



HAL
open science

'A People of Tractable Conversation': A Reappraisal of Davis's Contribution to Arctic Scholarship (1585-1587)

Marc-Antoine Mahieu, Mickaël Popelard

► **To cite this version:**

Marc-Antoine Mahieu, Mickaël Popelard. 'A People of Tractable Conversation': A Reappraisal of Davis's Contribution to Arctic Scholarship (1585-1587). Frédéric Regard. *The Quest for the Northwest Passage: Knowledge, Nation and Empire, 1576-1806*, 19, Pickering & Chatto (Routledge), pp.71-87, 2013, Empires in Perspective. hal-01384539

HAL Id: hal-01384539

<https://inalco.hal.science/hal-01384539>

Submitted on 20 Oct 2016

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

**‘A PEOPLE OF TRACTABLE CONVERSATION’:
A REAPPRAISAL OF DAVIS’S CONTRIBUTION TO ARCTIC
SCHOLARSHIP
(1585-1587)**

MARC-ANTOINE MAHIEU AND MICKAËL POPELARD

Compared to other Elizabethan mariners who also engaged in exploratory voyages and maritime expeditions, such as Martin Frobisher, Sir Francis Drake or Sir Walter Raleigh, John Davis has received surprisingly little attention in recent years. In her recent book about early modern voyages and English travel narratives, Mary Fuller devotes ample space to Frobisher’s voyages but makes only two passing remarks about John Davis, whose name features only once in her introductory chapter about ‘the English Worthies’ ; in a similar fashion, Robert McGhee acknowledges that Davis outmatched Frobisher in terms of both his sailing and cartographic skills and yet his brief comments on Davis’s three expeditions are confined to the end of his chapter on ‘Martin Frobisher’s Gold Mines’.¹ If, as Fuller explains, ‘the celebration of a "heroic Age of Discovery" depends on a number of deliberate and specific omissions – in other words on remembering some things and forgetting others’, then it seems fair to say that John Davis’s early contribution to the discovery of the Northwest Passage has often been ‘forgotten’ by the historians of the field. Fuller goes on to remind her readers that:

Forgetting may be ideological, and operate along the lines of particular interests; it can result from a deliberate suppression of certain memories or histories. It is also a function of narrative. To tell a story, one creates a frame, a beginning and end and a central line that moves from one to the other. Likewise, as a history is composed, some things will be brought to the center and some moved to the side, or off the margins of the page altogether.²

In John Davis’s case, ‘the suppression of memories’ does not appear to be ideological and it probably does not ‘operate along the lines of particular interests’ either. But it can be argued that as the story of the Northwest Passage was written and re-written by historians, John Davis’s important contribution to the quest for the Northwest Passage was increasingly moved to the margins of the page, if not pushed off the page altogether. It will be the aim of this paper to suggest that Davis should be brought back to the center of the narrative, if only to restore some historical balance with Frobisher.³ It is true that Davis failed to reach his intended goal and never discovered the Passage to Cathay – which he still believed to be ‘most probable’ after his third and last voyage in 1587. But so did Frobisher, whose three voyages may be described as geographic and economic fiascos. In that regard, Davis proved more successful than Frobisher since he unwittingly discovered the key to the Northwest Passage by reaching Sanderson’s Hope – present-day Upernavik – at latitude 72°46’. We would like to suggest that the real legacy and import of Davis’s three northern voyages lie in his scientific approach, which characterized both his navigational

techniques and his description of the Inuit. For Davis was not just the author of *The Seaman's Secret* or the inventor of the 'backstaff', an instrument that made it easier for mariners to 'shoot the sun'. He also described the natives he encountered with such open-mindedness and objectivity that his account of the Greenlanders has been seen with some justification as the 'first ethnological notes of any consequence' made about the Inuit.⁴

John Davis was born into a yeoman family in 1543 and grew up in Sandridge near Dartmouth, on the right bank of the river Dart. After qualifying as a master mariner in the late 1570's, he embarked on a successful career as a privateersman and a shipmaster. He finally retired at the rather early age of thirty-six, only to be recruited by Adrian Gilbert so as to take part in a fresh attempt at finding the Northwest Passage, less than ten years after Martin Frobisher's first foray into the Arctic. There is conclusive evidence that Davis met the philosopher and mathematician John Dee at his house in Mortlake in January 1583 to prepare a new voyage into the Arctic, in the presence of Adrian Gilbert and Secretary Walsingham. Dee believed that three of the five existing passages from Europe to Cathay were yet to be discovered: in addition to the Northeast Passage – the search for which had hitherto been the preserve of the Muscovy Company – there still remained the Northwest Passage and the route over the Pole, which he believed were to make it possible for English 'princes to possess the wealth of all the East parts', as Sir Humphrey Gilbert put it in his *Discourse of a discoverie for a new passage to Cataia* (1576).⁵ Adrian Gilbert and his associates were granted a patent by the queen to sail 'Northwestward, Northeastward or Northward' and they enlisted the financial support of a rich merchant, William Sanderson, who had developed a strong interest in maritime expeditions and scientific instruments, including celestial and terrestrial globes. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, who relies on the testimony of John Janes – the chronicler of the first and third voyages – it was Sanderson who persuaded the associates to appoint 'one Mr. John Davis, a man well grounded in the principles of the arte of navigation, for Captain and chief Pilot of the exploit'.⁶ Having been granted the royal patent in February 1585, Davis was able to embark on his first northern voyage in June.⁷

Davis's attempts at discovering the Passage have survived in the form of the narratives written by Janes, who happened to be Sanderson's nephew. His two accounts were published by Richard Hakluyt in his *Principall Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589). The report on the second voyage was written by Davis himself and was also printed in Hakluyt's collection of travel narratives. We shall examine this second account at greater length because it contains Davis's list of Inuit words which, we believe, is pivotal to the reassessment of Davis's role and importance in the history of Arctic exploration.

Like Thomas Harriot's *Brief and True Report of the Newfoundland of Virginia* (1588) or some of Montaigne's most famous *essais* – such as 'Des cannibales' or 'Des coches' – Davis's notes constitute a fine example of pre-ethnography. Of course, not all the comments made by Davis and Janes were devoid of a sense of cultural superiority. Yet, on reading their reports, one cannot fail to be struck by the explorers' relatively unprejudiced tone as they describe the natives' mutual solicitude or even their fundamental honesty. It is true that Davis sometimes seems to contradict

himself: commenting on the Inuit's apparent passion for iron – which caused them to steal the ship's anchor – Davis felt bound to denounce their 'vile nature'. But both Davis and Janes display a genuine interest in the Arctic people they interacted with. Failing to find a new maritime route to China, Davis appears to have turned part of his attention to the Inuit instead. The Inuit often take pride of place and it looks as if the description of their mores had been substituted for the traditional list of profitable 'commodities' that can be found in so many travel narratives. This is all the more remarkable as the quest for a Northwest or Northeast maritime route to China partly originated in the English merchants' desire to remedy their financial woes after the cloth trade with Antwerp and the Low Countries had become less profitable.⁸ What is more, Davis did not content himself with listing their drinking and eating habits, or 'the many little images' and diverse cultural artefacts they produced. Our main contention is that Davis also approached their language with linguistic acuity.

Encountering 'very tractable people': Arctic pre-ethnography

Davis set sail in June 1585 with a total crew of forty-two. He was the captain of a ship called the *Sunshine* while the other ship, the *Moonshine*, was under the command of one William Bruton. John Janes was Davis's supercargo and a member of the *Sunshine*'s crew. Davis and his men sighted Greenland for the first time on 20 July. He seems to have been far from favourably impressed if one is to judge by the name he chose to give it:

The 20. as we sayled along the coast the fogge brake up, and we discovered the land, which was the most deformed rockie and montainous land that ever we saw ... the shoare beset with yce a league off into the sea, making such yrksome noyse as that it seemed to be the true patterne of desolation, and after the same our Captain named it, The Land of Desolation.⁹

Davis and his men then turned Cape Farewell (Uummannarsuaq) without trying to explore the coast and entered what is now the fjord of Nuuk (Nuup Kangerlua, previously Godthaab Fjord), which Davis named 'Gilbert Sound', at latitude 64°11'. It was there that they first encountered a group of Inuit. If the very first contact proved a little baffling and rather disconcerting, Janes tells us that surprise and diffidence rapidly gave way to 'many signs of friendship':

The Captain, the Master and I, being got up to the top of an high rock, the people of the countrey having espied us, made a lamentable noise, as we thought, with great outcries and skreechings: we hearing them, thought it had been the howling of wolves ... Whereupon M. Bruton and the Master of his shippe, with others of their company, made great haste towards us, and brought our Musicians with them from our shippe, purposing either by force to rescue us, if need should so require, or with courtesie to allure the people. When they came unto us, we caused our Musicians to play, ourselves dancing, and making many signs of friendship.¹⁰

It is perhaps significant that the first interaction between the two parties should have taken such a musical form as this scene may be said to set the tone for Davis's subsequent encounters with the different groups of Inuit he met. On the whole, it seems that concord prevailed over disharmony, though it is important not to oversimplify the necessarily complex and ambivalent feelings that both sides mutually experienced towards the other party. It should also be noted that, from the start, the Inuit's 'speech' and their 'pronunciation' aroused Janes's linguistic curiosity: 'their pronunciation was very hollow thorow the throat, and their speech such as we could not understand'.¹¹ If Frobisher's first contact with the natives gave rise to a display of gymnastic virtuosity on the part of the Inuit,¹² in Davis's case the first encounter between the explorers and the natives concluded with music, dancing and a scene of rejoicing: 'one of them came on shoare, to whom we threw our cappes, stockings and gloves, and such other things as then we had about us, playing with our musicke, and making signes of joy, and dauncing'.¹³

In the rest of his narrative, Janes often insists on the feelings of 'trust' and 'familiarity' that gradually developed between the two groups. On the second day, the English gained the trust of the Inuit by mimicking their attitudes and 'swearing by the sun after their fashion': 'so I shook hands with one of them, and he kissed my hand, and we were very familiar with them. We were in so great credit with them upon this single acquaintance, that we could have anything they had.'¹⁴ Much like Thomas Harriot who also admired the ingenuity of the native Algonkians,¹⁵ Janes marvelled at the skill of the Inuit. In particular, he showed deep interest in their fine – and warm – sealskin buskins, gloves and hoses, for which he willingly exchanged his much less comfortable clothes, 'all being commonly sowed and well dressed: so that we were fully perswaded they have divers artificers among them.'¹⁶ In fact, except for their religion¹⁷ – or lack thereof – Janes did not find anything wrong with them, as can be seen from the following description of the first group he came into contact with: 'they tooke great care one of another ... They are very tractable people, void of craft or double dealing, and easie to be brought to any civility or good order: but we judge them to be idolaters and to worship the Sunne.'¹⁸

Leaving the fjord of Nuuk on 1 August 1585, Davis and his men proceeded on their quest for the Passage, crossing the strait from Greenland to Baffin Island (i.e. Davis Strait) and anchoring their ships in Exeter Sound under a mount they called Mount Raleigh. They found the latitude to be 66°40 and the sea to be 'altogether void from the pester of ice'. The land was also devoid of any Inuit, though it was home to many white bears which the English hunted and killed before departing. This was the northernmost point that Davis reached in the course of his first voyage and on 8 August they set sail southward and doubled the cape of Cumberland Peninsula – which they named Cape God's Mercy, 'as being the place of our first entrance for the discovery.'¹⁹ They then entered a deep sound – Cumberland Sound (Kangiqtualuk) – and seeing that the water was 'of the very colour, nature and quality of the maine ocean', they thought that they had finally discovered the entrance to the Passage. However, they did not have the time to confirm, or rather disprove, their (erroneous) theory as they contented themselves with sailing up and down the sound for four

days. On 14 August, they went ashore but could not establish contact with the Inuit. This was the same group of Inuit that Frobisher had met less than ten years before and Samuel E. Morison's suggestion that they 'remembered Frobisher's kidnapping' and 'kept out of sight' seems more than likely.²⁰ Davis and his men heard dogs howling and they found a few cultural artefacts which Janes described in some detail,²¹ but they were not to see the Inuit again for the rest of their voyage. On 24 August, they finally resolved to sail home and they reached Dartmouth on 30 September 1585.

Davis's second voyage began on 7 May 1586 with a fleet of four ships, two of which (the *Sunnshine* and the *North Starre*) were to go their own way and explore the straight-over-the-pole route. They did so, but met with little success – as one can easily surmise. The other two ships, the *Mermayd* and the *Moonshine*, were to resume their quest for the Northwest Passage with John Davis leading the way on the *Mermayd*. Doubling Cape Farewell, Davis returned to the area of modern Nuuk, where he met the same Inuit with whom the English had played music the year before. Though the account of the second voyage was written by Davis himself, it may be noted that he used the exact same words as Janes had done in his own narrative, describing the Inuit as 'a people of *tractable* conversation'.²² Like Janes, Davis also insisted on the fact that the English had formed a true friendship with the Inuit and he depicted the hearty welcome they were given as soon as they landed:

But after they had espied in the boat some of our company that were the year before here with us, they presently rowed to the boat, and took hold on the oar, and hung about the boat with such comfortable joy, as would require a long discourse to be uttered: they came with the boates to our ships making signs that they knew all those that the year before had been with them. After I perceived their joy and small fear of us, myself with the Merchants & others of the company went ashore, bearing with me twenty knives: I had no sooner landed, but they leapt out of their canoes and came running to me and the rest, and embraced us with many signs of hearty welcome: at this present there were eighteen of them, and to each of them I gave a knife: they offered skins to me for reward, but I made signs that they were not sold, but given them of courtesy.²³

That Davis was genuinely interested in the Inuit's way of life is evidenced by the rest of his narrative, for he then set about exploring the land and 'searching for the habitation of this people'.²⁴ Instructing some of his men to inspect the country, he made it clear that they should neither shoot at nor injure the people in any way. If Davis's narrative is anything to go by, the first days of his stay in Gilbert Sound seem to have been almost entirely taken up by various exploratory missions. On 3 July, Davis explored another sound 'where the people by signs willed me to go, hoping to find their habitation: at length they made signs that I should go into a warm place to sleep, at which place I went on shore'.²⁵ More often than not, the explorers turned into friends, sharing the Inuit's games and participating in their leisure activities, as when the English engaged in a wrestling contest with the natives. Because the Inuit

kept following the English about, Davis ‘was desirous to have our men leap with them, which was done, but our men did overleape them: from leaping they went to wrestling, found them strong and nimble.’²⁶ Having achieved such a degree of familiarity with the Inuit, it should come as no surprise that Davis was able to describe the natives with more objectivity than Frobisher, whose men, it will be remembered, famously stripped an old woman of her clothes to ‘see if she were cloven-footed’.²⁷ The following description bears witness to Davis’s comparatively neutral, almost pre-ethnographic tone. It should be noted that Davis never presented the Inuit as deformed or devilish creatures, as Settle had done with the elderly Inuk. True, Davis also acknowledged that the natives were sometimes given to practising witchcraft. But his tone is considerably more balanced and cautious than Settle’s, and his physical description of the Inuit sounds emotionally disengaged and as factual as was possible for a late sixteenth-century observer:

The people are of good stature, well in body proportioned, with small slender hands and feet, with broad visages, and small eyes, wide mouthes, the most part unbearded, great lips, and close toothed. Their custom is as often as they go from us, still at their returne to make a new truce, in this sort, holding his hand up to the Sun with a loud voice he crieth Ylyaoute, and striketh his brest with like signs, being promised safety, he giveth credit. These people are much given to bleed, and therefore stop their noses with deerres hair, or the haire of an elan. They are idolaters and have images great stores, which they weare about them, and in their boats, which we suppose they worship. They are witches, and have many kinds of inchantments, which they often used, but to small purpose, thanks be to God.²⁸

This is not to say that Davis never behaved in a partial way or that he proved always immune to ethnocentric feelings. Being invited to witness what the English believed to be a sacrificial ceremony, Davis ordered one of his men to put out the fire and ‘spurne it into the sea, which was done to shew them that we did contemne their sorcery.’²⁹ This was hardly the response characteristic of a detached ethnographer dealing with a shamanistic ritual. In this, he was no different from most of his contemporaries who could not ‘recognize the validity of Indian society’ (or Inuit society, for that matter) ‘in its own terms – something beyond sixteenth century thinking’.³⁰ What really caused Davis to lose his temper was the Inuit’s repeated attempts to steal iron – something a ship captain in a hostile environment could not turn a blind eye to. Essentializing their ‘nature’, Davis judged that the Inuit:

... were marveilous theevish, especially for iron, which they have in great account. They began through our lenity to show their vile nature: they began to cut our cables: they cut away the Moonlight’s boat from her stern, they cut our cloth where it lay to air ... they stole our oares, a caliver, a boar speare, a sword, with diverse other things.³¹

Yet, at the same time, Davis prevented his crew from retaliating and harming the

natives, and he soon regained his calm, especially after the Inuit had brought the English seal skins as a token of restored amity. But, Davis continued:

Seeing iron they could in no wise forbear stealing: which when I perceived it did but minister unto me an occasion of laughter to see their simplicity, and I willed that in no case they should be any more hardly used, but that our own company should be the more vigilant to keep their things, supposing it to be very hard in so short time to make them know their evils.³²

It was at this point that Davis inserted his famous list of Inuit words into his narrative, to be commented upon later on in this chapter. This passage is also interesting because it suggests that Davis was convinced that the Inuit could ultimately be made to ‘know their evils’ – provided the English were given more time to educate them. According to Quinn, this belief in the natives’ perfectibility was one of the key differences separating those who thought that the ‘civilised’ and ‘the savage’ were ‘two distinct and mutually incompatible categories of human beings, the former incapable of being raised to the level of the latter’, from those who held the opposite view that the Indians – or the Inuit – were ‘by nature capable of reaching a level of civilisation comparable with that of the English’.³³ Like Harriot, but unlike Frobisher,³⁴ Davis probably belonged to the latter category. In fact, his narrative clearly reveals that he was considerably more open-minded and sensitive to cultural differences than the rest of his men who complained that ‘his lenity’ and ‘friendly using’ caused the Inuit to misbehave, giving them ‘stomacke to mischief’. This is one of the rare instances when the reader may actually hear two very distinct voices in the narrative as Davis gives a verbatim account of the conversation he had with his men, using direct speech:

Our Mariners complained heavily against the people, and said that my lenitie and friendly using of them gave them stomacke to mischief: for they have stolen an anchor from us, they have cut our cable very dangerously, they have cut our boats from our sterne, and now since your departure, with slings they spare us not with stones of halfe a pound weight: and will you still indure these injuries? It is a shame to beare them. I desired them to be content, and said, I doubted not but al should be wel.³⁵

However, all did not go well, for the Inuit started slinging stones at the *Moonlight*, with the result that Davis eventually lost his temper for good. For all Davis’s lenity, his patience and understanding had certain limits: ‘whereat being moved, I changed my curtesie, and grew to hatred.’³⁶ He pursued the Inuit in his boat but never caught up with them as they manoeuvred their kayaks much too swiftly. On the following day, however, the natives offered to conclude a new truce with the English and Davis kept one of the emissaries as a hostage for the anchor the Inuit had stolen. Yet, when the wind started to blow in a favourable direction, Davis decided that they should set sail immediately and the English took the Inuk with them. Like Frobisher, Davis therefore abducted a native inhabitant, but unlike his predecessor he had not planned

the kidnapping, at least if we are to believe him: ‘then we pointed to him and his fellows for our anchor, which being had, we made signs that he should be set at libertie.’³⁷ Whereas Frobisher's captive bit his tongue in two so as not to communicate with his enemies, Davis's hostage, we are told, became ‘a pleasant companion among [them]’ – yet another sign that Davis probably managed to interact with the Inuit in a more competent way than Frobisher did. Relating an episode from Frobisher's second voyage, Settle judged the Inuit ‘to be altogether voyde of humanitie and ignorant of what mercy meaneth’.³⁸ Davis and Janes, on the contrary, never doubted that the Inuit were human beings and that they should be treated as such.

Reaching the area of present-day Sisimiut, at latitude 66°33' on the west coast of Greenland, the fleet split, with the *Moonshine* continuing its search for the Passage while the *Mermaid* began her homeward voyage. In this area, Davis met another group of Inuit. He observed them carefully enough to notice some linguistic differences: ‘they differ not from the other, neither in their canoes nor apparel, yet is their pronunciation more plain than the others, and nothing hollow in the throat’.³⁹ Davis then sailed southward and the end of his second voyage was comparatively uneventful, except for a short – and dangerous – encounter with natives off the coast of Labrador, in latitude 56°.⁴⁰ The *Moonshine* finally arrived in the West Country at the beginning of October, after a voyage of five months.

In many respects, Davis's third voyage was a repetition of his previous two expeditions, and it is not necessary for us to discuss it in extensive detail. Suffice it to say that Davis's purpose was to explore the northern part of Davis Strait – which later came to be known as Baffin Bay – in the hope that he could find the entrance to the Passage there. Davis visited some of the sites he had already explored on his previous voyages, including Gilbert Sound, Exeter Sound, Cumberland Sound and the Cape of God's Mercy. But he also visited places he had never been to, such as the modern Upernavik, at latitude 72°46' on the west coast of Greenland. This was Davis's furthest north and he named the place Hope Sanderson, coming very close to discovering the actual entrance to the Northwest Passage, Lancaster Sound, between Devon Island and Baffin Island. Davis and his men did meet some Inuit in the course of their third voyage, but the novelty of the first encounters had worn off by now, and Janes's narrative contains little new information in the way of the Inuit's language or way of life.

Reappraising Davis's linguistic contribution to inuitology

Before discussing the list of words which Davis inserted into his narrative, it is important to turn the perspective around in order to get a clearer idea about who were the Inuit that Davis met in the course of his three voyages. The ancestors of the modern Inuit started leaving Alaska between AD 1.000 and AD 1.200, entering and, for some of them, settling down in the western Central Arctic before reaching the eastern Arctic and Greenland. Those migrants spoke the language ancestral to the present-day Inuit dialects, which is reconstructed by linguists under the name of Proto-Inuit.⁴¹ Thanks to the new culture they had developed (known as the Thule or Neo-Eskimo culture), they moved quickly and efficiently across the continent, which accounts for

the surprising homogeneity of their dialect continuum. In some areas on their way eastwards, Thule Inuit met and assimilated the descendants of the Paleo-Eskimo populations. Preceding the Thule Inuit by about two thousand years, the Paleo-Eskimos had also left Alaska and settled across the American Arctic. Around AD 1.000, at the same time the Thule Inuit were entering Greenland through the northwest, Scandinavian Vikings from Norway and Iceland (starting with Erik the Red) undertook to colonize southwest Greenland which had been deserted by its Paleo-Eskimo population. As the first wave of Thule people moved into the island and progressed downward along the east coast, the Europeans did not meet the Inuit until the twelfth century, when Norse colonists exploring north Greenland encountered a second wave of Thule migrants who had started progressing along the west coast. We know from different sources that relations between the two groups rapidly turned sour. Owing to unfavourable climate changes, the Vikings finally left Greenland towards the end of the fifteenth century, thus making it possible for the Inuit to settle around the entire west coast.

Following his encounter with a group of Inuit on southeast Baffin Island in 1576, Christopher Hall, one of Frobisher's assistants, had put together a first list of seventeen Inuit words.⁴² Two years later Martin Frobisher had landed on the west coast of Greenland but had only found uninhabited ruins and recent traces of Inuit presence. Though Frobisher's wordlist has tended to attract more attention for the simple reason that it predated Davis's by ten years, the forty words which Davis wrote down after coming into contact with a group of Inuit on the west coast of Greenland represented an improvement on Frobisher's compilation, if only because his list was twice as long as Hall's. It has been argued that 'European visitors to the Inuit Arctic waited for over a hundred years before again producing wordlists equivalent to Hall's and Davis's compilations'.⁴³

The forty Inuit words compiled by Davis are reproduced here in their original orthography and translation, as found in Davis's account of his second voyage which was printed in Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*. The first two columns of the following table contain the words and their translations as printed in Hakluyt. Column three summarizes Hinrich Johannes Rink's pioneering attempt at deciphering the list – a task that had been assigned to him by Albert Hastings Markham, the late nineteenth-century British explorer, who printed Rink's conclusions in his edition of the *Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator*.⁴⁴ The words therefore appear in their nineteenth-century forms and spellings. Column four consists of the words deciphered by Louis-Jacques Dorais, a leading specialist in the language of the Inuit.⁴⁵ They are given in their supposedly original forms. Finally, in the last three columns we present our own hypotheses, giving first what we believe to be the original form of the word, then its morphological analysis and finally its translation.⁴⁶ When only the stem can be identified, it is placed after the symbol √.⁴⁷

	<u>Davis</u> (1586)		<u>Rink</u> (1880)	<u>Dorais</u> (2010)	<u>Our hypotheses</u>		
1	<i>kesinyoh</i>	<i>eat some</i>	Nerisinaït, Only eat.	-	kiisiniaruk	kii-si-nia-ruk bite-ANTIP-please- IMPER.2SG/3SG	please, let him have a bite!
2	<i>madlycoyte</i>	<i>musicke</i>	-	-	? √ matsa(q)-		(to sing a baby to sleep)
3	<i>aginyoh</i>	<i>go fetch</i>	Aiguk, or ainiaruk, Fetch it.	a[g]eniariuk, "go and fetch it"	aginiaruk	agi-nia-ruk go.fetch-please-IMPER.2SG/3SG	please, go and fetch it!
4	<i>yliaoute</i>	<i>I meane no harm</i>	-	-	ilauvutit	ila-u-vu-tit friend-be-INDIC-2SG	you are a friend
5	<i>ponameg</i>	<i>a boat</i>	Umiamik, (by) Boat.	-	? umiamik	umia-mik boat-PL.INSTR	by boat
6	<i>blete</i>	<i>an eye</i>	-	-	qubliit	qubli-it teardrop-PL	teardrops
7	<i>unuicke</i>	<i>give it</i>	-	-	? tuniguk	tuni-guk give-IMPER.2SG/3SG	give it!
8	<i>tuckloack</i>	<i>a stagge or ellan</i>	Tugto, A reindeer.	-	tuktuuk	tuktu-uk caribou-DU	two caribous
9	<i>panygmah</i>	<i>a needle</i>	-	paningma, "my daughter's"	paningma	paning-ma daughter-RELAT.POSS1SG	my daughter's
10	<i>aob</i>	<i>the see</i>	-	-	? tauva	tauva ANAPH.over.there.INTERJ	it is over there!
11	<i>mysacoah</i>	<i>wash it</i>	Misuguk, Dip it.	-	misuguk	misu-guk dip-IMPER2SG/3SG	dip it!
12	<i>lethicksaneg</i>	<i>a seale skinne</i>	-	-	quliksanik	quliksa-nik caribou.skin.coat-PL.INSTR	with caribou skin coats

13	<i>canyglow</i>	<i>kisse me</i>	Kuninga, Kiss me.	kunigluk, "let both of us kiss each other"	kunigluk	kunig-luk kiss-IMPER.1DU	let (both of) us kiss each other!
14	<i>ugnera</i>	<i>my sonne</i>	Ernera, My son.	irnera, "my son"	irnira	irni-ra son-POSS1SG	my son
15	<i>acu</i>	<i>shot</i>	-	-	?		
16	<i>conah</i>	<i>leape</i>	-	-	?		
17	<i>maatuke</i>	<i>fish</i>	Matak, Whale skin.	-	mattaq		whale skin with blubber
18	<i>sambah</i>	<i>below</i>	Sama, Below, or seaward.	samma, "there it is below"	samma	samma down.there.INTERJ	it is down there!
19	<i>maconmeg</i>	<i>will you have this</i>	Màkuniuga, Some of these.	-	makkuninnga	makkuninnga this.thing.here.PL.INSTR	(with) these things here
20	<i>paaotyck</i>	<i>an oare</i>	Pautik, or pautit, A kayak paddle.	-	pautik		kayak paddle
21	<i>asanock</i>	<i>a dart</i>	Agssangnik, By hand.	-	assangnik	assang-nik hand-PL.INSTR	with hands
22	<i>sawygmeg</i>	<i>a knife</i>	Savingmik, (with) Iron ; or a knife.	savingmik, "[give me] a knife, please!"	savingmik	saving-mik knife-INSTR	with a knife
23	<i>uderah</i>	<i>a nose</i>	-	-	? qingara	qinga-ra nose-POSS1SG	my nose
24	<i>aoh</i>	<i>iron</i>	-	-	? √ auk-		(melt)
25	<i>cocah</i>	<i>go to him</i>	Kâkâ, Go on.	-	qaa qaa		hurry up!
26	<i>aba</i>	<i>fallen down</i>	Atâ, Below it.	avva, "there it is far away"	avva	avva over.there.INTERJ	it is over there!

27	<i>icune</i>	<i>come hither</i>	Ikunga, Thither.	ikani, "there"	ikani	ikani there-LOC	there
28	<i>awennyé</i>	<i>yonder</i>	-	avani, "there away"	avani	avani over.there-LOC	over there
29	<i>nugo</i>	<i>no</i>	Nagga, No.	-	naagga		no
30	<i>tucktodo</i>	<i>a fogge</i>	-	-	taktuk		fog
31	<i>lechiksah</i>	<i>a skinne</i>	-	-	quliksaq		outer caribou skin coat
32	<i>maccoah</i>	<i>a dart</i>	Mákua, These.	-	makkua	makkua this.thing.here.PL.RELAT	of these things here
33	<i>sugnacoon</i>	<i>a coat</i>	-	-	√ sirnaak-		(to be protective)
34	<i>gounah</i>	<i>come down</i>	-	unuuna, "by this way down there"	ugguuna	ugguuna here-TRANSL	through this way here
35	<i>sasobneg</i>	<i>a bracelet</i>	-	-	sapanganik	sapanga-nik bead-PL.INSTR	with beads
36	<i>ugnake</i>	<i>a tongue</i>	-	-	uqaq		tongue
37	<i>ataneg</i>	<i>a seale</i>	Âtânik, (by) Saddleback seals.	-	aataanik	aataa-nik harp.seal-PL.INSTR	with harp seals
38	<i>macuah</i>	<i>a beard</i>	-	-	makua	makua this.thing.here-PL	these things here
39	<i>pignagogah</i>	<i>a threed</i>	-	-	√ pirniq		(sewing that joins two pieces of clothes)
40	<i>quoysh</i>	<i>give it to me</i>	Káissuk, Give it.	-	? qaissavat	qai-ssa-vat hand.over-FUT-INDIC.2SG/3SG	you will hand it over

The words compiled by Davis pose serious problems and they certainly constitute difficult material but they are less impenetrable than might be thought at first sight. There is some sort of coherence in Davis's notation and this allowed us to decipher words which had not been explained so far. For example, it is clear that Davis did not hear the initial /qu/ syllable: '*lethicksaneg*' stands for *quliksanik* while '*blete*' stands for *qubliit*. Similarly, he missed the initial /u/ in several cases: *ugguuna* becomes '*gounah*' and *umiamik* probably led to '*ponameg*'. We have reason to believe that Davis consistently wrote *gn* for /rn/, not only in '*ugnera*' (*irnira*), but also in two more words whose ending is not recognizable, '*sugnacoon*' (stem: *sirnaak-*) and '*pignagogah*' (stem: *pirniq*). There is one exception to this pattern: '*ugnake*' stands for *uqaq*. But here as in a number of similar instances (e.g. '*uderah*', *qingara*), the problem comes from the voiceless uvular stop /q/, which is a difficult phoneme for any native speaker of English. It must also be acknowledged that the way Davis rendered vowels and some endings is somewhat erratic and often erroneous. But Davis seems to perceive the length opposition in '*maccoah*' (*makkua*) and '*macuah*' (*makua*), which are two distinct forms of the same lexeme *manna*. All in all, more than three fourths of the words compiled by Davis may be accounted for. Besides, the table clearly shows that Davis more or less correctly understood about fifty percent of the words, so that we tend to agree with Markham that

many of these words have a great similarity, both in sound and sense, to those of the present day. The collection of them reflects great credit on the accuracy and perspicacy of Davis; for the difficulty of obtaining and writing down the words and phrases of an unknown tongue is very very great, more especially after such a short intercourse with the natives as Davis had, both parties being totally ignorant of each others's language.⁴⁸

The meaning of the forms compiled by Davis is quite revealing about both his and the Inuit's degree of communicative involvement. Whereas Frobisher and Hall's list consists exclusively of concrete object nouns – thirteen out of the list's seventeen words denoting body parts –⁴⁹ the words collected by Davis include an important proportion of verbs and interjections, which tends to prove that he was indeed possessed of a certain sense of language, for such words are considerably more difficult to identify and translate than common descriptive words.

Bearing in mind that an Inuit word may include one full clause, and sometimes even more than one clause, a central question is whether Davis's wordlist did or did not include references to verbal and non-verbal interactions. Some words speak for themselves, most notably '*yliaoute*' (or *ilauvutit*, which translates as 'you are a friend') and *canyglow* (or '*kunigluk!*', meaning 'let us kiss each other!'). Judging from such phrases, we may reasonably conclude that Davis did achieve some degree of familiarity with the Inuit he met on the coast of Greenland. Further evidence of Davis's interaction with the Inuit may be found in words like '*nugo*' (*naagga*, 'no'), '*cocah*' (*qaa qaa*, 'hurry up'), '*quoysah*' (? *qaissavat*, 'you will hand it over'). Davis's list also abounds in imperative forms: '*kesinyoh*' (*kiisinaruk!*, 'please let him have a bite!'), '*aginyoh*' (*aginiaruk!*, 'please go and fetch it!'), '*unuicke*' (*tuniguk!*,

‘give it!’), ‘*mysacoah*’ (*misuguk!*, ‘dip it!’). It should be noted that the affix *-niaq-*, which may be translated as ‘please’ here, somewhat softens the order, making it sound more gentle and polite.

The spatial deictic words point to the deictic anchoring of the list, as is made manifest in such interjections as ‘*sambah*’ (*samma!*, meaning ‘it is down there!’), ‘*aba*’ (*avva!*, ‘it is over there!’), as well as in pronouns like ‘*macuah*’ (or *makua*, which Davis wrongly takes to mean ‘a beard’ but which actually means ‘these things here’), ‘*maccoah*’ (or *makkua*, misconstrued by Davis as meaning ‘a dart’, but actually meaning ‘of these things here’), or ‘*maconmeg*’ (*makkuninnga*, ‘with these things here’). Locative nouns such as ‘*icune*’ (*ikani*, ‘here’), ‘*awennyé*’ (*avani*, ‘over there’), and ‘*gounah*’ (*ugguuna*, ‘through this way here’) are also of special interest. Although about half the words in the list consist of object words, they do not always appear in the absolutive singular, which is their most basic form. On the contrary, even some of the nouns referring to concrete objects are given in the instrumental, a case form with various possible functions, which indicates that they were embedded in a dialogue: ‘*lethicksaneg*’ (*quliksanik*, ‘with caribou skin coats’), ‘*asanock*’ (*assangnik*, ‘with hands’), ‘*savygmeg*’ (*savingmik*, ‘with a knife’), ‘*sasobneg*’ (*sapanganik*, misinterpreted by Davis as meaning ‘a bracelet’, but actually meaning ‘with beads’), ‘*ataneg*’ (*aataanik*, ‘with harp seals’), ‘*ponameg*’ (? *umiamik*, ‘by boat’). Interestingly enough, the list also includes kinship terms, which indicates that the Inuit tried to introduce themselves by explaining and elucidating their family relationships: for example, in Davis’s list, the word ‘*ugnera*’ stands for *irnira*, which means ‘my son’ while ‘*panygmah*’ (in fact *paningma*) means ‘my daughter’s’.

Apart from what it tells us in terms of his interaction with the Inuit, Davis’s compilation is not entirely devoid of scientific merits. His list is the second document that was written in an Inuit dialect, but it is the first document in Greenlandic. As such, it contains capital information about the language spoken by the Inuit in the late sixteenth century.

From a phonological perspective, the significance of Davis’s wordlist is threefold. 1) It is known (from comparisons with other Eskimo languages) that the Proto-Eskimo form for ‘to go’ was *ayə-.⁵⁰ In all present-day Inuit dialects, the intervocalic */y/ has disappeared from this stem, giving way to *ai-* in Alaska and Canada, *aa-* in Greenland. As Davis’s list includes the word ‘*aginyoh*’, we may reasonably conclude that the /y/ still existed in the sixteenth century (*aginiaruk*). 2) In modern West Greenlandic, the only possible consonant clusters are the following: two identical consonants; a uvular followed by a labial or a dental; the cluster /ts/. Now, it is obvious that many more consonant clusters were allowed five centuries ago, as is apparent from the following examples: /bl/ in ‘*blete*’ (*qubliit*), /kt/ in ‘*tuckloack*’ (*tuktuuk*) and ‘*tucktodo*’ (*taktuk*), /ks/ in ‘*lechiksah*’ (*quliksaq*), /yl/ in ‘*canyglow*’ (*kunigluk*), /ɲm/ in ‘*panygmah*’ (*paningma*) and ‘*savygmeg*’ (*savingmik*). All these clusters have undergone regressive assimilation since Davis’s time. 3) Whereas Frobisher and Hall’s list suggests that a distinction was still made between the vowels /i/ and /ə/ on Baffin Island, the words collected by Davis show no evidence for such a distinction – a difference which was inherited from the Proto-Eskimo four-vowel system. It is highly probable that /ə/ had merged with /i/ and other vowels in

Greenland, or at least that /ə/ had become recessive. In fact, Davis erratically uses the letters *y*, *u* and *i* to transcribe reflexes of both */i/ and */ə/.⁵¹

In addition to its phonological significance, the list is also remarkable for a number of morphological reasons. 1) Davis's list clearly proves that the dual number still existed in the sixteenth century, as can be seen from the words 'tuckloack' (*tuktuuk*, 'two caribous') and 'canyglow' (*kunigluk*, 'let (both of) us kiss each other'), while it has now disappeared from standard West Greenlandic. 2) Several inflexional affixes still in use in West Greenlandic can be recognized, in particular the instrumental case (-*mik*: 'ponameg', 'maconmeg', 'savygmeg'; -*nik* in the plural: 'sasobneg', 'ataneg', 'lethicksaneg', 'asanock'), the possessive affix in the first-person singular (-*ga* in the absolutive case, as in 'ugnera', 'uderah'; -*ma* in the relative case as in 'panygmah') and a double-person imperative ending, -*guk* (notably in 'aginyoh' and 'mysacoah'). 3) The last word in the list, 'quoyzah' (? *qaissavat*, 'you will hand it over'), is noteworthy. It possibly suggests that the future tense affix -*ssa-*, which is specific to Greenlandic – albeit derived from the Proto-Inuit suffix **tya-*⁵² – already existed in the sixteenth century and is not a recent innovation.

Finally, the list also commands attention because of its lexical features. To give but one example, the word Davis noted for 'fog', 'tucktodo' (*taktuk*, Proto-Eskimo **taɣətuy*⁵³) has disappeared from Greenland, where the word *pujoq* is used today. However, it is still in use in the western part of the dialect continuum and it is therefore interesting to know that a reflex of **taɣətuy* used to exist in Greenland.

All in all, it can be inferred that the variety of Greenlandic that was spoken in the sixteenth century bears more similarities to the dialects currently spoken in the western part of the continuum (i.e. in Canada and Alaska) than it does to modern Greenlandic. There is no compelling evidence as far as the seventeenth century is concerned, but documents dating from the eighteenth century show that, by then, the language had remained phonologically and morphologically quite conservative.⁵⁴

All these elements strongly suggest that Davis's contribution to the history of the quest for the Northwest Passage should be reappraised. Real though they may be, the linguistic merits of Davis's list failed to impress critics like Louis-Jacques Dorais who stressed the 'poor linguistic skills' of its author. Comparing Davis's wordlist to Hall's compilation, he argued that the latter could 'be understood in a proportion of 100%' and went on to speak disparagingly of Davis's linguistic capabilities:

The explorer did not always understand what his informants were trying to tell him. For example, the word for 'needle' is translated *panygmah*, which evidently stands for *paningma*, 'my daughter's'. Davis's informant probably tried to explain whose needle it was, while the explorer thought it to be the name of the object itself.⁵⁵

There is no point in denying that Davis did make some interpretative mistakes. But we would like to suggest that the mistakes he made may partly be attributed to the risks he took in interacting with the Inuit. In other words, his errors were the price to pay for his conversational boldness and they probably deserve to be judged less harshly than has sometimes been the case. To put it at its simplest, Davis's situation

exemplified Quine's concept of 'radical translation'. The English mariner behaved in much the same way as the linguist imagined by Quine in his 'gavagai' problem: confronted with a form of life that was totally unfamiliar to him, he formed analytical hypotheses in an attempt to catapult himself into the natives' language.⁵⁶

If, as James Axtell argues,⁵⁷ judgments are intrinsic to the writing of history, then John Davis's three northern voyages probably deserve at least some degree of praise for the way he managed to interact with the Inuit. Davis never considered the people he encountered as being beyond the pale of humanity, nor did he believe them to be 'naturally given to fierceness and rapyne', as Michael Lok – Frobisher's financial backer – would have it.⁵⁸ This may go some way to explaining why his three expeditions to the Arctic did not give rise to any lethal skirmishes. Of course, one must be careful not to paint too simplistic a picture of Davis's northern ventures and we do not want to suggest that he invented modern ethnography – though, in this regard, he certainly fared much better than most of his contemporaries. Our aim is not to pit Davis's scientific successes against Frobisher's economic and moral fiascos. In the field of maritime exploration as in so many other fields, successes and failures are often relative. But it seems to us that both Davis's careful dealing with the natives he came into contact with and the wordlist he compiled provide strong grounds for a reevaluation of his role in the history of the quest for the Northwest Passage, quite independently of the fact that he *did* pave the way for the discovery of the passage.

- ¹ See M. C. Fuller, *Remembering the Early Modern Voyage. English Narratives in the Age of European Expansion* (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 1-20; R. McGhee, *The Last Imaginary Place: A Human History of the Arctic World* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2004), pp. 153-72.
- ² Fuller, *Remembering*, pp. 16-7.
- ³ A simple search for 'John Davis' as a subject in the British Library integrated catalogue yields only two relevant results whereas a similar search for 'Martin Frobisher' yields about twenty records. On Frobisher, see also T. A. B. Symons (ed.), *Meta Incognita: A Discourse of Discovery. Martin Frobisher's Arctic expeditions, 1576-1578* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1999).
- ⁴ E. Dodge, *Northwest by Sea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 96.
- ⁵ Quoted by D. B. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlement. The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 372.
- ⁶ Quoted by S. E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages A. D. 500-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 586.
- ⁷ For a detailed summary of Davis's voyages, see for example W. P. Cumming, R. A. Skelton and D. B. Quinn, *The Discovery of North America* (London: Elek, 1971), pp. 213-52.
- ⁸ See E. H. Ash, "A Note and a Caveat for the Merchant": Mercantile Advisors in Elizabethan England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33:1 (2002), pp. 1-31, especially on pp. 2-8.
- ⁹ J. Janes, 'The first voyage of M. John Davis, undertaken in June 1585 for the discoverie of the Northwest passage. Written by M. John Janes Marchant, sometimes servant to the worshipfull Master William Sanderson', in R. Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. J. Masefield (London: J. M. Dent, 1927), vol. 5, pp. 281-91, on p. 283.
- ¹⁰ Janes, 'The first voyage', pp. 285-6.
- ¹¹ Janes, 'The first voyage', p. 286.
- ¹² For a description of this episode and the Inuit's agility, see G. Best, *A True Discourse of the late voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya, by the northweast, under the conduct of Martin Frobisher generall (1578)*, ed. R. Collinson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1867), p. 73.
- ¹³ Janes, 'The first voyage', p. 286.
- ¹⁴ Janes, 'The first voyage', p. 286.
- ¹⁵ Unlike the Inuit, though, the Algonkians were a 'poor people' who had not devised many tools or techniques to alleviate their agricultural chores. But Thomas Harriot praised their 'wit' and 'ingenuity': 'In respect of us they are a people poor, and for want of skill and judgement in the knowledge and use of our things, doe esteeme our trifles before things of greater value: Notwithstanding in their proper manner considering the want of such means as we have, they seem very ingenious; for although they have no such tooles, nor any such crafts, sciences and artes as we; yet in those things they doe, they shewe excellencie of wit': T. Harriot, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588), ed. P. Hulton (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), p. 25.
- ¹⁶ Janes, 'The first voyage', pp. 286-7.

- ¹⁷ Ash points out that Sebastian Cabot instructed novice explorers searching for the northeast passage not to meddle with religion when dealing with ‘uncivilised people’: ‘the subject of religion was to be avoided at virtually all costs in order to prevent unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings’ (*Mercantile Advisors*, p. 11).
- ¹⁸ Janes, ‘The first voyage’, p. 287.
- ¹⁹ Janes, ‘The first voyage’, p. 289.
- ²⁰ Morison, *The European Discovery of America*, p. 592.
- ²¹ Janes, ‘The first voyage’, p. 290.
- ²² J. Davis, ‘The second voyage attempted by M. John Davis with others, for the discoverie of the Northwest passage’, in R. Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations*, vol. 5, pp. 291-303, on p. 292.
- ²³ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 293.
- ²⁴ Davis gives a succinct description of the Inuit’s tents, ‘made with seal skins set up upon timber wherein they found great store of dried Caplin, being a little fish no bigger than a pilchard; they found bags of trane oil, many little images cut in wood, seal skins in tan-tubs, with many other such trifles’ (‘The second voyage’, p. 293).
- ²⁵ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 294.
- ²⁶ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 294.
- ²⁷ See D. Settle, ‘The second voyage of Martin Frobisher to the West and Northwest Regions in the yeere 1577’, quoted in P. C. Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise: An Elizabethan’s Obsession for an English America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 53.
- ²⁸ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, pp. 294-5.
- ²⁹ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 295.
- ³⁰ D. B. Quinn, ‘Englishmen and Others’, in *European Approaches to America, 1450-1640* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 145-73, on p. 167).
- ³¹ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 295.
- ³² Davis, ‘The second voyage’, pp. 295-6.
- ³³ Quinn, *European Approaches to America*, p. 167.
- ³⁴ Fuller points out that ‘most of Frobisher’s encounters with the Inuit were or became violent in varying degrees’, which was certainly not the case with Davis (*Remembering*, p. 26).
- ³⁵ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 297.
- ³⁶ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 298.
- ³⁷ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 298.
- ³⁸ See D. Settle, *A True Report of the last voyage into the West and Northwest regions* (1577), quoted in Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise*, p. 53.
- ³⁹ Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 301.
- ⁴⁰ ‘Secretly lurking in the wood’ the natives attacked a group of five English sailors, two of whom they killed (Davis, ‘The second voyage’, p. 303).
- ⁴¹ See M. Fortescue, S. Jacobson and L. Kaplan, *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary, With Aleut Cognates*, 2nd edn (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, 2010). In modern usage, the term ‘Eskimo’ primarily refers to the linguistic family comprised of the Inuit dialect continuum and the Yupik languages. In some parts of the Arctic, one also calls ‘Eskimos’ the people whose ancestral

language belongs to the Eskimo linguistic family, namely the Inuit and the Yupit.

⁴² The list features in Hall's account of Frobisher's first voyage: C. Hall, 'The first voyage of Mr Martin Frobisher to the Northwest for the search of a passage to China; anno 1576', in Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations*, vol. 5, pp. 131-7, on p. 137. For more details, see below note 49.

⁴³ L.-J. Dorais, *The Language of the Inuit. Syntax, Semantics and Society in the Arctic* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 110.

⁴⁴ Markham explains that 'Dr. Rink, the Director of Royal Greenland Trade at Copenhagen, and formerly Royal Inspector of South Greenland, has very kindly examined these Eskimo terms, and compared them with those now in use amongst the Greenlanders, with the following result': A. H. Markham, *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1880), p. 21.

⁴⁵ See L.-J. Dorais, *The Language of the Inuit*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ We would like to thank Michael Fortescue and Larry Kaplan for kindly considering our hypotheses. We are also grateful to Naja Trondhjem, a native speaker of West Greenlandic and a teacher and scholar at the Institute of Eskimology, University of Copenhagen, who gave us her opinion about several forms of the list.

⁴⁷ In the morpheme glosses we use the following abbreviations: 1, first-person; 2, second-person; 3, third-person; ANAPH, anaphoric prefix; ANTIP, antipassive; DU, dual; FUT, future; IMPER, imperative mood; INDIC, indicative mood; INSTR, instrumental case; INTERJ, interjective form; LOC, locative case; PL, plural; POSS, possessive suffix; RELAT, relative case; SG, singular; TRANSL, translative case.

⁴⁸ Markham, *The Voyages and Works of John Davis*, p. 21. By contrast, Dorais's view seems too severe and rather unfair: 'Unfortunately for us, Davis and his scribe were much worse linguists than Christopher Hall. Many of their words are thus unrecognizable. Moreover, the explorer did not always understand what his informants were trying to tell him' (*The Language of the Inuit*, p. 108).

⁴⁹ See Hall, 'The first voyage of Mr Martin Frobisher', p. 137: 'argotteyt "a hand", cangnawe "a nose", arered "an eye", keiotot "a tooth", mutchatet "the head", chewat "an eare", comagaye "a legge", atoniagay "a foote", callagay "a pair of breeches", attegay "a coate", polleuetagay "a knife", accaskay "a shippe", coblone "a thumb", teckkere "the foremost finger", ketteckle "the middle finger", mekellacane "the fourth finger", yacketrone "the litle finger".'

⁵⁰ See Fortescue *et al.*, *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary*, p. 7.

⁵¹ As can be seen by comparing the words *mysacoah*, *uderah*, and *pignagogah* (Proto-Eskimo stems: *m̥acy-, *q̥əŋar, *p̥ərɲər) with the words *yliaoute*, *sugnacoon*, *icune* (Proto-Eskimo stems: *ila-, *ciqni-, *ika-).

⁵² See Fortescue *et al.*, *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary*, p. 474.

⁵³ See Fortescue *et al.*, *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary*, p. 353.

⁵⁴ See K. Bergsland and J. Rischel (eds), *Pioneers of Eskimo Grammar* (Copenhagen: The Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, 1986).

⁵⁵ Dorais, *The Language of the Inuit*, pp. 108-9.

⁵⁶ See W. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1960). At the outset of the second chapter (p. 28), which presents the 'gavagai' problem, Quine introduces the concept of radical translation in the following way: 'The recovery of a

man's current language from his currently observed responses is the task of the linguist, who, unaided by an interpreter, is out to penetrate and translate a language hitherto unknown. All the objective data he has to go on are the forces that he sees impinging on the native's surfaces and the observable behavior, vocal and otherwise, of the native. Such data evince "meanings" only of the most objectively empirical or stimulus-linked variety. And yet the linguist apparently ends up with native "meanings" in some quite unrestricted sense; purported translations, anyway, of all possible native sentences. Translation between kindred languages, e.g., Frisian and English, is aided by resemblance of cognate word forms. Translation between unrelated languages, e.g., Hungarian and English, may be aided by traditional equations that have evolved in step with a shared culture. What is relevant rather to our purposes is *radical* translation, i.e., translation of the language of a hitherto untouched people.'

⁵⁷ J. Axtell, *After Columbus, Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially on p. 31.

⁵⁸ M. Lok, 'East India by the Northwestward' (1577), MS Otho, E., viii, fol. 46 (47), in V. Stefansson and E. McCaskill (eds), *The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher*, 2 vols (London: Argonaut Press), vol. 1, p. 161.