

Norwegian linguist studies Inupiat language

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Many miles separate the village of Anaktuvuk Pass and the city of Oslo, Norway but the miles don't matter to Norwegian linguist Knut Bergsland.

Bergsland will spend 26 days in Akaktuvuk Pass to make corrections in several volumes of Inupiat stories, legends and discussions.

Bergsland has transcribed more than 18 hours of Inupiat tapes that were recorded in the late '40's. After transcribing the tapes he produced two volumes of Inupiat legends, stories and discussions that were recorded by Helge Ingstad between the years of 1949-50.

Bergsland explained, "He (Ingstad) passed the winter in Akaktuvuk Pass. He recorded a large collection of songs, stories and discussions. He turned his linguistic material over to me. I started working on those and listening to them.

"I listened to the taperecorder and went syllable by syllable. Hellava work."

Bergsland doesn't actively

speak the Inupiat language and he's only heard the language on tape. "I know their voices but I've never seen their faces," he said.

"My work with the Inupiat and Aleut has been a hobby and it has taken half my life," he said.

Bergsland explained how the roles have switched. He said when Ingstad first went to Anaktuvuk Pass in 1949, the Inupiat were informants, but now members of the North Slope Borough School District and other Inupiat organizations are seeking information on the Inupiat language.

"When Ingstad was there they (Inupiat) were the informants. By their own initiative they went to look for this material" he said as he pointed to the thick notebook filled with Inupiat material.

Bergsland will spend his time in Anaktuvuk Pass polishing what he has transcribed. "Certain points in this text are unclear to me," He added, "They were recorded in a sodhouse. A perfect place."

Bergsland went to Atka to study the language of the Aleuts in 1952. He worked with Moses Dirks' grandfather and in 1976, Dirks spent three months in Norway.

"I got in touch with two people and they suggested I should go to Atka. That was very fortunate because little work had been done on that dialect," he said.

He also discussed retaining a Native language. "In order to keep up a language, it is essential parents speak the language to their children."

When Bergstad was here in the early 50's, many people spoke Native languages and they took their languages for granted.

"When I was in Alaska in 1952 and if someone mentioned bilingual education you would get a big laugh," he said. He said he's noticed a change where now people want to learn the language since then.

Bergsland talked about his perception of Alaska when he first came here.

"At that time there was something left of the old order. When that generation disappeared, the old order disappeared. It was encouraged to look down on the old culture 30 years ago. All the kids were looking outside of the village. Now a new dignity has come... Now you have scholars from several groups. Nice change."

Bergsland talked about the value of retaining a Native language.

"The value you attribute is what makes it valuable."

To retain identity and dignity Native people should keep their language he said. "I hate to think of a future with everyone speaking Chinese. People should look at different sides and come from different molds. Different languages develop different things."

"Culture is not something you receive. It's something you do. You learn identity by doing something."