

SOCIOLINGUISTIC TYPOLOGY OF ALASKAN RUSSIAN VARIETIES¹

MIRA BERGELSON^a, ANDREJ KIBRIK^{b,c}

^aNational Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow);

^bInstitute of Linguistics RAS (Moscow); ^cLomonosov Moscow State University

Alaskan Russian is a form of the Russian language that emerged in mid-18th century in the process of Russian colonial presence in Alaska. Alaskan Russian (AR) became a native language of the people of mixed Russian-Native American origin residing in various parts of Alaska. In the 19th century, the people born in such families were known as “Creoles”. AR was spoken throughout the Russian American period and long after, up to the present time.

In Russian colonial times, some contact forms of Russian were spoken in every part of Alaska where Russian presence was noticeable. For an approximate list of Russian posts location see map at <http://www.colonialvoyage.com/eng/america/alaska/russia.html>.

In this paper, we look at a number of locations where AR has been spoken. They include several villages on the Kenai peninsula, the Kodiak archipelago and the Pribilof islands. The AR variety of the Ninilchik village (NR) on the Kenai peninsula has survived till the present time and is to a certain degree described in a number of publications — Daly 1986, Krauss 1996, Bergelson, Kibrik 2010, 2014, 2017.

Our aim in this paper is to analyze new data on the distribution, functioning and degree of preservation of AR in its various historical locations in Alaska: Ninilchik and Nanwalek in the Kenai peninsula, Kodiak and Ouzinkie in the Kodiak archipelago, Saint Paul (the Pribilof islands). We present them in the form of a typology based on a number of features. Besides the obvious parameters such as number of speakers, official schooling, social prestige and the like, we would like to include other features, particular for the region and the period discussed. Those include:

- bilingualism or trilingualism in the family and community: Native American/AR/English;
- language repertoire of the priest in the community: SR/English/AR/Native American;
- specific locations and economic activities and processes: trapping/trading/mining/other labor;
- specific time frames: first half of the 19th century / second half of the 19th century / first half of the 20th century / second half of the 20th century;
- roles of individuals who served as agents of change.

Sociolinguistic typology of this kind contributes to the more general studies of postcolonial languages.

¹ Research underlying this paper was supported by Russian Science Foundation grant # 17-18-01649.