

# **Dene-Yeniseian Workshop**

## **University of Alaska Fairbanks**

**Saturday, March 24, 2012**

**8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

**Gathering Room in Brooks Building (right inside front door)**

**Conference Planning Committee:** Larry Kaplan, Ben Potter, James Kari, Gary Holton

The final schedule, workshop reading list, notices, and instructions for watching the live webcast will appear on [www.uaf.edu/anlc/dy](http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/dy).

### **SCHEDULE**

(as of February 17)

**8:30 A.M. Coffee. Display of books and articles on Dene-Yeniseian**

**9:00 A.M. Welcome**

#### **Overview of the Program**

James Kari, Alaska Native Language Center, UAF

**9:15 A.M. Geography, Demography, and Time Depth: Explaining How Dene-Yeniseian Is Possible**

Edward Vajda, Western Washington University

Archaeology, human genetics, linguistics and folklore studies often yield what seem to be conflicting evidence of human prehistory when in fact they tell different parts of the same story. This presentation unites evidence from disparate branches of the study of human prehistory in a new synthesis to explain how the Dene-Yeniseian linguistic hypothesis fits with what other branches of science have revealed about the peopling of the Americas from North Asia in the late Pleistocene and Early Holocene.

**9:45 A.M. Archaeological Inquiries into Na-Dene and Yeniseian Prehistory**

Ben Potter, Department of Anthropology, UAF

This presentation summarizes current knowledge on the prehistory of Yeniseian, Na-Dene, Eskimo-Aleut, and Salishan from an archaeological perspective. Current debates on material culture continuity/discontinuity are highlighted and new finds are discussed. Specific technological terms (and potential cognates) that may serve to sharpen our focus on historical linguistics of the region are also discussed.

**10:15 A.M. Environmental Correlates of Expansion of Pastoralist Groups in Eastern Siberia and the Dene-Yeniseian Wedge**

David R. Yesner, professor of Anthropology and associate dean of the Graduate School, University of Alaska Anchorage

Since the time of horse domestication in the Kazakhstan region, pastoralist groups have undergone several waves of expansion into Siberia. New palynological and other paleoclimatic data for central and northeast Asia during the late Holocene period allow correlation of these dispersal events with periods of steppe expansion. These dispersals into northeastern Asia and the Russian Far East are themselves correlated with the expansion of Tungusic speech, following Bellwood's recent model. The result of these dispersals was to create a wedge between Dené-Yeniseian groups previously occupying the Subarctic region (although the question about Yukaghir still remains). As indicated by Vajda, aspects of mythology and remnants of former matrilineality may trace this process among contemporary Siberian populations.

**10:15 A.M. Coffee**

**10:30 A.M. The Current State of Genetic and Biological Anthropology: Evidence for the Dene-Yeniseian Connection**

Allie Dewey and Michael Kenyhercz, Department of Anthropology, UAF

It is well understood in biological anthropology that, morphologically, the Na-Dené/Greater Northwest Coast populations show characteristics intermediate to those of Eskimo-Aleuts and North and South American Indians. Craniodental studies carried out by biological anthropologists have identified four possible migration scenarios to describe the variation in the New World. Of the models, the most widely accepted within biological anthropology given the linguistic, biological anthropology, and genetic evidence is that of three migrations (Paleoindian, Na-Dené, Eskimo-Aleut, with Aleut and Eskimo diverging after arrival in the New World). The Na-Dené have been associated with the Siberian Dyuktai cultures and are believed to have migrated through the interior Beringian plane, while Aleut-Eskimo folk associated with the Aleutian Anangula culture migrated from the Beringian coast.

Scott and O'Rourke (2010) summarized and evaluated several competing hypotheses based on the most recent genetic studies focusing on the Athapaskan and Tlingit groups in North America and the Kets in Asia. Using biodistance and comparing specific genetic markers allowed researchers to compare these two groups for relatedness. As of yet, there is no biological evidence proving the link between these specific populations despite studies analyzing biodistance, HLA, Y chromosome polymorphisms, several mtDNA haplotypes, or STRs. This is more than likely due to admixture in the modern population as well as limited sample size. Each study opens up new theories and possibilities about the time and route of migration into North America. Was the genetic diversity seen today already present in the original migrating population but there are no current remnants of the population remaining in Asia? Perhaps there are similarities between the groups but the correct location to search on either the molecular or geographical level has yet to be discovered. With further molecular study and field work these connections may yet be found but at the current time we simply do not have this evidence beyond that linking the Kets and the Na-Dene.

**11:00 A.M. Resources for Yeniseian Studies at the Rasmuson Library, UAF**

Katherine L. Arndt, Alaska and Polar Regions bibliographer, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library

The collections of the Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks, include a number of basic works on Yeniseian languages and cultures. Past and future acquisitions in this subject area focus upon published monographs and dictionaries.

While the library provides access to some of the journals containing relevant articles and occasionally receives offprints that are added to the collections, it leaves the active collection of published articles and the gray literature to the Alaska Native Language Center Archive.

- 11:15 A.M.      **The Ket Language: From Descriptive Linguistics to Interdisciplinary Research****  
(Discussion of preconference reading: [www.uaf.edu//files/anlc/Kryukova\\_DYpaper.pdf](http://www.uaf.edu//files/anlc/Kryukova_DYpaper.pdf))  
Elena Kryukova, Department of Siberian Indigenous Languages, Tomsk State  
Pedagogical University

Since the beginning of the last centuries linguists' minds are engrossed by the hypothesis of relationship of Siberian people's and Native American languages. In 1968 in his fundamental work "The Ket Language," A.P. Dulzon wrote: "The Ket language being the most studied in the group of Yeniseian languages has a very complicated and peculiar verb morphology system. This system has many typological correspondences in its main features with the verb morphology system of Basque, Vershik, many Caucasian languages and Native American's languages."

Common problems connected with extinction of the Ket language, current sociolinguistic situation in Ket people places of residence are reflected in this report. Work on recording, processing and digitalizing archived language data performed at the Department for Indigenous Siberian People's languages of Tomsk state pedagogical university is also described in the given report. In the end of report there is a linguist's point of view on the hypothesis of Dene-Yeniseian relationship and also a lay-person's point of view on it.

- 11:30 A.M.      **Open discussion of morning papers and questions via webcast****

- Noon              **Lunch break. Lunch will be delivered to the Brooks Building.****

- 1:00 P.M.      **Applying Computational Phylogenetic Methods in Evaluation of the Dene-Yeniseian Hypothesis****  
Gary Holton (ANLC) and Mark Sicoli (Department of Anthropology, UAF)

Linguists have for a century suggested a common linguistic heritage for Na-Dene and Yeniseian, but only recently has a case been made using traditional methods of historical reconstruction (Vajda 2010). Our work responds to challenges to use alternative methodologies to evaluate this hypothesis (Campbell 2011, Diamond 2011) and contributes to a growing body of literature using bioinformatic methods to push the time depths at which linguistic comparison can test hypotheses of prehistory (see also Dunn et al. 2005, Gray and Atkinson 2003). In this paper we examine the Dene-Yeniseian hypothesis using computational phylogenetic methods applied to two recently compiled data sets. The first data set is composed of typological and morphological characters, while the second is composed of lexical characters coded for cognacy. We fit trees to these data using both Bayesian and neighbor-joining network models. In both cases the degree of tree-like structure within Northern Na-Dene is minimal, suggesting a long history of diffused innovations (cf. Krauss 1973, Hill 1978) and a possible center of radiation (Sapir 1916). The typological dataset in particular shows a significant tree-like signal at higher levels that supports the Dene-Yeniseian hypothesis, with a thought-provoking twist. The phylogenies suggest an ancient heritage for Yeniseian in Beringia with the relationship representing a terminal Pleistocene back migration.

**1:30 P.M. Two Topics for Dene-Yeniseian Comparison: Geographic Lexicon and the Incorporate Slot**

James Kari (ANLC, UAF) and Sharon Hargus (University of Washington)

Kari will summarize the more archaic patterns in Athabascan directionals, place names, and geographic terms based upon Athabascan languages with good place name documentation. Sources on Eyak and Tlingit will be mentioned. Werner's 2007 compilation of Yeniseian place names is a good starting point for comparisons of the DY geographic lexicons.

The incorporate slot in Yeniseian and Na-Dene is an intriguing topic for DY comparison. As noted in Vajda 2010 (p. 55, fn 28) it seems likely that an incorporate noun stem 'mind, thought' is cognate in Athabascan-Eyak and in Yeniseian. Hargus will summarize some incorporate slot inventories (Koyukon, Babine-Witsuwit'en). While most Northern Athabascan incorporates are shared, there are some exotic items, perhaps found in only one language: e.g. Inland Dena'ina *ni'ats'ezdu* 'we dual sit night bear hunting', where the incorporate 'a' appears nowhere else but in a couple of verb themes that refer to night bear hunting.

**2:00 P.M. Is Aleut Syntax a Result of Language Internal or External Change?**

Anna Berge (ANLC, UAF)

The causes for the degree to which Aleut diverges from Eskimo remain enigmatic to specialists, and there is some speculation that Aleut and Na-Dene languages may have had substantial contact. For example, Leer (1991) shows that Aleut and neighboring Na-Dene languages share typologically unusual number marking features, and Fortescue (1998) suggests the possibility of prehistoric Athabascan substrata in Aleut. Recent advances in archaeology and genetics of the indigenous populations of the Pacific Rim and in the understanding of linguistic relationships across the Bering Strait suggest the time is right for revisiting a number of lingering questions within Eskimo-Aleut. In this paper, I discuss unresolved differences between the Eskimo and Aleut languages, including not only the well-known noncognate lexica but also syntactic differences (beyond the language internal developments that have led to the current Aleut anaphoric system). The intent is to suggest the need for the need for collaborative studies of areally shared features, to determine the extent to which Aleut and Athabaskan speakers may have been in contact.

**2:30 P.M. Coffee**

**2:45 P.M. Dene-Yeniseian Linguistics: A Progress Report**

Edward Vajda (WWU)

This presentation gives an overview of the latest research on the Dene-Yeniseian language link, with attention to new material addressing critiques that have appeared since the publication of *The Dene-Yeniseian Connection*.

**3:15 P.M. Roundtable Discussion**

Participant discussion; discussion of questions sent in by e-mail from webcast viewers

**4:00 P.M. Adjournment**