Inuit on the Labrador coast are shown to have a comparatively complex system of classifying and describing sea ice: knowledge now held by speakers over 40 years old. Elders used up to 60 specialized words and described Inuttut concepts like ‘âjugak’ a lead or crack used for hunting, fishing and travel. Interviews involving 24 speakers aged 37-79 show a decline in linguistic competence such that the youngest participants knew fewer than a dozen words. The extinction of at least 200 other North American speech communities since Contact should be a warning about how quickly languages can vanish and permanently alter the ability of future generations to experience the oral history of their ancestors. That is not the situation in Labrador today. But inspired efforts must be undertaken now if Inuttut and this type of human knowledge are to survive into the next generation. The positive result of this study for Labrador Inuit is its documentation of an oral tradition that persists still, eloquently describing seasonal ice conditions along the Labrador Coast.

key phrases: Eskimo-Aleut; Inuktitut, Inuttut, endangered languages, phonology, sea-ice, Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, intervocalic v