

ALASKAN RUSSIAN: A SPECIAL RESULT OF LANGUAGE CONTACT

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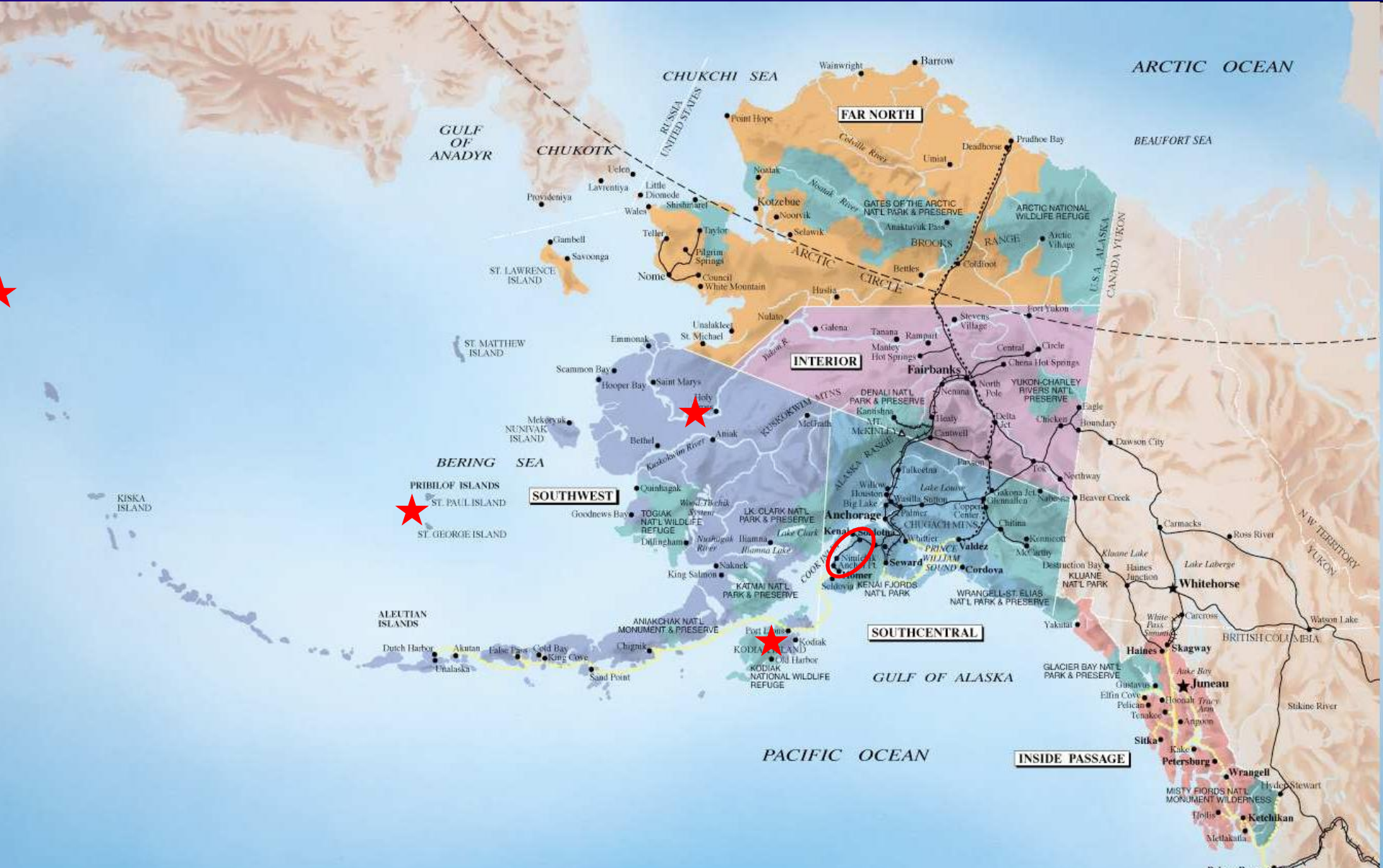
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MPI-EVA, Leipzig, May 3, 2015

Alaskan Russian (AR)

- Variety of Russian that developed in Alaska at the time of Russian America
- Different from any variety of Continental Russian (CR)
- Goal of talk: reconstruct features and history of 19th century AR on the basis of modern evidence
- Why interesting?
 - The sociocultural and linguistic world of Russian based contact varieties left little trace compared to English, Portuguese, etc. (APiCS)
- Main source of evidence: Ninilchik Russian (NR)
- NR = variant of AR that has been preserved in the speech of descendants of the Ninilchik village (Kenai peninsula)

Locations



Ninilchik in the 1950s, Nick Cooper



30/10/2012

Nick Cooper
2011

Studies of NR

- Conor Daly, 1980s
- Our field work (1997, 2012, 2014)
- Wayne Leman
- Evgeny Golovko
 - also Kodyak



Working on the beach



Selma Oskolkoff Leman, 86 yrs

Joe Leman, 95 yrs

17/07/2014

Ninilchik Russian is a moribund language

- No speakers under 70
- Barely functioning as a means of communication
- Limited competence in younger speakers
- Code switching and code mixing
- Strong individual variation

Social history context: important dates

- 1740s - first visits of Russians to Alaska
- 1799 - establishment of Russian American Company, a mixed governmental-entrepreneurial formation
- 1847 - Ninilchik settlement for RAC retirees is established
- 1867 - Alaska sold to the US
- ca. 1917 - Russian school in Ninilchik is closed down
- 1920s - start of the American school
- 1950 - Sterling Highway going through Ninilchik is built

Beginning of Russian contact



Ethnic groups in Russian America

- Russians - never exceeded 1000
- Native Americans - Aleuts, Alutiiq and other Eskimos, Tlingits, Athabaskans...
- "Creoles" - bilinguals of mixed origin (official beginning from 1821)
 - Ninilchik: creoles of Russian and Kodiak Alutiiq descent
- Russian as a prestigious language

Stages of Alaskan and Ninilchik Russian

Beginning from	Mid-18 th cent.	Late 18 th cent.	1840s	1920s	WWII
Stage / variety	Common AR	Alutiiq-influenced variety of AR	Established NR	Endangered NR	Obsolescent NR
Processes	Aleut-Russian bilingualism	Alutiiq-Russian bilingualism	Russian monolingualism	Russian-English bilingualism	Dominance of English, gradual decay of NR

"Archaeological approach"

- In order to claim that phenomenon P existed at time T we need positive evidence of that
- Often P could have existed before T , but if there is no positive evidence, P should not be attributed to a time earlier than T

"Archaeological" approach - is it at all possible?

- "Both language contact and language obsolescence may promote structural changes, but specific criteria have not yet been established to distinguish between changes that can be seen as signs of obsolescence in process and changes that might occur under language contact or multilingual settings."

(Claudine Chamoreau and Isabelle Léglise. 2012.
A multi-model approach to contact-induced language change. p.13)

Common AR

- Aleut-Russian dictionary by Yakov Netsvetov (1835-1843)
 - Neutralization of palatalization
 - *d'irá* 'hole, burrow'
 - Pribilof islands *kras'iw'iy* 'beautiful'
 - NR *r'íba* 'fish', *ad'íshka* 'short breath'
 - Locally developed lexical items
 - *tupól'ina* 'cottonwood tree'
 - NR *l'is'ína* 'tree' (Ushakov 1938, vol. 2: 48: 'tree trunk')
 - *krásnaya r'íba* 'red salmon', CR *nerka*
 - *pr'ibywáyit* 'high tide'

Alutiiq-influenced variety of AR

■ Phonetic change

- /w/ - *wadá* 'water' cf. Counceller and Leer 2012: 17
 - cf. *Willage News*

■ Phonetic variation

- /r/: [r ~ ɹ] - same variation as in Alutiiq loanwords from Russian cf. Counceller and Leer 2012: 22

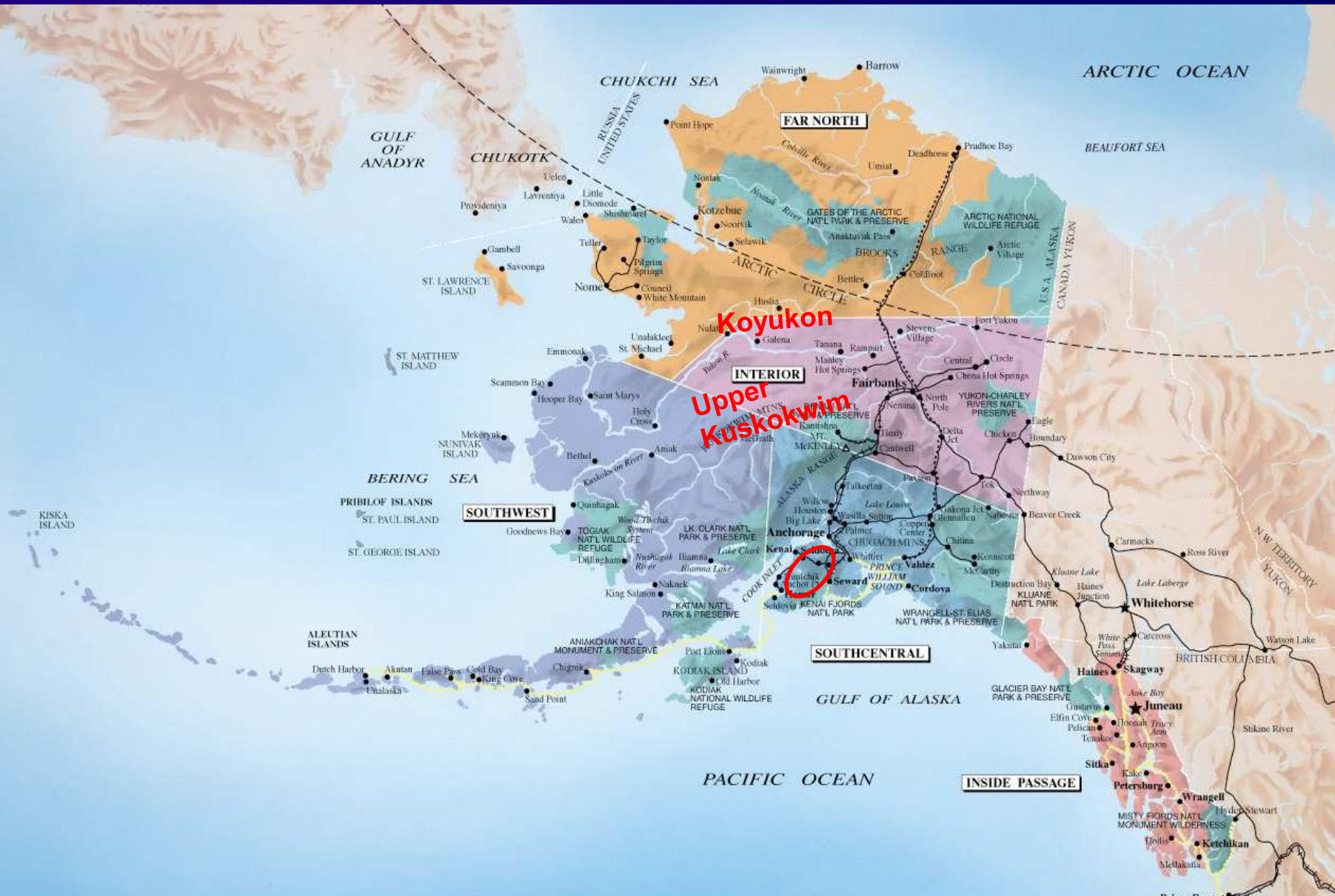
■ Lexicon

- *mamáyi* 'clams' (Alutiiq *mamaayaq*)
- *ukúd'ik* 'bumble bee' (Alutiiq *uqutiituq*)
- *n'ún'ik* 'porcupine' (Alutiiq *nuuniq*)
- *kál'uk* 'chamber pot' (Alutiiq *qaaluq*)

■ Case restructuring

- *hl'éba* 'bread' - cf. *hlema* (Upper Kuskokwim Athabaskan)


Upper Kuskokwim and Koyukon



Alutiiq-influenced variety of AR

■ Restructuring of gender system

- Loss of neuter
- Expansion of masculine to original feminine


- *marškóy cháyka* 'ray fish' (local) 
 - cf. *krásnaya br'úshka* 'robin' (Siberian)
- Koyukon *belgee sol* 'a sort of salt' < AR **melk'iy sol* 'fine salt' (cf. CR *melkaya sol*)

Ninilchik Russian

- Doubling of possessive markers
 - *sahát'ina nos* 'moose nose'
sahát + in + a
moose + possessive + Gen
 - NB: generalized form for any number and gender
- Preposition doubling
 - *sa s wám 'i* 'with you (pl)'
- Leveling of morphophonemic alternations
 - *w'ízhit* 's/he sees' cf. CR 3Sg *víd'it*, 1Sg *vízhu*
- Lexicon
 - *kazná* 'lynx' (Dena'ina *kazhna*)
 - *N'in'íl'chika m'is* 'Ninilchik point'
 - *núshk'i* 'woman's breasts'

Late Ninilchik innovations (sporadic English influence)

■ Lexicon

- English-based innovations
 - *gaza'ín* 'motor boat'
 - *rababútsi* 'rubber boots' 
 - *béyb'ichka* 'baby, little kid'
- Russian-based innovations
 - *halódn'ik* 'refrigerator'
 - *sabáka* 'dog salmon', CR *keta*
 - *kóshichiy práznik* 'Halloween'

Language obsolescence: Massive English influence

■ Calques

- *zhir* 'fat, oil', including 'mineral oil, petrol'; CR *neft*'
- Conor Daly's paper
Iwónay mat' wes' noch {television} karaúlil
 - 'His mother was watching TV all night'
 - *gl'id'et* 'look' }
 - *karaúlit* 'guard' } watch

■ Loan words

- *utamab'íl* ~ {automobile}

■ Discourse markers

- {*you know*}

Modern stage: High degree of individual variation

■ Language attrition in originally fluent speakers

- *w twayóm stáram~ .. stáray dom búl'i ... w twayóm stáray .. d~ dom .. stáray damú ...dom*

- Multiple attempts to produce the phrase *w twayom staram damu* (Locative case) 'in your old house'

AR and other Russian-based contact varieties

- Russian Chinese Pidgin (see Perexval'skaja 2008, APiCS)
- Mixed language - Copper Island Aleut (see e.g. Golovko 1997)

■ Native CIA RCP | AR CR

Was there decreolization of AR in Ninilchik ?

- Very likely
- NR can be seen as a peculiar Russian dialect
 - Result of contact
 - But not really a contact language
- Complete isolation for decades after 1867
 - Mechanisms of complexification - Trudgill 2011:
 - relatively stable, low contact, small community with tight social networks
- Russian parochial school influence

What is special about AR?

- For the typology of contact induced change: rare combination of stages
 - Several distinct historical periods of bilingualism over 200 years
 - Decreolization in between
- For the Russian linguistic oecumene:
 - the only historical overseas variety
 - unlike any other Russian based contact lect

To conclude

- “The view that contact-induced changes and the consequences of language decay have to be distinguished is relatively **unusual** among specialists in the field.
- It has often been said that the types of change observable in an obsolescent language **do not differ** from those occurring in other kinds of contact settings.”

(Claudine Chamoreau and Isabelle Léglise. 2012.
A multi-model approach to contact-induced language change. p.13)

- Differences can be detected through fine-grained “archaeological” work

Speakers

- Louie Kwasnikoff
- Harry Leman
- Arnie Oskolkoff
- Nick Leman
- Betty Porter
- Cecil and Mae Demidoff
- Selma Oskolkoff Leman
- Joe Leman
- Paul Oskolkoff
- Nick Cooper
- George Jackinsky

- Our thanks to all of them
- also to Wayne Leman and Marina Raskladkina
- and to MPI EVA linguistics dept. for having been there