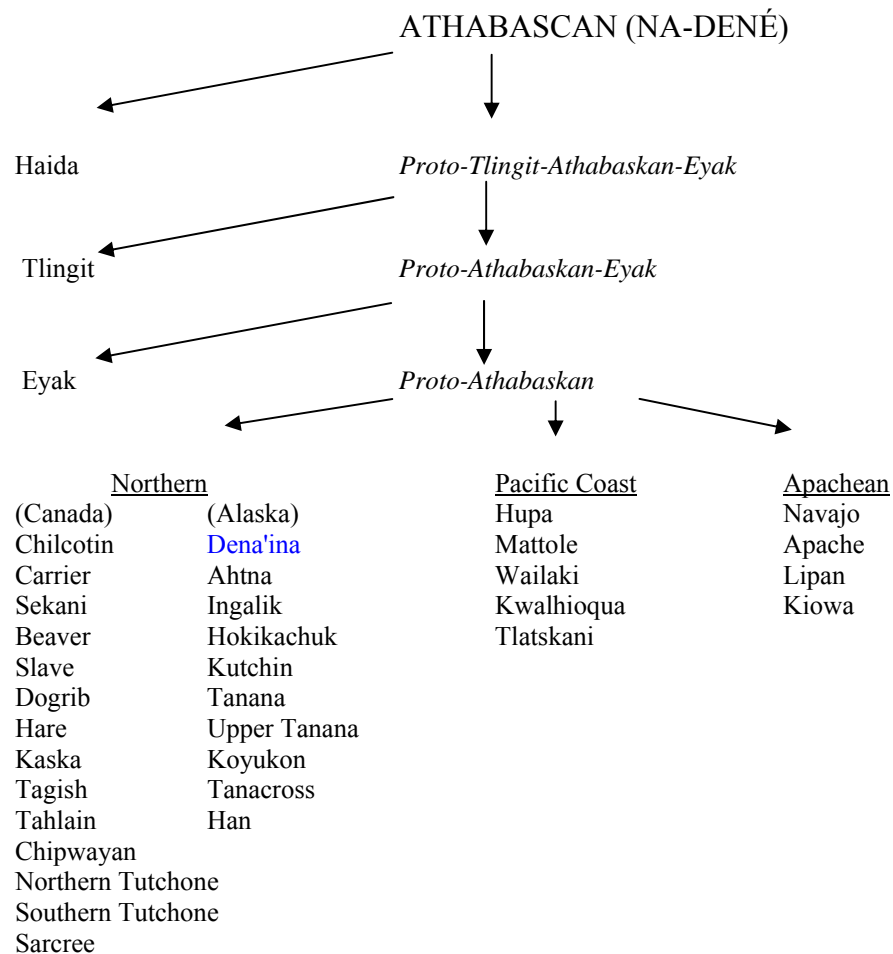
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I. Historical Overview

A. Athabascan or Na-Dené Language Family

1. Languages are classified based on similarities in:
 - i. phonology (structure of the sound system)
 - ii. morphology (the structure of words and relationship among words)
 - iii. syntax (the structure of sentences and relationship among sentences)
2. Similar languages imply historical connection and are lumped in a language family
3. Athabascan Languages (Krauss and Golla version) (names in italics are extinct stem languages):



B. Terminology: Dena'ina or Tanaina

1. Many Russian maps were produced in German from Russian-speaker data
2. in the process initial "d" became "t"
 - a. Dena'ina → Tanaina
 - b. Dusdubena → Tustumena

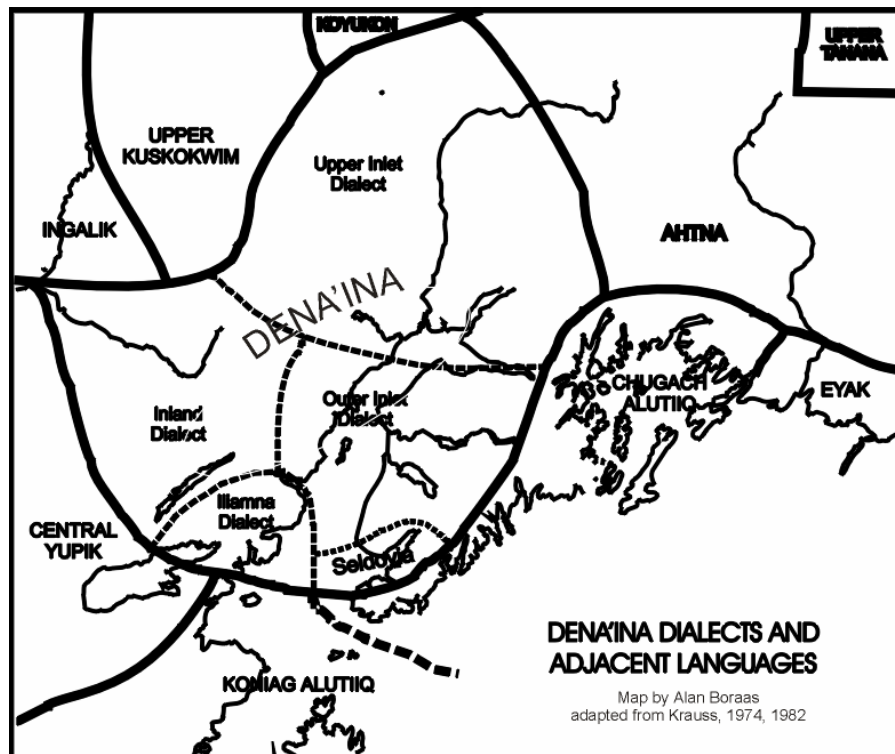
3. Iliamna and Lime Village folks say "denna-eena," others say "den-i'-na"

C. Nearest languages to Dena'ina

1. Definition: Languages are mutually unintelligible between two or more groups of speakers. Their structures are so different that one speaker cannot understand the other.
2. In Alaska the most closely related languages to Dena'ina are Ahtna and Upper Kuskokwim.
 - i. By definition an Ahtna speaker cannot readily understand a Dena'ina speaker and vice-versa.
3. Alutiiq and Yupik are part of the Eskimo Language Family and are entirely different from Athabaskan languages.
4. The various Dena'ina dialects do include a number of Alutiiq (*agutig*, *Gashaq*) and Russian (*banya*, *barabara*, *toyon*, *bidarka*, *achdi*), and English loan words.

D. Dialects

1. Definition: Dialects are mutually intelligible between two or more groups of speakers, but have differences in sounds or words (lexicon)
 - i. Sound variation
 - a. Outer Inlet (Kenai) dialect caribou = bejex
 - b. Inland Dialect caribou = vejex
 - ii. lexical variation
 - a. Outer Inlet (Kenai) dialect animal = ninya
 - b. Inland dialect animal = ggagga (also word for bear)
2. The five dialects are: Upper Inlet, Iliamna, Inland, Outer Inlet, Seldovia



3. There are about 70-100 speakers of the Upper Inlet, Iliamna, and Inland dialects. Most are elderly.
4. the Seldovia dialect, is extinct.
5. The Kenai dialect is on the verge of extinction if you define a speaker as one who can and does form new, never heard before sentences in a language.
6. Many younger Upper Inlet, Inland, and Iliamna Dena'ina understand (competence) but do not speak (performance) their language

E. Language Use and Language Loss

1. Most early 20th century Dena'ina were tri-lingual in Dena'ina, Russian, and English. Many also spoke Alutiiq
 - i. e.g. Sergi Kvasnikoff of Nanwalek speaks: Dena'ina, Alutiiq, English, Russian, and Norwegian
2. Around the turn of the century up to about 1950, public school policy was to systematically extinguish Native languages as part of a forced assimilation policy by the United States government. In Kenai, Dena'ina youth were beaten or had their mouths washed out with soap for speaking Dena'ina (or Russian) while at school.
3. Forced language loss remains a bitter memory among older Kenai and other Dena'ina,
 - i. a number appear to have repressed language memory
 - ii. others feel shame for having succumb to language loss

II. Structural Linguistics

A. Elements of Structural Linguistics

Phonology and phonetics: the sound system of a language
 Morphology: the structure of words (free and bound morphemes)
 Syntax : the structure of sentences

B. Dena'ina Phonology and Phonetics

1. Language Sounds
 - i. Humans are capable of making about 84 sounds (explosive, many more if implosive and clicks are used) Most languages use about 40 sounds to make all the words in their language.
 - ii. The **International Phonetic Alphabet** (I.P.A.) was invented by anthropologist Edward Sapir in 1921 to describe all the possible human sounds and the I.P.A. can be used to write any language.
2. Anthropological linguists applied I.P.A. orthography (spelling system) to languages which were non-written as of the 1920s.
3. In the 1930s Cornelius Osgood, a student of Sapir's, applied a version of the I.P.A. to Dena'ina

- i. 24 pages in "Ethnography of the Tanaina"
 - ii. he did not follow through directing his research to other parts of Alaska and North America.
4. I.P.A. and Navaho
 - i. In the 1930s a version of the I.P.A. was applied to Navaho.
 - ii. James Kari became interested in Athabaskan languages while teaching at a high school in northern California among the Hupa.
 - a. He pursued a Ph.D. at the University of New Mexico and his linguistic studies included Navaho.
 - b. He came to Alaska in 1971, initially on his own and later affiliated with the Alaska Native Language Center, to study Athabaskan languages.
5. Kari met Peter Kalifornsky and other Dena'ina speakers in 1972 and taught Peter a version of the I.P.A. modified for Navaho and then northern Athabaskan languages.
 - i. Peter then slightly modified a spelling convention to conform to his understanding of a phonological rule in Dena'ina (a vowel following "gh" is "a" not "e").
 - ii. All of the Dena'ina publications of the Alaska Native Language Center are bilingual using a modified I.P.A. for Athabaskan languages.
6. Dena'ina Vowels
 - i. Outer Inlet (Kenai) Dena'ina has four vowels: a,e,i,u (by comparison, English has nine vowels)

Symbol	sound	example
a	"ah"	as in English "pot"
e	"eh"	as in English "bet"
i	"ee"	as in English "beet"
u	"uh"	as in English "foot"
7. Consonants
 - i. Consonants: The following two charts depict Dena'ina consonants and Standard American English consonants. The phonetic terms are defined as follows. The Dena'ina sound system is adapted from James Kari (Kalifornsky 1991:xxxv)

Terms

Vd. = Voiced, the voicebox is used in making the sound

Vl. = Voiceless, the voicebox is not used in making the sound

Gl. = A glottal stop, a short closing of the glottis (the gap between the vocal cords)

Stop = the air passage is momentarily stopped at the indicated place of articulation

Fricative = the air is forced past the indicated place of articulation

Affricate = a stop combined with a fricative

Nasal = the air is stopped at the place of articulation and forced out the nasal cavity

Lateral = the air is forced laterally around the tongue at the place of articulation

I.P.A.: DENA'INA SOUND SYSTEM, CONSONANTS

	bilabial	Labio Dental	Inter- dental	alveolar front	alveolar mid	Alveolar back	alveo- palatal	velar front	velar back	glottal
Stop, vl, unaspirated				t	tl	ts		k	q	
Stop, vl aspirated										
Stop, vd.	b ^l			d	dl	dz		g	gg	
Stop, gl.				t'	tl'	ts'		k'	q'	
Fricative, vl					l	s	sh (š)	x	h	hh
Fricative, vd		v ^l			l	z	zh (ž)	ɣ	gh	
affricate, vl.							ch (č)			
affricate, vd.										
affricate, gl.							ch'			
Nasal	m			n						
liquid										
glide, vl.										
glide, vd.	w									

1. b is used in the Outer Inlet (Kenai dialect) and Upper Inlet, v is used in the Inland and Iliamna dialects.

- The sounds in bold (above) are Dena'ina sounds that are not in English. It is difficult for an English speaker to make these sounds.
- The sounds in bold (below) are English sounds that are not in Dena'ina. It is difficult for a Dena'ina speaker to make these sounds and, in part, accounts for a "Native dialect" of English in Cook Inlet. For example the [✓] sound in English normally spelled "th" as in "thing" does not appear in Dena'ina. Consequently Dena'ina speakers often substituted the closest sound [t] and pronounced the English "thing" as "ting."

I.P.A.: ENGLISH SOUND SYSTEM, CONSONANTS

	bi abial	Labio Dental	inter- dental	Alveolar front	alveolar mid	Alveolar back	alveo- palatal	velar front	velar back	glottal
Stop, vl, unaspirated	p			t				k	q	
Stop, vl aspirated	p^h			t ^h				k^h		
Stop, vd.	b			d				g		
Stop, gl.										
Fricative, vl		f	✓ (th)			s	sh (š)		h	hh
Fricative, vd		v	ɸ (th)		l	z	zh (ž)			
affricate, vl.							ch (č)			
affricate, vd.							jh (j)			
affricate, gl.										
Nasal	m			n					ŋ	
liquid						r				
glide, vl.	hw									
glide, vd.	w						y			

8. Language Exercises

Vocabulary Words, Lesson 1 (from Kalifornsky/Boraas, 1990)

Word	Syllables	Meaning
Dena'ina	De-nai'-na	The people, the language
Ts'itsatna	ts'it-sat-na	Ancestors, the ancient Dena'ina
Yaghanen	Ya-gha-nen	the Kenai Peninsula, the good land
Kahtnu ht'ana	Kaht-nu ht'-a-na	Kenai Dena'ina
Tsaht'ana	Tsaht'-ana	Kenai Mountain Dena'ina
Kahtnu	Kaht-nu	Kenai
Ts'eldatnu	ts'el-dat-nu	Soldotna, trickling creek
Lika	Lik-a	dog
Qunshi	Qun-shi	beluga
Bejex	Be-jex	caribou
Dnigi	Dni-gi	moose
Ggagga	Gga-gga	brown bear
Qanchi	Qan-chi	porcupine
Ch'u	Ch'u	and
Yethdi	Yet-h-di	and then, next
Yaghali	Ya-gha-li	good, fine, ok
yaghali du	Ya-gha-li du	is it good? (traditional greeting)

III. DENA'INA SYNTAX (sentence structure)

A. Sentence Word Order

1. The basic word order in English is subject, verb, object (svo)
2. The basic word order of Dena'ina and all Athabascan is subject, object, verb (sov).
3. For example in Peter Kalifornsky's translation of the Lords Prayer, The first sentence:

Natukda yuyanq' t'nt'a.

literally translates as:

"Our father + in heaven + is,"
(subject) (object) (verb)

and contrasts with the English word order:

"Our Father [who] + is + in heaven."
(subject) (verb)(object)

[this is a poetic sentence, in standard English the "who" is deleted]

IV. DENA'INA VERB MORPHOLOGY (word structure)

A. Morphology is the study of the structure of words (sounds with meaning) in a language

1. **morpheme** = unit of sound that determine meaning
2. **free morpheme** = a word without prefixes or suffixes. Prefixes and suffixes together are called **affixes**.
3. **bound morpheme** = an affix that changes the meaning of a free morpheme and which makes no sense by itself.

Example: in English "cow" is a free morpheme because it has meaning by itself

"s" is a bound morpheme because it makes no sense by itself, but has meaning only when added to a free morpheme such as "cow". Cow+s [cows] means more than one cow

B. Dena'ina Verbs and why they are so complicated

1. Dena'ina nouns (subjects and objects) are fairly straightforward (free morphemes that usually lack complicated bound morphemes).
2. Athabaskan verbs are among the most complex linguistic structures in the world
 - i. there is a complex system of multiple codes for mode (tense)
 - ii. the verb contains information that is often associated with nouns and pronoun
 - iii. meaning is imbedded in the grammar

C. A Dena'ina **verb** consists of two parts: a **verb stem** and a set of **verb prefixes**

Verb Prefixes
19 18 17 16 15 14 #13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Verb Stem
disjunct prefixes conjunct prefixes

1. **The Verb Stem**

The verb stems are highly complex (from an English speakers standpoint) and convey two types of information: that of the **verb aspect** and that of the **verb theme**.

a. Verb Theme: A verb theme is a set of verb stems that fall in a similar semantic category (to traditional Dena'ina speakers) such as a series of actions, or one out of many possible series of actions

b. Verb Aspect: The verb aspect will code for mode: future/progressive, imperfect or perfect.

Dena'ina Modes (like tense)

Future/progressive: The action or condition of the verb will occur in the future or continue in the future.

English e.g. I will walk to the river.

The container will be sitting on the table.

Imperfect: the action or condition of the verb is continuing. Usually translated into English as present tense.

English e.g. I am walking.

Perfect: the action or condition of the verb began and ended in the past. Usually translated into English as past tense.

English e.g. I had walked to the river. or I walked to the river.

2. Verb Prefixes:

- In addition to the verb stem, the Dena'ina verb has a set of prefixes which can number up to 19 depending on the word.
- Prefixes are divided into disjunct prefixes and conjunct prefixes. Disjunct prefixes tend to have nomnitive (noun like) qualities. Conjunct prefixes are more abstract.
- the prefixes also imbed codes for mode (future/progressive, imperfect, perfect) in prefix positions 3,4, and 5.
- Most stems require one or more prefixes to be part of the verb. These are listed in a dictionary.
- Additional prefixes can be added to convey complex meaning.

3. Phonological Shape

- Morphemes sometimes shift from a generalized morpheme to one determined by sounds before or after it.

4. Examples of Dena'ina Verbs

a. shchehgh "I am crying"

prefixes							2	1	stem
morphemes							esh	Ø	chehgh
phonology							sh		chehgh

b. ch'echegh "someone is crying"

prefixes							12	1	stem
morphemes							ch'e	Ø	chehgh
phonology							ch'e		chehgh

-chehgh is a singular stem

c. k'echegh "something is crying"

prefixes							12	1	stem
morphemes							k'e	Ø	chehgh
phonology							k'e		chehgh

d. tuqezyu 'they (2) went up the mountain'

prefixes				17	#	12	4	1	stem
morphemes				tu		qe ₁	z	Ø	yu
phonology				tu		qe	z		yu

stem is singular