

# ALASKA'S NATIVE LANGUAGES:

## Past, present and future

The prehistory, history, present status and destiny of the twenty Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut languages of Alaska are the subject of a new publication, *Alaska Native Languages: Past, Present, and Future*, by Michael Krauss, head of the linguistic staff at the University of Alaska's Alaska Native Language Center. The 110-page work, the fourth in a series of research monographs from the Center, includes the title paper, a map, and two shorter related papers also by Krauss.

Alaska Native Languages gives the general reader a good up-to-date overview of the field of Alaskan languages, answering many questions frequently asked about them. The first part of the paper deals with the relationships and origins of Alaska's Native peoples as shown by their languages; with the curious and confused history of the term, "Aleut"; and with the place of Alaskan peoples in the larger groups in North America to whom they are related. Moving from prehistory to history, Krauss describes the study of and attitude toward Native languages and culture in the Russian and American periods up to 1960, the work of missionaries both linguistically inclined and otherwise, and the tragic effects of suppressive schooling. The period since 1960, when both Natives and non-Natives began to cooperate to recognize and maintain their cultural heritage, closes the historical review.

A major portion of the work is devoted to a group-by-group review of the present status of each of the Native languages — its location, population, number and age of speakers, degree of visibility, and use in education and literature. The factors influencing language loss and viability are identified and suggestions made for coping with them through such means as comprehensive bilingual education and bilingual radio and television.

Included with *Alaska Native Languages* are the article, "The

Future of Alaska Native Languages," which was published in four parts in the *Tundra Times* in April 1980, and an article prepared by Krauss for an international meeting on Eskimo-Aleut languages, "The Eskimo Languages in Alaska, Yesterday and Today."

*Alaska Native Languages* is the first work for the general reader to deal with the subject of this fundamental part of Alaska's Native cultural heritage. The paperback book is

(Continued on Page 7)

# ***Native Languages***

**Continued from page 5**  
available from the Alaska Native  
Language Center, University of  
Alaska, Fairbanks, AK 99701  
for five dollars.