

**The Linguistic Legacy of Russians in Alaska**

**Russian Contact and Linguistic Variation in Alaska, with Special  
Attention to Ninilchik Russian**

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## *1. Introduction*

Russia's sustained presence in Alaska, from the arrival of the first Russians in 1732 (and then again in 1741) until the transfer of the territory into U.S. possession, had a profound impact on the region's cultural landscape. The evidence of Alaska's Russian heritage survives in many place names (e.g., Kodiak, Sitka, Nikiski, Kalifornsky, to name a few), in the remnants of Russian folk tales in the folklore of Alaskan natives, and in the robustness of the Russian Orthodox Church in many communities (Black 2004: 287). But nowhere is this history more tangible than in the languages of the indigenous peoples of Alaska and, perhaps surprisingly, within the dialectal varieties of Russian spoken by descendants of these original settlers.

There are numerous accounts of the Russian contact-induced changes to Alaskan languages such as Aleut and Yupik (Brenckle 1975, Berge & Kaplan 2005, Koo 1980, Schumacher 1977), which detail the hundreds of borrowings from Russian into these languages, as well as other more innovative changes, such as the relexicalization of pre-existing terms to accommodate new objects and concepts and the coining of completely new terminology using the language's own morphemes (Berge & Kaplan 2005). However, as I imply above, contact-related change in Alaska has not been unidirectional. In fact, the variety of Russian spoken by the descendants of Russian settlers (and most likely by their forefathers) displays unique features that can best be explained by the unique contact situation that existed during the era of Russian control and later under Americanization.

In this paper, I describe the noteworthy features of some Alaskan Russian dialects, and offer explanations for the origins of these features where they deviate from Contemporary Standard Russian. I focus mostly on providing an account of the dialect of the village of

Ninilchik, where linguists Andrej Kibrik, Mira Bergelson, and Wayne Leman, whose materials provide the basis for my analysis, have undertaken the most thorough efforts at documentation of Russian in Alaska. A more detailed discussion of their materials and methodology is discussed in Section 3. Section 2 provides a brief historical overview of the social circumstances of the linguistic contact. Section 4 presents actual data from Ninilchik Russian and section 5 discusses the significance of language attrition in NR. Section 6 concludes the paper with suggestions for future research.

## ***2. Language Contact in Alaska, Past and Present***

The contact situation in Alaska, with respect to the development of Alaskan Russian, may be divided into two general stages: (1) the period of Russian settlement and dominion (generally accepted to have been between about the 1740s and 1867, when the territory was sold to the United States (Black 2004; Berge & Kaplan 2005)); and (2) the period following the Alaska purchase through the present day. These two stages are characterized by the presence of different languages as well as different patterns of social organization, and both have contributed in distinct ways to the dialect we may observe today.

### **2.1 Russian America (1740s-1867)**

The motivation for the settlement of Russian America was largely economic. During most of this period the territory was in the hands of the Russian-American Company, which was solely charged with extracting and trading the land's resources (Black 2004: 209). In fact, settlement

for its own sake was prohibited, and so most of the contact that occurred in Russian America at this time would have been between the predominantly male employees of the RAC and the Alaskan natives with whom they traded. This is not to say, however, that contact was entirely restricted to this sphere—in fact, as is often the case in these contact situations, such as the one that gave rise to the mixed language Michif (Bakker & Papen 1997), there was a great deal of intermarriage between the young, single RAC employees and native women. And as was the case with Michif, where many of the French traders had children with the native Canadian women (Bakker & Pappen 1997: 297), Russian men in Alaska often fathered children with Alaskan women, resulting in a population of individuals of mixed heritage (Black 2004: 209-20). In some cases, such children were simply assimilated into their mothers' tribes—this was especially true of the Tlingits, who are a matrilineal society (and therefore do not need to acknowledge the ethnicity or nationality of the child's father) (Black 2004: 214). In other cases, the men of the RAC chose to remain in Alaska once their service ended and started families with their native wives. The speakers who supplied the data I present in this paper are the descendants of such unions. At the time, these “Creoles” were considered by the Russian authorities to be a distinct class (Black 2004), and would have spent a great deal of time navigating both the social sphere of Russian Alaskan society, where their Russian heritage was acknowledged, and that of their indigenous culture.

During this first period, the groups with which Russian settlers had a great deal of contact were the Aleut, Alutiit, Tlingit, Athabaskan, and Yupiq. The most extensive contact seems to have been with the Aleuts, who were the first indigenous people to make contact with the Russians (Brenckle 1975). Meanwhile, contact with the Tlingits was the least extensive, or at least, unfriendly enough to not have been conducive to mutual linguistic influence. The two

groups had a number of violent conflicts in the 1850s (Black 2004: 278), and the Tlingits made the Russian settlers uneasy. However, they eventually forged a relationship of mutual respect and tolerance: the Tlingits often provided services for Russian officials, while these officials were called upon by the Tlingits to mediate disputes among Alaskan native groups (Black 2004: 278). It is unclear, however, whether this cooperative relationship ever truly filtered down to daily interactions between lower-rank members of the two groups. There are attested cases of intermarriage with Tlingits (or at least of the existence of Russian-Tlingit children), but as is noted above these children were generally considered Tlingit regardless of their Russian heritage, and most likely identified more closely with their Tlingit parentage. Predictably, therefore, the linguistic influence of Russian on Tlingit is comparatively limited. Thus, of the many attested borrowings from Russian in indigenous languages, Aleut and several Yupiq dialects supply the greatest number (Brenckle 1975: 421). Tlingit, however, is not mentioned at all in some articles or is mentioned only in passing in others (Berge & Kaplan 2005, Brenckle 1975). Given this relative lack of borrowings and the problematic nature of Tlingit-Russian relations during this period, we can conclude that the linguistic changes in Russian outlined below are probably not due to Tlingit contact.

Meanwhile, the Russians had a sustained relationship with the Aleuts, with a great deal of trade and intermarriage. The Aleuts also adopted the Russian Orthodox Church more eagerly than other Alaskan indigenous groups, because its practices were similar to their own religious customs in many respects (Black 2004: 230). Naming was also a highly important practice for the Aleuts, and Orthodox Baptism allowed for Russian names to become very widespread among them. Some employees of the Russian-American Company even adopted young Aleut boys, and funded their education in Russian (Liapunova 1987: 111).



In any account of linguistic change facilitated by colonization, it is necessary to discuss language policy or any forced linguistic conversion of indigenous peoples that may have been implemented by the colonizers. The case of Russian Alaska is interesting in that there was very little invasive linguistic regulation. While Russian was required in school, this seems to be the only public sphere where Russian was actually enforced. The Russian Orthodox Church was especially welcoming of the natives and their languages, providing both religious services and written materials in their own languages (Black 2004: 230, 247). A number of Russian Orthodox priests were well-versed in Inuit-Aleut languages and helped create an orthography for them in order to promote literacy (Black 2004: 230, 247). This acceptance of native linguistic culture might have significantly facilitated the linguistic effects of Inuit-Aleut languages on Russian.

Many of the linguistic features that can be observed in native Alaskan languages confirm that the contact between their speakers and speakers of Russian was fairly extensive—enough to foment lasting linguistic change that has been visible long after the departure of the RAC. Examples of this change include, of course, many Russian borrowings. Koo (1980) provides a list of several hundred borrowings into Aleut, most of which are for physical objects (likely introduced into the culture by Russian settlers) or religious concepts that were likely introduced by the Russian Orthodox Church. They include such words as *miliitiwaq* ‘prayer’ (CSR *mol’itva*), *piiwaq* ‘beer’ (CSR *pivo*), and *angilaq* ‘angel’ (CSR *angel*). These words have taken on not only native phonology, but native morphological inflection as well: all of the words listed above have the Aleut nominative suffix *-q* (Oswalt 1958). One particularly intriguing example of the salience of Russian in native North American languages comes from the language of Coast Miwok, spoken not in Alaska but rather in Northern California, where Russian settlers established a presence at Fort Ross from 1811 to 1840 (Oswalt 1958: 245). Coast Miwok

contains examples of doubly-borrowed lexicon—that is, borrowed first into Alutiiq from Russian, and then into Coast Miwok from Alutiiq. One example is the word for ‘cat’, attested in Catherine A. Callaghan’s Bodega Miwok dictionary (1970): B.M. *kuškak* ‘cat’ > Alutiiq *kuška-q* ‘cat-ABS.SG’ > Russian *koška* ‘cat-NOM.SG’<sup>1</sup>.

Other works provide less overt examples of lexical change. Berge and Kaplan (2005) give a number of examples of what they call “relexicalization,” in which Russian cultural influence prompted a change or expansion of the meanings of certain words, to include concepts that did not previously exist in the language. Consider an example from Central Alaskan Yupiq: *tuunraq* ‘shaman’s helping spirit’ has been relexicalized to mean the Christian concept of a ‘devil’ (Berge & Kaplan 2005: 294).

Given the depth of this contact in Alaska, and the linguistic changes in the native languages that are clearly the result of it, it is reasonable to posit that many of the curious features of Alaskan Russian are also the results of contact, rather than of internally-motivated historical change. It is probably during this stage of colonization that Russian and Alaska’s native languages had the greatest effects on one another—when the predominant foreign presence was Russian, and when this presence was greatest. All of the influences of these indigenous languages on Alaskan Russian are likely remnants from this era.

## 2.2 1867 and beyond

After the departure of the Russian-American Company, Alaska underwent intense Americanization as efforts were taken to “eradicate[e] Russian culture” (Black 2004: 287), in particular the Russian Orthodox Church. Under American control, English became the standard

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<sup>1</sup> A special thank you to Perry Wong for supplying the etymology for this particular example.

language of education and the primary language of Alaskan residents and has remained so to this day. Black (2004:287) also suggests that Alaskan natives and those of mixed heritage were demoted in status after the sale of Alaska to the United States—that is, where previously natives and their property were accorded a certain degree of respect as far as the Russian-American Company was concerned, many of them were disenfranchised after the Alaska Purchase and remained so until late in the 20th century. Perhaps due in part to this decline in status and to a decreased volume of trade between natives and Russian immigrants, English seems to have had a more dominant effect on Alaskan Russian—or at least the variety that exists today—despite the rich history of indigenous contact characterized above. English has been able to dramatically affect today's Alaskan Russian for the simple reason that all of the AR speakers have shifted to English. As the examples of Alaskan Russian features will show in Section 4, most of the peculiar structural features of AR are due to heavy English influence and interference.

Today the Russian residents of Alaska may be divided into several categories (Golovko 2010):

1. Old Believers, who fled to places such as the United States to escape reforms to the Russian Orthodox Church;
2. Descendants of employees of the Russian-American Company and their families;
3. Recent Russian immigrants to Alaska, who arrived in the 1990s.

This paper focuses on individuals belonging to the second category, who generally seem to have little linguistic contact with members of the other two categories. According to the Ninilchik speakers themselves, they are aware of the existence of the communities of Old Believers, and

acknowledge their Russian as being different (in particular, spoken too quickly for NR speakers to understand). In general, however, Old Believer communities tend to be isolated and exclusive, and whatever contact exists between them and the communities in the second group, it is unlikely to be sustained enough to have a dramatic impact on either of the groups' dialects. According to Golovko (2010), the same is true of the relationship between categories 2 and 3, as the recent Russian immigrants have chosen to reside in larger Alaskan cities or are otherwise mostly dispersed throughout the state. In this way speakers of Alaskan Russian have remained isolated from the influences of Contemporary Standard Russian, with one documented exceptional case, in which a Russian woman married into a community with Alaskan Russian speakers in Kodiak Town (Golovko 2010). This woman proceeded to teach AR speakers "correct" (which is to say, Contemporary Standard) Russian words. However, my research has not uncovered any such case in the village of Ninilchik, and it is likely that the only real contact these speakers have had with CSR speakers has been with the Russian researchers who have been documenting their language.

The village of Ninilchik has its own unique history. It was established by the Russian-American Company as a retirement settlement for company employees who were no longer fit to work, and the families of these retirees (Arndt 1996). It eventually also attracted those of mixed Russian-native heritage. The residents of Ninilchik who remain today trace their lineage to Athabaskans who resided near the village and intermarried with the Russians and the Russian-Aleut Creoles already living there (Leman 2011). All of the speakers interviewed in the materials I am using are part of a group of 2700 known descendants of one early Ninilchik family, and an Alaskan native matriarch who was Alutiiq or possibly Aleut (Leman 2011).

### ***3. The Data***

#### **3.1 Materials and methodology**

Almost all of the data I present in this paper is taken from recordings of field work done by Mira Bergelson, Andrej Kibrik, and Wayne Leman, who have kindly shared their materials with me. Mr. Leman is a member of the Ninilchik community, and the three undertook a project to document Ninilchik Russian in response to interest expressed by the community. The primary goal of their research has been the construction of a comprehensive dictionary of NR, which is publicly available online (<http://www.lulu.com/ninilchik>). For this reason, their sessions with speakers mostly consist of the elicitation of individual words from all parts of speech and various semantic categories. Kibrik and Bergelson, whose recordings (in conjunction with the dictionary itself) comprise the bulk of my data, would provide speakers with English terms and ask them if there was an equivalent in Alaskan Russian. Where speakers could not provide one, the linguists would supply the Contemporary Standard Russian word and ask the speaker if he or she recognized it. There are known drawbacks to using this sort of method. For example, speakers might be tempted to give direct translations of compound terms (which could have the appearance of calques), or might claim to recognize a word they do not, in fact, know, in order to avoid embarrassment. However, in general, this methodology seems to have been unproblematic here. Speakers freely denied knowing many of the Russian words they were asked about, which suggests that they most likely did not feign recognition of those words they did claim to know.

Seven speakers took part in Kibrik and Bergelson's 1997 sessions, although several others participated in the Ninilchik Russian dictionary project. Here, I focus on these seven

speakers because they showed the most spontaneous syntactic data, as they were able to enter into conversations in Russian with the researchers, who themselves are native speakers of Moscow Russian. The names of these speakers are Arnie Oskolkoff, Larry Oskolkoff, Louie Kvasnikoff, Harry Leman, Dean Kvasnikoff, Betty Porter, and Cecil Demidoff. All of these speakers are older members of the community, and all but one (Betty Porter) are male. All of the speakers are semi-speakers with more or less the same degree of competency, and display many of the same dialectal peculiarities. The exception to this uniformity is Cecil Demidoff, whose speech differs significantly from the other Ninilchik Russian speakers and whose case is discussed separately below. It is unclear whether Mr. Demidoff grew up in a different speech community (in Ninilchik or outside of it), or if there are other environmental or social reasons that may be responsible for the differences in his dialect of Alaskan Russian. Perhaps Russian was better maintained in his family and he was better able to acquire it during his childhood, or perhaps he has had contact with other Russian-speaking groups (the speaker mentions at some point that he has spoken with Old Believers). Whatever the cause of his unique idiolect, his speech merits its own discussion, which is presented in Section 4.6.2.

### **3.2 Limitations**

Before I begin my analysis of these materials, it is necessary to note several limitations in using these materials for a comprehensive account of Ninilchik Russian. The obvious limitation is that the primary goal of Bergelson's and Kibrik's research was *not* a comprehensive account of the structure and linguistic variation of NR—their goal was a lexical inventory, and so there was no real systematic testing of syntactic constructions or inflectional morphological forms.

Speakers were not asked to give complete nominal or verbal paradigms, and most of the forms that appear in the dictionary and the recordings are nouns in the nominative case, except when they are used in sentences, where some case structure seems to be preserved. Still another dilemma is verbal morphology, which is very rich in Contemporary Standard Russian but was not thoroughly elicited from the NR speakers because, again, a morphological account was not the purpose of the work. Thus, there are only a few forms of each verb that are accounted for.

There are no existing recordings of Ninilchik Russian speakers using NR to communicate with other NR speakers freely in conversation. In fact, according to Golovko (2010), Alaskan Russian is not used communicatively by its speakers—it is rather an identity marker. Speakers greet each other in Alaskan Russian, and might even inquire about their interlocutors' welfare, but the dialect's primary function is to index the speakers' common heritage. Thus, where there is unelicited speech in the NR recordings, the NR speakers are talking with researchers from Moscow, and the speakers are keenly aware that NR is different from the “correct” way that people speak in Moscow. Thus, they may be somewhat reticent about how their spoken Russian is perceived.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, there is a plenty of important information to be gleaned about the structure of NR—and the origins of this structure—from the dictionary project. I present my analysis in Section 4.

### **3.3 Transcription**

Throughout the text, Alaskan Russian words are transcribed phonetically; e.g., where there is an [a] in the transcription it may either be an unstressed /o/ or a full /a/, while an [o] in the

transcription is a stressed, unreduced /o/. Iotated vowels such as /ja/ and /je/ are indicated by the palatalization of the preceding consonant or by the glide /j/, depending on speaker pronunciation.

Certain phonological aspects of Alaskan Russian, such as vowel quality and palatalization, have changed considerably with respect to CSR, in a way that is regular enough to possibly reflect sound changes that occurred when AR was robustly spoken. However, certain other phonological differences, such as those concerning stress, are extremely erratic. While the placement of stress in Alaskan Russian has deviated from that of CSR, it does not currently pattern in a predictable way from speaker to speaker (or even within different tokens of one individual's speech). For this reason, I am excluding it from the analysis and do not mark it in this paper.

Contemporary Standard Russian words are simply transliterated into English based on their conventional spellings.

#### ***4. Features of Alaskan Russian***

##### **4.1 The Lexicon**

The most thorough information available about Alaskan Russian is, unsurprisingly, lexical. A large percentage of the Niničik Russian lexicon is equivalent to Contemporary Standard Russian (according to Bergelson & Kibrik 2010, 78% of the elicited NR words are either identical to or very closely resemble CSR). Many of these words, however, reflect certain phonological alterations that are described below. The remaining part of the lexicon contains: (1)



borrowings from native Alaskan languages and English; (2) Contemporary Standard Russian terms that have undergone semantic changes; and (3) a number of other differences worth noting.

#### 4.1.1 Remnants of Dated Russian Dialects

Ninilchik Russian, as well as the other examples of Alaskan Russian provided by Golovko (2010), contains many words that may be described as “archaic”—that is, not common in modern Russian dialects. Some examples include: *struš* ‘carpenter’s plane’, *čuhn’á* ‘Finn’, and *čihótka* ‘tuberculosis’ (from Bergelson & Kibrik 2010). In my listening of the Ninilchik Russian recordings, I have identified the following as dated lexical items: *šibka* and *hodka* ‘much’, *nužn’ik* ‘outhouse’, *kalužina* ‘puddle’, *zapasivat’* ‘save’ (as in, *an’i vsjo zapasival’i* ‘they saved everything’), and Golovko 2010 provides the following examples as well: *tamaka* ‘up there’, *tiperia* ‘now’, and *stalon’ka* ‘salt shaker’ (CSR *salonka*). Ninilchik Russian has also retained older names for Russian places, such as *Petrograd*, which speakers today use to refer to St. Petersburg (even though this name was only officially in use between 1914 and 1924).

Some other phrases likely arose during Russia’s Westernization (and were part of the dialects that would become Alaskan Russian), and have since come to have more Slavic replacements in today’s Contemporary Standard Russian. These include Germanic nautical terminology, such as the following for wind directionality: *nordvaj v’et’er* ‘northerly wind’, *sadvaj v’et’er* ‘southerly wind’, *ostvaj v’et’er* ‘easterly wind’, and *westovaj v’et’er* ‘westerly wind’ (today these would be, respectively, *severnyj*, *južnyj*, *vostočnyj*, and *zapadnyj v’et’er*). Another word is of French origin—*brazir* ‘bra’, from French *brassière* (today, the common CSR word is *lifčik*).

The presence of these forms confirms that Alaska's Russian dialect had 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian as its input, and that there has not been significant contact with Contemporary Standard Russian that might have supplanted these forms with modern equivalents. There are also a number of words that seem to originate from Siberian Russian dialects, such as *kamasi* 'moccasins' (NR recordings), *pučk'i* 'wild parsley', *iwraška* 'land squirrel', *naweska* 'garret, upstairs' (Golovko 2010). The presence of these words is historically explicable: many of the employees of the Russian-American Company—who are the likeliest forefathers of Alaskan Russian—were from Siberia and the Russian north (Black 2004: 210).

#### 4.1.2 Borrowings

Ninilchik Russian also contains some borrowings from indigenous languages, which most likely made their way into NR during the period of Russian America, in addition to many borrowings from English. Of the 1100 lexical items Bergelson and Kibrik collected, about 2% are borrowings from English, 0.5% are borrowings from Athabaskan, and another 0.5% are borrowings from Alutiiq (2010: 323-324). Examples of Athabaskan borrowings include: *kazna* 'lynx', *tajši* 'dried fish', and *k'inkašl'a* 'a type of berry' (Bergelson & Kibrik 2010: 324). Their examples of Alutiiq borrowings include such words as: *mamaj* 'clam', *kal'uk* 'chamber pot', *ukud'ik* 'bumble bee', and *n'un'ik* 'porcupine' (Bergelson & Kibrik 2010). Some other examples that occur in the NR recordings are *nušk'i* 'breasts' (from Alutiiq *mugsiiq*, see Leer 2003: 42) and *vumarak* 'a type of fried fish' (from Alutiiq *uumatak*, meaning 'boiled half-dry fish', see Leer 2003: 57). It is interesting to note that all of these native borrowings are for nouns, and mostly for flora and fauna for which the original 19th century Russian settlers may not have had

terminology. Another possible explanation for the prevalence of animal terms is that, as fur traders and hunters, the settlers would likely have spent most of their time talking to native populations about indigenous wildlife.

Most of the NR borrowings are from English, and include: *rababútsi* ‘rubber boots’, *čum* ‘chum, friend, man’, *maks’ikan*, *maks’ini* ‘Mexican, Mexicans’, *gubernant* ‘government’, *karp’in’t’er* ‘carpenter’, *stol* ‘stall (as in, horse stall)’, and *inw’ilop* ‘envelope’. There is also at least one “false friend” from English in NR—that is, an English word for which there is a word of a similar form in Russian, but with an entirely different meaning. In NR, the word *fam’ilija* is used to mean ‘family’, but the Contemporary Standard Russian meaning is actually ‘last name’.

These borrowings, like those from the indigenous languages, seem to be indicative of the spheres in which the languages of contact were used. While the indigenous languages were predominantly used to conduct trade (except, of course, in cases where natives and Russians intermarried), English was clearly used in a more informal social sphere and provided the terminology for everyday subjects of conversation, such as people and professions.

It is also important to note that while the native terms might have in some cases been for wildlife for which there were no Russian terms, these English words have come to be used for objects and concepts for which early Alaskan Russian probably did have terminology.

It is not surprising that these three languages represent the bulk of Ninilchik Russian borrowings. The Russian speaking families in the village trace their lineage to a full-blooded Alutiik woman, and many Alutiit intermarried with the creoles and Russian-American Company employees that settled in the village. English probably represents the greatest percentage of the borrowings because of all the languages that were in contact with Alaskan Russian, English was the most intrusive, and AR shows many signs of English interference. It is clear, however, that

these examples of English borrowings are, in fact, borrowings, and not code-switches (of which there are many examples, examined in Section 4.6). These words are borrowings because they take on Alaskan Russian phonology—consider the instances of palatalization in *karp'in't'er*, which do not exist in English ‘carpenter.’

#### 4.1.3 Semantic change

Russian terms in Alaskan Russian have also undergone semantic change, and are used differently than in CSR. In many cases of semantic change, the nature of the change is fairly transparent, and has to do with overgeneralization or (less prevalently) undergeneralization of meaning. What is meant by overgeneralization here is the use of a word that refers to a set of specific things to refer to some broader category that this set falls under. Some examples include the use of *makaka* ‘macaque’ to refer to monkeys in general, *čurjak* ‘worm’ (CSR *č'ervjak*) to refer to insects generally, and *ljašk'i* ‘thighs’ (in CSR, slang for the more formal *bědra*) to refer to the leg as a whole. Examples of the opposite phenomenon—restricting a the use of a general term for only a specific subset of the general meaning—include *golov-k'i* ‘head-DIM.PL’ to mean specifically ‘fish heads’ and *br'uk'i* ‘pants’ to mean specifically ‘everyday working pants’.

There are also several examples of the sort of “relexicalization” present in indigenous languages, in which a word comes to have multiple meanings that it did not originally have, on the model of English. Take, for example, English ‘beat’, which could be used to mean ‘hit’ but also ‘best, as in a game’. The word *pob'il* in NR has also come to have these two meanings. This is evidenced in (1):

- (1) *vseh*                    ***pob-il***  
 everyone                beat-MASC.PST  
 ‘(I) bested everyone.’ (lit. ‘I beat/hit everyone.’)

Another example of this type of relexicalization is on the model of the English word ‘bad’, which has a wide range of meanings that includes ‘spoiled’, as in ‘The milk has gone bad’. Ninilchik Russian has adopted this range of meanings, and uses the word *hudoj* to mean ‘misbehaving’, as in *hudaja defka* ‘(jokingly) a prostitute’, and also ‘spoiled’ as in (2):

- (2) *ja*            *dum-aju*                    *malako*            ***xudoj***  
 I            think-1SG.PRS.PRF            milk            bad  
 ‘I think the milk is spoiled.’ (lit. ‘I think the milk is bad.’)

Other semantic changes are not so clear, and are seemingly the result of confusion of words with related meanings. Consider *pr’ival*, which in CSR means ‘camp’, but has come to mean ‘school (of fish)’ in NR. Another example is *s’etka* ‘spider web’ (CSR ‘net’). These examples are numerous and are not merely restricted to animal terms; a full inventory of the example of this type of semantic shift on the Ninilchik Russian recordings is presented in Appendix 1.

The final type of explainable semantic change seems to exist to create a distinction in meaning for NR speakers. I have already mentioned the word *fam’ilija* ‘family’ (CSR *s’em’ja*). The CSR version of this word also exists in NR, but the two have distinct meanings. *Fam’ilija* is used for one’s immediate family, whereas *sem’ja* is used for the extended family or clan. NR speakers have also utilized CSR terms to create disparate words for women of different ages: *baba* ‘middle-aged woman’ (CSR ‘woman (slang)’) and *defka* ‘young woman’ (CSR ‘girl (slang)'). Another interesting example is *čalovek* ‘man’ (CSR *č’elov’ek* ‘person’). The existence

of this change has led to the innovation of a new plural *čalovek'i* ‘men’, which does not exist in CSR, where the plural of ‘person’ is, of course, *ljud'i*.

#### 4.1.4 Neologisms

The NR lexicon does not solely consist of borrowings and Russian terms that have undergone some sort of semantic change: speakers have also coined many terms and phrases completely original to Ninilchik Russian. Some of these are phrasal, and are strings of CSR lexicon: *rib'ič'ij daroga* ‘lead’ (lit. ‘fish-ADJ path’), *d'eduška kamar* ‘a particular species of large mosquitoes in Alaska’ (lit. ‘grandpa mosquito’), *bat'ik'ina sopl'i* ‘snot berries’ (lit. ‘pop’s snot’), *golubeja br'uk'i* ‘jeans’ (lit. ‘blue pants’). Others are of unknown origin or innovations with no obvious etymology: *na giškom* ‘naked’, *kužak* ‘snow on branches’.

However, most of the innovations in NR are simply morphological modifications of existing roots. One common strategy in NR lexical innovation is the suffixation of a diminutive morpheme: *svin'-ok* ‘piglet’ (lit. ‘pig-DIM’, or ‘little pig’), *r'eč-uška* ‘creek’ (lit. ‘river-dim’ or ‘little river’). The diminutive suffix is also used to create nominalizations of existing verbs: *ači-ška* ‘eggshell’ (from CSR *čist'it* ‘to peel’), *ad'iwa-ška* ‘clothing’ (from CSR *od'evat* ‘to wear’), and *nad'ivaška* ‘slippers’ (from CSR *nad'evat* ‘to put on’). Other non-diminutive nominal suffixes are employed as well: *pl'is-un* ‘dancer’ (from CSR *pl'isat*), *vyrva-ta* ‘vomit’ (from CSR *vyrvat* ‘to vomit’), *sa-ka* ‘urine’ (from CSR *ssat* ‘to piss (vulgar)’).

#### 4.1.5 Calquing

Bergelson and Kibrik recorded several calques in their collection of dictionary data. The ones I identified from their recordings are: *žopa-dira* ‘ass-hole’, *novaja luna* ‘new moon’ (CSR *novalun’ije*), *palav’ina s’istra* ‘half-NOM sister’ (CSR *svodnaja s’estra*), *mast’er ribak* ‘master fisherman’, and *mal’enkoj/bol’šoj k’išok* ‘small/large intestine’ (CSR *tonkij/tolstyj kishok*).

#### 4.1.6 Lexical loss

There has been some loss of terminology, some of it unsurprising. Ninilchik Russian speakers do not typically provide formal, medical terms when asked about body parts, and supply instead informal, slang variants, such as *bruha* ‘stomach’ instead of the more formal *život*. However, there is also unexpected loss of core vocabulary in NR. For example, there is no term for ‘cousin’ and when asked, the speaker could not provide a term for ‘nephew’ and did not recognize the CSR term *pl’emjann’ik*.

While the more scientific terminology for body parts might not have been known or used by the Russian settlers in Alaska (which is somewhat improbable), it is *certainly* unlikely that the same is true of words for close family members. This is especially implausible given that most of the original residents of Ninilchik were Russian-American Company retirees and their families, whose descendants still consider family ties very important. Curiously, this counterintuitive loss of kinship terminology is attested in other languages undergoing attrition, such as Montana Salish. Like speakers of Alaskan Russian, speakers of Montana Salish have mostly shifted to English, and their once elaborate system of kinship terminology has been reduced to resemble the much simpler English model (Thomason 2007: 3). Given that the loss of NR kinship terms has also occurred in those cases where an equivalent does not exist in English (in CSR, ‘cousin’

can have two variants depending on the individual's gender—*dvojurodnyj brat* ‘male cousin (lit. brother once-removed)’ and *dvojurodnaja s’estra* ‘female cousin (lit. sister once-removed)’), the Montana Salish explanation may also be applied here, and this loss is likely due to attrition.

This is one of the first examples of attrition that we have seen so far, but attrition due to the prevalence of English plays a large role in accounting for much of the linguistic variation I discuss in later sections of this paper.

## 4.2 Phonology

A detailed account of the phonology of Alaskan Russian is given in Bergelson & Kibrik (2010). For our purposes, I summarize their findings here and discuss in greater detail my own additional findings.

### 4.2.1 General summary

Most of the phonemes of Ninilchik Russian coincide with those of Contemporary Standard Russian. The phonetic quality of vowel phonemes has not undergone major changes, and NR vowels have many of the same phonological patterns as Russian. For example, NR exhibits the same patterns of reduction of unstressed vowels—phonemes /e/ and /o/ do not typically appear in unstressed syllables unless the speaker is enunciating (Bergelson & Kibrik 2010). However, the degree of difference between stressed and unstressed vowels is less significant than in CSR, and there is substantial variation among speakers in unstressed vowel quality—unstressed /u/, /o/, and /a/ appear in the same positions in the same words for different speakers. Bergelson and



Kibrik give the example of [mál'in'kaj], [mál'in'koj], and [mál'in'kuj] ‘little, small’, where different speakers produced different vowels in the same word. Their proffered explanation for this phenomenon is the variability of the original 19th century dialects, and the presence of speakers of other Slavic languages such as Polish. However, given the small speaker sample, the rarity with which they speak Russian, and high levels of attrition, at least some of these variations are probably idiolectal. In the NR recordings, speakers themselves sometimes oscillate between different pronunciations, lending credence to the claim that they have forgotten much of the language.

Ninilchik Russian’s consonantal phonemes are also very similar to their original Russian input, but there are several differences worth noting. The Contemporary Standard Russian velar fricative /x/ has, for some speakers, been replaced with the more English-sounding glottal fricative /h/. Similarly, the Russian trill /r/ has become the English alveolar approximant /ɹ/ for a number of speakers. Most, if not all, of the speakers of NR also have an additional phoneme that does not exist in Russian: /w/.

Another important distinction is the behavior of palatalization. Ninilchik Russian displays numerous departures from Contemporary Standard Russian in this respect. Before /e/, dental stops, nasals, and laterals are palatalized, but all other consonants are necessarily not. This allows for non-Russian sounding strings such as *rečka* ‘river’ (CSR *r'ečka*). Also unusually, all consonants except for /l/ are palatalized before /i/, allowing for such words as *r'iba* ‘fish’ (CSR *ryba*), *m'išonak* ‘mouse-DIM’ (CSR *myšonak*), and *puz'ir* ‘bubble’ (CSR *puzyr*). This final example also illustrates another aberration in palatalization—loss of palatalization of word-final labials, gutturals, and /r/, yielding examples like *tsep* ‘chain’ (CSR *tsep*). All other consonants may still be palatalized word-finally in Alaskan Russian.

These changes have resulted in the dephonemicization of palatalization in NR. CSR hard and soft consonants are in contrastive distribution; in NR, the distribution of these consonants seems to have become fairly predictable (that is, allophonic), at least for the contexts described above.

An interesting type of palatalization has arisen because of the loss of the CSR phoneme /y/ in NR. NR has retained /y/ after /l/, where both /i/ and /y/ are still in contrastive distribution (in the NR transcriptions this distinction is represented as [C<sup>ˈ</sup>i] and [Ci]). Elsewhere the tendency of speakers is to produce [i] with a preceding palatalized consonant. In a number of cases, this tendency has given rise to a new type of palatalization that resembles Slavic First Palatalization, where stops and fricatives become /ž/ before the vowel /i/. Thus we have such changes as [v<sup>ˈ</sup>id<sup>ˈ</sup>it] > [vižit] ‘he/she sees’, [muz<sup>ˈ</sup>ikan<sup>ˈ</sup>its] > [mužitkan<sup>ˈ</sup>its] ‘musician’, and [puz<sup>ˈ</sup>ir] > [pužitir] ‘bubble’ (which seems to be in free variation with the above-mentioned *puz<sup>ˈ</sup>ir*). Alternatively, this change may be a kind of iotation, where speakers are reinterpreting /i/ as /ji/. This certainly would explain the last example, which contains a common Slavic change whereby [zj] > [ž]. If this is the case, the change in [muz<sup>ˈ</sup>ikan<sup>ˈ</sup>its] would have had the following trajectory [muz<sup>ˈ</sup>ikan<sup>ˈ</sup>its] > [muzjikan<sup>ˈ</sup>its] > [mužitkan<sup>ˈ</sup>its].

It should be noted, however, that the degree of palatalization varies. Thus in some of these cases, where the consonants have been declared “hard,” speakers are, in fact, producing some palatalization—but it is much less pronounced than it is in Contemporary Standard Russian. Furthermore, these rules are just generalizations—some speakers, for reasons that may need to be examined on a case-by-case basis, display characteristics that are closer to Contemporary Standard Russian than others.

#### 4.2.2 v/w alternation

NR has developed a labio-velar glide /w/ (see Section 4.2.1). This glide is somewhat substitutable for /v/, and the NR corpus has numerous examples of this phonological change: *t'i wid'eš* 'you.SG see' (CSR *v'id'eš*), *al'hown'ik* 'alder' (CSR *ol'xovn'ik*), *wy horošyje* 'you (formal) are kind' (CSR *vy xorošyje*), to name a few. One tempting explanation for this phenomenon is that the glide has entered Ninilchik Russian due to English influence; however, this is most likely not the correct explanation, because English not only contains both /v/ and /w/, but they are fully fledged phonemes in their own right (i.e., not allophones). Bergelson & Kibrik (2010) describe what they call a "Ninilchik accent," where Ninilchik speakers display this confusion in English too, saying such things as 'Willage News' instead of 'Village News.' This alternation in Russian also exists for other Alaskan Russian speakers that are not from Ninilchik (Golovko 2010). In fact, the Ninilchik accent may itself be due to some sort of external influence. Golovko (2010) proposes that this influence is Alutiiq, as Alutiiq has a /w/ phoneme but not /v/. Bergelson and Kibrik (2010) also list Aleut as a possible influence.

Despite the assertion in Golovko (2010) that the Russian /v/ is always realized as /w/, this is not actually the case—in the NR recordings, there is enormous variation among speakers in this regard. There is also at least one case where /v/ is *never* realized as /w/—this is the preposition *v* 'in/to'. Consider example (4):

- (4) *an'i r'ib-u v bank'i zakriw-aj-ut*  
 they fish-ACC in jars close-PRF-3PL  
 'They are sealing the fish in jars.'

This speaker clearly has *v/w* confusion (c.f. CSR *zakryvajut*), but nevertheless uses /v/ for the preposition. Perhaps this is just an especially salient word-form in NR and has been frozen in its original phonology, or perhaps there is some regular distribution of the two phonemes. Whatever the case, this is a matter that requires further research before a definitive conclusion may be reached.

#### 4.2.3 Simplification

There are some patterns of phonological simplification among NR speakers that seem to be motivated by a desire to shorten complex words (that is, words with many syllables). Some of these involve the deletion of whole syllables at a time: CSR *šipovn'ik* → NR *šipn'ik* ‘briar rose’; CSR *promyšl'enn'ik* → NR *promušn'ik*. In other cases this is accomplished by vowel deletion: CSR *perevodčik* → NR *pl'ivodčik* ‘translator’, CSR *govor'at* ‘(they) say’ → NR *govrut*. In the case of *govrut*, speakers seem to be choosing a simpler inflection that is available elsewhere in the language, overgeneralizing the a-stem 3PL ending *-ut*.

There is also occasionally a tendency to simplify word-final consonant clusters, such as /br'/, which appears in the words for some of the months of the year. Thus, CSR *s'ent'abr'* ‘September’ becomes *sjentjap*, CSR *nojabr'* ‘November’ becomes *nojap*. The change from [b] to [p] in word-final position in both words is not unusual—word-final devoicing of voiced Cs is normal in CSR.

### 4.3 Word formation

There have been many idiosyncratic changes to derivational morphology in Ninilchik Russian, most of them sporadic and without any discernible pattern. These changes always correctly yield the desired part of speech, but they often do so with an unexpected affix. There were at least two cases in the Ninilchik recordings where the nominal ending *-n'ik* was used unexpectedly: *naž-n'ik* ‘sheath’ (likely originally from CSR *nož* ‘knife’) and *sklad-n'ik* ‘pocket knife’ (from CSR *skladyvat* ‘to fold’). These are not quite innovations, but are unusually-formed nouns, for which similar forms exist in Russian: *nažn'ik* is comparable to CSR *nožny* ‘sheath’, while *skladn'ik* is similar to CSR *skladnoj nož* ‘pocket knife’ (lit. ‘foldable knife’).

#### 4.3.1 Nominal and adjectival allomorphy

The other derived forms that exhibit irregularities are not quite so semantically motivated, and are instead minor alterations to the expected form of the word through the affixation of the correct morpheme, but an incorrect allomorph (due either to a phonological oversight or the use of a form that corresponds to an undesired case). These sorts of patterns occur in (and are not restricted to) masculine adjectives and plural nouns.

The most common endings found in originally masculine, “long” adjectives (that is, adjectives used attributively) are: *-aj*, *-yj*, and *-oj*. *-aj* is an interesting innovation in Alaskan Russian that will be discussed in Section 4.4.1—it is essentially a default adjectival suffix (a blend of masculine *-Vj* and feminine *-aja*). *-yj* usually appears in word forms where it is expected: *b'izumnyj* ‘crazy’ (CSR *b'ezumnyj*), *babrovyj* ‘beaver (adj.)’ (the same in CSR). *-oj* is also present in some expected cases: *bal'noj* ‘sick’, *bal'soj* ‘large’. But it is also frequently affixed in cases where *-ij* and *-yj* are expected: *mal'enkoj* ‘small’ (CSR *mal'en'kij*), *pjanoj*

‘drunk’ (CSR *pjanyj*). Furthermore, the affixation of *-oj* where it *is* expected is also fairly robust in NR, and it is never replaced by the innovative adjectival suffix *-aj*. So while there are forms like *galodnaj* ‘hungry’ (CSR *golodnyj*), *garbataj* ‘humpbacked’ (CSR *gorbatyj*), and *d’ikaj* ‘wild’ (CSR *d’ikij*), the suffixes in *daragoj* ‘expensive’, *galuboj* ‘blue’, and *ftaroj* ‘second’ remain unchanged from their Contemporary Standard Russian variants.

Reinterpretation of the extensive nominal inflectional morphology of Contemporary Standard Russian is the likeliest explanation for the unusual plural morphemes that appear in some Ninilchik Russian words. Nominal endings in Russian are selected on the basis of declension class, gender, number, and case, and it is not surprising that Ninilchik semi-speakers tend to simplify and overgeneralize endings within this complicated system. Provided that speakers are aiming to provide the citation forms of nouns, the result is the following unusual nominative plurals: *uglja* ‘coals’ (CSR *ugl’i*) and *kostja* ‘bones’ (CSR *kost’i*), *walasa* ‘hairs’ (CSR *volosy*), and others. There is also a regularization of some plurals, such as *syny* ‘sons’ (CSR *synovja*) and *kamenja* ‘rocks’ (CSR *kamn’i*).

#### 4.3.2 Exuberant use of diminutives

The most regular of the unique derivational features of Ninilchik Russian is speakers’ tendency to overuse diminutives. We have already seen an innovative use of diminutives in Section 1.1.4, where they are used to express new concepts. However, NR speakers also use diminutives in places where they are not semantically required—that is, where they are not required to specify that something is small and are not being used as a term of endearment. Speakers simply show a preference for diminutive forms instead of basic nominative forms of the noun: *ako-ška*

‘window-DIM’ for *okno*, *kaš-ka* ‘millet-DIM’ for *kasha*, *kot’-ik* ‘cat-DIM’ for *kot*, *golaf-ka* ‘head-DIM’ for *golova*, *kalen-ka* ‘knee-DIM’ for *kal’eno*, and many more.

What is prompting speakers to exuberantly use diminutive suffixation? One possible explanation is that this is symptomatic of language attrition: according to the “regression hypothesis” put forth by Jakobson (1941) (discussed in Keijzer 2010), the process of language decay is the reverse of language acquisition, or more simply, features that develop late in childhood are lost quickly while those that develop early on are retained better. Thus, diminutives, which are frequently used with children, are some of the earliest morphological patterns they acquire, and would therefore be one of the patterns they retain successfully in adulthood, in the face of decay. Another possible explanation is that the NR speakers never mastered the non-diminutive variants of these words, which could be due to a lack of formal education in the Russian language. Today’s NR speakers likely learned Russian at home when they were children, with whom adults frequently overuse diminutives, and may never have even acquired the regular forms.

Another explanation argues in favor of simplification (which may or may not be due to attrition): words with diminutives regularly have stress on the penultimate syllable, and through diminution speakers are also able to restrict the number of nominal inflectional paradigms with which they must be familiar, as there is a limited number of diminutive endings compared to the endings possible in the entirety of the language.

#### **4.4 Inflectional morphology**

A morphosyntactic account of NR is necessarily limited at this stage, since much of the available data from speakers is of nouns in their nominative forms. Nevertheless the available data indicate that there has been a definite breakdown of inflectional morphology, and loss in the grammatical categories of gender and case.

#### 4.4.1 Gender

It is difficult to determine the exact nature of the changes to gender that are clearly present in Ninilchik Russian, but they undoubtedly exist—decay in grammatical gender in Ninilchik Russian was observed by Conor Daly in the 1980s (see Daly 1985, 1986), and it is likely that it has only intensified since then. There is ample evidence of non-standard gender agreement between nouns and their modifying adjectives (in particular, many cases of feminine or neuter nouns being modified by masculine adjectives), but this loss is not complete; that is, there are still cases where feminine adjectives surface and agree with nouns that are feminine in CSR, showing that speakers, at least early on, retained the category of grammatical gender in their language. Thus, we have cases of nonstandard agreement, as in the following:

- (5) a.    *moj*            *ako-ška*            *t'ist-aj*<sup>2</sup>  
          my.MASC    window-DIM.NEUT<sup>3</sup>    clean-MASC  
          ‘My window is clean.’
- b.    *moj*            *sabaka*  
          my.MASC    dog.FEM  
          ‘my dog’

<sup>2</sup> A common phonetic change in NR is [č] > [tʰ] / \_i, so this word corresponds to CSR *čistyj* ‘clean-MASC’.

<sup>3</sup> As I discuss later in this section, the neuter has almost completely disappeared from Ninilchik Russian, and has been reanalyzed in a number of interesting ways. The case presented in (5b) is especially intriguing because the neuter noun looks like a feminine noun (with ending [a]), but is nevertheless interpreted as masculine, suggesting that there is a greater proclivity for masculine agreement.



but also (albeit much rarer) cases where agreement is standard:

- (6) a. *bol'sh-aja*      *d'ift'onka*  
           big-FEM            girl.FEM  
           'big girl'
- b. *ana*                *zabawn-aja*  
           3SG.PRO.FEM    cute-FEM  
           'She is cute.'

In some cases, speakers allow for one word to have both masculine and feminine agreement: when asked, speakers attested that both *moj dočka* (my-MASC daughter) and *moja dočka* (my-FEM daughter), and similarly *durnaja baba* (dumb-FEM woman) and *durnoj baba* (dumb-MASC woman), are acceptable. These two cases are especially interesting because they are places where the feminine gender should be especially salient, since the modified nouns also have natural (female) gender. This seems to suggest that the loss of gender in Ninilchik Russian is such a powerful change that even natural gender does not protect nouns from being generalized as masculine.

The assertion that gender has become unstable in NR is further underscored by the fact that speakers sometimes give contradictory agreement for the same noun in the same utterance:

- (7) *et-a*                *sabaka*                *haroš-aj*  
       this-FEM            dog.FEM                good-MASC  
       'This dog is good.'

Note that *sabaka*, which is a feminine noun is CSR, simultaneously takes both feminine and masculine adjectives. Thus, whatever changes to grammatical gender are occurring in NR, they have clearly not stabilized.

Other examples suggest that, in addition to a gradual loss of grammatical gender, some nouns have undergone changes to their gender. As is evidenced by the examples in the preceding paragraph, loss of gender seems to converge on default masculine inflection—the presence of a feminine form is highly marked. It is reasonable to posit, therefore, that in cases where a noun that is ostensibly masculine is being modified by a feminine adjectival form, the feminine form is intended and this noun may actually have undergone a change in grammatical gender. Consider the following:

- (8)     *odna*            *nokat'*  
           one.FEM        nail-MASC  
           ‘one nail’

Sometimes this change in gender is reflected on the noun itself, as in the following case:

- (9)     *et-a*            *hleb-a*        *haroš-aj*        (CSR *xl'eb*)  
           this-FEM        bread-FEM        good-FEM  
           ‘This bread is good.’

This final example also contains the “default” adjectival ending mentioned above: *-aj*, which frequently replaces *-yj* and *-ij* (and in very rare cases, *-oj*). It is unclear where this innovation comes from; it may be an amalgamation of the traditional masculine and feminine adjectival endings, and speakers default to it when they are unsure of agreement. This would be a typologically unusual linguistic change, but a better explanation is unavailable at present. One could, perhaps, argue that all the masculine unstressed adjectival endings had been generalized to *-aj*, so that for cases where speakers still retain feminine gender, they merely suffix *-a*, resulting in the standard feminine adjectival ending *-aja*. However, if one assumes that the affixation of

the feminine marker *-a* occurs *after* the change of unstressed Vs to /a/, this would result in such forms as *bol'sh-oj-a* 'big-FEM', which we know do not occur because of the existence of *bol'sh-aja*, which is attested in example (6a). Furthermore, an *i, y > a* change is not attested anywhere else in Ninilchik Russian. Thus, the change of *-Vj* to *-aj* is likely the result of the creation of a new suffix that does not affect *-oj* because it is protected against the change by its stress, and is therefore more salient to NR speakers.

At least one change to grammatical gender in NR is certain: the neuter has been almost completely lost (Bergelson & Kibrik 2010, confirmed by their NR recordings). Unlike in the case of masculine and feminine gender, where speakers maintain a distinction especially in cases of biological gender, the loss of the neuter extends to NR's pronominal system. The distribution of *on* 'he' (or the masculine singular 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun) and *ona* 'she' (the feminine singular 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun) is not the same as it is in Contemporary Standard Russian, where it is used for human nouns but also for inanimate nouns with the corresponding grammatical gender. *On* and *ona* exist in Ninilchik Russian as well, but are restricted in usage to human nouns, as in example (10):

- (10) *on*                                    *mne*                                    *skaz-al*                                    *pro*    *t'eb'e*  
 3SG.MASC.PRO.NOM    1SG.PRO.DAT    tell-PST.3SG.MASC    about    2SG.PRO.DAT  
 'He told me about you.'

Overlooking the irregularities in case and the more informal (though common) choice of preposition, the speaker substituted the expected masculine pronoun for a human male subject. *On/ona* 'he/she' can also be used for animals when one specifically wants to call attention to the animal's sex. Otherwise, all non-human nouns are not regarded as gendered by the speakers. NR speakers also no longer use *ono* (3SG.NEUT.NOM.PRO), which has no obvious conceptual

equivalent in natural gender. In fact, *ono*, which is low frequency in CSR, seems to have completely disappeared from NR. Rather than employing any of these available personal pronouns, speakers instead opt for various incarnations of the demonstratives *eto* (3SG.DEM.NEUT.NOM), *eta* (3SG.DEM.FEM.NOM), and *etot* (3SG.DEM.MASC.NOM) whenever they mean to refer to something inanimate. For example, a speaker produced the following pronominal expressions when referring to *malako* ‘milk-MASC’.

- (11) a. *ja zab-ula pro et-o*  
 I forget-PST.3SG.FEM about this-NEUT  
 ‘I forgot it (the milk).’
- b. *ja bud-u jest‘ kaš-ku s et-im*  
 I be-FUT.1.SG eat-INF porridge-DIM with this-MASC/NEUT.INST  
 ‘I’m going to eat porridge with it (milk).’

This same sort of construction extends to plural nouns. (12a) gives an example of how Ninilchik Russian deals with pronominalization of human plurals, while the non-gendered counterpart is in (12b):

- (12) a. *in’i malenk-ije*  
 3PL.PRO small-PL  
 ‘They (people) are small.’
- b. *et’-i malenk-ije*  
 this-PL small-PL  
 ‘They (the chairs) are small.’

In (12a), the pronoun used for the human plural is a phonetic variation of the expected *on’i* (3SG.MASC.NOM.PRO), here expressed as [in’i]. In (12b), in place of the same expected pronoun,

the speaker instead uses the demonstrative *et'i* (3PL.NOM.DEM) because the antecedent is inanimate.

It is clear that the current gender system in NR exists in a very reduced form, but it is not clear how much of this reduction is due to change within the language or due to the fact that the only remaining speakers of the language are semi-speakers, who have forgotten much of it or may have never fully acquired it to begin with. Bergelson and Kibrik (2010) argue that while the current system does show signs of attrition, the loss of gender as a grammatical category is not a recent phenomenon in Ninilchik Russian, and existed even when there were proficient speakers of the dialect. There is at least one documented early Alaskan Russian phrase that has non-standard gender agreement: *melk'ij sol'* 'fine salt' (*sol'* is feminine, in CSR so we would actually expect *m'elkaja sol'*) (Krauss 1996). There are also a number of present collocations where the non-standard agreement is probably not new, such as *marskoj čajka* 'skate' (lit. 'sea-MASC seagull-FEM') (Bergelson & Kibrik 2010). This expression most likely functions as a unit, and was coined when changes to grammatical gender were already underway. Bergelson and Kibrik argue that the time this phrase was coined would likely have been early on, around the time of the founding of Ninilchik, when settlers would have been discovering wildlife.

Given the contact situation in Russian America, it is certainly possible that gender change is not a recent innovation. One of the possible sources of this change is Aleut, whose speakers were in extensive contact with the Russians. Aleut does not have gender as a grammatical category, even for animate or human nouns (Veniaminov 1834). Another possible source is Alutiiq, which has a case system but no grammatical gender (Leer 1990).

However, in arguing that the loss of gender is an early change dating to the period I describe in section 2.1, Bergelson and Kibrik (2010) seem to discount the possibility that contact

with English (where grammatical gender no longer exists) has also contributed to this change. Given that, since Americanization, English has supplanted Russian as Ninilchik speakers' primary language, it is highly unlikely that the influence of English has not served to expedite loss of grammatical gender in NR.

#### 4.4.2 Case and use of prepositions

Like gender, case is not a stable category in Ninilchik Russian. There are many recorded instances of speakers utilizing some case that is not the nominative, at times standardly and at other times non-standardly. The most commonly encountered loss of case is in the quantifier-noun construction. In general, in Contemporary Standard Russian, plural quantifiers and numerals ending in 5 and higher take plural nouns in the genitive case:

- (13) Contemporary Standard Russian  
*mnogo slov-∅*  
 many word-GEN.PL  
 'many words'

In NR, however, the nouns often appear in the nominative case, and at times in their singular form and at times in the plural; (a more expanded list appears in Appendix 2):

- (14) Ninilchik Russian  
 a. *mnoga babr'-i*  
 many beaver-NOM.PL  
 'many beavers'  
 b. *pjat' pal'ets-∅*  
 five finger-NOM.SG  
 'five fingers'

Yet other examples show that the standard cases have not totally disappeared, and that speakers do not always default to the nominative case (which we might expect) when they use non-standard case constructions. Consider the following examples with the preposition *na* ‘on’, which takes the prepositional case in CSR:

- (15) a. *ja na et-u stul-ch'ik-u<sup>4</sup> siž-u*  
 I on this-FEM.ACC.SG chair-DIM.MASC-DAT.SG sit-1SG.PRS  
 ‘I am sitting on this chair.’
- b. *ja na et-u koj-k-i liž-u*  
 I on this-FEM.ACC.SG cot-FEM.GEN.SG lie-1SG.PRS  
 ‘I am lying on this cot.’

Neither of these examples uses the expected prepositional case; furthermore, these sentences, which are taken from the same speaker, show a discrepancy in case choice for the same prepositional construction: *stulch'ik* (chair-NOM) is realized as dative *stulch'iku* in (15a) and *kojka* (cot-NOM) is realized as genitive *kojk'i* in (15b).

This instability of case also extends to pronominal inflection. Possession in CSR is often expressed with the following prepositional expression: *u + X-genitive (+ est)* ‘X has’. In some utterances, the standard case is preserved, but frequently speakers use the dative in place of the genitive, as in (16):

- (16) a. *u mne hud-oj sp'ina*  
 by 1SG.DAT.PRO bad-MASC back.FEM  
 ‘I have a bad back.’

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that this noun form is actually the feminine accusative singular, and that the original nominative singular form is feminine *stulch'ika*. Regardless of which analysis one may prefer, these examples nevertheless illustrate the absence of the prepositional case after *na* in NR.

- b.     *mne*                 *vreme* *n'etu*  
           1SG.DAT.PRO   time    NEG  
           'I have no time.'

(16b) also shows elision of the preposition in the same type of *u* + *X-genitive* construction that is in (16a). One possible explanation for this example is that there is interference from CSR expressions such as *mne n'ekogda*, which is also used to mean that the speaker is in a hurry but standardly requires the dative 1<sup>st</sup>-person pronoun *mne*, without a preposition. It is also possible that because of such expressions (which are used to express a state, such as *mne xolodno* 'I am cold' or *mne nužno* 'I am in need of..'), the dative case has come to be a kind of catch-all, oblique case that appears in sentences where there is no overt verb.

This explanation is sufficient for the examples in (16), but if such a change has occurred it has not been universal. Consider (17), where a speaker of NR handles an expression like *mne xolodno* in a non-standard way:

- (17) *m'inja*            *n'e*    *pav'izlo*  
        1SG.GEN.PRO   NEG   was.lucky  
        'I didn't get lucky.'

Here, where we expect the dative pronoun *mne*, we instead see the genitive pronoun *m'inja* (a variant of CSR *m'enja*), which suggests that there is simply confusion of the dative and genitive cases, or that they have become interchangeable for these types of constructions.

Despite the inconsistent way that cases are used, the presence of these different case forms reveals that at least at some point, Niničik Russian had a fairly developed case system that has since undergone attrition. Unlike in gender, however, case has probably only recently begun to decay, after Niničik speakers shifted to English. Language shift and English contact



are the best explanations for decay in the case system because the indigenous languages with which Russian was in contact all have elaborate case systems (for Aleut see Veniaminov 1834, for Alutiiq see Leer 1990), and it is unlikely that they would have triggered this loss of case morphology.

## **4.5 Syntax**

In addition to the changes to case and gender morphology that are discussed above, there are other elements of morphosyntax that differentiate Ninilchik Russian from Contemporary Standard Russian. In this section I focus primarily on word order and other elements of syntax.

The syntax of Ninilchik Russian is predominantly the same as Contemporary Standard Russian. In constructions where case morphology is relatively robust, NR maintains a variable word order, and speakers are usually able to maintain standard subject-verb agreement. Nevertheless there are some unusual features, which are discussed in the following sections.

### *4.5.1 Word order*

In CSR, SVO is generally considered to be the unmarked word order, but Russian's elaborate case morphology allows for variety in word order, where the position of a noun in a sentence is not related to its grammatical role but rather to information structure. This variability in word order is maintained in Ninilchik Russian, as is evidenced by the following example, where the word order is somewhat marked (SOV):

- (18) *ja em-u knig-u da-la*  
 I he-DAT book-ACC give-PST.SG.FEM  
 ‘I gave him the book.’

#### 4.5.2 Sentences formed on the model of English

The NR dictionary recordings contain a number of interesting examples of sentences that in some way violate CSR syntactic rules. Example (19) contains a sentence that would be considered distinctly malformed in CSR. Examples (20-21) are grammatically correct but not quite idiomatic in CSR. The common thread in all of these cases is that the sentences appear to be based on English constructions.

Consider the following example of negation in NR as compared to the CSR and English versions:

- (19) a. Contemporary Standard Russian  
*ja nikogda tak ne del-al*  
 I never so NEG do-PST.3SG.MASC
- b. Nihilchik Russian  
*ja nikogda tak del-al*  
 I never so do-PST.3SG.MASC  
 ‘I never did that.’

Both in English and NR, there is no negation of the verb; in CSR, however, the verbal negation is vital for the sentence to be understood. In general, negative concord is required in modern Russian syntax and is a very salient feature of the grammar, much like the stressed adjectival suffix *-oj* is a salient phonological feature. Unlike *-oj*, where the salient stress of the morpheme preserves it as the language changes (to the exclusion of unstressed variants), the salience of negative concord fails to shield it from being lost, just as the salience of biological gender in

examples like *moj doč'* (my-MASC daughter-FEM) does not keep them from losing grammatical gender as the language undergoes attrition. Thus it is likely that, as in the case of *moj doč'*, the loss of negative concord is due to attrition rather than historical change.

The following example illustrates a similarly marked phenomenon that is present in NR:

- (20) a. Contemporary Standard Russian  
*mne da-li desjat' tsen-tov čtoby kup-it'*  
 1SG.DAT give-PST.PL ten cent-GEN.PL in.order.to buy-INF  
*nam konfet-Ø*  
 1PL.DAT candy-GEN.PL
- b. Nihilchik Russian  
*mne da-li ten cents kup-it' nam candy*  
 1SG.DAT give-PST.PL buy-INF 1PL.DAT  
 '[They] gave me ten cents to buy us candy.'

In (20), the NR sentence is again missing an element that is crucial in CSR, the subordinator *čtoby* 'in order to', which must precede the verb. In English, the infinitive verb can be used to indicate a purpose ('to buy' can mean 'in order to buy'), but in Contemporary Standard Russian, the infinitive cannot be used this way. Therefore this is yet another NR sentence that is modeled on English syntax.

In the next example, consider the odd verb choice in the Nihilchik Russian sentence:

- (21) a. Contemporary Standard Russian  
*ja poš-ěl rybač-it' so svoim tovarišč-em*  
 I go-MASC.SG.PST fish-INF with my acquaintance-INST
- b. Nihilchik Russian  
*ja uš-ol rybač-it' so svoim tavarišč-am*  
 I leave- MASC.SG.PST fish-INF with my acquaintance-INST  
 'I've gone (left) to fish with my acquaintance.'

The use of the verb *uĵt'i* (leave-INF) in (21b) would be peculiar in CSR, where the verb may take a PP or nothing at all, but not a CP. For example, it is grammatical in CSR to say *ja ušol<sub>PP</sub>[iz magaz'ina]* 'I left<sub>PP</sub>[from the store]', but it is somewhat unnatural to say *ja ušol<sub>CP</sub>[kupit'/pokupat' produkty]* 'I left<sub>CP</sub>[to buy groceries]' unless it is introduced by a subordinating conjunction such as *tol'ko* 'just as' or *kogda* 'when'. It is acceptable in CSR to say *tol'ko ja ušël rybačit kak...* 'just as I left.to go fishing... (something happened)', but without the use of *tol'ko* the expression in (21b) is not quite idiomatic. In English, however, both sentences sound well-formed, and it is likely that the speaker is basing his NR sentence on his understanding of the appropriate English uses of this particular verb.

It is important to note that in all of these examples, the speakers were *not* asked to provide a translation of an English sentence, where these sorts of direct translations are always a possibility. All of these examples were freely uttered by the language consultants, in the course of telling a story or providing a sentence to illustrate how a particular lexical item is used. Thus, these are samples of the actual speech of the consultants, and are linguistically significant.

#### **4.6 Code-switching**

In Section 4.5.2, we saw one type of English interference in NR, in which speakers produce Russian sentences that are clearly being modeled on English syntax. While English may not have initially been a major source of change in Alaskan Russian, it is clear that English has significantly contributed to the attrition of Alaskan Russian, and it is likely that English is also responsible for some of the features described above, such as the changes to case morphology. Another of the many reasons not to deemphasize the role of English is the rampant code

switching done by the speakers whenever they try to speak in full Russian sentences. NR speakers displayed two of the different types of code-switching that are proposed in Muysken 2000: alternation between languages, and insertion of one language's lexical material into the grammatical framework of another language.

#### 4.6.1 Alternation

For most of the language consultants, code-switching was restricted to alternation between whole words or constituents. In some cases, the switch is brought on when speakers do not know the name of a particular thing in Russian, as in the following: *pot*<sup>5</sup> *zd'elana iz cotton* 'the container is made of cotton', *tut mnogo starfish* 'there are a lot of starfish here', and *last names nebil'i* 'there weren't last names'. (That there is no word for 'last name' is unsurprising; recall that the Contemporary Standard Russian term for 'last name', *familija*, has come to mean 'family' in NR.)

In other cases, the speakers code-switch when they wish to elaborate on certain concepts, where it is likely easier to express their thoughts in English:

(22) only thing *huda bi-lo sadok* belongs to the company  
               bad be-PST.NTR trap  
               'The only bad thing was the trap belongs to the company.'

(23) *pol-i eto more than one*  
        floor-nom.pl this  
        'Floors—that's more than one.'

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<sup>5</sup> *Pot* is a Niničchik innovation, meaning a container of some sort (not to be confused with CSR *pot* 'sweat', which also exists in NR).

In (22) and (23), the vocabulary in the English alternations is likely not the cause of the code-switch as it is in *tut mnogo starfish*—the speaker in (23) most likely knows the lexical Russian equivalents for both ‘more’ and ‘one’, but may be unfamiliar with the phraseology required to express the concept ‘more than one’. In these cases, therefore, the problem is not the lexicon, but probably the relevant syntax and morphology necessary to use that vocabulary in these sentences.

#### 4.6.2 Word-internal insertion

All of the insertion that is present in NR is word-internal—that is, the lexical material of English is inserted into the grammatical frame of Russian and receives Russian inflectional marking. Insertion is exhibited by only a single Niničik Russian speaker, who also exhibits alternation like the speakers in 4.6.1. In contrast to (22)-(23), however, Cecil’s code-switching seems to be entirely motivated by gaps in lexical knowledge, and much of his case morphology is intact:

(24) *evonaj* grandpa      *im-el*      *lavk-u*      *v*      village-*e*  
 his                      have-MASC.SG store-ACC      in      village-PREP  
 ‘His grandpa had a store in the village.’

(25) *an’i*    *et-om*      pitchfork-*am*  
 they    this-INST      pitchfork-INST  
 ‘they...with this pitchfork’

It is possible to argue that these are not instances of code-switches, but rather further examples of borrowings from English. However, the English words in (24) and (25) differ significantly from the borrowings described above in their phonology. The words that I have labeled as English

borrowings have Ninilchik Russian phonology; the words in (23) and (24) are pronounced in exactly the same way they are in English. Since Ninilchik Russian clearly phonologically tailors its borrowings, it is far more likely that these are code-switches than borrowings that have somehow retained English phonology.

## ***5. Classification of Alaskan Russian***

### **5.1 Contemporary Standard Russian, Ninilchik Russian, and Alaskan Russian**

How can we classify Ninilchik Russian and Alaskan Russian with respect to Contemporary Standard Russian, and how do the two varieties compare with one another? It is clear that Alaskan Russian and all of its incarnations (in Ninilchik and elsewhere) are dialectal varieties of Russian. For the most part, Alaskan Russian is mutually intelligible with Contemporary Standard Russian (Bergelson & Kibrik 2010), except perhaps in those cases where speakers code-switch frequently. Although AR shows signs of morphosyntactic decay, its numerous borrowings and lexical innovations show that it was once a robust dialect with many of its own distinct features—some of which may have even been lost by the time Bergelson, Kibrik, and Leman made their recordings in 1997 and 2009-2011, and will likely remain unknown. A robust Alaskan Russian dialect, however, would not have differed substantially enough from CSR to be classed as a mixed language or creole.

This paper has mostly considered Ninilchik Russian when describing Alaskan Russian as a whole, which may seem problematic. However, in terms of contact-related linguistic variation, the limited sample of Ninilchik Russian provides an effective structural overview of Alaskan

Russian in general. Purportedly, the only differences between Ninilchik Russian and Alaskan Russian varieties spoken in places such as Kodiak are lexical, and many of them can be explained by the presence of different flora and fauna in the languages' respective areas (Golovko 2010). According to Golovko, there are other lexical discrepancies that demand further explanation, but given the limited number of remaining speakers of Alaskan Russian, at least some of this lexical variation may be due to the differences in the knowledge of individual speakers.

These differences among individual speakers are not significant enough to posit additional varieties of Alaskan Russian in Ninilchik. The speakers interviewed showed signs of speaking the same dialect: different speakers offered many of the same lexical items and showed many of the same patterns of gender agreement, and all of the speakers showed a preference for the Ninilchik adjectival ending *-aj*. The only speaker who is truly remarkable in some way is Cecil Demidoff, whose speech displays rather different code-switching patterns from the other Ninilchik Russian speakers. It is unclear why Cecil has maintained regular case morphology when others have not. Even more unexpected is the fact that he, like the other NR speakers, has lost a great deal of lexical information but *unlike* the other NR speakers has maintained a great deal of grammatical information; these changes usually occur together (Polinsky 1995). It is possible that Cecil was part of a different speech community, one in which Alaskan Russian had developed differently and was showing signs of becoming a mixed language like Copper Island Aleut, which displays a similar pattern where one language supplies the lexicon and another the inflectional morphology and syntax (see Golovko & Vakhtin 1990). While Cecil's speech does not quite fit this description (there is still ample Russian lexicon, in addition to the dominant



Russian grammar), the development of his idiolect (and that of other Alaskan Russian speakers like him, should they be found) may shed light on the genesis of mixed languages.

## **5.2 The degree of language attrition**

Without longitudinal data, it is difficult to assess the degree to which Alaskan Russian has decayed, or the rate at which decay is taking place. It is also difficult, especially in the case of English interference, to assess whether some of these changes are merely the results of contact with English or are in fact due to the onset of language death. It is likely that in at least a few cases, there is not only one influence that is responsible. (Consider the example of loss of grammatical gender. There is reason to believe that there was some loss of gender when the language was robustly spoken in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it has certainly been exacerbated by English interference.)

Other Russian-speaking communities in the United States, outside Alaska, display similar patterns of change as Alaskan Russian, suggesting that in both sets of cases the shared changes are due to the influence of English, whether due to contact, shift, or both. Biggins (1985) provides an account of a South Russian dialect spoken by a community of Old Believers in Oregon. Russian has been fairly preserved in this community, predominantly because the Turkish Old Believers are a closed group and remain isolated from mainstream American society as well as other neighboring groups of Old Believers (Biggins 1985: 48). Nevertheless the dialect of Russian in this community, however different it may have originally been from the dialect that would eventually become Alaskan Russian, resembles AR in a few noteworthy ways. Like AR, Turkish Old Believer Russian (TOBR) has some constructions that seem to be modeled on

English syntax. One common example is the ordering of the possessive construction: in TOBR, it is *possessor (genitive) + object (relevant case)*, which is the reverse of the syntax in CSR but strongly resembles English. For example, TOBR has such expressions as *s'erd'ica razrív* 'heart-GEN attack-NOM' (CSR *razryv s'erdca*) and, more complexly, *s'estrí muža brat* 'sister's (GEN) husband's (GEN) brother' (CSR *brat muža s'estry*) (Biggins 1985: 167). While this is similar to the Turkish word-order for such constructions (and these speakers are themselves from Turkey), the case-marking more closely resembles English, with genitive marking on the possessor (English 's for nouns).

Another variety of Russian spoken in the United States has many of the phonetic features that Alaskan Russian has likely borrowed from English. The Russian variety of an Old Believer community in Erie has a change from CSR /x/ to the more English glottal fricative /h/, as well as a change from /r/ to /ɹ/ (Holdeman 2002). Interestingly, Erie Old Believers also display a /z<sup>i</sup>/ > /ž/ change (as in the NR example *pužir*, given in Section 4.2.1). Holdeman gives the example of the first name *Kuz'ma*, which is pronounced *Kužma* by some speakers, and offers an alternative explanation to the one I give in 4.2.1. His claim is that this phonological difference is due to speakers' resorting to the closest English phonetic equivalent to a palatalized alveolar sound: its post-alveolar counterpart (Holdeman 2002: 178). Thus we have [z<sup>i</sup>] > [ž], but also [s<sup>i</sup>] > [š] as well as [d<sup>i</sup>] > [dž] and [t<sup>i</sup>] > [tš]. The final change is attested in Ninilchik Russian, but in reverse, as in *t'istaj* (CSR *čistyj*) in (5). This seems to suggest that speakers of Russian who are fluent in English are prone to confusion of palatalized alveolar and post-alveolar sounds.

Polinsky (1995, 2006, 2007) has done work in identifying patterns of language loss in immigrant communities in the US, where speakers who grow up as second-language learners of languages other than English tend to speak a "reduced" version of their heritage language.

Reduced languages generally display the following characteristics (taken from Polinsky 1995): (1) acceptance of illegal structures and rejection of sound structures in the full language; (2) inflectional reduction of irregular paradigms and morphological leveling; (3) loss of subject-verb agreement; (4) inability to construct relative clauses; (5) use of resumptive pronouns and loss of control structures and null copying; and (6) decline in word-order variation, to consider just those features for which we have data available in Alaskan Russian.

The phenomenon expressed in (1) is difficult to assess in Alaskan Russian because there is no documented “full” language to which it may be compared. Even before the AR speakers shifted to English and the language underwent attrition, Alaskan Russian was certainly markedly different from CSR due to the various dialects from which it developed as well as its contact with indigenous Alaskan languages. As we have seen, speakers do accept (and provide) structures that are illegal in CSR (such as the absence of negative concord in (19)), but some of the aberrations from CSR are due to language change rather than a deterioration of the structure of the language.

Nevertheless, Alaskan Russian undoubtedly shares some of the remaining features. Morphological leveling is evident in some of the nominal morphology—such as plural *sini* ‘sons’ (sg. *sin*) for expected *synovja*, and to some extent in the overuse of diminutives. The NR dictionary recordings also contain one example of loss of subject-verb agreement:

- (26) [ja]            n'e    ponima-ješ<sup>6</sup>  
 1SG.NOM.PRO NEG understand-2SG.PRS  
 ‘I don’t understand.’

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<sup>6</sup> Speaker used this sentence when referring to himself.

There is no evidence of the rest of the features, however; in fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Many of the NR speakers are able to successfully use *kotoryj* ‘which’ (and its inflected forms) to introduce a relative clause.

- (27) ...*kator-i*      *mnoga sp'i-t*                      (Ninilchik Russian dictionary)  
       which-MASC a.lot sleep-3SG  
       ‘...that sleeps a lot.’

Speakers also successfully employ pro-drop and do not resort to resumptive pronouns. Consider the following sentence:

- (28) *on*    *na*    *makušk'-i<sub>i</sub>*     $\emptyset_i$     *na*    *gar'-e*  
       he    on    peak-PREP                      on    hill-PREP  
       ‘He’s at the top of the hill.’

Here, the speaker successfully employs pro-drop—a similar construction in Reduced Russian may look something like:

- (29) *on*    *na*    *makušk'-i<sub>i</sub>*    *ona/eta<sub>i</sub>*    *na*    *gar'-e*  
       he    on    peak-PREP    it                      on    hill-PREP  
       ‘He’s at the top, it is on the hill.’

with the speaker using some sort of pronoun to refer back to ‘peak’.

Speakers are also still able to use a variable word-order, as we can see in section 4.5.1.

While it is true that the absence of these features does not necessarily prove that Alaskan Russian is not a reduced language as defined in Polinsky’s studies of heritage speakers, the fact that it only minimally shares these characteristics suggests that while it may eventually become a reduced language, it has not yet attained such a status.

It is difficult to assess the degree to which the current Alaskan Russian dialect has been reduced, because of the dearth of information available about Alaskan Russian in its healthiest incarnation. Comparing Ninilchik Russian as it undergoes attrition with Contemporary Standard Russian is not as useful as comparing today's Ninilchik Russian even to that observed by Conor Daly in the 1980s, because NR did not develop from CSR and has not been influenced by it. When they were robustly spoken, the varieties of Alaskan Russian were already markedly different from CSR. For example, although there is loss of grammatical gender, this loss may have occurred in the earliest days of Ninilchik Russian, when it still had a vibrant speech community, and is likely not due to decay. However this distinction is only possible because there is some (albeit minimal) historical data available for comparison.

## ***6. Further Research***

Both the lexicon and phonology of Alaskan Russian have been well-documented (see Bergelson & Kibrik 2010, Golovko 2010). In this paper I have attempted to outline some of the more intriguing morphological and syntactic features of Ninilchik Russian. There are a number of inherent issues in my analysis, such as the limited number of speakers surveyed and the likelihood that many of the changes that seem to be related to English morphology and syntax are likely due to language attrition. As a result, some of these features may be idiolectal, while features such as English syntax and code-switching have likely only very recently entered the language, as speakers have shifted to English as their primary language, and did not exist when there were proficient Alaskan Russian speakers. Dating the various changes that Alaskan Russian has undergone in the course of developing into the variety (or varieties) that we observe

today is a difficult undertaking because of the dearth of longitudinal data. Furthermore, the data available today contain huge paradigmatic gaps because of the prevalence of citation forms rather than inflected words or whole sentences. What is necessary to perform a keener morphosyntactic analysis is more focused data collection, and answers to the questions raised here can only be obtained from a systematic testing of nominal and verbal paradigms in Alaskan Russian with its speakers.

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**Appendices:** All of the following are selectively compiled lexical items and phrases that may be heard in Bergelson and Kibrik's 1997 Ninilchik Russian recordings.

**Appendix 1.** Words exhibiting semantic change to related meanings

NR word	NR meaning	CSR meaning
<i>p'iro</i>	'fin'	'feather'
<i>pr'ival</i>	'school (of fish)'	'camp'
<i>nogt'i (odna nokat')</i>	'claws'	'nails'
<i>s'etka</i>	'spider web'	'net'
<i>čalawek (pl. čalawek'i)</i>	'a man'	'person'
<i>rad'itel'</i>	'relative/acquaintance'	'parent'
<i>d'efka</i>	'young woman'	'girl (slang)'
<i>baba</i>	'middle-aged woman'	'grandmother; woman (slang)'
<i>s'em'ja</i>	'extended family; clan'	'family'
<i>r'eb'ata</i>	'children'	'guys'
<i>n'em'its</i>	'Nazi'	'German'
<i>žid</i>	'Jew (not derogatory)'	'Jew (derogatory)'
<i>učonnij</i>	'smart (adj.)'	'academic (n.)'
<i>burl'it'</i>	'to fight'	'to rage'
<i>gl'ina</i>	'mud'	'clay'
<i>palav'ik</i>	'carpet'	'mat/rug'
<i>sar</i>	'King (suit in cards)'	'tsar'
<i>golaj</i>	'bald'	'naked'
<i>d'iržu</i>	'I use'	'I hold'
<i>krol'ik</i>	'rabbit'	'bunny'
<i>makuška (Everest)</i>	'Mt. (Everest)'	'hill'
<i>žili</i>	'muscles'	'veins'
<i>matka</i>	'some female animal'	'uterus'
<i>sopl'i</i>	'spit/snot'	'snot'
<i>ja atašal</i>	'I am hungry'	'I lost weight'
<i>jupka</i>	'petticoat'	'skirt'
<i>past'ilka</i>	'diaper'	'mat'
<i>pramišljat'</i>	'to hunt'	'to earn one's living'

**Appendix 2.** Quantifier-noun constructions (Q + N-GEN.PL)

CSR	NR variant	Gloss
<i>desjat' dvorov</i>	<i>d'esjat' dvari</i>	'ten yards-NOM'
<i>mnogo bobjor</i>	<i>mnoga babri</i>	'many beavers-NOM'
<i>mnogo p'erja</i>	<i>mnoga p'iro</i>	'many feather-NOM'
<i>mnogo slov</i>	<i>mnoga slova</i>	'many words-NOM'
<i>mnogo sv'eta</i>	<i>mnoga sv'et</i>	'a lot of light-NOM'
<i>mnogo rusk'ix</i>	<i>mnoga rusk'ij</i>	'many Russian-NOM'
<i>pjat' pal'tsov</i>	<i>pjat' pal'ets</i>	'five finger-NOM'
<i>mnogo ostrov</i>	<i>mnoga astrava</i>	'many islands-NOM'
<i>mnogo kamen'</i>	<i>mnoga kam'en'i*</i>	'many rocks-NOM'
<i>malo piska</i>	<i>mala p'isok</i>	'little sand-NOM'
<i>kusok l'da</i>	<i>kusok ljod</i>	'piece of ice-NOM'

\*The CSR nominative form of this is *kamni*, where /e/ is elided.

### Appendix 3. Overuse of diminutives

CSR nominative form	NR word	Gloss
<i>myš'</i>	<i>mišonak (pl. mišonk'i)</i>	'mouse'
<i>kot</i>	<i>kot'ik</i>	'cat'
<i>ščinok</i>	<i>saba-čka (dog-DIM)</i>	'puppy'
<i>okno</i>	<i>akoška</i>	'window'
<i>kaša</i>	<i>kaška</i>	'millet'
<i>golova</i>	<i>golafka</i>	'head'
<i>monaxinja</i>	<i>manašin'ka</i>	'nun'
<i>kotjonok</i>	<i>kot'-ik, koš-onak (cat-DIM)</i>	'kitten'
<i>mal'čik</i>	<i>mal'č'iška</i>	'boy'
<i>zuby</i>	<i>zub'ik'i</i>	'teeth'
<i>koleno</i>	<i>kal'enka</i>	'knee'
<i>letučaja myš'</i>	<i>l'etučaj mišonak</i>	'bat'

### Appendix 4. Irregular pluralization

NR nominative singular form (assumed)	NR nominative plural form (elicited)	Gloss
<i>jajtso</i>	<i>jajtsy</i>	'egg(s)'
<i>kam'en'</i>	<i>kam'enja</i>	'rock(s)'
<i>ugl'</i>	<i>uglja</i>	'coal(s)'
<i>sin</i>	<i>sin'i</i>	'son(s)'
<i>wolas</i>	<i>wolasa</i>	'hair'
<i>kost'</i>	<i>kostja</i>	'bone(s)'

<i>burun</i>	<i>buruna</i>	‘wave(s)’
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### Appendix 5a. Code-switching (alternation)

Segment with switch	Translation
<i>pot zd’elana iz cotton</i>	‘The basket is made of cotton.’
<i>tut mnoga starfish</i>	‘There’s a lot of starfish here.’
<i>tam mnoga different kinds</i>	‘There are a lot of different kinds there.’
<i>I slishu</i>	‘I hear.’
<i>poli—eto more than one</i>	‘Floors—that’s more than one.’
<i>on tam iskal candy</i>	‘He looked for candy there.’
<i>u vsjah tits</i>	‘They all have tits.’
<i>n’e nada jevo mučat’ because ran’še kagda č’elavek utanjot porpos člevika na b’erik po- mal’en’ko</i>	‘Don’t torment him because before, when a person would be drowning, the porpoise would [bring] the person ashore a little.’
<i>eto sami glavan...bil mink</i>	‘That’s the most important...was mink.’
<i>gd’e Northern Lights bivajutsa z’emoj</i>	‘Where the Northern Lights happen in the winter.’
<i>last names n’ebil’i</i>	‘There were no last names.’
<i>American government vsjo zakril</i>	‘The American government closed everything.’
<i>Only thing huda bila—sajok belongs to the company, eta n’e jevonaj</i>	‘The only bad thing was the trap belongs to the company, it’s not his.’
<i>Tam thunder, tut lightning</i>	‘There there’s thunder, here there’s lightning.’

### Appendix 5b. Code-switching (insertion)

Segment containing switch	Translation
<i>Evonaj grandpa im’el lavku v village-e</i>	‘His grandpa had a stand in the village.’

*on'i etam **pitchfork**-am*

'They using the pitchfork...'

*S drug'ih **country** taskajut [ribu] v **Alask-u**  
pradajut*

'They dragged [fish] from other countries to  
sell in Alaska'