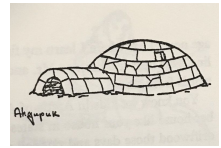




I Am Eskimo: Aknik My Name

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Overview

This collection of stories, written by an Inupiaq man named Paul Green, was published in 1959. For this project, I focused on one story titled "How to Make Snow Igloo."

It was written as a response to inaccurate portrayals of Alaska Native people by non-Native writers.

The historical context of this collection can be revealed through examination of the history of Alaska Native literature and the history of Kotzebue.

Green writes in his dialect, which is a form of non-standard English. Studying the Inupiaq influence on his English reveals how non-standard Englishes are not inferior or incorrect but rather varieties of English with historical and cultural roots.

History of Kotzebue, Alaska

The Inupiaq name for Kotzebue is Qikiqtagrak, or Kikiktagrak, meaning "almost an island," and Inupiat people have lived there for more than 600 years ("Kotzebue: Qikiqtagrak."). Kotzebue Sound "has long been a trade and communication center for the entire Kobuk-Noatak-Selawik River drainages" (Hippler 34), and many people from the surrounding areas have migrated there since the 1960s.

The name "Kotzebue" comes from Otto von Kotzebue, a Russian explorer who sailed through what is now Kotzebue Sound in the early 19th century (Anderson xxi). Christianity was introduced later, between 1896 and 1902, and spread to the rest of Northwest Alaska from Kotzebue (Burch 82).

History of Alaska Native Literature

Alaska Native people have historically relied on an oral tradition to "convey important ideas, concepts, and traditional knowledge from generation to generation" (Griffin 34).

Like many aspects of Alaska Native cultures, this was impacted by the introduction of Christianity. First, some Alaska Native people began to create unique forms of picture writing in order to remember and retell stories and prayers from the Bible (Griffin 36-37). However, this picture writing "disappeared after a few decades" (Dorais 183) as missionaries focused on spreading literacy in their efforts to convert Alaska Native people (Griffin 39).

With the introduction and eventual domination of written literature, much of the oral literature has been lost. It hasn't completely disappeared, though, and many people are working to revitalize it in the same way languages are being revitalized (Dorais 168).

In the 1960s, there was renewed interest among Inupiat people in "writing their language and having it taught in schools" (Dorais 183), and in 1972, a law passed which established the Alaska Native Language Center "whose efforts enabled every Alaskan aboriginal language to be endowed with a simple and accurate standard orthography by the mid-1970s" (Dorais 183).

It is also important to consider how we define the authenticity of an Alaska Native writer, because doing so has a direct effect on the discussions surrounding it (Seeds and Smelcer 133). The question of authorship has also been impacted by "the shift from a strictly oral-based culture to one that includes written texts" (Seeds and Smelcer 134).

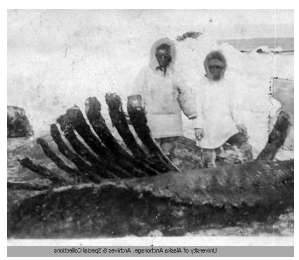
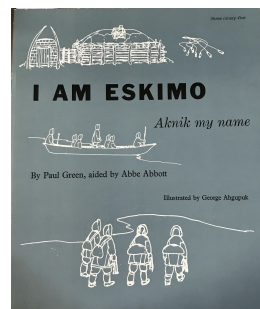
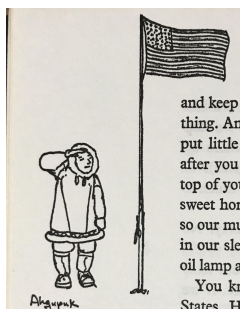
Linguistic Analysis

Green's dialect is an example of non-standard English, meaning it is "unlike the English taught in schools and used in the national media (Kaplan). Many of the characteristics of his dialect can be related to characteristics of the Inupiaq language, including:

- ❖ Omitting the third person singular verb ending -s (i.e. "he write" for "he writes")
- ❖ Omitting prepositions and articles
- ❖ Borrowing words from Inupiaq

Inupiaq has many differences from English. To start with, it is polysynthetic and agglutinative, meaning words are constructed as needed by adding multiple affixes to a base word (Dorais 9). As a result, Inupiaq words are often much longer than English words, and may be many words combined into one (Dorais 54).

This analysis reveals how Green's dialect is influenced by the interactions between English and Inupiaq, which has broader implications for how we view non-standard Englishes.



Paul Green on left

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