

WASSILLIE, ALBERT. 1980. *Nuvendaltun Ht'ana Sukdu'a: Nondalton People's Stories*. Anchorage: National Bilingual Materials Development Center.

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DENA'INA TOPICAL DICTIONARY. By James Kari. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, 2007. Pp. xxix + 366. \$49.00 (paper).

James Kari has had a deep and abiding interest in the Athabascan language Dena'ina—in the introduction to *Dena'ina Topical Dictionary* he remarks that he first worked with speakers of the language in 1972, when he “became transfixed with the geography of the Cook Inlet and by the realms of knowledge that these people commanded” (p. xvi). In the references, he lists some unpublished Dena'ina dictionaries: a 1974 “Kenai Tanaina Noun Dictionary, Preliminary Version” and a 1977 “Dena'ina Noun Dictionary”; there is also reference to a 1994 “A Dictionary of the Dena'ina Athabaskan Language,” vol. 1, “Topical Vocabulary” (draft manuscript). This new, and strikingly beautiful, dictionary thus has a long history, and the community is fortunate that Kari has decided that it is time to make it more generally available. This dictionary, the work of many years and many people, with over one hundred speakers of Dena'ina contributing to it, is an outstanding contribution, one that sets a high bar.

Kari notes that the *Dena'ina Topical Dictionary* “sets a high standard as a reference work for the fields of Alaskan anthropology and comparative Athabascan. It is organized around subject areas, a format which enhances the display of technical information and offers easy access to people with many different interests” (p. xvi). Topical dictionaries were very popular for Athabascan languages in the 1970s; the first dictionary of Slave that I was involved with was a topical dictionary modeled on the early topical dictionaries from the Alaska Native Language Center, the publisher of the *Dena'ina Topical Dictionary*. Such dictionaries are often of great interest to speakers and allow a way to get deeply into the vocabulary of a language through work revolving around semantic fields. The topics included in the *Dena'ina Topical Dictionary* are rich and varied, representative of those in other Athabascan topical dictionaries but with a breadth of topics and a depth of vocabulary that are, I believe, unprecedented. There are 31 chapters in addition to the introduction. The introduction provides background on the history of the project and the Dena'ina language, including a discussion of important areas of the vocabulary that are indicated in the dictionary (e.g., archaisms, words whose sources are unknown) as well as an introduction to the sound system and orthography, and information about Dena'ina dialects and differences between them in terms of sound, lexicon, and morphology.

The chapters cover the following: animals; fish, shellfish, and amphibians; birds, insects; plants; pronouns; relatives, kinship terms; people; body parts; Dena'ina place-names; water, snow and ice; land and land forms; sky, weather, and atmosphere; days, seasons, months, and adverbs of time; clothing and adornment; skin tanning and sewing; tools; hunting and fishing devices; houses, shelters, racks and caches; transportation; fire; household furnishings, personal belongings, and miscellany; cooking

bat, little brown ( <i>Myotis lucifugus</i> ) §	hełjech	‘darkness dance’
north star	yuq’ ts’itayanq’ z’uni (N) k’tsik’q’e daltuni (U) beghu k’eghtuni (O) naq’ets’ z’uni (L) ts’ideq daztuni (O)	‘one in the center of sky’ ‘the one on top’  ‘the one over us’ ‘the one straight up’
hat (traditional), hood <i>hat furs or skins: lynx, ground squirrel, muskrat, marten, otter, wolf</i>	chik’ish, -chi’ik’ich’a (IO) kit’un, -kit’una (U)	‘head hood’ ☐ ‘end leaf’
scissors	nuynich (U) nuzhnich (ONII) luzhnich (LN)	< Rus
food	k’qat ch’elqadi vava (I)	√ ‘that which we eat’ √
linguist	qatl’uh qena ghezdunen	‘one who stays at the base of the words’

FIG. 1.—Sample entries.

and eating utensils and containers; foods; games, music, and stories; religious terms and spirits; abstract or nonmaterial concepts; colors; numbers, measurements, and adverbs of quantity; areal nouns, postpositions, and adverbs of location; riverine directionals; and question words and sample questions. In addition, there is an English index, a personal names index, and references. All told, the dictionary contains over 8,000 entries and includes 198 illustrations.

The entries in the dictionary are structured in three columns. The leftmost column gives the English word, the middle column the word in Dena’ina, with words in different dialects being listed, and the final column gives information about the word including its literal meaning and other information. A few sample entries are shown in figure 1. The open box in the third column of the third word in figure 1 indicates that the source of the word is unknown, the abbreviation √ in the third column of the fifth entry marks that the word is a root morphologically, and the abbreviation § in the first column in the first entry indicates that the animal is considered inedible. The abbreviations following the Dena’ina words in the middle column indicate dialects. I have chosen the entries in figure 1 randomly simply to give a small taste of the kinds of information found in the dictionary. In the Dena’ina column, not only are different dialects shown, but possessed forms are included when relevant (the forms of ‘hat’ that are preceded by a hyphen are the possessed forms). The third column provides a variety of types of information. The entry for ‘food’ shows that there is a basic root (√), but a morphologically derived word, with a nominalizing suffix, also exists. The fourth entry shows a loanword from Russian. The last entry shows that the dictionary

includes not only traditional words but new words as well, and gives an indication of how new words are formed.

The list of topics in the dictionary gives insight into the kinds of things that are important in Dena'ina culture: snow and ice, weather, tanning, hunting, racks and caches, fire, games, and so on. Looking inside a typical chapter, one finds numerous sections. For instance, the chapter on animals includes sections on general terms, land mammals, marine mammals, domestic animals, distant animals, and other animal terms. The chapter on plants, in addition to a section on general terms, has sections on conifers, broadleaf trees and bushes, berry plants and berries, grasslike plants, thick-stemmed plants, other edible plants, medicinal plants, other land plants, water plants, mosses, lichens, fungi and mushrooms, unidentified plants, agricultural plants, vegetation conditions, types of trees, general plant and tree parts, and types of wood. The chapter on games, music, and stories has seven sections: toys and games; sports, exercises, and games for conditioning; gambling game, hand game; cards; songs and dances; musical instruments; stories, language, and verbal arts. Within each chapter, there are photographs and drawings illustrating the concepts of that chapter.

The vocabulary is enormously rich and detailed. Here I mention some unusual features in the listing of words. In the chapter on games, music, and stories, words for quoit game calls are given, along with the words for calls for the hand game, a stick gambling game. Names for traditional dances are included, as are names of dances introduced by the Russians (e.g., *gadril* 'quadrille', *walis* 'waltz'). In addition, words for sports, exercises, and games for conditioning show a rich vocabulary—calisthenics, winter games, wrestling, push-ups, chin-ups, finger wrestling, high jump, leg hooking, and many others are included.

The chapters on flora and fauna are particularly impressive. In the chapter on birds, the names of the birds are ordered taxonomically, together with some Dena'ina classification categories; each bird name is marked for whether the bird is edible or its eggs harvested as well as for whether the bird is considered inedible. There are over 130 different birds listed, together with their Latin names; literal translations are given, language sources, and, for some birds, their call. There are pictures of a number of birds as well, and a detailed picture showing the parts of a bird, with labels for those parts for which there are words in Dena'ina. The chapter on insects is similar in nature, with a list of a large number of identifiable insects as well as a number of unidentified ones.

In the section on money counting, Kari points out that the system dates from the 1880s' fur trade. Not surprisingly, perhaps, given this origin, the word for 5 cents means 'one beaver castor', while 25 cents means 'plus beaver castor', and \$1.50 means 'one marten' or 'one muskrat' and, in some dialects, \$20 means 'one coat'.

The chapter on riverine directions discusses the structure of directional words and provides rich examples of the directional system, consisting of a directional prefix, a root, and a directional suffix. The prefixes indicate distance overall, while the suffixes indicate location and movement. The roots show the importance of directions, indicating upstream, in back of; downstream; upland; downland; up; down; ahead; out in the open; across. A picture, showing words for the directions from two points, helps to bring the system alive.

I mentioned illustrations above and return to them briefly here. The book includes a large number of photographs, drawings, and maps, many of which have extra discussion with them. They include pictures of animals and plants, maps of Dena'ina band names, body parts of moose, a picture of a phase of the moon, pictures of traditional tools, and drawings of the interior and exterior of a house, among many others. These, together with the interesting information given about words, help the user of the dictionary enter a little more into Dena'ina life, making it more real.

The English index is very helpful in using the dictionary. The index does not give as full and detailed information as is found in the dictionary, but nevertheless, it gives an idea of where to find things, something that can be very difficult in a topical dictionary. The index begins with 'abdomen' and ends with 'zipper', and in between we find words such as alphabet, anemone, blocks, cassock, dangerous place, flute, hem, marijuana, peacock, popcorn, shallow area on stream, wind-swept area, and many, many others, far too numerous to give even a hint of the range of vocabulary.

It would be easy to go on. Every page is full of gems, and it is easy to spend hours with this dictionary, for someone interested both in comparative Athabascan linguistics and in northern cultures. The richness of the vocabulary in the dictionary is remarkable; this dictionary could well be used by someone interested in the kind of knowledge that is lost when a language dies.

The book begins with a foreword by Alan Boraas, an anthropologist at Kenai Peninsula College in Alaska. Boraas remarks on the great contribution of the *Dena'ina Topical Dictionary* to language revitalization efforts in the Dena'ina communities, noting that "For many Dena'ina, the book will be an icon of what once was, what is now, and what might be. For other Alaskans it will be a source of information about a rich cultural heritage and a new perspective on a land they or their family migrated to. Writers and scholars in linguistics, anthropology, ethnobiology, folklore, history, and Native studies will find themselves with well-worn copies as they access the information and perspective of the language of a place" (pp. xiv–xv). He ends his foreword with a quotation from the well-known Dena'ina Elder, Peter Kalifornsky: "Dena'ina hnaga ch'k'echigi yaghali q'udi. Dena'ina hnaga bel qunuhdetulnit. Now that the Dena'ina language is written well, the Dena'ina language will be preserved" (p. xv).

In closing, I would like to echo what Jonathon S. Ross, President and CEO of the Alaska Native Heritage Center, says in his foreword: "Thank you for this book, Jim, and thank you as well to the many Dena'ina q'edna who have shared these words" (p. xv). Many communities are grateful for this work, and Jim Kari and his colleagues have done a tremendous service to these communities in producing this dictionary. The dictionary is a labor of love, and it will be very much appreciated for years to come. With Jonathon Ross, I add my thanks to Jim Kari and the Dena'ina speakers for this dictionary. It has already given me many hours of pleasure, and I know it will give me many more.

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