

Alaska Native Language Center News

Dictionaries of ten Alaska Native languages will be compiled by the staff of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, with funding recently granted by two federal agencies. The National Endowment for the Humanities has granted \$184,919 toward a three-year project, and the National Science Foundation made grant of \$99,492 for the first of two years for the same project.

Inupiaq, Central Yup'ik, Siberian Yupik, and Sugpiaq (Alutiiq) Eskimo (all of the Eskimo languages spoken in Alaska) are included in the project. Of the Indian languages, Tlingit, Haida, Ahtna, Tanaina, Koyukon, and Eyak will be covered.

At the present time a complete dictionary exists only for Eyak. It is a massive scholarly work which will be edited for more general use by its compiler, Dr. Michael Krauss, who is also principal investigator of the dictionary project.

Other ANLC staff involved in the project are James Kari, who is compiling the Ahtna and Tanaina dictionaries; Jeff Leer, who will compile dictionaries for Tlingit, Haida, and Alutiiq; Steven Jacobson, who has the Central Yup'ik dictionary well under way and will also head the Siberian Yupik project; and Eliza Jones, from Huslia, who is compiling the Koyukon dictionary.

Many other Alaskans will contribute to the project. Two university students, Lucy Coolidge and Sandra Iknokinok, are already at work on the projects in their native Yup'ik and Siberian Yupik languages. Specialists in the other languages will also be employed. Project personnel will work with people in cities and bush villages to make sure dictionary coverage is as complete as possible.

The staff sees a dual importance for the dictionaries: they will be used both by students and by scholars. Although several Native Alaskan languages are now taught at the university and at community colleges, the students have only preliminary and incomplete dictionaries to use in their work. Bilingual teachers, too, will find a rich source of material in the new dictionaries. Outside the schools, however, it is hoped that people in Alaskan communities will enjoy having these works and seeing how impressive and rich is the range of Native Alaskan speech.

The dictionaries will appear in print over the next five years or so. First off the presses will probably be the Central Yup'ik dictionary, of great importance to the approximately 15,000 speakers of the language and the many students who are studying it in high school, at Kuskokwim Community College, and at the University of Alaska.