

Bilingualism in Russian America (Based on oral folk art)

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In the last decade a lot of attention has been paid to the activities of the Russian-American Company (RAC). Scholars base their research on the printed documents and narratives of indigenous storytellers of Alaska and California. The main sources of information about the events of those days are the stories of witnesses of the events in the Tlingit language, archived correspondence between the commandants of fortresses in Novo-Arkhangelsk, Alaska and Fort Ross, California. This represents the main object of our study.

Many representatives of different linguistic families lived in the Bering Strait and adjacent areas. Careful analysis of the recent history reveals many similarities in the traditional farming, language and culture of the indigenous inhabitants of North America and native people of the Russian North studied by our ethnographers. The two continents, Asia and America, meet at the crossroads of the North-eastern region of Siberia, Northern Pacific Region, and North America. Since ancient times it has been a crossroads of people and their cultures, a place inhabited by different animals and plants shared and exchanged on both the Asian and American continents.

Despite its remoteness this area has attracted numerous hunters, traders and researchers. Nature offered and shared its rich resources only with those who treated it with respect and care. The sea was full of fish, seabirds and marine mammals. The rivers were full of salmon that returned to the fresh water to spawn. The land at the crossroads of the continents flourished with herds of caribou (reindeer in Eurasia, caribou in America), moose (elk in Eurasia, moose in America), bears, fur animals and lots of useful plants, berries, and mushrooms. The indigenous people of these places lived in harmony with the world for thousands of years.

Using the available raw materials they built warm shelters, sewed colorfully decorated clothes, created elegant and beautiful things, surprising others by the perfect forms and uniqueness, which was a measure of social status in the society. "The crossover of the cultures as a result of social development has led to the confrontation of "hunters" and "gatherers"; often it was a reflection of the in-clan interactions, tribal hierarchy and was expressed in various forms of ceremonies and celebrations of different groups of people and their arts and crafts associated with the natural environment" (MacNeish, 1956)*.

The history of development of these sites illustrates close interaction between the people of the east and the west, and this interaction is clearly reflected in the national oral folk art in the form of myths, legends and stories created by the local people, celebrating nature and depicting certain historical events. Today the indigenous people of these territories still live in the same geographic locations. Their culture is preserved in their current style of clothing and lifestyle. Hunting, fishing and animal herding are still the same major activities.

From this point of view Alaska of course represents the special interest.

The research of Alaska is quite specific due to the fact that the history of Alaska and Russia was shared, and similarly to Alaska having a definite place in Russian mentality, the memories of Russians still play a significant role in the minds of Alaskan Natives. In particular they occupy an important and quite controversial place in the historical outlook of Tlingit people because members of this tribe had close contact with the Russians who arrived with the Russian-American Company.

We must mention the works of Gumilev, L.N. who stated: "The Russians came to an understanding with the Aleuts and landed on the coast of America, and then they met with the Eskimos and established full contact with them as well. Only Aleuts and Eskimos supported the Russians, and therefore they settled only on the shores of the Bering Sea and in the Bering Strait because of the safety. As for California, the Russians could not settle there because the Indians did not support them; there was no contact with the Indians, but the Russians did not engage in the genocide like the Anglo-Saxons did. They preferred to go to the places where they had an established contact with local population, and they limited themselves by the territories of Siberia, Aleutian Islands and Alaska" (Gumilev, 1990: 167).

Such reasoning is based on ignorance of facts, or disregarding of the facts. "The contact" was "established" by Russians with the Aleuts and Kodiak Eskimos first of all through conquest, subjugation and brutal wars with the elements of genocide. "With regard to the Californian Indians the facts indicate a relatively high degree of loyalty by the Indians and their developing integration within the Russian colony (essentially the integration model was the same as in the colonial society of the Aleutian Islands and Kodiak Island, but without the wars)." (Grinev, 2003).

It should be noted that prior to this the term "Russian" referred to a person of a mixed origin. Later the term "Russian" was used by historians as a term describing Siberians, or even indigenous Alaskans who lived in the territory of the Russian-American Company. This difference in terminology may cause a problem in verification of the number of Russians killed in the battles of 1802 and 1804.

Among the preserved manuscripts invaluable in the history research of Russian America we can mention the translations of manuscripts of Christian content, prayer books, dictionaries of native people and grammar reference books.

The first attempts to distinguish the written language from the conversational language go back to the 14th century, when St. Stephen of Perm created an alphabet for the Komi people from Finno-Ugric language family who lived in the north-east of Russia. However, it did not develop much, given the difficult political situation at that time.

After Russians settled in the territory of Alaska in the 18th century, a lot of words were borrowed by the local population. In the territory of Russian America, the words like toion (toyon), promyshlennik (industrialist), versta (mile), pud (pound) and others were used in conversations until the 19th century. This greatly complemented the vocabulary of the oral folklore.

Bishop Innokenty Veniaminov (John) made a big contribution to the study and systematization of the language. He created an alphabet for the Aleutian language based on the Latin alphabet. He did it with the assistance of Aleutian Toyon (Leader) Ivan Pankov. In 1834 they wrote and published the Catechism in the Aleutian language.

On the territory of the Russian-American colonies, excluding the Fort Ross, stretched for 3000 kilometers, the following six languages were present: Unalaska language, Kodiak language, Kenai language, Yakutat language, Sitka language, and Cak language. Creole Yakov Netsvetov greatly assisted Bishop Innokenty Veniaminov in compiling the dictionary of Tlingit people. "He trained other priests from the locals such as Innokenty Shayashnikov and Lavrenty Salamatov, who continued teaching Christian faith during the period of American colonization." (Grinev, 2003).

The Russian Orthodox Church has developed a literacy program for the Tlingit population with the help of the Bishop Innokenty (Veniaminov) who created the first alphabet for the Tlingit language. The Orthodox Church supported bilingual education in schools, but with the arrival of Americans to these territories there was a tendency to suppress the use of the native Tlingit language completely.

Bishop John Veniaminov began to study languages of the American Indians and stated in his "Notes on Kolosh and Kodiak languages" (the Tlingit language he also called Kolosh language) that there are many Aleutian-Eskimo dialects. For example, the Californian Indians of Big Bodega did not understand Indians living a little further into the continent at Fort Ross. People who lived up north from Ross did not understand either one, even though they all lived within a 200 miles radius." (Veniaminov, 1846).

"If each sound could be assigned a letter, then in the Kolosh-Sitka language there would be more than 30 letters, as for many of the vowels and consonants they are pronounced differently, for example: *kuh*, *kuh'*, *k'uh'* and *k'uh* (the first word stands for *kalga*, type of fish, the second word stands for *lead*, then comes *sulfur*, and the last one is *box*). To write these words exactly how they are pronounced by Kolosh people, the letter "k" needs to be broken down into three parts and the letter "h" into two parts, and leave it as it is. However, if this similarly sounding letters mark with certain indicators of aspiration sounds, as I did it for the

Aleutian language, then the Kolosh language would have no more than 17 letters, namely: *a, g, e, i, k, k', l, n, s, t, u, h, ts, ch, sh, tsch, you, ya.*" (Veniaminov, 1846)

It is noted that the language of Kolosh from Nasov differed from Sitka and Cake languages, but had the same word formation. "There are as many parts of speech in Kolosh language as in Russian, for example: *Tlingit* is *a man*, *tl'its'in* is *strong*, *chatle'nakh* is *one*, *hut* is *I*, *etahani*' translates to *I'm doing*, *etuts'ini*' – *made*; *gek'yo* – *good*, *chitakh'* – *from*, *ush* – *if*, *a'!* is an exclamation mark. In the Kolosh language there are many compound words consisting of two and three or more words that are mostly monosyllabic. For example, *kachi'n* stands for *hand*, where "*ka*" means *man*, and "*chi'n*" means *paw* or *flipper* of a marine mammal. *Tukatgat'a'* is a *pregnant woman*, where the "*tu*" stands for "*her*", "*kat*" means "*stomach*", "*gat*" is a *child*, and "*a*" is "*to be*" (Veniaminov, 1846).

Tlingit language forms a separate branch of the Na-Dene languages, and interestingly, the Eyak language is the closest to it.

<i>Language family</i>	<i>Language</i>
Eskimo-Aleutian	Aleut, Alutiiq, Central Yupik, Sibenan Yupik, Inupiaq
Tsimshian	Tsimshian
Haida	Haida
Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit	Tlingit, Eyak, Ahtna, Tanaina, Ingalik, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Tanana, Tanacross, Upper Tanana Han, Kutchin

Table 1.

In the early twentieth century Edward Sapir insisted on including the Tlingit language into the language family of Na-Dene, but his opponents, Franz Boas (in 1917), and Plinius Earl Goddard (in 1920) along with the other scholars of that time were opposed to that, arguing the fact that "the Tlingit language is too different from other languages of Na-Dene" (Sapir)*.

Research conducted in the late twentieth century by Heinz-Jürgen Pinnow (1962, 1968 and 1970) and by Michael Krauss (1964, 1965, 1969) have proven a strong link between the Tlingit language and the Eyak language, hence the relation to other Athabasca languages was proven. Today relation of the Tlingit language to the language family Na-Dene is considered to

be undisputable and well recognized. Tlingit language was also linked to the Haida language that later on was excluded from the list of researched languages. Presently Haida is considered to be an isolated language with many borrowed words from the Tlingit language. However, in 2004 John Enrico had provided list of evidence of the relationship of these two languages, thus, once again he fueled the scientific discussions. "Haida language used by Haida people is considered to be one of the most complex languages, since it employs 70 prefixes. It has been used in the north-eastern part of the North America" (Sapir)*.

Tlingit writing language is based on the Latin alphabet. All Tlingit people spoke two languages. However, their second language after the mother tongue was English, not Russian, as it would be expected.

Tlingit or Lingit is the original language of Tlingit people. The home of Tlingit people is the south-eastern coast of Alaska, extending from Yakutat down to Ketchikan. There are many Tlingits who came from remote areas of northern British Columbia and southern part of Yukon Territory.

"Taking into account the fact that this language was spoken on such vast territory, it is not surprising that there are many dialects. Therefore, Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian were the main languages of Alaska" (Greenberg, 1987)*.

The main dialects of Tlingit language is the northern and southern dialect, as well as the disappearing dialect called Tongass Tlingit. Nevertheless, the Tlingit people have no problem in understanding each other.

Most of the sounds in Tlingit language are guttural, and some sounds are similar to German language. "The language of the Tlingit is unique because it is not only guttural, but also glottalized language with the sounds called in linguistics glottalized fricatives" (Golovko, 1994).

Due to the lack of written evidence prior to the first contact with the Europeans in the late eighteenth century about the history of the language in particular and the nation in general, the history of Tlingit language is still not uncovered completely and holds a lot of mystery. Even after the moment of meeting with Europeans and prior to the beginning of the twentieth century there is very little information about the language. The scientists assumed that the language was distributed to the north of Ketchikan-Saxman (a district in Alaska) to the Chilkat area. This conclusion was made based on the fact that some conventional characteristics of the language have been gradually disappearing from South to North.

The number of common features between the dialects of Tlingit language and the Eyak language is especially impressive due to the existing remoteness between these groups. Eyak language has been considered officially as a dead language since January 21, 2008, because on this day the last representative of the tribe Marie Smith Jones has died at the age of eighty-nine years. The main reason of the Eyak language extinction is considered to be the massive usage of English language and also the influence of other Indian languages, mostly Tlingit.

In many settlements of Alaska to this day people have been using Russian costumes and have been following Russian traditions. Local people speak their native languages and use a lot of Russian words. Russian names are widely used by local people. Many names have contemporary English spelling.

Soon after Russians settled in America, scholars continued attempts to learn the language of the indigenous people by learning their oral folk art.

After the sale of Alaska to America in 1867 an interest towards the indigenous languages had declined, although there have been numerous attempts to translate stories from Tlingit language. "At the end of Russian influence in Alaska, more than fifteen translations were made and published in "The Golden Age" magazine in 1830 – 1860's" (Campbell, 1979)*.

According to some data, at the beginning of the twenty-first century there were only 140 Tlingit language speakers, all of whom were bilingual and the second language was English. According to the data, in 1995 there were 845 Tlingit speakers.

Native language literacy was re-introduced through the efforts of linguists such as Constantine Naish and Jillian Story. These linguists have created a modern alphabet of the Tlingit language that is widely used to this day.

Unlike the English alphabet that has 26 letters, the Tlingit alphabet has 32 consonants and 8 vowels. This alphabet was created not only with the actual letters, but also with the use of spaces, underlines and apostrophes in order to reflect specific sounds of the language. For example, the word *yéil* means *crow*, and the word *yéil'* (with apostrophe) means *elderberry*.

Tlingit grammar does not have clear concept of time while time concept exists in English language expressed by verbal forms. Verbs in Tlingit language can transmit information about the frequency of performed actions, or include the notion of the beginning and the end of an action. "Grammatical and phonetic features of a language are difficult to study if that language was not learned from birth" (Swanton, 1909)*.

Folklorists make every effort to preserve the myths, legends, fairytales (tales) and legends (stories). There is an outstanding type of narrative art called an oratory. Stories based on real historical events passed by their witnesses to the next generations, eventually get transformed to a certain degree. Oratory, on the other hand, is similar to a song and is performed with musical accompaniment and ritual dance.

While studying the myths and legends of Tlingit people, Native Americans from southern Alaska, it is noticeable that two mythical heroes Eagle and Raven are been depicted amongst other characters most of all in the north-western folklore, that can be compared to Coyote, the mythical figure of the south-western ethnic group. Another main theme cross-cutting through all the stories is the attitude toward the wealth and social status. Life was full of the gifts coming from the sea and from the land. Similarly to other cultures from the same

region Tlingit people valued goods highly; and social inequality was very clearly shown in North America. Therefore, many legends have parallel reflection of European folklore, where an average man from a low-status family would reach wealth and respect of others as a result of supernatural events or by overcoming a number of epic trials.

On the other hand, Tlingit people believed in the system of potlatches (gifts), during which wealth was distributed by the rich to the poor in order to define and reinforce their status. "There are a number of stories where altruism and a desire to share wealth is been encouraged" (Swanton, 1909)*.

Myths are sacred pieces of work, and both the narrator and the listener believe in the truthfulness of story. They reflect the period prior to or during the creation of the world, linking it with present times and usually containing strong supernatural elements.

Legends are also considered to come from reality, but they may also contain elements of fantasy. At the same time, legends were created in a much later time, when the world has already been established and had its own forms that are known in the contemporary culture.

Tales/fairytales are endless stories that are not believed to be true by neither narrator, nor by listener.

The above forms of creativity make it possible to create countless works of oral folk art that reflects the reality of life.

As a form of oral folk art a narrative combines freedom of a narrator and a complex nature of the main hero. Narrator can easily vary the details of a narrative, adding or omitting any details that were passed from one storyteller to another.

Ethnographic texts are usually presented without any comments or explanations of cultural components used in the story. The role of these stories often lie in the description of the main character, e.g. in a fable there was always a moral to the story.

Native people of Alaska have known that the natural balance of their lives depends on how they treat this land. According to the oriental wisdom, the Earth is sacred and there is a relation between the Earth and people's actions.

Traditional folklore of native people in Alaska strives to create an episodic and colorful character. This image is usually based on real events, or with consideration of upcoming events, which is more significant than the theme, or the plot and techniques of the storyteller. Colonization by Russians became a special source of oral folk art in Alaska. This aspect of creativity has not been fully researched. Often it is impossible to determine the type of oral folk art: is it a myth, legend, fairytale, or just a story? The same storyline presented by different narrators may reflect different genres.

Many of the tales (narratives) are really unique and exist in a single version while others have many versions, which differ significantly from each another. Different stories come from different storytellers representing various ethno-linguistic groups in the territory of Alaska.

The witnesses of the events reflect them in their stories so that later generations would not forget their history. For instance, the stories of the battles in Sitka passed from one generation to another. Currently, the clan leaders have decided to publish these stories and show the complex relationship between the "white people" with their superior forces and the Tlingit people courageous, but few and poorly armed. This was reflected in the book "Russians in Tlingit America," published and edited by Lydia Black, Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer in 2008.

In the tale "The Battles of Sitka" told by Sally Hopkins and recorded from her words by the National Park Service, Sitka, Alaska in August of 1958, both Tlingit and Russian names are mentioned. Russians used already existing names of places and recorded them as they had heard those using Russian spelling and orthography rules. In the tale "The Battle of Sitka" these names were restored and written in Tlingit modern language and indicated both names in the parentheses. For example, the name given by the British *Xutsnoowu* [*Khutsnov, Angoon*] was replaced by earlier word in Russian language *Sitka*.

Russian documents and oral folk art of the Tlingit people allow us to compare two perspectives on the events in the history of Russian Alaska and see the overall picture of that time reflected in the language, culture, personal names, and geographical names.

Comparing historical documentary evidence from Russian sources and stories passed by narratives, without even mentioning names, we can see that they are talking about the same historical events, adding details to the full picture. For example, a reference to the description of the attack of Katlian on Russians with a hammer is the most striking detail of the most Tlingit stories.

In the oral folk art of Tlingits the name of Henry Barber was not mentioned due to the fact that the leader of Tlingit people was executed by hanging. There is also no mentioning of the joint attack by Tlingits on Russian positions from the Dry Bay to Sitka and Cake, in which Baranov suspected the conspiracy.

We have an opportunity to look at these historical events through the eyes of Tlingit people who live in their communities nowadays, and we can compare them with our knowledge about this period in the history of Russian America. Documents that have survived and that are preserved by the current generation provide an opportunity to analyze those events and form our opinions about them.

We should also mention the names of famous storytellers, poets and writers who preserved oral folklore and created more stories in Tlingit. They are: Nora Marks Dauenhauer (1927 -), poet, scholar, and linguist who dedicated her live to the research and preservation of Tlingit language. She always stressed importance of storytelling in research in order to

understand better culture of speakers. In addition to publishing such poems as "Comlan shaman" she has published many papers together with her husband, Richard Dauenhauer. She included bilingual Tlingit-English commentaries in the book of collection of oral folklore *Haa Shuka, Our Ancestors: Tlingit Oral Narratives* (1987), as well as Tlingit oratory *Haa Tuwunaagu Yis, For Healing Our Spirit: Tlingit Oratory* (1990). As a result of their joint work they created methodic on teaching of Tlingit language: "Beginning Tlingit" (1976), "Tlingit Spelling Book" (1984), as well as the guidebook on the use of audio materials, records, and examples from the oral Tlingit folklore. Nora Marks Dauenhauer conducted a lot of research on Tlingit language, culture, and oral folklore (Tlingit language oratory). Together with other authors, she has published numerous articles.

Andy Hope III (Andy Hope III) is the writer, poet, journalist, and editor of the Raven's Bones Journal. He is also a much respected author of works celebrating indigenous culture of Tlingit people.

Among numerous Tlingit singers and storytellers of our days we should acknowledge Amy Marvin/Kooteen (1912 -); Chookan Sháa is a leading soloist and principal drummer for the Mt. Fairweather Dancers; deceased Robert Zuboff/Shadaax' (1893-1974) who was famous storyteller and humorist. We should also remember Johnny Jackson/Gooch Éesh (1893-1985) who was a singer, storyteller, and narrator. Still living Jessie Dalton / Naa Tlaa, (1903 -) is a brilliant orator, fluent in two languages, English and Tlingit. Another deeply-respected orator whom we must mention, Austin Hammond/Daanawáak (1910-1993), he was a talented storyteller, native speaker and an activist. Before his death he composed a song and dedicated it to his people, Tlingits. He hoped the song would become the national anthem of Tlingit people and performed at various meetings and ceremonies (Swanton, 1909)*.

Modern analysis of Tlingit oral folklore allows us to understand perception of the native people of Alaska, Russians and Americans on the chain of events that took place two centuries ago, after the founding of the Russian fort in Sitka.

Russian documents and oral folk art of Tlingits allows us to compare two perspectives on the events in the history of Russian Alaska and see the overall picture of the time reflected in the language, culture, personal names, and geographical names.

Russian-American culture may become one of the prototypes of future unity in the period of the universal globalization as cultures and languages are intertwined. However, each nation, both Russian and American Indians, should remember their roots, traditions and customs of their people and pass them to the younger generations in order to survive and do not disappear without a trace from the Earth.

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