

Upper Kuskokwim Athabaskan: A case of resistance to language contact

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**LANGUAGE VARIATION:
CONDITIONS, MECHANISMS, RESULTS**

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научный
фонд**

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Properties of a language



Classical view

- Inheritance from the ancestral language
- NB: still found in some special traditions

Realistic view

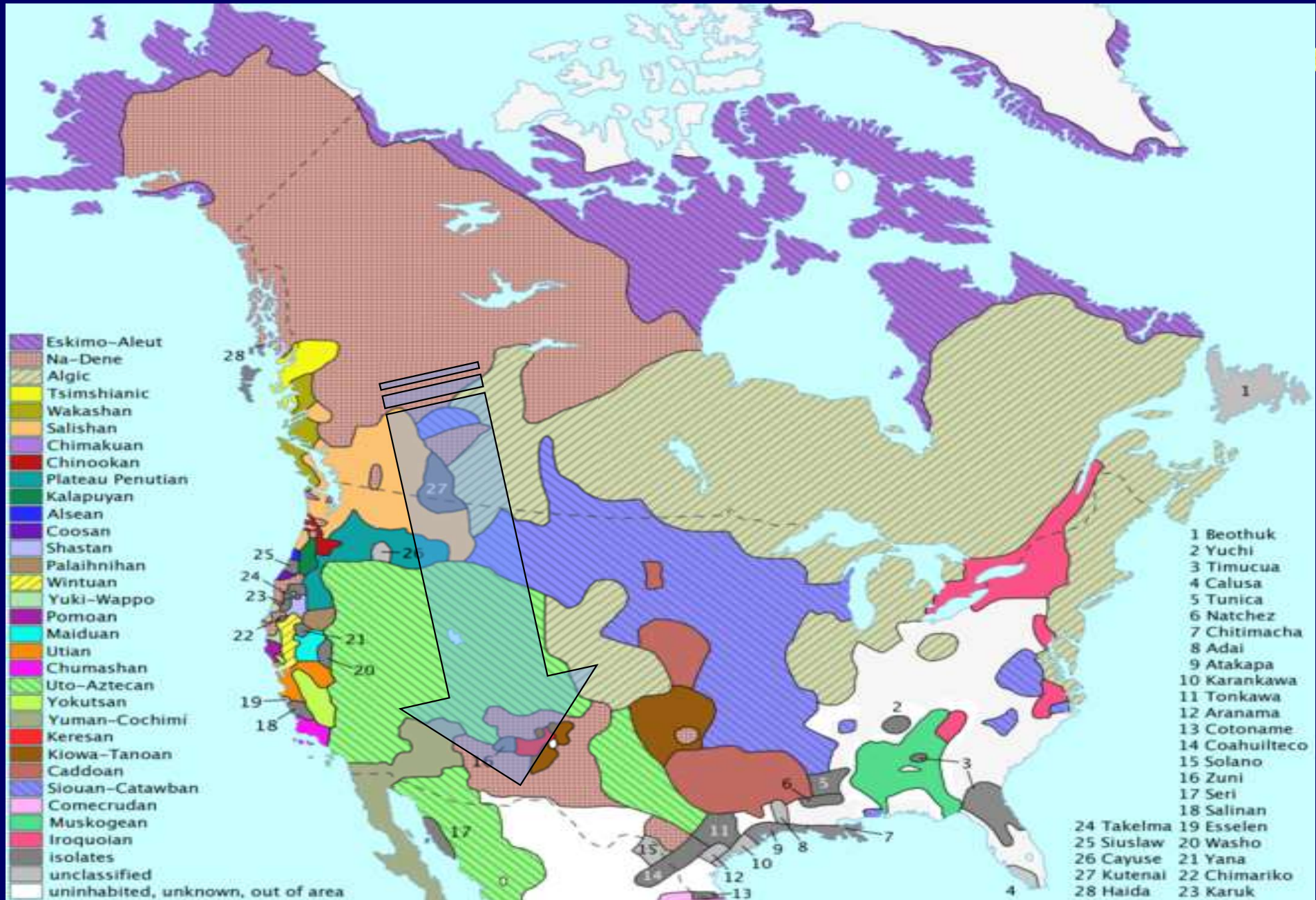
- Inheritance
plus
- Interference
 - ranging from convergence phenomena to contact languages

However



- Some languages are quite close to the classical model
- Athabaskan languages
 - Sapir 1921:
 - мы не можем усмотреть, чтобы какой-либо атабаскский диалект сколько-нибудь широко заимствовал слова из какого-нибудь соседнего языка <...> В них по этой причине проявилась высокая степень сопротивляемости языковому отражению внешнего культурного опыта говорящего на них населения

The case of Navajo



The case of Hupa

- Spence 2016, "Lexical innovation and variation in Hupa (Athabaskan)"
- Brown's (1999) metrics of "lexical acculturation"
 - percentage of borrowed vocabulary
 - convergence index
 - from -1 (coinages based exclusively on native material)
 - to +1 (exclusive borrowing)
- Hupa
 - 20% / 10%
 - -0.67



In this talk



- A review of borrowed phenomena in Upper Kuskokwim, interior Alaska
- and a brief comparison with the neighbouring Dena'ina, South-Central Alaska
- Attempt for an explanation

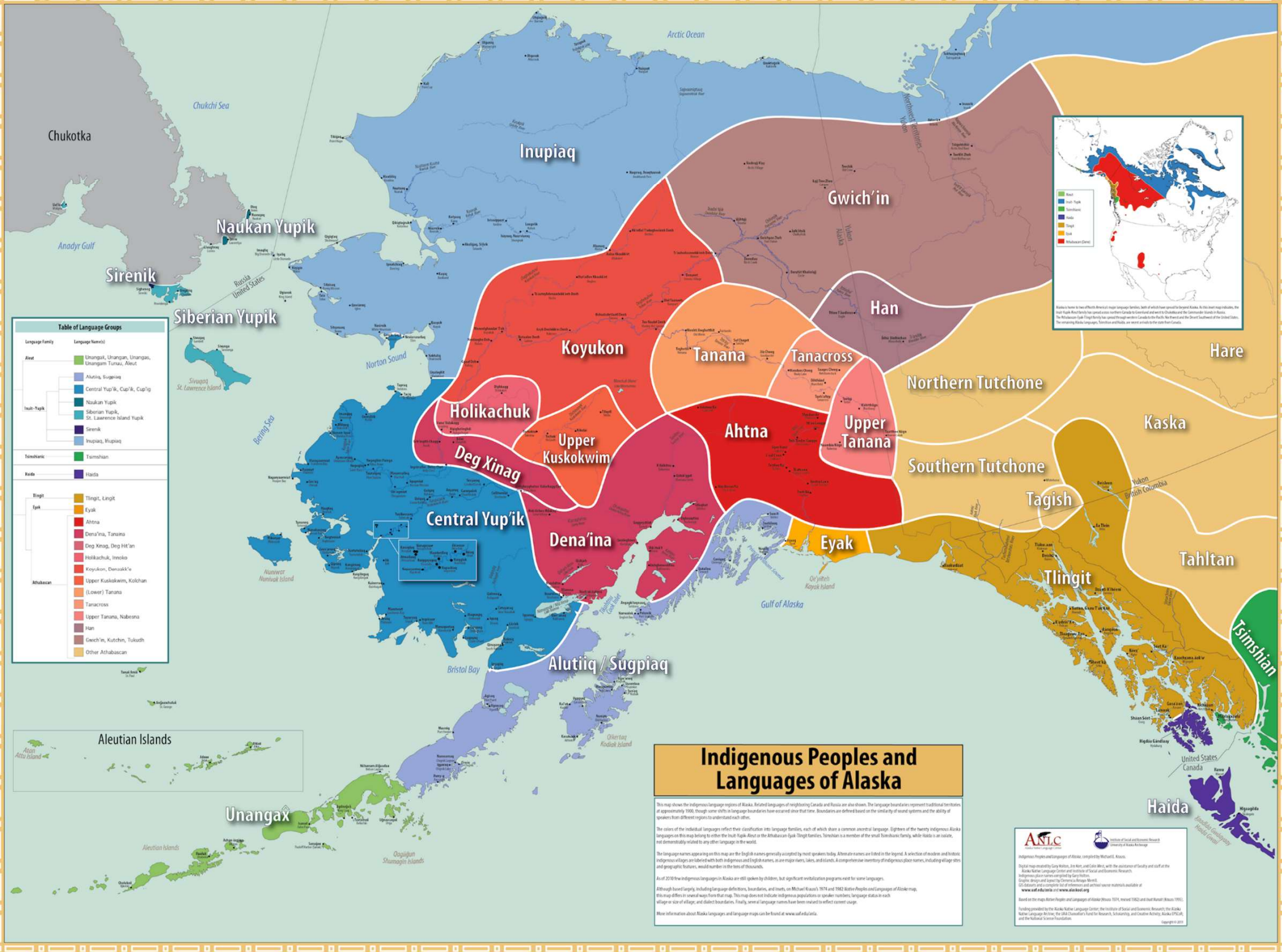


Table of Language Groups	
Language Family	Language Name(s)
Alutic	Unungax, Unangan, Unangas, Unangam Tunuk, Aleut
	Akutan, Sugieq
	Central Yup'ik, Cup'ik, Cup'ig
	Naukan Yupik, Siberian Yupik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik
Inuit-Yupik	Sirenik
	Inupiat, Iñupiat
Tsimshianic	Tsimshian
Kada	Haida
Tlingit	Tlingit, Lingit
Esk	Eyak
	Ahtna
	Dena'ina, Tanana
	Deg Xinag, Deg Hit'an
	Holikachuk, Imeko
	Koyukon, Dena'uk'u
	Upper Kuskokwim, Kolchan
	(Lower) Tanana
	Tanacross
	Upper Tanana, Nabesna
Han	
Athabaskan	Gwich'in, Kutchin, Tukudh
	Other Athabaskan
	Tahltan
	Tsimshian
	Haida
	Tlingit
	Eyak
	Ahtna
	Dena'ina
	Upper Kuskokwim
Holikachuk	
Deg Xinag	
Central Yup'ik	
Alutiiq / Sugpiaq	
Unangax	
Aleutian Islands	

Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska

This map shows the indigenous language regions of Alaska. Related languages of neighboring Canada and Russia are also shown. The language boundaries represent traditional territories as of approximately 1900, though some shifts in language boundaries have occurred since that time. Boundaries are defined based on the similarity of sound systems and the ability of speakers from different regions to understand each other.

The colors of the individual languages reflect their classification into language families, each of which has a common ancestral language. Eighteen of the twenty indigenous Alaska languages on this map belong to either the Inuit-Yupik or the Athabaskan-Esk-Tlingit families. Tsimshian is a member of the small Tsimshianic family, while Haida is an isolate, not demonstrably related to any other language in the world.

The language names appearing on this map are the English names generally accepted by most speakers today. Athabaskan names are listed in the legend. A selection of modern and historic indigenous villages are labeled with both indigenous and English names, as are major rivers, lakes, and islands. A comprehensive inventory of indigenous place names, including village sites and geographic features, would number in the tens of thousands.

As of 2010 few indigenous languages in Alaska are still spoken by children, but significant revitalization programs exist for some languages.

Although based largely on language definitions, boundaries, and maps, as Michael Krauss (1978) and 1982 show, Peoples and Languages of Alaska map, this map differs in several ways from that map. This map does not include indigenous populations or speaker numbers; language status in each village or size of village, and dialect boundaries. Finally, several language names have been revised to reflect current usage.

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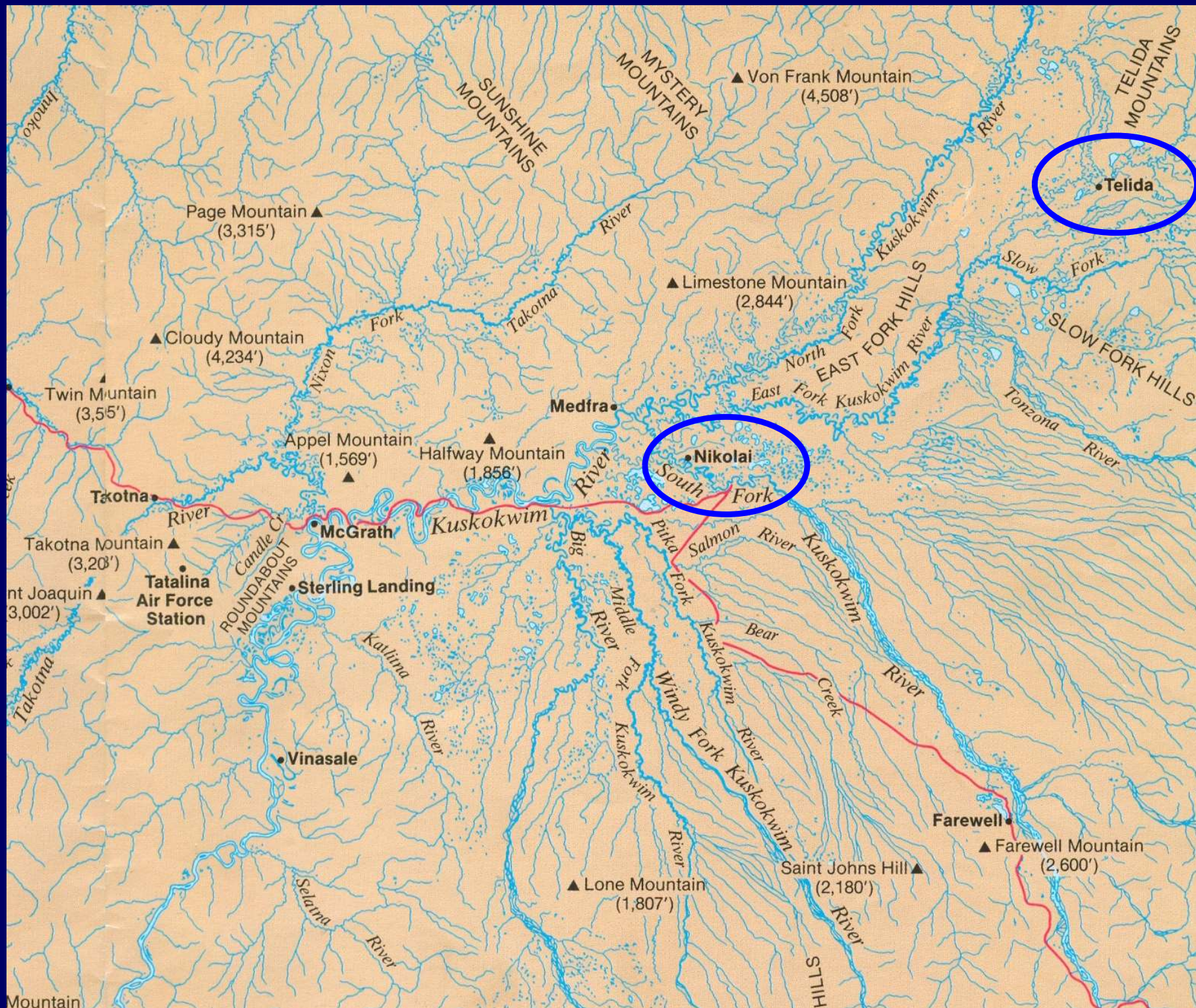
Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska, compiled by Michael Krauss.
 Digital map prepared by Gary Waters, Jim Kern, and Colin Ware, with the assistance of family and staff of the Alaska Native Language Center and Institute of Social and Economic Research.
 Indigenous place names compiled by Gary Waters.
 Graphic design and layout by Christina Knapka-Morris.
 GIS software and a complete list of references and author name materials available at www.uaf.edu/ala and www.alaska.org

Based on the maps *Alutic Peoples and Languages of Alaska* (Shoemaker 1917, revised 1962) and *Eastward Bound* (Krauss 1995).
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Upper Kuskokwim people

- Among the 11 (or 12) Athabaskan tribes in Alaska
- The UK tribe/language was identified as distinct by Hosley, Krauss, and Collins in early 1960s
- Most of the UK people reside in the village of **Nikolai**
- Religion: Russian Orthodoxy (since the 19th century)
- Traditionally, a few hundred people occupied a territory of the size of Austria
- Semi-nomadic seasonal life style



Upper Kuskokwim language



- Less than 15 speakers left out of the population of about 450
- The youngest fully-fledged speaker born in 1952
- Latent speakers among younger people (in their 50s)
- Teaching UK at school since 1973, no result
- Prior work – Collins and Petruska 1979
- Our team – eight field trips between 1997 and 2019

Unusual purity of UK



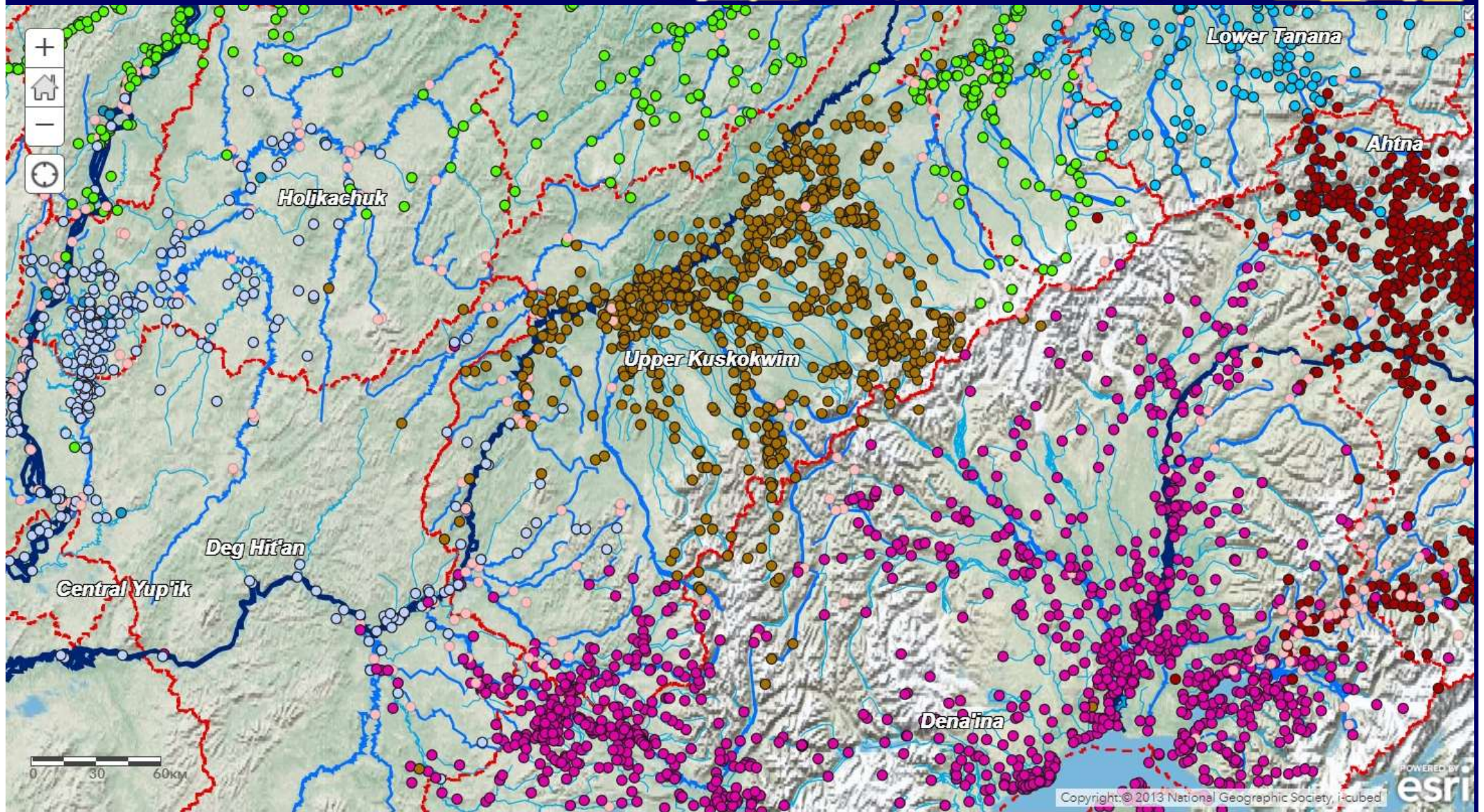
- Very few loanwords
 - Partial exception: some Russian nouns
- No identifiable grammatical influence
- UK largely conserves the original Athabaskan type

Old prehistory



- The UK area is close to (or is included in) the original Athabaskan homeland (Krauss 1980; Kari 2010; Hargus 2016)
- The area was occupied by Athabaskans for thousands of years
 - According to different opinions, about 3.5 K years (Krauss 1980) or from 6 K years up to 12 K years (Kari 2010)
- Athabaskan languages are characterized by “geolinguistic conservatism” (Kari 2010; Sapir 1921; Fortescue 1998; Campbell and Poser 2008)

Kari and Smith's toponymic map



Place names

- James Kari and associates have collected over 900 UK place names (streams, lakes, mountains, landscape forms, etc.)
- All of them (with very few exceptions) are native Athabaskan descriptive terms, such as:
 - *diniltseje noʔ* 'red paint creek'
 - *tohwnagheʔo di* 'where a hill comes into water'
 - *ʔizdlaghe zighash noʔ tʔogh ʔizʔone*
sheefish harvest river headwaters standing
'Mount Hesperus', lit. 'the one at headwaters of sheefish are harvested stream'
- There are no signs of borrowing place names from any substrate language

Geographic isolation



- Remote area
 - separated from the South by the Alaska range
 - far from the coast
 - connected to the coast by the Kuskokwim river, far smaller than the Yukon
 - difficult swampy terrain, hard to cross in summer
- As a result, it was accessed the least of all by Russian and American travelers
- Even though a very small language, it was preserved somewhat longer than other Alaskan Athabaskan languages

Verb morphology

nontinghiji'el

no-	ni-	ti-	<u>ni</u> -	ghi-	s-	<u>l</u> -	<u>'el</u>
again-	2Sg.Acc-	Inc-	Cl.Roundish	Prog-	1Sg.Nom-	Detrans.Trans-	act:Prog

Future

'bye', 'I will see you next time'

- Long words
- Many morphological positions in the verb
- Almost exclusive prefixation (unusual)
- Complex verb lexeme derivation
- Derivation and inflection are intermingled
- Order of inflectional morphemes is not canonical
- Transitivity indicators, sensitive to both lexical and inflectional factors
- One grammeme is conveyed by several devices (multiple exponence)
- Complex morphophonemics: s+l > j
-

Four kinds of potential contacts

- Other Athabaskan
- Yup'ik Eskimo
- Russian and Church Slavonic (from mid-19th century)
- English (from the beginning of the 20th century)

Koyukon

Holikachuk

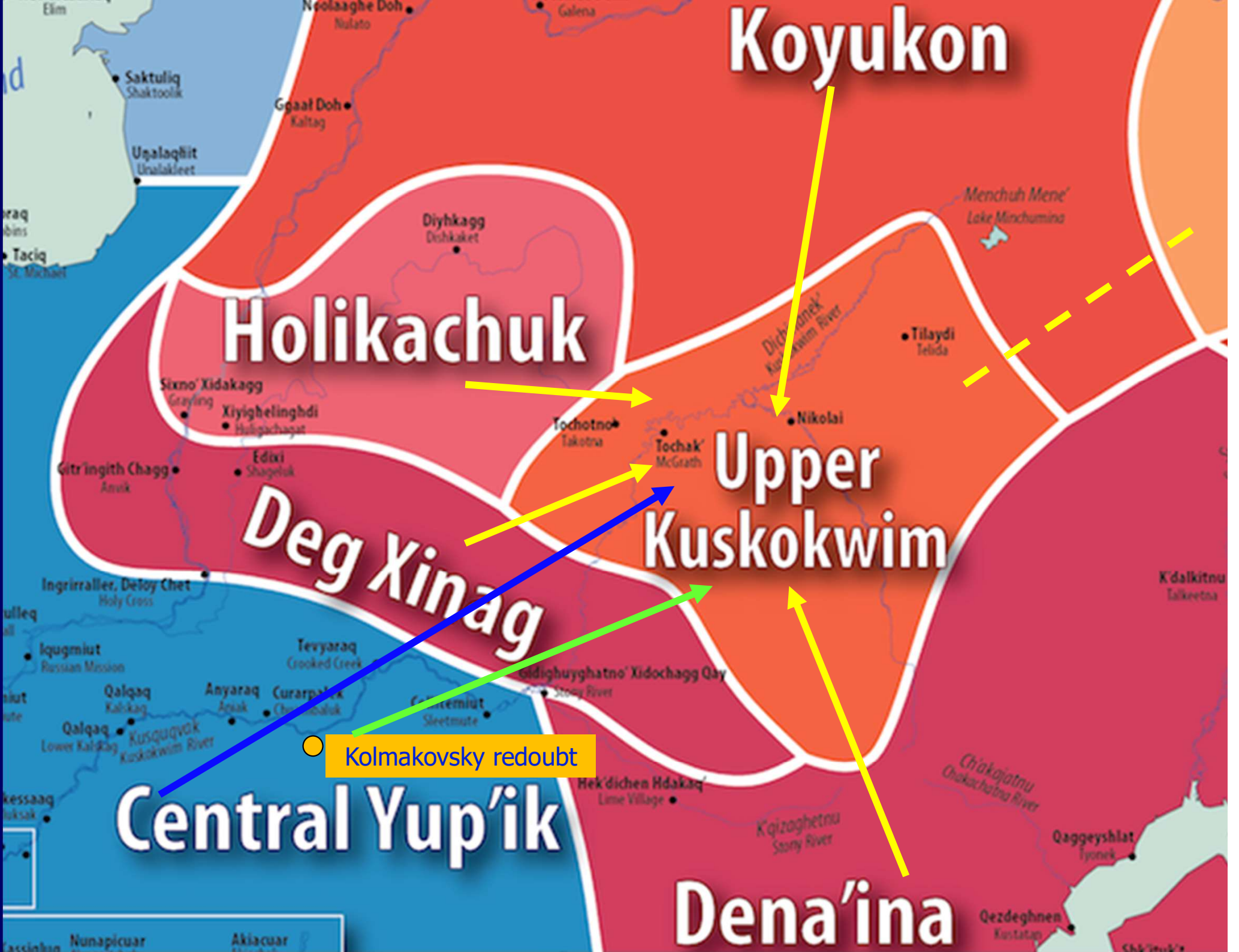
Upper Kuskokwim

Deg Xinag

Central Yup'ik

Dena'ina

Kolmakovsky redoubt



1. Contact with other Athabaskan

- Interior Athabaskan languages constituted a dialect chain/network
 - At least this concerns Lower Tanana – Koyukon – Holikachuk – UK
 - Some important UK individuals arrived from Yukon
 - including chief Nikolai, born in the 1850s
 - from Holikachuk
 - and from Lower Tanana
- UK was not a well-defined language itself: profound dialectal differences between older speakers (born in early 20th century)

Michael Krauss on Athabaskan variation

- “Athabaskan languages <...> are really parts of a dynamic complex of more or less constant interactions and influences” (Krauss 2005: 118)
- “Can't remember if or where I published on my 1962 encounter with the 3 Waska brothers on a sandbar at Tatlawiksuk, who spoke Yupik with each other, but remembered Kuskokwim Ingalik with *tth ts tr*, as 3, 2, and 1 series, so 3 brothers on one sandbar managing to belong to 3 different Athabaskan "substocks" of Hoijer's 1963 book and article!” (Krauss, p.c., May 14, 2018)



1934 - 2019

Koyukon

Holikachuk

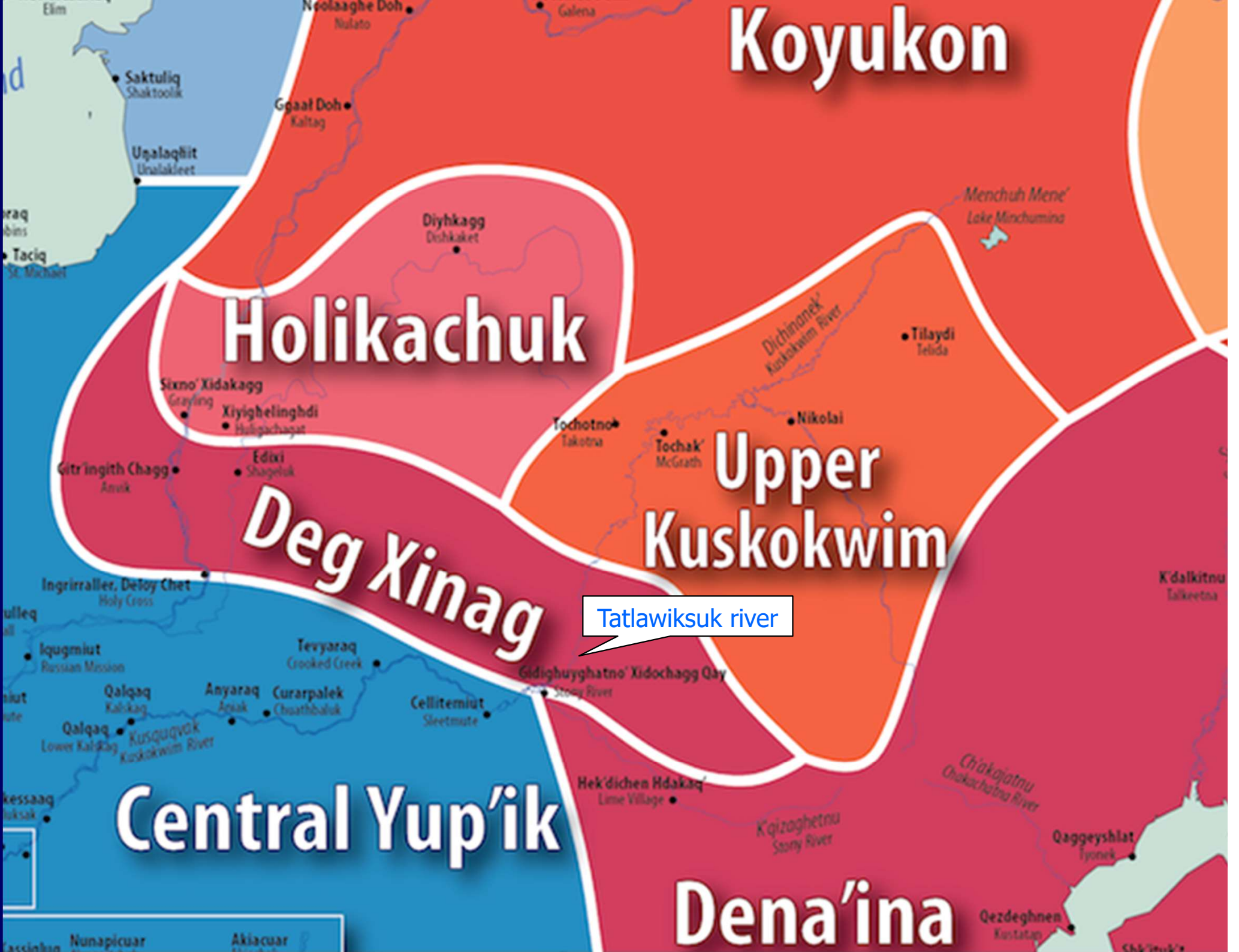
Upper Kuskokwim

Deg Xinag

Central Yup'ik

Dena'ina

Tatlawiksuk river



Consolidation of the UK tribe/language

- The non-discrete situation lasted till early 20th century, when UK villages were established
- and when the Russian Orthodox religion became firmly established as a cultural distinction
- Borrowings from other Athabaskan languages are difficult/impossible to trace because of ethnic comparative-linguistic knowledge

Michael Krauss (1981) : “Native comparative Athabaskan linguistics”

- “With speaker’s awareness of phonological correspondences potentially affecting the form of diffusions, it can become unknowable whether a form which appears to be descended from the proto-language by regular phonological development is in fact so descended by always having been in the “language”, or was at one time not in the language, but borrowed into it from a related language or dialect, with correct phonological adjustment, thus no longer detectable as a loan or dialect borrowing” (p. 7).



1934 - 2019

Mount McKinley / Denali



- 'the tall one'
 - KY: *Deenaalee*
 - UK: *Denaze*
 - LT: *Dinadhi*
 - DH, HO: *Denadh*
- 'big mountain'
 - DN: *Dghelay Ka'a*
 - AT: *Dghelaay Ce'e*

Partial exception: Toponyms in the UK periphery



- Yentna river
- DN *yentnu* 'backbone river'
 - *yen-* 'backbone'
 - *-tnu* 'river'
- UK *yanatno*?
 - root not understood
 - vowels changed randomly
 - cf. *yin-* 'backbone'
 - *-no*? 'river, stream'

A rare case

- Susitna river
- Dena'ina *suyitnu* 'sand river'
- If rendered properly in UK, it would be *soshutno?*
- But in fact it is *srosrutno?*
- Vowels are "right", but consonants are all mixed up
- An interesting kind of loanword
- An imperfect attempt of recalculation

2. Contact with Yup'ik Eskimo

- Athabaskans generally avoided contact with unrelated native groups/languages
- Sapir (1921: 209): “The Athabaskan languages of America are spoken by peoples that have astonishingly varied cultural contacts, yet nowhere do we find that an Athabaskan dialect has borrowed at all freely from a neighboring language”



Eskimo Interethnic Contacts: Bering Strait and Alaska area

Compiled by H. van der Voort

Yup'ik lexical loans

- Very few Yup'ik loanwords
 - *duyuk* `salt' < *taryuq* `salt, brine, ocean'
 - DH *dighiyuq* (K)
 - HO *daghiyuq*
 - KY *degheyukk*
 - *dwhjak* `pipe' < Ing. *tuxgaq* < CY *tugkar* `tusk'
 - *yolwhk'a* `window' – from Alutiiq *yaaləq* (CED: 108)
 - probably via Dena'ina: *yuleq* `window, windowpane'; *yulq'a* `window opening'
 - or via DH *yolq'a* `window, smoke hole'
 - *-k'a* `cavity, opening'
 - *londik* `thimble'
 - probably from Yup'ik (CY *tekeq* `index finger, thimble')
 - via Dena'ina: *lukdeq* OR *lukdeq*
 - *lo-* `hand'
 - *ghw/wk* (endearing particle) < CY *ruluq* `poor, nice'
 - *tsuyda ghw/wk* `the poor grandma'
 - the only identified borrowing directly from Yup'ik

UK and Yup'ik

- Avoidance of contact with Yup'ik till the beginning of the Russian period
- In the case of rare contacts Athabaskans usually develop a limited knowledge of other languages
- Other people rarely learn Athabaskan as a L2
- From late 19th century Eskimos were gradually becoming cultural intermediaries between Russians and UK
 - priests visiting
- Eskimos gradually expanded upriver
 - Alec Alexia (b. 1884) who married into the UK community
 - Apparently became a fluent speaker
 - His son Miska Alexia (b. 1915-1917) was partly bilingual
 - But his daughter Agnes Nikolai has zero knowledge of Yup'ik
 - Alec hardly contributed to the UK language

UK vs. Deg Hit'an (=Ingalik)

- "... a system of of trade, war and alliance obtained <...> mixed communities and some intermarriage, bilingualism and also language shift from Ingalik to Yupik (especially Kusquqvagmiut) occurred more than to other Indian languages <...> There were only occasional contacts with the Kolchan Indians" (van der Voort 1996: 1072)

Lack of phonological influence from Eskimo

- UK conservative vowel system:
 - four full vowels /i/, /u/, /a/, /o/ (plus two reduced vowels)
- Cf. Dena'ina (=Tanaina) – strong contact with Alutiiq
- Cf. Deg Hit'an (=Ingalik) – strong contact with Central Yup'ik
- “both Tanaina and Ingalik have a vowel system that's transformed exactly into Yupik i a u and schwa! (Ingalik orthography shows upsilon, but that = labialized schwa, and the i and u are lowered to [e] and [o].) Also kashims etc., but hardly any loans! Can't be a coincidence that IK and TI, otherwise so different, both happen to have triangle (u > i) plus schwa and are neighbors to Yupik.” (Krauss p.c., May 2018)

UK as a typical Athabaskan language with respect to language contact

- Very few lexical borrowings from Yup'ik
- No known grammatical borrowing
- Verb structure prevents borrowing in principle
- Athabaskans developed a highly complex and impenetrable system and were content with it for an unlimited period
- Not a hint of participating in a linguistic area, God forbid Sprachbund

3. Contact with Russian

- Started in 1844 (Lavrenty Zagoskin's expedition) or a few years earlier
- Lasted well beyond the official end of Russian America (1867)
- No evidence that UK people ever learned to *speak* in Russian (unlike coastal native peoples in Alaska)
- But they learned OCS prayers and chants by heart, without understanding lexical and grammatical content

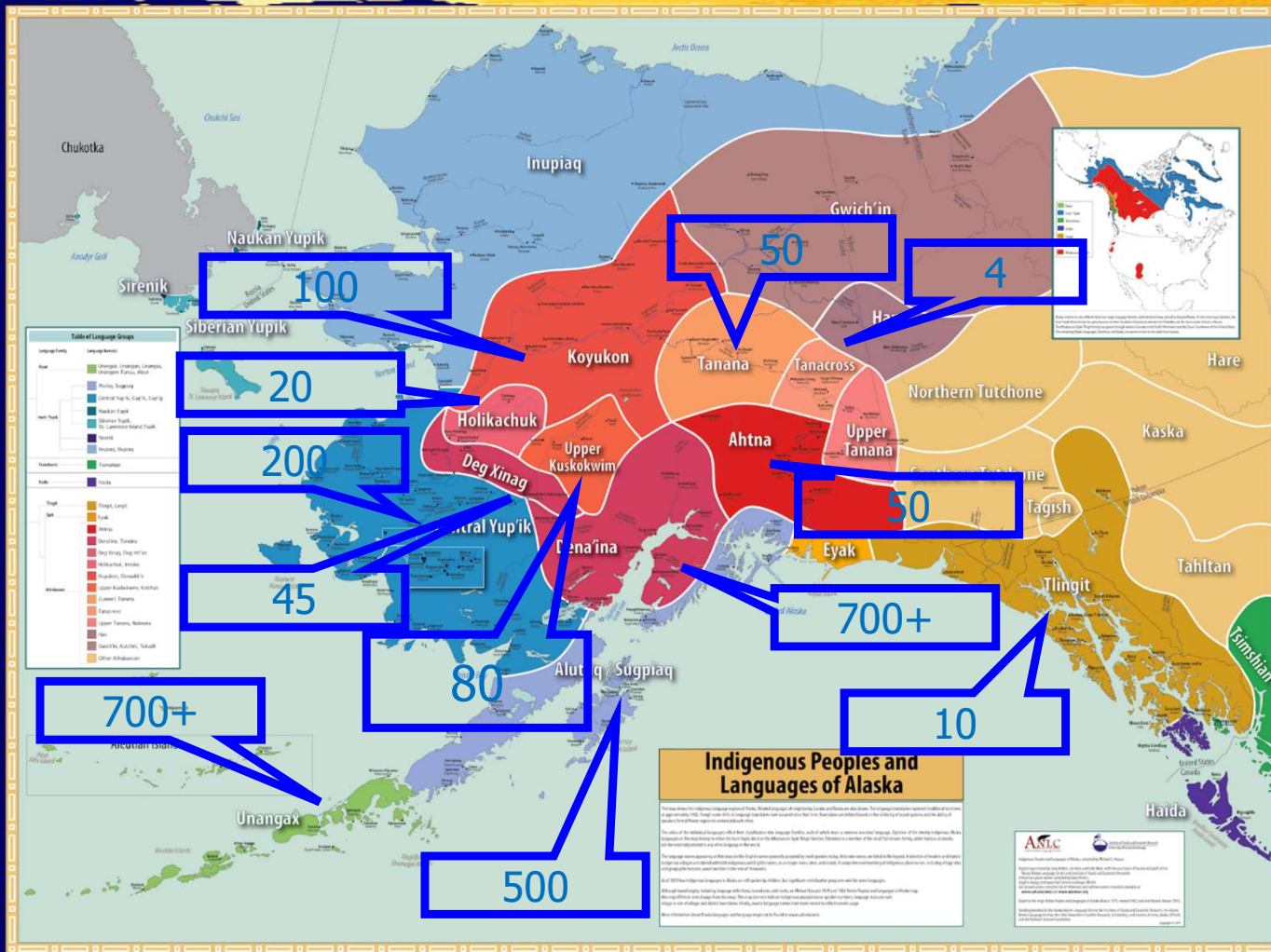


Russian borrowings



- Athabaskan languages open up somewhat for borrowing only under culture shock:
 - Alaska – from Russian
 - Canada – from French and English
 - Pacific – from English
 - Navajo – from Spanish
- About 80 nouns of Russian origin
 - European artefacts (tools, food)
 - cultural (mostly religious) concepts
- Borrowed phonemes: *boze* 'God', *anhere* 'archpriest'
- The UK people learned individual Russian words
 - *suhale* 'crackers' < *suxari*
 - *mesruk* 'sack' < *mešok*
- Hypothesis: not via entrenched bilingualism but rather via ostensive acquaintance with and nomination of particular referents

Number of Russian loanwords



Russian loanwords

- mesruk 'мешок'
- malgasr 'баркас'
- tsasja 'чашка'
- milhudik 'пароход'
- manjak 'банка'

Via Koyukon *maalgaas*,
cf. Koy. *kk'es* – UK *k'isr*

Via Dena'ina *chashga*, cf.
Den. *bach* – UK *mats*
Den. *gega* – UK *jija*

Via Eskimo,
cf. CY (also Alutiiq)
palagg'uutaq

via Eskimo,
cf. CY *paankaq*, Alutiiq *paankaaq*,
and then via unidentified Athabaskan

Evidence of some
familiarity with Yup'ik
morphology

Correspondences

PA	Alveolar	Labialized	Velar
Koy	ts	ts	k
UK	ts	tr	ch
Den	ch	ch	k

Directly from Russian

Via an Athabaskan language

Via an Eskimo language

Via an Eskimo and an Ath. language



UK < Athabaskan (< Yup'ik) < Russian

- *tsaynech* 'tea kettle' < Den. *chaynik* < Rus. *čajnik*
 - cf. *mats* 'gull' – Den. *vach*
 - cf. *dighach* 'shirt' – Den. *dghak* k > č
- *kalandasik* 'pencil' < CY *kalantaassaq* < Rus. *karandaš*
- *manjak* 'jar' < ?Athab < CY *paankaaq* < Rus. *banka*
- *jilejik* 'paper, letter' < Hol. *gilegiq* < CY *kalikaq* < Kor. *kalikal*

➤ Evidence of some familiarity with Yup'ik morphology 40

Russian loans shed light on old language contact

- Most “Russian” loanwords actually arrived via the mediation of other languages (both Athabaskan and Eskimo)
- Native comparative linguistics: loans via Dena’ina, Koyukon, and Deg Hit’an
 - Some borrowed toponyms from Athabaskan
- Contact with Eskimo languages mostly via the mediation of Athabaskan
- Some limited direct contact with Russian and Central Yup’ik
- We thus discern the old network of inter-language and inter-dialect relationships

4. Contact with English

- Began in early 1900s
 - Several early borrowings, e.g. *falaʔena* 'guys'
- Very limited bilingualism before WWII
 - Traditional lifestyle: semi-nomadic, long distance travel
 - Much of the time in small isolated groups, gathering for church holidays
 - But Anglo people penetrate the area (see Raskladkina 2019)
- Contact became massive in 1948 (missionary school)
- Bilingualism spread during the following decades
- Balanced bilinguals: those born in 1940s
- This generation also leveled out the dialectal differences
- Language shift in 1960-70s
- Complexity of Athabaskan helped to preserve these languages intact but now it speeds up their decline

Диалектное варьирование в ВКА

System label	Speakers (age)	Interdental	Dental	Retroflex	Alveopalatal
		'my tongue'	'snow'	'raven'	'stick'
Conservative, or no merger	Philip Esai (1938) Jim Nikolai (1934)	sitsula [?]	tsetl'	dotron'	dichinh
Standard merger, or loss of interdentals	Almost all speakers born in 1939 or later; Nick Dennis (1928) is close too	sitsula [?]	tsetl'	dotron'	dichinh
Merger of dentals and retroflex	Lena Petruska (1909) Bobby Esai (1918) Junior Gregory (1926)	sitsula [?]	tsetl'	dotson'	dichinh
Loss of interdentals and retroflex	Anna Alexia (1916)	sitsula [?]	tsetl'	dotson'	dichinh
Partial loss of dentals and merger with alveopalatals	Agnes Nikolai (1933) Dora Esai (1934)	sitsula [?]	chetl'	dotron'	dichinh

Conclusions on UK: Causes of purity

- Geographical isolation
- Long residence in the area, without any unrelated languages in the vicinity
- General disinclination of the Athabaskan languages to borrowing and “geolinguistic conservatism” (Sapir 1921, Brown 1999, Kari 2010)
- Native comparative knowledge of Alaskan Athabaskans
- Scarcity of contact with Yup'ik and of bilingualism in Yup'ik
- Lack of bilingualism in Russian
- Brief period of partial bilingualism in English
- Special morphology, almost excluding borrowing of verb roots or affixes

Comparison: external influence upon Dena'ina

- Dena'ina are unique among the Athabaskan tribes in adjusting to the marine way of life
- Cultural influence of Alutiiq
- "During most of the 19th century Russian was spoken as throughout Cook Inlet. Kodiak and Kenai were the center of Russian influence with Orthodox churches and stores with trade items. Many Dena'ina learned Russian as a second language or they used many Russian words." (Kari 2017, p. 254)
- Compared to other Dena'ina dialects, the Outer Inlet (=Kenaitze) dialect demonstrates substantial phonological influence of Russian
 - borrowed vowels /o/, /e/
 - borrowed consonants /v/, /w/ and others
 - and some grammatical phenomena as well, see below

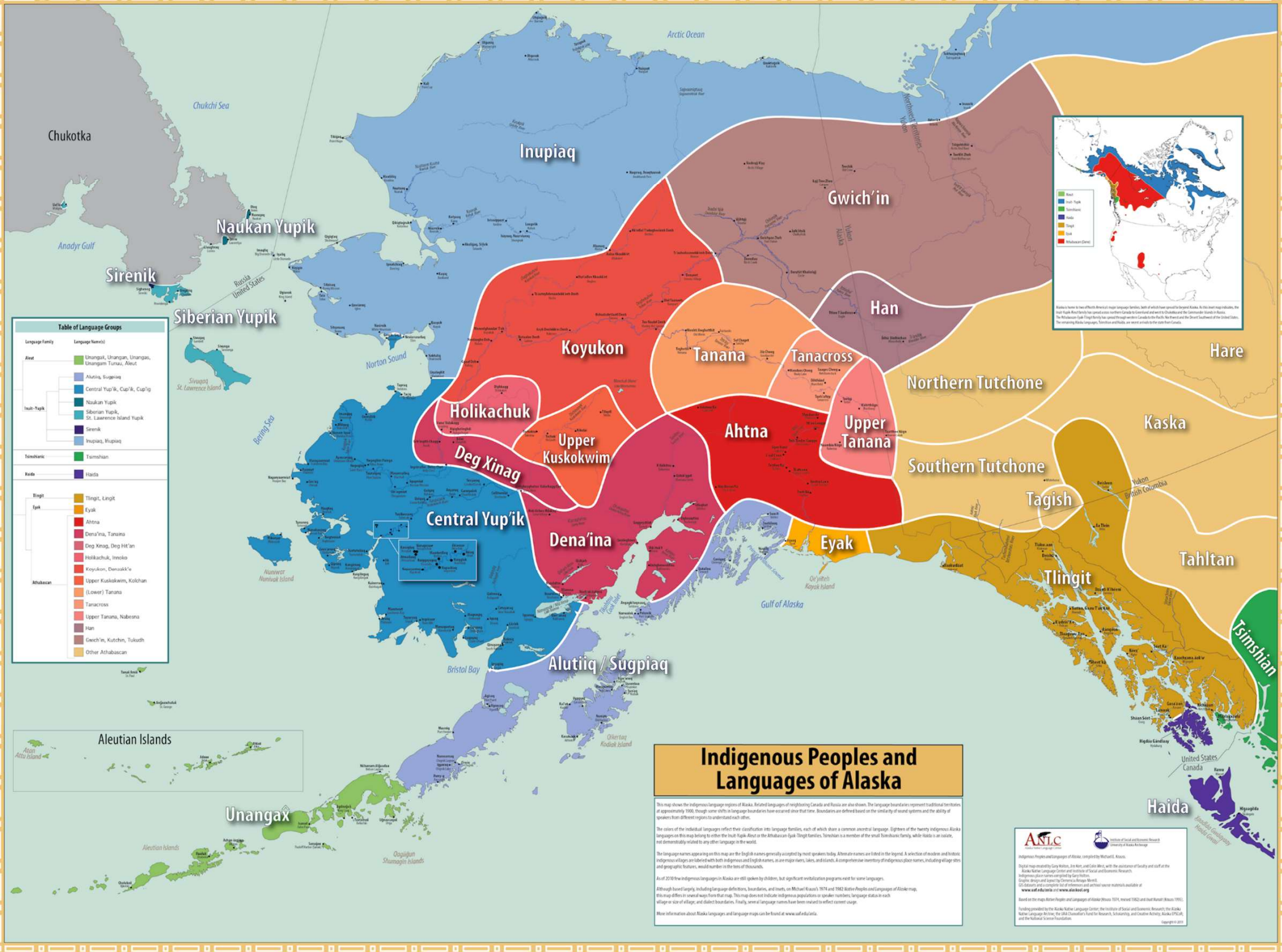


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	(Lower) Tanana
	Tanacross
Upper Tanana, Nabesna	
Athabaskan	Han
	Gwich'in, Kutchin, Tukudh
	Other Athabaskan

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Borrowing in Dena'ina

- About 750 loanwords (Kari 2019)
- They include words that are mostly borrowed from Russian, but also a few from English (10), Alutiiq or Yup'iq (9), as well as some substrate words (less than 20)
 - More Russian loanwords in the Outer Inlet Dialect
 - Thematic groups of nouns – see Sheina and Sidorina 2020
- Unusual borrowings in Dena'ina:
 - 23 verbs
 - *gurit galegga* 'cigarette papers'
 - *brasdi ya hudit* 'I went to confession' (Kari p.c.) – Pidgin Russian?
 - even suffixes
 - -shki 'small, endearing'
 - *tage-shla-shki* 'kids', lit. 'dear-small-SUFF'
 - *ezhi-shki* 'a little cold'
- Conclusion:
 - Dena'ina experienced far stronger cultural and linguistic influence than UK
 - Much more numerous nominal borrowings
 - But still very few borrowings from other indigenous languages
 - Athabaskan language profile remains intact in any conditions

*Thanks
for
your
attention*



ATHABASKAKAI HAMBURG

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- <http://www.hamburgwiki.de/wiki>:
- Der Athabaskakai hat seinen Namen nach dem Schiff *Athabaska*, das an dieser Stelle gesunken ist.

