Language work and language collections: an ongoing exchange

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Things I want to talk about

• The archive where I work (ANLA)
• Language work
• Why work with archival materials?
• Barriers to language work – for example, spelling (what are yours?)
• An example of the archival cycle
• Your projects and interests
Alaska Native Language Archive

~ 1500 linear ft. manuscripts, including nearly everything written in or about Alaska Native languages
~ 5000 recordings
outgrowth of more than 50 years of language documentation and development work in Alaska through the Alaska Native Language Center
Coverage

- All 20 Alaska Native languages
- Related languages outside Alaska
- Alaska Russian
- Alaska Saami
- Chinook Jargon
ANLA Timeline

- 1960 Krauss to UAF, begins collecting copies of anything he can find
- 1972 state legislation founds ANLC but doesn’t mention archive
- 1980 first catalog (Krauss and McGary)
- 1999 first electronic catalog project (Giulia Oliverio)
- 2000 first digitization project (collaboration with Oral History)
- 2001 join Open Language Archives Community (collaboration w/ ARSC)
- 2002 relocation to Brooks Building
- 2003-5 National Endowment for the Humanities (Anna Berge)
- 2006-7 UA President’s Fund (Rose Speranza)
- 2008 first materials available online
- 2009 NSF-funds first full-time employee (Stacey Baldridge)
- 2012 relocation to Rasmuson
Language Workers

• People who work with language come in different styles.
• Some are academically trained in documentation, archiving or theory.
• Some are academically trained in language education.
• Some are self-educated in language study and might know just about anything.
We learn from each other

Don’t tell anybody but here’s what I think about learning things.

– Everybody has to learn *how to learn* for themselves.
– Education tries to provide an environment that fosters learning (by bringing different kinds of learners together).
– But learning is done everywhere. It’s hard to stop it from happening.
– Our job is to learn *how to learn useful things* from each other and from sources of information.
Language Work

We learn about languages from people who speak them
We try to save what we learn
And learn from what was saved
And that’s why archival work goes both directions: in and out.
Why work with archival materials?

Efficiency
(Don’t reinvent the wheel)

Inspiration and learning
(Collected materials demonstrate the practices of successful researchers)

Authenticity and variety
(Materials collected when a language is spoken by a larger community can give you examples you can’t find under conditions of language shift.)

Repatriation
(Collected materials can be reorganized to increase accessibility for their community of origin.)

Added Value
(You can add to what is known about the material.)
Barriers to Language Work (one example – what are yours?)
Spelling – (no)

c – th“/ thin
d – d
e – “/ they
ě – “/ then
f – f
g – g
h – “ he
i – “ “ pique
i – “ “ pick
j – z “ azure
k – k
l – l—note, not čl
m – m

ü – “ “ German kühl
shape lips to say
oo, but say ee
ú – as in but
v – v
w – “ “ wish
x – a very deep gutteral
like the Arabic ghain
y – as in you
z – “ “ zone
dj – j “ “ judge
hw – wh “ “ when
hy – hu “ “ hue
ly – lli “ “ million
Spelling (yes)
Kh/kh [x] khał ‘backpack’
[ŋ] yenghĩt’an’
‘he/she looked at him/her/it’
Cycle of preservation
When language material comes in to ANLA

- Everything that applies in Oral History also applies here
- Except that the step of transcription and interpretation can take a lot longer.
- There can be another, internal set of cycles that sometimes involve more people:
  - Original recording
  - Transcription and translation with those who know the language
  - Homework to look stuff up and prepare fair copy
  - Checking the manuscript again with people who know
Who can add value to archived data?

Everybody who is interested:

– The person who made the recording
– The person or people speaking or singing on the recording
– Somebody who has done work on the same language or similar material
– Somebody who wants to use the material for a new purpose, say, creation of class materials or academic study
An example

• Coming back to texts recorded in 1961 by Michael Krauss in Minto
• Worked on, in different versions, by Mary Jane McGary and James Kari
• But never published.
• For several stories, the audio was lost.
• Fall 2015, Krauss and I visited Sarah and Bergman Silas in the Eagles Wings home in North Pole and went over the stories without audio. Mike and I read them to Sarah from his and Jim’s notes, and we recorded her explanations.
Owl Story: Process

11.
(VIII) pp 167-169 [4b2]
ex Ts’udzeghi Koxt’ana Ghila’dé
eng When Horned Owl was a Person
owl.mct
tape lost
checked with notebook
Owl Story: Process
Owl Story: Process

ode' yedhonoyedenek ts'e k'u
bebet' éghédoół ts'e k'u
his stomach swelled up and then

benagha' benagha' kha'ał k'u ch'edeltthuts (?) ts'e
his eyes his eyes
turned yellow and

degheneel deenot k'u ode yech'eł'oł yech'eł'oł.
while
Owl story: process

Ts'e k'w bebet' ghedul ts'e k'w benagha' kha'al k'w ch'edeltthukh ts'e deghenił dinot k'w ode yech'eł'oł, yech'eł'oł.

Ts'e k'w bebet' ghedul ts'e k'w benagha' kha'al k'w ch'edeltthukh ts'e deghenił dinot k'w ode yech'eł'oł, yech'eł'oł.

Ts'e k'w bebet' ghedul ts'e k'w benagha' kha'al k'w ch'edeltthukh ts'e deghenił dinot k'w ode yech'eł'oł, yech'eł'oł.

and and his.be.it.swe and also his.ey? also beca and it.hap.while contin she.m she.m
Owl Story: Process

41. Òde yedho noyedenek ts’e k’w bebèt igheduł ts'e
She poured it all down his mouth and his stomach began to bloat and

42. k’w benagha’, benagha’ xa’ał k’w ch’edeltthwx ts’e deghenił dino k’w òde yech’eł’oł, yech’eł’oł.
and his eyes, his eyes began to turn yellow while the fed him and fed him.
about those spellings

- You might notice that none of these Owl pages are spelled in the same way.
- Does this matter?
- Sometimes this seems like a barrier to participation.
- I want to encourage people to engage with materials that seem to be spelled funny
- Because the main thing is to recognize the words
- You can always write it in a new way for a new purpose
In my opinion

An archive should be a backup and a workroom.

A place to return to to work with what’s been saved, and improve it.

To *have* intellectual or cultural material means to work with it and make it part of your knowledge.

And then save your work where someone else can find it.

Because no matter how brilliant one person’s work is, another can add something to it: explanation, illustration, application.

Or, if we are lucky, one more version.
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