

Судьба аляскинского русского в контексте истории Русской Америки

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Международная научно-практическая конференция
«РУССКАЯ АМЕРИКА:
ИЗ ПРОШЛОГО - В НАСТОЯЩЕЕ И БУДУЩЕЕ
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Alaskan Russian (AR)

- Variety of Russian that developed in Alaska at the time of Russian America
- Different from any variety of "Continental Russian"
- Locations:
 - Ninilchik Russian (NR) ~ Kenai Peninsula Russian
 - **Kodiak Town Russian (KTR)** ~ Kodiak (Afognak, Ouzinkie) Russian
 - *Kenai Town Russian
 - *Pribilof Russian
 - *Aleutians Russian
 - *Sitka Russian
 - ? Interior Alaska Russian
 - ? Nanwalek/Seldovia Russian

Alaskan Russian: places



History: important dates

- 1740s - first visits of Russians to Alaska
- 1792 - St. Paul's Harbor (presently: **Kodiak**) was established as the capital of Russian America
- 1799 - establishment of Russian American Company, a mixed governmental-entrepreneurial formation
- 1840s - **Ninilchik**, **Afognak** and **Ouzinkie** settlements for RAC retirees are established
- 1867 - Alaska sold to the US
- 1900s - fishing industry in Kodiak archipelago
- 1910s - start of the American school in Ninilchik
- ca. 1917 - Russian school in Ninilchik is closed down
- 1920s - beginning of massive Americanization of Alaska
- 1941 - Kodiak city becomes center for the Navy in Alaska
- 1950s - Seward Highway

AR history context: A narrative

- From Loren Leman's introduction to the *Silver Archer* award ceremony:
- "Our childhood home is Ninilchik on the Kenai Peninsula. Its first permanent settling was in 1847 when our ancestor Grigorii Kvasnikoff and his wife Mavra, moved their 12 children from Kodiak. They were joined shortly after that by two Oskolkoff brothers who came from Sitka.
- Ninilchik was established originally as a retirement community for employees of the Russian-American Company who had met their contractual work obligations, but chose not to return to Russia, often because they had married Alaska Native women and had children who wanted to live in Alaska."

Loren Leman's narrative (contd.)

- "Just 20 years later Russia sold its interests in Alaska to the U.S. but to large extent because of its relative isolation from much of the outside world, **even 50 years later when my father was born, the first language learned and spoken by children was Russian.**
- By that time a Territorial School had been started by the U.S. government and the children learned English. **Many from that generation became truly bi-lingual.**
- Now, 151 years after the transfer, there are by our count **eight living elders who are fluent speakers of the unique dialect we call Ninilchik Russian.** They range in age from 86 to 99. "

A Timeline of Multilingualism: The story of Alaskan Russian

Period	Mid-18 th to mid-19 th cent.	1867 to the end of 19 th - first half of 20 th cent.	First half of 20 th century	Second half of 20 th cent. - present time
Stage / variety	Colonial Russian	Alaskan Russian loses the status of the colonial language	AR as postcolonial indigenous language	Obsolescent AR
Processes	Continental Russian in contact with the local languages => emergence of Alaskan Russian	Russian linguistic and cultural heritage is internalized as local	Russian-English bilingualism; traumatic experiences	Claiming native culture back

They had impact on the fate of Alaskan Russian



Иннокентий
Вениаминов
(1797 - 1879)



Шелдон
Джексон
(1834 - 1909)



Майкл Краусс
(1934 - 2019)

Where we looked for Alaskan Russian



- Ninilchik
- Nanwalek

Summer of 2019:

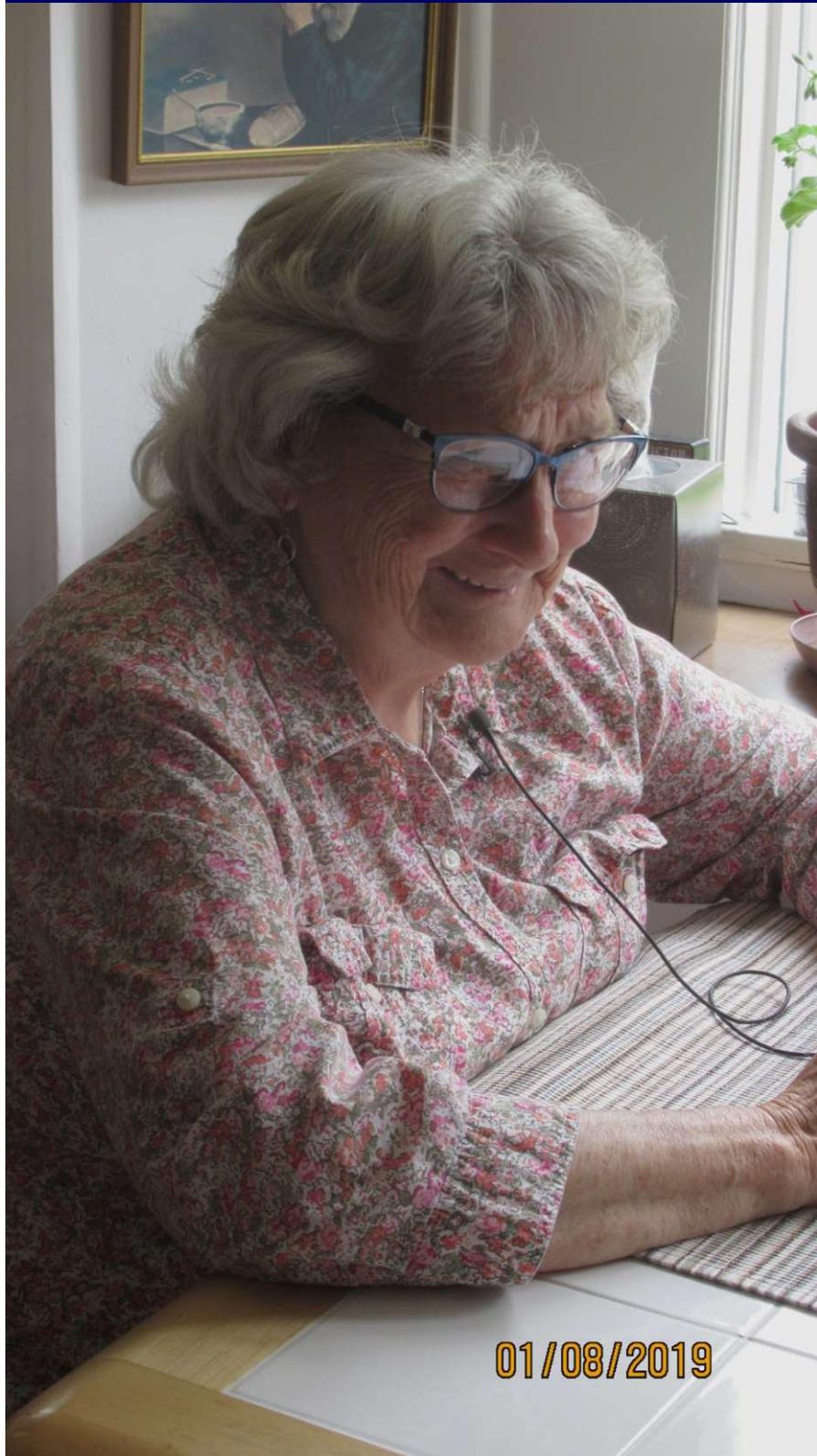
- Kodiak city
- Ouzinkie
- Saint Paul island
- *Anchorage
- Nikolai
- McGrath

Alaskan Russian: Ninilchik case

- Russian language of Ninilchik is NOT a contact language
 - A language of Creoles, but not a creole language
- Ninilchik Russian is a variant/dialect of Russian in its own right
 - Has its own phonetic system
 - Well preserved - even if restricted - vocabulary
 - Peculiar grammatical patterns
 - Language variant of certain time and location
- A surviving fragment of the linguistic and communicative system that emerged in Russian America by the mid-19th century.

Why Kodiak

- Kodiak was a place of socioeconomic activities of the Russian American Company
- Also, missionary and educational activities of the Russian Orthodox Church,
- Both activities created and promoted existence of a special ethnolinguistic group of Creoles.
- This group of initially bilingual and later trilingual people considered Alaskan Russian their first language
- This was true long after Alaska stopped being part of the Russian Empire
 - It became part of the US much later



Selma (Oskolkoff) Leman

- Born (1931) and raised in Ninilchik
- Definitely the best consultant among the remaining speakers of Ninilchik Russian
- Inexhaustible source of information
- Puzzles from the domain: "original creolization of NR vs. incomplete language acquisition vs. language attrition"

01/08/2019

Vassily (Bill) Hartman (1930-2020): The last speaker of Kodiak Town AR

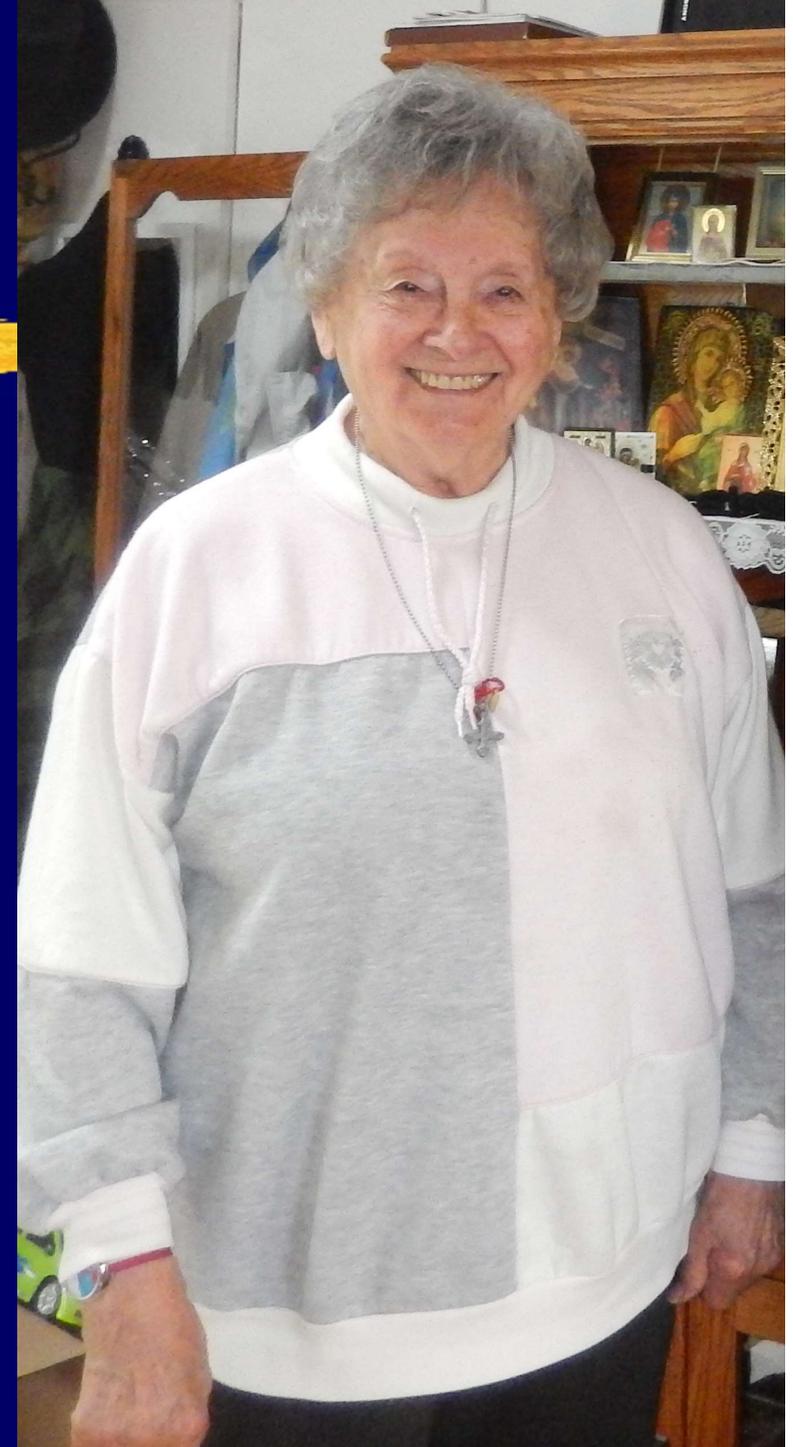


- Born (1930) and raised in Kodiak
- His mother only spoke Russian to him
- Did not know English before school
- **The last speaker of Kodiak Town Russian**
- Remarkable person and talented consultant



Raisa Baldwin

- Born (1931) and raised in Kodiak
- Rememberer of Kodiak Town Russian
- Enlightened person with interest in language
- Surprisingly exact and specific knowledge of preserved formulaic expressions
 - *a pusháy*
 - *s bógam*
- Kodiak Town Russian words
 - *arábak* 'black person' - also Iver Malutin
 - *chúchila* 'monument'



Agafon Krukoff Jr (1944-2021)



- Born and raised in Saint Paul (Pribilof islands)
- The local native language is **Aleut**
- Rememberer of Pribilof Russian
- Analytic mind, natural sociolinguist
 - "It was a bad word, too. When I was a bad boy, I was **sabák**. Don't be **sabák**. Behave yourself."

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




Alaskan Russian as a postcolonial language

- AR is a unique postcolonial variety of Russian
 - In fact, several varieties with minor differences
- A result of the loss of connection with the metropole after 1867 and the new English dominance.
 - Preserved archaic features of the 19th century Russian, having evanesced from CR during the 20th century;
 - Independent local innovations, not found anywhere in CR;
 - English influences acquired by the modern speakers, born in 1920s and 1930, who were growing in the situation of Russian-English bilingualism.

To conclude:



- The main question to answer for a postcolonial language to be considered at least to some extent 'indigenous':
 - How much is Russian linguistic and cultural heritage alive?
- Russian cultural and linguistic heritage in Alaska is visible in:
 - Orthodox Christianity
 - Russian names and place names
 - Russian language
 - Oral history
- Who does it belong to?

From Loren Leman's introduction to the *Silver Archer* award ceremony

- "Imagine a language that came from Russia 200 years ago, stayed somewhat locked in time, with influences from Alaska Native and English languages. And add to that the fact that language transmission was entirely oral—there was no written instruction or reading and none of these speakers knows how to read Russian in the Cyrillic alphabet."
- A testimony to the fact that AR became indigenous to Alaskan Natives
- As such, AR shared in full the fate of other indigenous languages in Alaska



Thank you for your
attention !