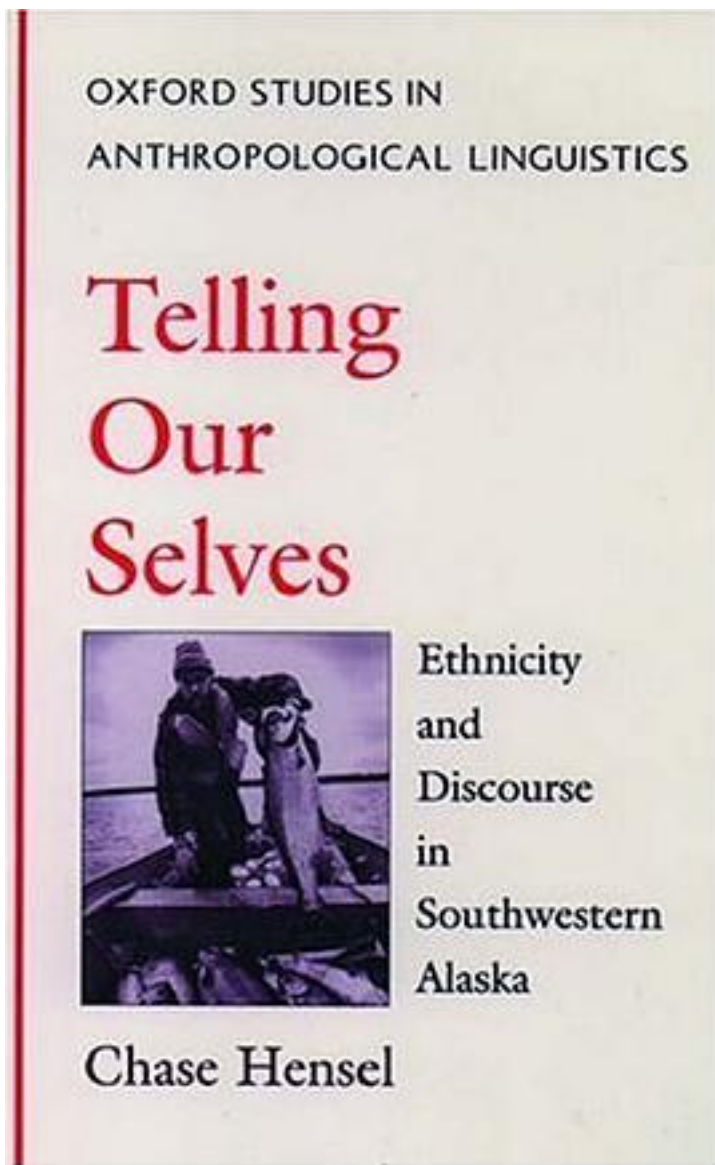


Telling Our Selves



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In this book, Chase Hensel examines how Yup'ik Eskimos and non-natives construct and maintain gender and ethnic identities through strategic talk about hunting, fishing, and processing. Although ethnicity is overtly constructed in terms of either/or categories, the discourse of Bethel residents suggests that their actual concern is less with whether one is native or non-native, than how native one is in a given context. In the interweaving of subsistence practices and subsistence discourse, ethnicity is constantly recreated. This type of discourse occurs in a conversational setting where ethnicity is both implicitly and explicitly contested. While the book is ethnographic, it is not "about Eskimo's." Rather it is about how Bethel residents use similar forms of discourse to strategically validate disparate identities. In this context, the homeland of Yup'ik Eskimos, subsistence is the focus of people's interactions, regardless of their ascriptive ethnicity. Even people who spend little time in subsistence activities spend a great deal of time in subsistence conversation. Unlike traditional ethnographies which focus on traditions, and consequently tend to reify the past, this contemporary ethnography focuses on contemporary preoccupations of identity and meaning. The ethnographic description becomes a device for preserving and explicating the opulent polysemy of situated talk.

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