

LONGSTORYSHORT

with LESLIE WILCOX



TITLE: LARRY KIMURA

LSS 921 (26:46)

FIRST AIR DATE: 5/31/16

Every once in a while, we slaughtered our own chickens, so we would have chicken hekka. And I thought hekka was a Hawaiian word, but it's supposed to be a Japanese word. And then I asked people from Japan, and they have no idea what I'm saying. So, I said, well, I'm sorry, I speak the Japanese I heard in Hawaii, so that's the word we use.

So, what happened with chicken hekka at your table?

Well, then at the dining table, my Japanese grandfather had made this table special. So, he had cut out in the center of the table a square that you could put a shichirin. Shichirin is where we put the charcoal into this little stove from the furo fire, and charcoal. And then, we put the cast iron skillet on it to cook our hekka with all the vegetables.

Right at the table.

Right at the table.

Wow.

The best meal we could have. And I still miss it. I don't have a stove like that anymore. You have a gas stove, maybe. That's the closest thing you could do; yeah.

Larry Lindsey Kimura of Hawaii Island grew up with a Japanese father and Hawaiian mother. He was exposed to both the Japanese and Hawaiian languages through each of his grandmothers, but it was the Hawaiian language that he resonated with more. His lifelong passion for the language, and determination to keep it alive, is one of the reasons the Hawaiian language is flourishing today. Larry Lindsey Kimura, next, on Long Story Short.

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

Aloha mai kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Dr. Larry Lindsey Kimura, associate professor of Hawaiian language and culture at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, is often called the grandfather of Hawaiian language revitalization. And for good reason. The results of his dedication to perpetuating the language can be seen and heard across the islands through the ever-growing number of Hawaiian language speakers. His interest in Hawaiian language started when he was growing up in the 1940s and 50s in the ranching town of Waimea on Hawaii Island. The only people who still spoke fluent Hawaiian were his grandmother's generation, and he sensed then that the language was on the verge of extinction.

My father is pure Japanese, Isao Kimura, and he's Nisei, second generation. My grandparents are from Hiroshima, Japan. Came over like most of the Japanese here in Hawaii, for the plantation, sugar plantation. And unusual for a Japanese family to get involved with ranching. On my ji-chan's side, my Japanese grandfather's side, as soon as his contract was up in Kohala, then he worked for the Hind Ranch at Puu Waawaa in North Kona. And then, from there, went over to Parker Ranch, and then continued his family there, where my father was born, raised. So, like my mother as well, my mother from the Lindsey family, and her mother is a Purdy. So, that's how we have the Purdy and Lindsey combination.

So, part-Hawaiian. How much Hawaiian?

Oh, she always said she's Hawaiian. And I said, How could you be pure Hawaiian if your name is Lindsey? She said, Well, that's all I know. But she's half-Hawaiian. Yeah. She finally proved that to the Hawaiian Homes. A little bit more than half. Yeah.

And spoke Hawaiian.

Yes; as she grew up. And I heard Hawaiian, you know, from her. And my father, of course, is a native speaker of Japanese, 'cause that's his first language with his siblings.

What language did they speak to each other?

Between my parents, of course, English. Yeah.

And you had grandparents, one of whom spoke Japanese, and one Hawaiian.

Yeah. No, I only knew my Japanese grandmother and my Hawaiian grandmother, 'cause both of my grandfathers had died before I got to know them. So, when they got together, they would conduct their conversation in real broken Pidgin. You know, lots of Hawaiian words. I always thought my Japanese grandmother was saying Japanese words, and they were really Hawaiian words when she's talking to us, as well. She didn't speak to us in fluent Japanese, except when we needed scolding.

So, when you were born, what was your father doing, where?

By the time I could remember, he was already working with pasture, noxious weeds, to getting rid of panini. You know, the cactus was getting out of hand, and lantana, and things like that getting out of hand, and working with all of these botanists on what the best solutions would be. And then also feed; the best kinds of grasses that would grow in different sections. The ranch was huge, of course. Is huge. And different weather conditions, all of those things. And this where he got to know the land like the back of his hand. So, although on my mother's side, of course, my grandfather on my mother's side was the head of the cowboys of Parker Ranch since 1906 or so, and until his death. But of course, you work on the land, so you get to know it. And I thought all of those life experiences from my father and grandfather's side made an impact on our lives about a place, and knowing a place, and how to respect it, especially because of what was happening with the land, how it was being used. And you know, I didn't really appreciate that so much until moving away.

During this time, are you learning Hawaiian?

The Hawaiian that I got to learn is when I was in the company of basically my Hawaiian grandmother. Because she would socialize in her language. And if you spoke English, she could speak English, but she wasn't comfortable speaking English. So, she was more normal with her own gang of people, her generation, and people who spoke the language. And there were still people in our community who spoke it very fluently, who were, you know, speakers of it.

You were so impressed with the Hawaiian language. Did the Japanese language not appeal to you in the same way?

It did appeal to me, but it didn't appeal to me in the same way. Right. And how I got to make that understanding for myself, you know, I can't rationalize that now, but I knew that the Hawaiian language had this place, Hawaii as its place, and that Japanese was not. I knew that from a very early time in my life, so it wasn't difficult for me to think that this language, Hawaiian, won't be here for long.

You thought that as a young boy?

Yeah. Because I saw that the people who were using it very naturally in their lives were older people.

So, you had a sense that the language might need saving?

Well, I didn't think of it that way, you know, earlier. Until later.

M-hm. You thought of it as something that wasn't gonna be happening in the future much. You know, you're one of the few people I know who as a child had a sense of something, and an attachment to something, and you know, as you grew up, you know, you wouldn't know how you would ever monetize it or make a career out of it, or have it be something that stays with you. But you did. There was a career that unfolded for you in Hawaiian language.

Yes; a career unfolded. I didn't think of it in those terms, that I was going to make this a career. 'Cause I didn't know what to call it. I just knew this is what my passion is, and this is what I'm gonna be working in, whatever it's gonna be called. I didn't know what the name of it was going to be.

Were you confident it would come? That it would be would be something that you—

I was confident that that's what was I was going to dedicate myself to. But you know, as I said, who's gonna pay me for it? Is this a job, or is this a profession? It didn't um, enter my mind that way.

Larry Lindsey Kimura didn't speak Hawaiian growing up beyond what he learned from spending time listening to his grandmother and her friends. It wasn't until he was at the Kamehameha School for Boys in Honolulu that he had his first Hawaiian language class. And that didn't go very well.

We were given a six-week course at the eighth grade, and I almost flunked the course, because I didn't feel it was taught correctly. In my opinion.

Because it didn't sound like what you learned at home.

Yeah; it was trite. It wasn't taught like it was the real thing. And for me, it was a bit offensive. So, I didn't take to it. So, when another opportunity came up—this is very rare. Colonel Kent, the president of the boys' school, I didn't know was interested in Hawaiian, and he convinced this person who is a native speaker of Hawaiian—she had just retired teaching her whole life in Hawaiian music, that is Dorothy Kahananui. She retired from the University, he convinced her to come in my sophomore year, and she was to teach Hawaiian she's never taught before, and write a textbook for high school. A textbook to teach Hawaiian. And she was there just for those three years I was there, and I happened to have a free homeroom period when she came, enrolled in the class, and just loved it. And that's how I got to be trained enough to speak it to my grandmother when I got home during the summer breaks that we went home, you know.

What did your grandmother say when you came home speaking?

Of course, I was a bit hesitant and frightened what her response would be. But luckily, I had been writing to her in Hawaiian, in letters. And she responded. And so, she had this idea about my becoming ... well, she thought I was just becoming interested in Hawaiian then, but actually, I was interested in it way before. And so, actually, it felt very comfortable using Hawaiian. And with my granduncles and grandaunts, you know, that group of people back home, they were not critical at all. They were very supportive. So, I was lucky. Maybe Mrs. Kahananui taught me well enough, so ...

So, you were loving Hawaiian at Kamehameha, talking with your Hawaiian grandmother in Hawaiian, but you still didn't see how this would be of benefit to you in a profession. There was no such job that you knew of, right, to move along to.

No. I was just, you know, engaging it as much as I could, to learn as much as I could.

And was there anybody else around you who wanted to do this?

No.

Buddies of yours? No?

Everybody thought it was a crazy thing, I'm sure. I just didn't want to discuss, I didn't know how to talk about my interest with anyone. Because at that time, people would probably think I was crazy.

And even your grandmother didn't know how interested you were.

No; she didn't know. Until she saw the letters that I wrote when I was in the tenth grade, eleventh grade, when I was taking Hawaiian.

So, just a personal consuming interest that you kept to yourself mostly.

Yes.

Wow.

But obviously, as it became more outward, people recognized it; yeah.

Well, after Kamehameha, it was on to UH?

Well, I didn't know. You know, counselors at Kamehameha didn't counsel you to go into Hawaiian, actually, back then. There was no place to go, first of all. So, the only thing left for me to do was to stay at home, which I did, and I went to the two-year college at Hilo. Back then, it was only a two-year university campus. And then, you finished up here at Manoa. So, when I was in Hilo, luckily, you know, that gave me the opportunity continue meeting up with my grandparent generation, my grandmother and my aunts and uncles on weekends. And they were my teachers that helped me to become more fluent. And I was brave enough to begin to try and record some of our speakers of the language, older people. Yeah. And in fact, I saw that when Mrs. Kahananui brought this tape recorder, this huge seven-inch tape recorder to class and played this Bishop Museum recording of an interview of a native speaker with Mrs. Pukui. And I said, When my grandmother comes for my graduation, I'd love for her to be recorded like this person was recorded by Mrs. Pukui. You think Mrs. Pukui will do it? Oh, I'm sure she would. Why don't you just ... well, I think we could ask her. So, I did; I just found out where she lived, and introduced myself. And I said in Hawaiian, My grandmother is coming, would you interview her? She said, Of course, I would.

Wow; that was a big step forward.

Yeah.

She was the reigning authority.

So, that gave me, you know, this whole interest in understanding the value of trying to record as many of these people as we could.

And what did they think of you trying to record them?

Yeah; they probably thought I was pretty weird to be interested in what they would want to tell me in Hawaiian. And so, they were pleased to have somebody to actually take an interest in what they knew.

What did they talk about for the purpose of language?

Everything and anything. And I didn't care. You know, of course, I tried to find out about them, naturally. Their life, where they come from, and things they did, and all of those kinds of things and all. So many different topics.

Larry Lindsey Kimura's audio recordings of the last generation of Native Hawaiian language speakers have become a priceless community resource not only for language learners, but for his documentation of a way of life that is now long gone. After finishing his first two years of college in Hilo, Larry Lindsey Kimura went on to the University of Hawaii at Manoa to finish his undergraduate degree. It was during this time that he started meeting other students and young people interested in the Hawaiian culture.

Before I graduated from the University of Hawaii, I got involved with some young musicians, young male musicians. It was a rare thing to have younger, like you know, my—well, back then, they were twenty-two, twenty-three or so. And in Hawaiian music, lots of the Hawaiian music was being played for tourists and that kind of occupation. But when this group of people, men, young men got together, it was more about seeking a profession, maybe, in Hawaiian music. Not necessarily for the tourist industry, just that maybe they could do some recording. And maybe they could find some job. I don't know exactly. But I was not a musician. I only got involved because of my connection to Hawaiian language. So, Palani Vaughan, Frank Vaughan's girlfriend was in my class, one of my anthropology classes, and she knew that I knew some Hawaiian songs, unrecorded ones. And she asked if I could help her boyfriend, 'cause her boyfriend was interested in doing some Hawaiian songs that had not been recorded. And that's how I got to get involved with the recording industry, if you call it that, with Hawaiian music, because of my Hawaiian language connection. And so, this is where I got to meet Peter Moon, because he was one of the musicians for Palani Vaughan. The Sons of Hawaii, an older group of men, Gabby Pahinui, Eddie Kamae, and them had formed this group called Sons of Hawaii. And they were trying to bring out the old Hawaiian music. And then, there was this young group, the Sunday Manoa, just upstarts in Hawaiian music. And I think that affected the enrollment in language. And most of the students who enrolled in Hawaiian were ethnic Hawaiian students, and which was rare. I mean, the percentage of Hawaiian students at Manoa was very low at the time. Although, there were other non-ethnic Hawaiians who had enrolled in Hawaiian as well, just people from Hawaii; local people.

You think music drove their interest in language, then?

I think it kinda caught the ear. Then, another thing that was happening, of course, it was ten years after statehood in '59, so this is '69. The expansion of the urban sprawl of Honolulu out into, you know, Kuliouou, Aina Haina, and all of that. We became a state to make decisions about development that caused some concern about agriculture. And among the agriculturalists were some pig farmers, Hawaiian people who were being evicted.

From Kalama Valley.

From Kalama Valley.

Which is farther east.

Yeah.

Yes.

So, I think those three things were signs or indications of this beginning of the renaissance; the Hawaiian music, the Hawaiian language enrollment at Manoa, and eviction of pig farmers in Kalama Valley.

Displacement. Huh.

Yeah. Because Hokulea and Kahoolawe came after.

So, it felt like there was increasing interest, but you couldn't tell that it would actually develop into a phenomenon that would change many, many lives, and the course of history.

Yeah. It's strange that, you know, language seems to be something subtle, and yet, it is very powerful. And that's how come it's so easy to lose language, because people take it for granted, and they don't realize when it's not around them anymore, 'cause they feel that they're still Hawaiian, or whatever national affiliation, if I can use that word, or a place, your own place. But it's not just music, and it's not the food, and all of that, that keeps you who you are, you know. It's your own language.

Larry Lindsey Kimura started teaching Hawaiian language at the University of Hawaii at Manoa before moving back home to Hawaii Island to continue teaching language and culture at the UH Hilo. At the time of our conversation in early 2016, he'd been teaching for more than forty years, while also working from the grassroots community levels to achieve his goal of restoring the language.

You've had this very amazing role in the Hawaiian language, a number of really amazing roles. For example, you helped to found Punana Leo.

Yes.

The Hawaiian language preschools.

Yeah. Because we knew that just teaching it, you know, at college or in high school, those kinda classes like you would teach a foreign language is not going to get the language back to life. So, we knew that we had to get to the babies as young as we could. And the setting that could provide that for us would be like a preschool setting. Although we knew very little about preschools, except we heard the word preschool, and that's where parents take their babies to get some early education, childhood education.

So, you educated yourself pretty quickly on how to start a preschool.

Yeah; a good environment to have children, and then just speak to them in Hawaiian while you're educating them about all kinds of things.

Another amazing role was—well, is Hawaiian Lexicon Committee. You get to help invent new names in the language.

Well, it came out of, you know, the engagement especially with the younger kids, the younger children, two and a half, three-year-olds, because you needed to have words for cubbyhole, or how to do you say playhouse in Hawaiian, or you know, all of these words that are used in that kind of a program. And we had, of course, words coming out of our college classrooms, but not at the rate that was impacting us when we started these preschools. And then, it continued.

How do you say pacifier?

Yeah; all those kinds of things. And you know, they did circles in the morning, and they would have their literacy lessons in reading, writing, and beginning to recognize alphabets, and all kinds of things like that. And the content of the material, and the stories that we were—well, we didn't have a place to buy little books for our children, or nice posters with beautiful colors, so we had to take what was in English, you know. I'd go to the Salvation Army store, get a book for ten cents, and just cut and paste things on top of the English language, so that our Hawaiian teachers could read them to our children. And the context sometimes, there were words in it that were very foreign to Hawaiian. That's how we started. You know, now, we're getting a little bit more from Hawaiian into Hawaiian, but we still have to contend with the onslaught of a whole new world that our language was separated from for so long, that we need to catch up on. So, this Lexicon Committee or Hawaiian New Words Committee started officially more like from the beginning with the Punana Leo in 1983, 84, 85. '87, we became a little bit more official, because in '87, the Department of Education allowed our children from the Punana Leo preschools to enter into the kindergarten Department of Education programs. So, the first so-called Hawaiian immersion programs started, one at Waiau here at Pearl City, at Waiau, and also in Keaukaha in Hilo. Those were the first

immersion schools. And that, of course, even made more words for the Lexicon Committee to consider.

More work!

Mahalo to University of Hawaii at Hilo associate professor Larry Lindsey Kimura, dubbed the grandfather of Hawaiian language revitalization, for sharing with us your lifelong passion and dedication to the Hawaiian language and culture. And mahalo to you, for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, hui hou.

For audio and written transcripts of all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit PBSHawaii.org. To download free podcasts of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, go to the Apple iTunes store, or visit PBSHawaii.org.

Do you think knowing Hawaiian enables you to think in a different way?

Oh, yeah.

Do you think in Hawaiian?

Well, before you get to think in Hawaiian, you begin to see how that thinking is, yeah, before you can begin to think yourself. Because becoming a native speaker when you're not is a journey, and so, becoming fluent enough takes a while. But as you're learning and becoming more fluent in it, more native in it, then you begin to see how different it is to see the world around you through that language. You know, growing up on the ranch, you know, they talk about the seasons and they talk about the nalu. And I say, Oh, and how important the nalu is, and you know, I have to hear that language, the word, and then I have to understand what that means in connection to its importance to the place. Because it's a rain that comes and drifts across the land when it's hot, during the summer months especially. But that little moisture makes the grass grow greener there, and it's a salvation. You know, to recognize those things, because the language tells us that.

[END]