

The Kodiak town variety of Alaskan Russian: The diachrony of a contact language

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Research questions regarding language contact in Alaska

What languages were involved

Time frame and timeline

Locations

Circumstances

Results

Alaskan Russian (AR)

- Variety of Russian that developed in Alaska at the time of Russian America through contacts with the indigenous languages
 - mid-18th - beginning of 21st century
- 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

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
- 1920s - beginning of massive Americanization of Alaska
- 1941 - Kodiak city becomes center for the Navy in Alaska

Why Kodiak contact situation is so special

- 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

Data

- Historical data
- Sociolinguistic interviews
 - Various periods and functionality
- Linguistic fieldwork
 - mostly Ninilchik
 - Some variational sociolinguistics
 - Individual cases

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



- Born (1930) and raised in Kodiak
- Grew up speaking Russian with his mother
- His mother only spoke Russian to him
- Did not know English before school
- The last speaker of Kodiak Town Russian
 - *B'éb'ichk'i* 'kids' ~ *Déwachka* 'girl'
 - *Chayknút'* 'drink tea'
 - *Ana l'úb'it m'in'a natópat'* 'she likes to yell at me'
 - *Stupáy naw'irhú* 'go upstairs'
- Remarkable person and talented consultant

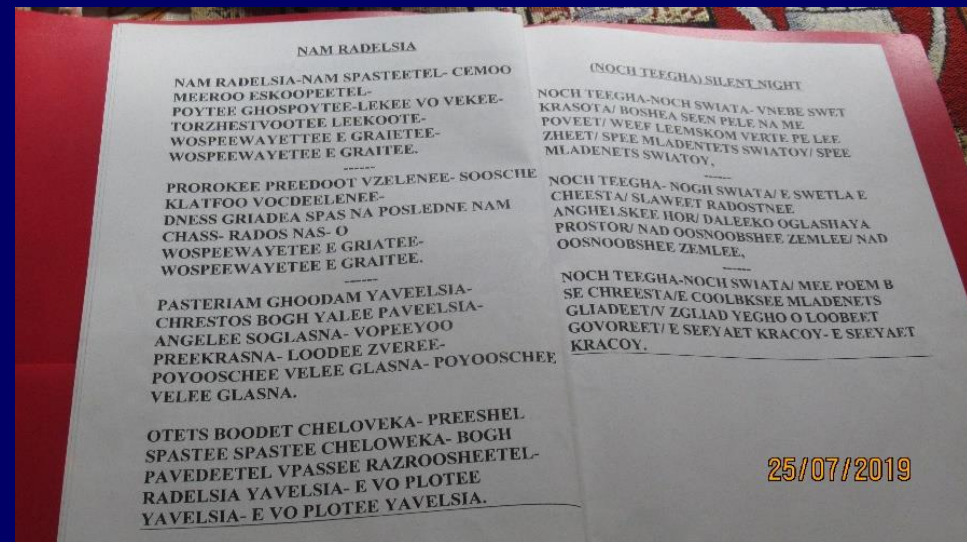
Raisa Baldwin

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



Ouzinkie

- Lilly Pestrikoff
 - Tatiana Chichenoff
 - Their father Larry Elanak
 - Priest F. Garassim
- Difference between two Kodiak locations: urban and rural
 - Similarity: presence of Alutiiq, though to a different degree



What is 'town'/'city' in the context of Russian America

- Features of an 'urban space' in Alaska
- Population: hundreds, not hundreds of thousands

US Census data	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930 (29)	1940 (39)	1950
Kodiak district	495		-	1465	1729	2094	6264
Kodiak town	341	495	438	374	442	864	1710

Ethnic groups in Kodiak

- Based on US Census (1900 vs. 1940)

	White	Indian*	Mixed/Aleut**	Negro
Kodiak settlement (village) 1900	39	27	275	0
	11%	8%	80%	0
Kodiak town (3 rd category) 1940	394	25	441	4
	46%	3%	51%	0%

- * 1900 - Indian: (all 'Alutiiq' + 1 'Tlingit') - called *aleut* and *sitka*
- * 1940 - Indian: ?? Athabaskan or Tlingit
- ** 1900 - Mixed: Creoles
- ** 1940 - Aleut: Creoles or Alutiiq
- Cf. Ninilchik (1940)- 134 people are Whites;
 - two families where women and kids are Aleut, men are Whites

Kodiak Town Russian

- Minor differences from NR
- Special articulatory setting
- Special phonetic realization of palatalized consonants
 - Especially /r/, /w/, /n/
- Variation within an individual idiolect
 - [v] ~ [w], [h] ~ [x], [r] ~ [R]
- In KTR
 - Phonetic realization of /s/ and /r/ in front of /e/ is softer than in NR.
 - Phonetic realization of /d'/ and /n'/ in front of /e/ is harder than in NR
- In KTR the labialized copula *bul* has an optional pronunciation as *b'il*.
- Retention and narrowing of the unstressed /o/ (optional)

Kodiak Town Russian



- New lexical items
 - *sól'its*, cf. *сольца*
 - *l'it'éts* and *l'itúchka*- clear 20th century neologisms for 'airplane'
 - *chayknút'* - rare dialectal relict
- Alutiiq words not attested in NR
 - *tamúk* 'yukola', *pag'ílk'i* 'driftwood'
- Grammar:
 - Polite 2Pl forms and patronymics
 - The case system is reduced to a higher degree than in NR
 - *Ya hachú parézhit' éta dóska.*
 - The same is true of gender agreement and tenses
 - To the contrary, verbal aspect differences are more articulated.

AR taxonomy

Alaskan Russian

??

■ Kenai

Kodiak

'Other'

■ Kenai Town ~ Ninilchik

Kodiak Town ~ Afognak ~ Ouzinkie ~ rest of
Kodiak

Kodiak Town Russian vs Ninilchik Russian

- Case system is destroyed to a greater degree
 - waz'm'í kaml'éyka
 - Ya xachú parézhit' éta dóska
- The same true for gender and tenses
 - mixing 2Sg and 3Sg in present tense
- But aspect is better preserved (Bill Hartman)
- Also: polite 2Pl, patronymics
- Today, Alutiiq became the choice for 'minority language'.
 - Not in Bill Hartman's youth

Language shift



- After the WWII AR did not function as means of communication, but kept its cultural and identification value
- Alutiiq was not used for communication by that time; its cultural value re-emerged since 1970-ies
- Ethnic and cultural identity of the Kodiak town residents - **Russian Aleuts**
 - as compared to the Ninilchik residents - **Russians**

A Timeline of Multilingualism: The narrative of the language contact in Kodiak

Period	End of 18 th to mid-19 th century	1867 to the end of 19 th - beginning of 20 th century	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
Language hierarchy	Alutiiq/Russian	Russian/Alutiiq English	Russian/English Alutiiq	English Russian/Alutiiq

Factors promoting AR

- Bilingual Russian-Alutiiq population of the archipelago
- Bilingual education for the Alutiiq children provided by RAC and the Orthodox church
- Indigenization of the Orthodox religion
- Geographic and functional distribution of the settlements, also for the RAC pensioners

Alaskan Russian

- AR is a unique postcolonial variety of Russian
 - In fact, several varieties with minor differences
- Kodiak Town Russian is its distinct and new (cf. Krauss 1996) dialect
 - The majority of population was speaking Russian as their first language in 1867 and up to 1920s (Daly, October 1985 report, Malutin 2009)
 - 1940 Census also shows that majority (at least 51%) was AR speakers
- KTR has features of more profound creolization.
- At the same time, it had a relatively long history of use in the urban setting, where AR was spoken in a broader set of functional domains compared to the Ninilchik village.
 - Creoles, residents of Kodiak town, were bilingual, or even trilingual in Alaskan Russian, Alutiiq, and eventually, English, and could write in these languages (Oleksa 1990).
- Factors that sped up its loss
 - Fishing industry, WWII, 1964 earthquake
 - Competition with Alutiiq, at least for some families (starting in 1970-ies)

Parameters of the sociolinguistic typology of multilingualism resulting from language contact

- Bilingualism or trilingualism in the family and community:
Native American/AR/English
- Religion
- 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
 - Language repertoire of the priest in the community:
CR/English/AR/Native American
 - 'Waves' of CR influence

**Thank you for your attention !
Spas'iba / Quanaa**

