

My Little Corner of Canada

The syllabics system must go

by John Amagoalik

OTTAWA — We must change our writing system soon.

Syllabics is a cumbersome and outdated method of writing our language. If our language is to survive, we must adapt a more efficient system of writing.

We should establish a modified version of the Roman alphabet as our writing system. This is already in use in Labrador, the central and western Arctic, Alaska and Greenland.

The biggest success story is in Greenland, where the system has been in place for more than a hundred years. Books, educational materials and newspapers are all published using the Roman system. Inuktitut is thriving in Greenland. Schools, businesses, the media, and government all use this system.

It also makes it easier for non-Inuit to learn and use Inuktitut. School children who are already learning the Roman alphabet will find it much easier to adapt it to Inuktitut. Many school children are intimidated by the syllabic system and do not bother to learn it.



Some people have an emotional attachment to syllabics, thinking that it is an original part of our culture. It is not. It was introduced to us by white missionaries who had first introduced it to the Cree.

By reverting to a modified version of Roman orthography, our children will learn our language more easily. Non-Inuit will understand our language better and it will be easier to use such modern technology as computers in our own language.

This is not the first time I have expressed these opinions. I wrote a similar piece in *My Little Corner of Canada* back in 1987. That was five years ago. This time the situation is a bit more urgent.

If we love our language, we must move away from syllabics and join the modern world. Speaking our language is relatively easy.

Learning to read and write it is another story. You can speak your language all you want — but if you cannot read and write it — it will not be long before it dies. This is a reality we must face.

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