

2020-05-05 PT. 1

Michael Krauss

March 18, 2004

Fairbanks, Alaska

Andreas Droulias, interviewer

Series: Michael Krauss Life History Recordings

Michael Krauss said there were four religious groups that were still favorable to the use of Alaska Native languages: the Russian Orthodox, the Moravians, the Catholics, and the Episcopalians from the Canada side. Many of the groups published religious materials in Alaska Native languages during the second period after the neglect from the 1880s until the 1910s. He characterizes it as a period of cross currents to the mainstream Protestants who believed in suppressing languages and other groups who believed in using the Native languages at least in church. The conflict was resolved by not allowing Native languages in any schools although they were free to use them in church. So by the 1910s there was almost universal suppression of Alaska Native languages. In 1960 when he arrived in Alaska there were many communities where people under the age of thirty or forty weren't able to speak their Native language. Most of the villages throughout the state at least the children were not able to speak the language. There was no interest or study in Alaska Native languages from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Anthropology Department. Even the linguists in that department have not done work on Alaska Native languages. All the linguistics studies on Alaska Native languages from 1910-1960 were done by Scandinavians.

The Summer Institutes of Linguistics Weekly Bible translators were set up in Fairbanks when he arrived in Fairbanks. They had various people working with Alaska languages. He talked about meeting Irene Reed and Martha Teeluk in his linguistics course. They got him to start teaching a course in Eskimo in January 1961. It was based on Martha Teeluk's native Yupik. Irene was the student leader and his job was basically master commentator. He talked about the photograph of the class which is well known. There were six people in the class. This was the beginning of Alaska Native languages at UAF that grew into a curriculum which is still going. The following year Irene Reed and Martha Teeluk took over the course. He extended his research interests to Athabascan and Eyak. None of this was funded by UAF hard money, it was Carnegie money.

Krauss started a survey of Alaska languages research program with various people assisting him with a major grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) with \$38,000. They were to survey the Alaska Native language situation and start documenting languages which were in urgent need of documentation. Irene Reed and Martha Teeluk worked in Yupik and Alutiq. Krauss worked with Athabascan in Minto. Robert Austerlitz worked with Eyak. There were two graduate students from the University of Washington who didn't amount to anything who worked with Ahtna and Tanaina. He talked about the attitude of the university and working with Alaska Native languages. He was always able to bring in money to work with the Alaska Native

languages. The university took some pride in the work being done and took credit for this work. Krauss said the bulk of his research in the 1960s went to Eyak. His research on Athabascan linguistics explained a lot of the evolution of Athabascan languages. In 1962 he realized he needed to make a commitment to Eyak which was the closest to extinction and the most divergent of the Athabascan language family. With NSF money he devoted most the 1960s on documenting the Eyak language before it disappeared. He worked with the remaining five speakers. He made a permanent record of what was left in living memory of Eyak. At the same time the Yupik program was growing under Irene Reed and Martha Teeluk's care. It was first given as a special topics course in linguistics by the later 1960s. They had an underground agenda of elevating it to the position of a literary language that could be used in the schools. They worked to have a practical writing system which they succeeded in doing by about 1967-1972. By the late 1960s one of the advanced courses in the Yupik curriculum was called the Eskimo Language Workshop. It was an advanced composition for advanced students in Yupik who went to work writing drafts of readers and reading material for their younger brothers and sisters in school.

In 1967-68 there was federal legislation permitting bilingual education for students in their mother tongue. They started pushing for an Alaskan bilingual education movement. One of the first things they needed to do was to show Native languages could be used in the schools as a written language. They had devised a decent written language system and were already to go when it was allowable. His research done at the university was used to develop a writing system so people could use their own language in schools and train the teachers how it worked. He talked with the governor of Greenland and talked about establishing an exchange program. The governor wanted to study how the Alaskans managed to instill English into the Eskimo schools and he wanted to do the same in Greenland. Krauss said they did send over a young linguist to UA. Krauss said he wanted to overcome the colonial boundaries between people of the same language. He thought the Inupiat of Alaska, Canada and Greenland had a right to know and develop relations with each other. When he visited Barrow, he didn't see a single map of Greenland in the schools. This also applied to the situation with the Inuit in Alaska and the U.S.S.R. Part of their mission was to help spread knowledge back and forth.

Toward the end of the 1960s there were a number of international things taking place. He talked about the Sami doing things internationally. It became apparent in various North American meetings that at least other countries were trying to allow native languages back in the schools. At the same time Walter Mondale and Ted Kennedy visited UAF and other parts of Alaska and were rather taken aback to see the suppression pattern in Alaska. By 1969-1970 Irene Reed was able to persuade the BIA and the state operated school systems to experiment with the possibility that children might learn better to read and write if they were allowed to do so in their own language. It was proved possible. He credits Reed with doing a wonderful job training those people. When people would ask if Krauss had anything to do with it Reed would state that Krauss was at MIT at the time. The experiments of eight-week sessions were so successful that by 1972 it was possible to convince the state legislature to pass the Alaska Native Language bill. It mandated that children who spoke a language other than English must have a curriculum teacher and materials in that language and the Alaska Native Language Center was established at UAF. The Center was to support the community bilingual programs and to study Alaska Native

languages. He was the director of the Center. The study of Alaska Native languages purpose was not for enriching linguistics, but for the purpose of linguistics enriching the languages.

Krauss said the 1972 bill was introduced by Joe Josephson and Gary Holthaus. They mandated the use of Native language in the classroom. The legislation allowed \$200,000 for the Alaska Native Language Center at the university. He talked about the cuts from their budget by the university. For two years he went to Juneau to get more funds. They also were able to get grants. They produced ten dictionaries of Alaska Native languages with grant money. He said their Haida dictionary was coming out soon. His Ahtna dictionary was the first of the series to come out. He talked about the different dictionaries and their publication. The dictionaries are set up to maximize use for the people and at the same time are not that simple. He talked about the difficulties of some of the languages. They try to make the dictionaries user friendly. They represent the documentation of the language. Dictionaries for younger students can be derived from them.

Krauss said the grammar text dictionaries and the recordings need to be made accessible to the people and they need to be archived. The work needs to be kept and needs to have high priority for archiving the information. He said there are about 300 linear feet of material and files in their archive. This is about 12,000 items. He said the Center is an international model and internationally recognized as the kind of thing a university can do. It is the best-known center for this kind of work.

Krauss said there are two things that distinguish the Center and his work. One is placing the highest value on documentation of endangered languages and the race against time in doing good fieldwork to get materials produced. He discussed Chomsky's linguistic theory and how it eclipsed other values from linguistics. He regrets the lack of effort to preserve languages the way endangered species are preserved. Krauss has tried to elevate the business of salvaging the data. He said if you do it right then others will want to do it. He wanted to be useful to what Alaska needs. He discussed the hierarchy of academic structure.

Krauss interview ends at 00:51:46. Remainder of tape is Andreas Droulias interviewing an unidentified person about the impact of an oil spill.