

Study: Evolution of the language situation in Nunavut, 2001 to 2016

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Tuesday, July 9, 2019

Today, in honour of Nunavut Day, Statistics Canada is publishing a new study entitled "Evolution of the language situation in Nunavut, 2001 to 2016." For the first time, in addition to English and French, this analytical report is being published in [Inuktitut](#) and [Inuinnaqtun](#), the two Indigenous languages with official language status in Nunavut.

There is growing recognition of the importance of Indigenous languages in Canada and around the world. The United Nations declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The Canadian government just adopted *An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages*, which calls for, among other things, the appointment of a Commissioner of Indigenous Languages.

The linguistic situation in Nunavut, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, is unique among the Canadian provinces and territories: an Indigenous language is the mother tongue of the majority of its population. English, although a minority language in Nunavut, is attractive due to its status as the majority language in Canada. French, which is the mother tongue of less than 2% of the population, also has official language status in Nunavut.

The Government of Nunavut especially is making efforts to protect, promote and revitalize Inuktitut, a term which encompasses Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun, among others. In response to the "pressures confronting the Inuit Language," the Government of Nunavut's *Inuit Language Protection Act* reinforces the importance of the language as a cultural heritage and a means of expressing identity. The study published today by Statistics Canada provides a statistical portrait of the situation of Inuktitut in Nunavut and an overview of the evolution of the main factors that drive linguistic dynamics.

The findings show that the vitality of Inuktitut varies considerably between Nunavut's regions and communities. The main factor affecting its vitality seems to be the fact that Inuktitut is not fully transmitted as a mother tongue. However, Inuktitut rebounded somewhat from 2011 to 2016, mostly as a language of work.

This report is also available on the Indigenous Statistics Portal and Statistics Canada's Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics Hub.

A growing percentage of the Inuit population do not have Inuktitut as their mother tongue

Although the numbers are growing, individuals with an Inuktitut mother tongue represented 65% of the Nunavut population in 2016, compared with 72% in 2001. This decline was not the result of a decrease in the Inuit population in Nunavut, which was roughly 85% over the entire period, but rather of a decline in the number of Inuit who reported Inuktitut as their mother tongue. In 2016, 23% of Inuit in Nunavut did not have Inuktitut as their mother tongue, compared with 16% in 2001.

Inuktitut–English bilingualism is on the rise

The number of people who could conduct a conversation in Inuktitut rose by over 6,000 from 2001 to 27,320 in 2016, or 77% of the Nunavut population.

Although Inuktitut is also increasingly used at home, its use as main language is declining while its use as secondary language is increasing. In 2016, 74% of the Nunavut population (26,270 people) reported speaking Inuktitut at home at least on a regular basis. This was up slightly from 2001 (73%), when 19,480 people reported speaking Inuktitut at home.

These increases went hand in hand with the rise of English in Nunavut, among Inuit in particular. In 2016, 82% of Inuit were bilingual (Inuktitut–English), up from 76% in 2001. Most Inuit (58%) spoke more than one language at home (Inuktitut and English in nearly every case) in 2016.



The use of Inuktitut at work increases from 2011 to 2016

Another important aspect of a language's vitality is its use in the workplace. From 2011 to 2016, the proportion of workers who used Inuktitut at work rose from 58% to 61%. This was a reverse in trend from the decline observed from 2001 to 2011. Despite the recent rise, the proportion of workers who used Inuktitut at work in 2016 remained lower than in 2001 (65%).

Local and regional perspective: The vitality of Inuktitut appears to be more fragile in the Kitikmeot region

In 2016, 77% of the population in the Qikiqtaaluk region could have a conversation in Inuktitut (95% excluding Iqaluit). In the Kivalliq region, this proportion was 88%. However, it was much lower in the Kitikmeot region (57%).

Regardless of the indicator used, the vitality of Inuktitut appears to be more fragile in the Kitikmeot region, particularly in the communities of Cambridge Bay and Kugluktuk. The same is true in Iqaluit and Rankin Inlet, regional centres with larger non-Inuit populations, and in Baker Lake. The vitality of Inuktitut generally appears to be strong in most communities of the Qikiqtaaluk and Kivalliq regions.

Note to readers

This study was conducted together with the Government of Nunavut's Department of Culture and Heritage. The findings of this study were presented at the Inuugatta Inuktuuqta Conference, which took place in Iqaluit from March 25 to 28, 2019. Translation of the report into Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun was done by the Government of Nunavut.

This study uses data from Canada's 2001 to 2016 censuses of population, as well as data from the 2011 National Household Survey and the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey.

This report includes various indicators of the vitality of Inuktitut for each region and each community. It also provides many detailed statistics on different linguistic indicators, as well as several analyses of the characteristics and linguistic practices of the Nunavut population, of language transfers, exogamy and transmission of language to children, as well as English, French and immigrant languages in Nunavut.

Inuktitut is a designation standardized by the Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiit, Nunavut's Inuit Language Authority. It includes all the regional variations of the dialects spoken in Nunavut. In this study, Inuktitut refers to the census concept of the family of Inuit languages that comprises Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun and Inuit languages not included elsewhere.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3250](#) and [3901](#).

The analytical report "[Evolution of the language situation in Nunavut, 2001 to 2016](#)" is now available in English, French, [Inuktitut](#) and [Inuinnaqtun](#), as part of the *Ethnicity, Language and Immigration Thematic Series* ([89-657-X](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).