

Marina Raskladkina, Andrej Kibrik

Institute of linguistic RAS

**Sociolinguistic situation
in the Upper Kuskokwim,
Alaska:**

**FEATURES,
DYNAMICS,
AGENTS
OF INFLUENCE**

ICASS X

15-20 June, 2021

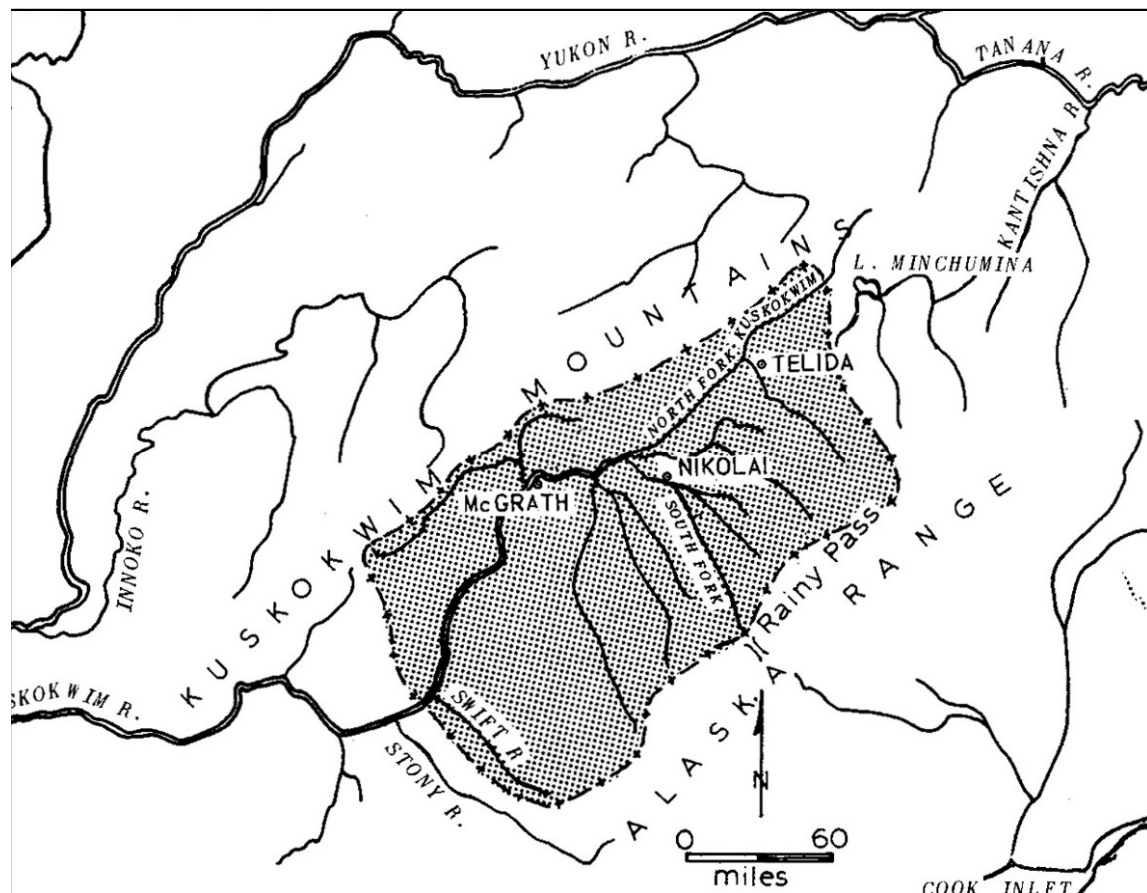
Arkhangelsk, Russia

РНФ | Российский
научный
фонд

При поддержке гранта 17-18-01649



UPPER KUSKOKWIM PEOPLE



The limits of aboriginal Kolchan occupation by Hosley, 1981

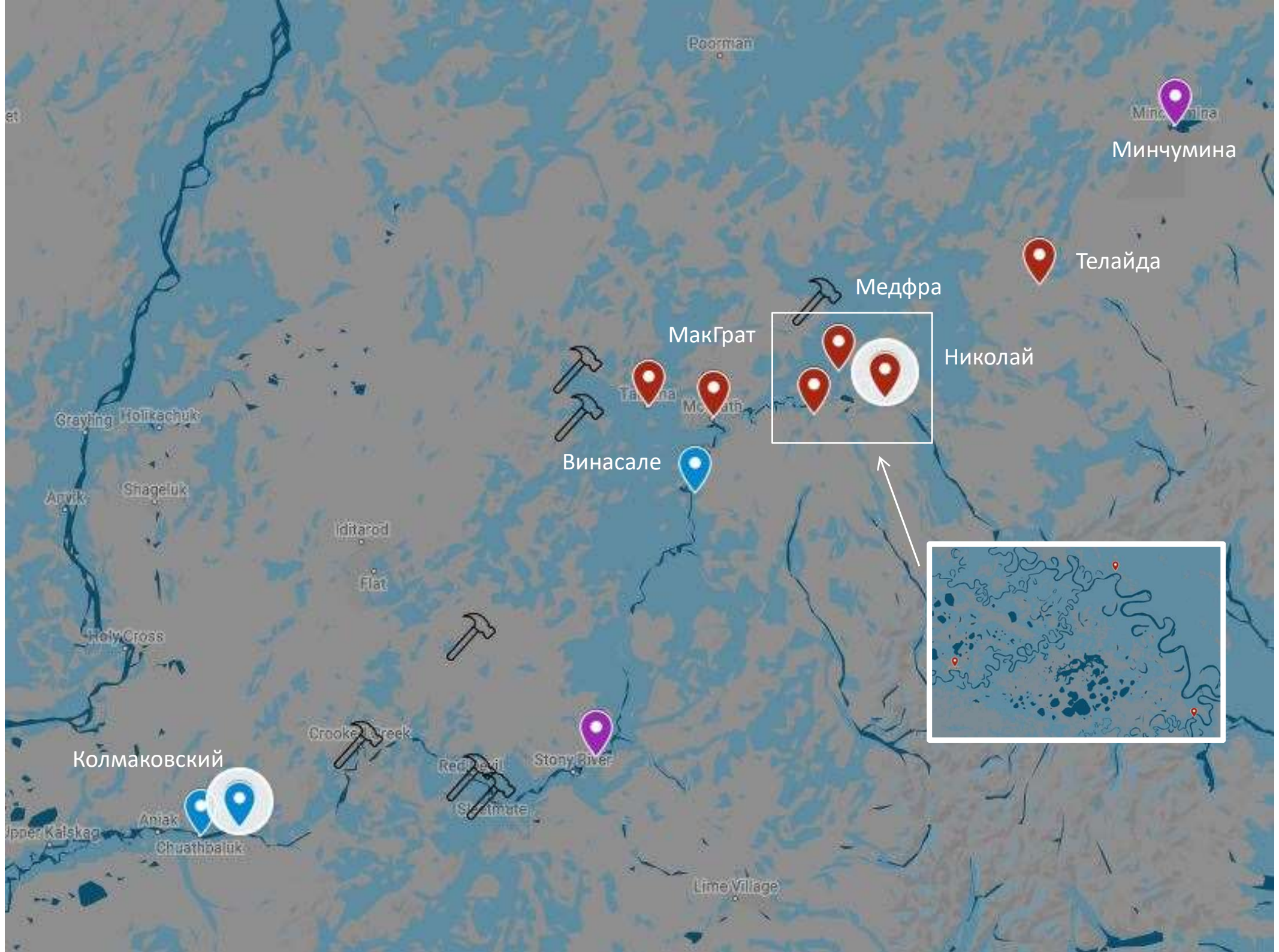
- Population in modern time: ca. 370 (Nikolai - abt 100, McGrath – ca. 100/400, Anchorage and others Alaskan places (more than 30 places))
- Population in the past: never exceeded 250-300 (Hosley, Collins)
- Language: Upper Kuskokwim Athabaskan
 - fluent and quasi-fluent speakers: ca.15-20
 - latent speakers: ca. 25
 - remembers: ca.30 (Kibrik 2019)

- Territory: Interior Alaska (remote area)
- Area in the past: 80 K square km



SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION in the Upper Kuskokwim area

- **native language of the area** - Upper Kuskokwim Athabaskan (in its local variants)
- **languages of the neighboring territories:**
 - Dene Athabaskan - Koyukon, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Tanana, Denaina
 - Eskimo - Central Yupik
- **language of the dominant culture:** English
- **others:**
 - Russian, Church Slavonic
 - various European languages (German, Polish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, French)



Роорман

Минчумина

Минчумина



Телайда

Медфра

МакГрат



Николай

Винасале

Телайда

МакГрат

Grayling Holikachuk

Arvik

Snageluk

Iditarod

Flat

Holy Cross



Crooked Creek



Stony River



Red Devil

Shimute

Колмаковский

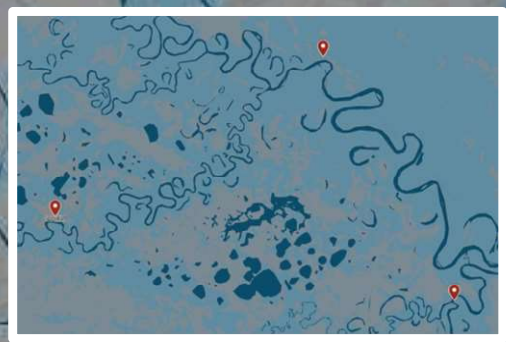


Upper Katskag

Aniak

Chuathbaluk

Lime Village



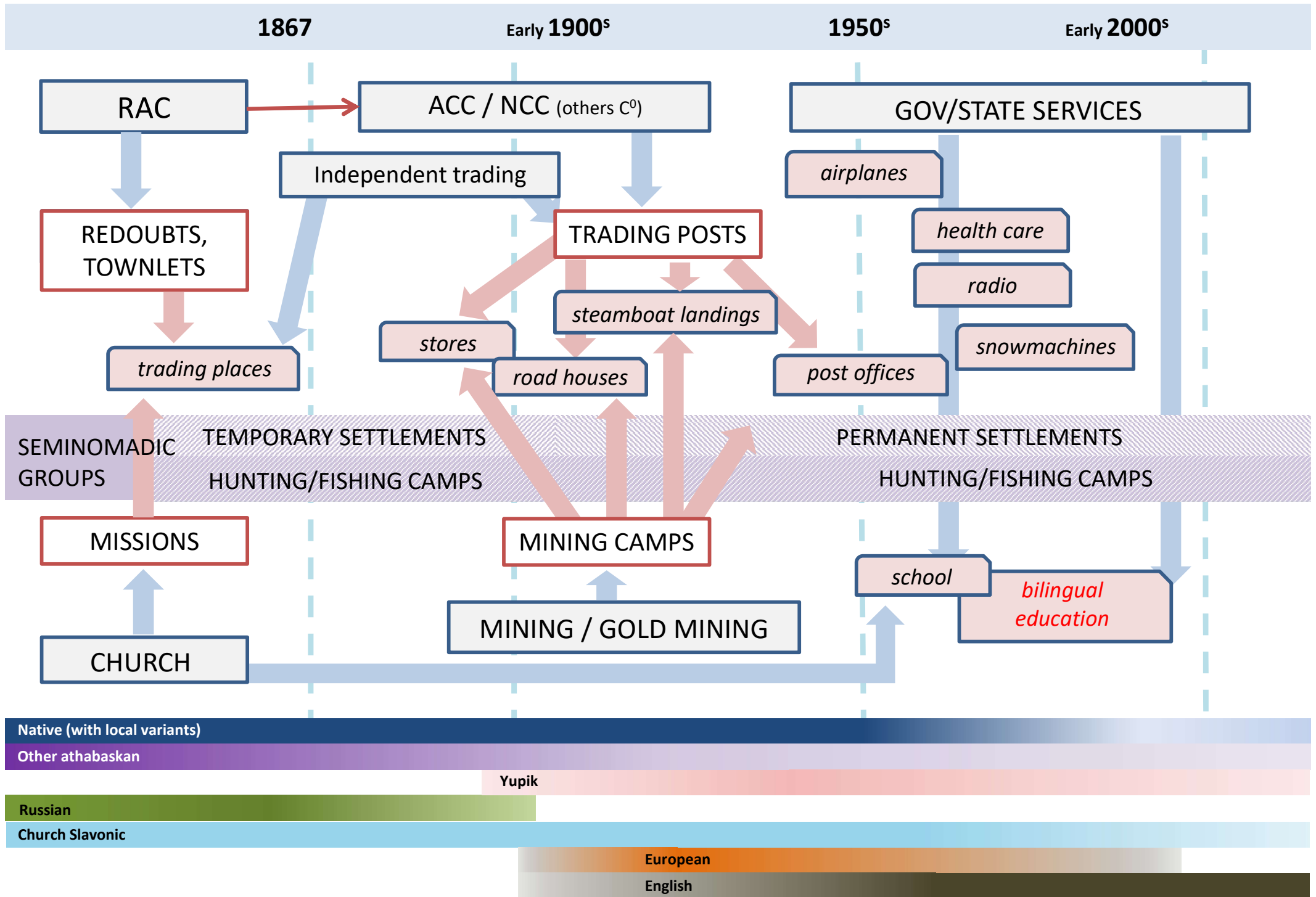


Sociolinguistic situation: AGENTS OF INFLUENCE

1. Explorers and traders
2. Russian Orthodox Missionaries
3. Mining and gold mining operations
4. Government services in the field of health, education, and economic development

UPPER KUSKOKWIM, ALASKA: AGENTS OF LINGUISTIC CHANGE

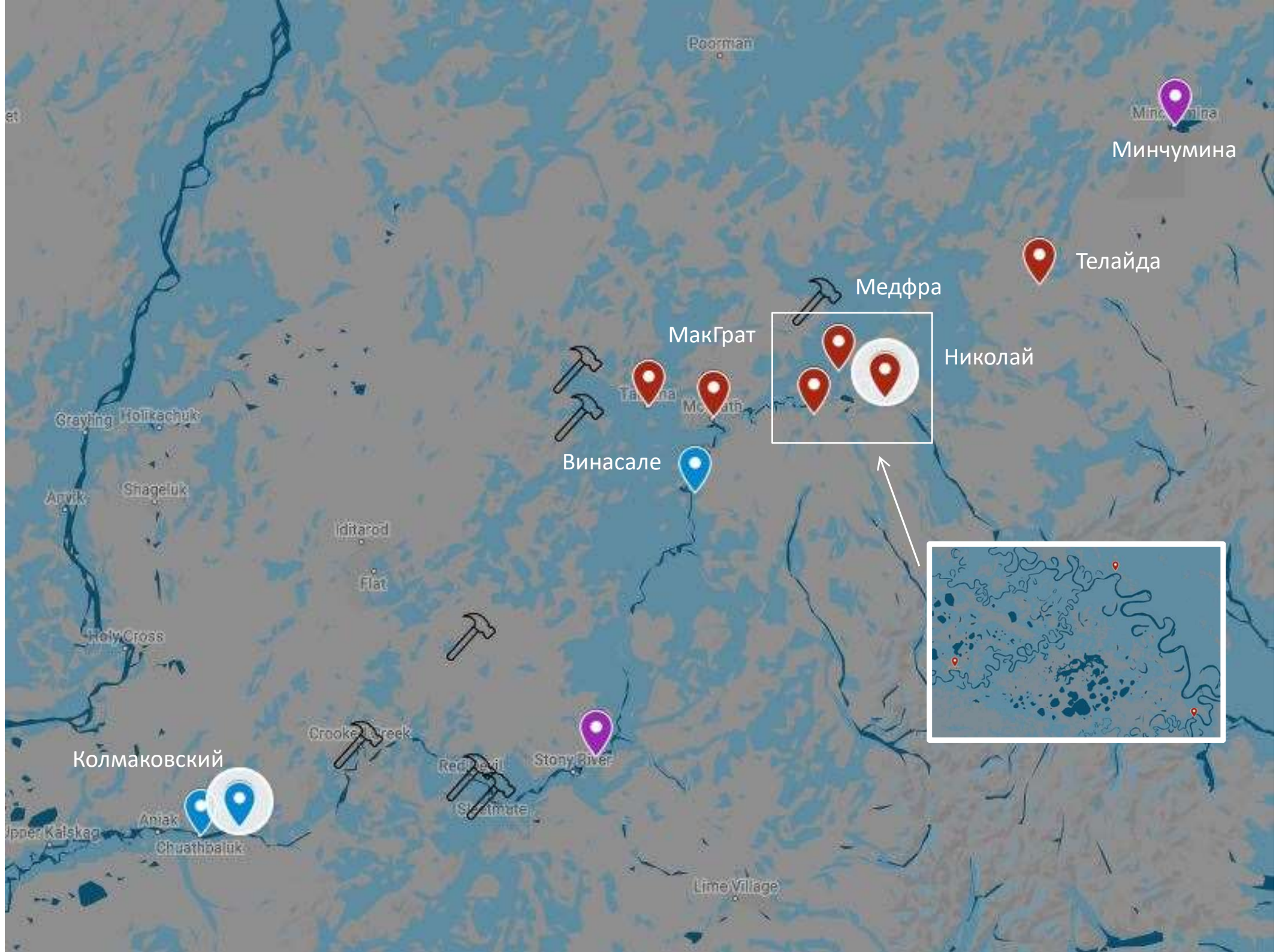
Raskladkina 2019, 2021





1. EXPLORERS AND TRADERS

- Early 1790s – first Russian explorers (Lebedev-Lastochkin company)
- 1830 – first formal Russian exploration of the Kuskokwim (Ivan Vassiliev)
- 1832-33 – **the first Russian station** founded by RAC along the Kuskokwim - Kolmakov townlet (middle Kuskokwim)
- 1839 - The first Russian to explore the upper Kuskokwim basin was probably Petr Kolmakov (ascended the Kuskokwim River to the Takotna River)
- 1841 – Kolmakov redoubt was founded by Semen Lukin
- 1844 – **Lavrenty Zagoskin`s expedition**
- RAC traders organized the trade points with aboriginal people (to buy fur and sell various goods)
- 1867 - purchase of Alaska by the United States; ACC/NCC used to operate village stores in Alaska from 1868 to 1922, served as the village courthouse and post office, bartered with locals)



Роорман

Минчумина

Минчумина



Телайда

Медфра



МакГрат



Винасале

Телайда

МакГрат

Николай



Grayling Holikachuk

Arvik

Snageluk

Iditarod

Flat

Holy Cross



Crooked Creek



Stony River



Red Devil



St. Ignace

Колмаковский

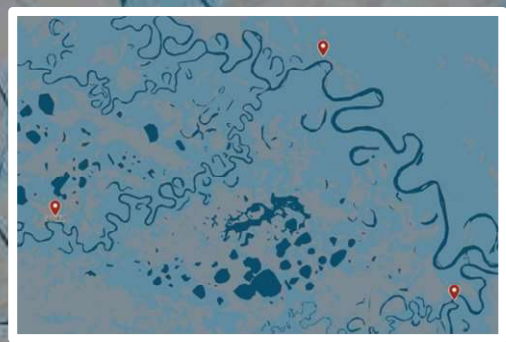


Upper Katskag

Aniak

Chuathbaluk

Lime Village





2.EXPLORERS AND TRADERS

- 1880 – exploration of Alaska by Ivan Petroff (census taker)
- 1890 – first census of Alaska
- 1898 - J. Spurr, geological survey
- 1899 - capt. E. Glenn, military expedition
- 1899 - J.Herron, explore the routes
- 1910 - G.Gordon, exploring for the University of Philadelphia Museum
- 1910 - H.Stuck

Alaska was officially incorporated as an organized **territory** in 1912, was officially proclaimed a state on January 3, 1959.



2.MISSIONARIES

- Upper Kuskokwim people are Russian Orthodox
- RAC traders and priests worked together to establish good relations with the aboriginal people
- 1830s – Russian traders were authorized to baptize the local people and conduct services
- the mission in Kolmakofsky was opened at 1861-62; the first time of contact of UK people with priests is unknown, but they were baptized before 1860s
- the time of the priest's first visit to UK is unknown: according to various sources, about 1892.
- 1911 – first church in Nikolai (2nd location); trip Chief Nikolai`s son to Kolmakofsky for the bells for the new church in relocated Nikolai
- other missions had no impact (unlike neighboring territories)



3. MINING, GOLD MINING OPERATIONS

- Mining/gold mining operations in the area and neighboring territories (*1906 – quicksilver near Shleetmut (middle Kuskokwim), 1906 – gold near Ganes Creek (from Upper Kuskokwim to Upper Innoko of the Yukon drainage), 1908 – gold near the Ophir (from Upper Kuskokwim to Upper Innoko of the Yukon drainage), 1910 – gold near Georgetown (middle Kuskokwim), 1917 – gold near the Nixon Fork*)
- the number of mining camps in the territory was not as large as in the Yukon, but brought hundreds of men - Europeans and Americans to the region
- Upper Kuskokwim people had only limited experience working in the mines; they provided some labor
- the camps had an impact on the development of trade and communications infrastructure
- close accommodation of local and visiting foreign-speaking people near mining places

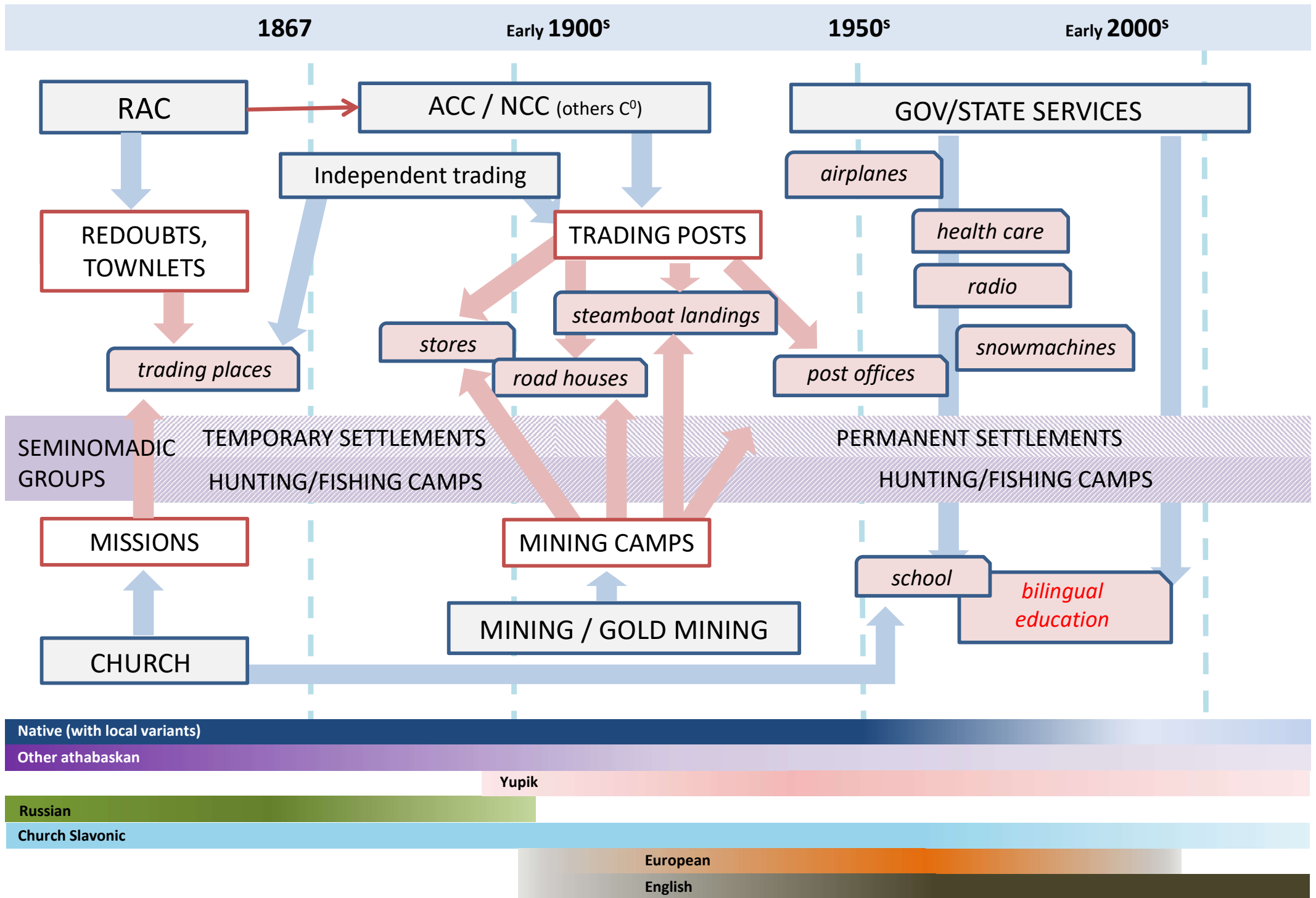


4. GOVERNMENT SERVICES

- Education
 - Support for the Nikolai school (first established in 1948 by Assemblies of God missionaries)
 - boarding schools
 - transformation of the traditional lifestyle because of wintering in Nikolai
 - bilingual education (1970s); efforts to revive the native language
- Transportation
 - riverboats (1910) – cutting wood; local people worked as deck hands and firemen on the boats and even acted as captains at times
 - airplane (1924)
 - snowmachines (1960s)
- Health care (regular from 1949)
- Communication
 - first short-wave radio – to report weather (1940s)
- Economic development (local people used to work outside: Fairbanks airport, military buildup in McGrath, construction of Alcan Highway and others)

UPPER KUSKOKWIM, ALASKA: AGENTS OF LINGUISTIC CHANGE

Raskladkina 2019, 2021





LINGUISTIC SETTING (1)

- **1800s – 1870s** – semi-nomadic groups with various local dialects UKA. Due to the situation (trade, religion) contacts with Russian
- **1870s – early 1900s** – seasonal settlements. Getting in touch with English (trade). Avoidance of contacts with the Yupik people.
 - Crooked Creek ('people from downriver') – the nearest to UK settlement with the mixed population (Yupik, Ingalik) – abt 400 km
 - First intermarriages with Yupik people in early 1900s.
 - 1898 – Spurr`s expedition along the Kuskokwim: *'They had ... difficulty in communicating as **none** of these Upper Kuskokwim people knew any English at that time'*.
- **Early 1900s – 1940s** - more contacts with English (trade, mining, government services); at least half of the male population could understand some English situationally; occasional contacts with European languages



LINGUISTIC SETTING (2)

- **1950s** – rapid penetration of the English language (school in Nikolai, boarding school, work outside)
 - **1960-1970s**
 - the beginning of the collapse of the UKA language; language shift, disintegration of the native language based communication in the family and in the community
 - The creation of the UKA alphabet by Ray Collins; activity in native languages revival organized by University of Alaska Fairbanks
- **1970s – present time** – English as home language/community language

CONCLUSION: features of the UK area

- Very remote area
 - No Russian church school – no stable Russian
 - the English school opened late - delayed but rapid penetration of English
 - there was no systematic impact of other confessions
- Limited natural resources for mining
 - occasional presence of European languages
- Small number of population
 - hard to save native language, hard to revive
- Language resistance
- Specific type of communication
 - taciturnity, transfer of life experience by real activity, not by speech
- Underspecified linguistic identity
 - no association with the name of the language and ethnic group. *“Who are you? – I am Athabaskan”(not Upper Kuskokwim)*



BETWEEN THE PAST AND MODERN TIME...

