

A 150-Year-Old Kuril Islands Tragedy: Yet Another Solution to the Copper Island Aleut Enigma

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Volume 45, numéro 1-2, 2021

Tchoukotka : Comprendre le passé, les pratiques contemporaines et les perceptions du présent
Chukotka: Understanding the Past, Contemporary Practices, and Perceptions of the Present

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090316ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1090316ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Chlenov, M. (2021). A 150-Year-Old Kuril Islands Tragedy: Yet Another Solution to the Copper Island Aleut Enigma. *Études Inuit Studies*, 45(1-2), 207–231.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1090316ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article s'intéresse aux origines d'une variante particulière de l'aléoute issue d'un contact linguistique et uniquement parlée sur l'île Medny ou l'île Copper, au sein des îles du Commandeur. Les linguistes et anthropologues russes ont réussi à étudier et documenter cette langue inhabituelle dans ses derniers instants d'existence, la définissant non pas comme un pidgin ou une langue créole, comme cela avait pu être assumé de manière raisonnable, mais comme une langue « mixte » particulière. Son matériel lexical avait une origine aléoute (dialecte attuan) alors que le paradigme verbal et le morphème flexionnel étaient russes, et les morphèmes dérivationnels étaient aléoutes. L'aléoute de Medny est aujourd'hui au bord de la disparition : avec seulement cinq locuteurs enregistrés en 2004, il est possible que la langue ne soit même déjà plus en usage. Toutefois, les chercheurs ayant documenté, étudié la structure et le vocabulaire de cette langue et rédigé des articles à la veille de sa disparition ont réalisé un exploit incroyable. Pour autant, la difficulté réside dans la nature inhabituelle d'effet de miroir inversé d'une langue créole : on s'attend ainsi à un vocabulaire russe enrichi d'éléments morphologiques aléoutes plutôt que la situation inverse, ce qui se passe ici. Par conséquent, la question de ses origines demeure irrésolue. J'ai recueilli des arbres généalogiques entiers des Aléoutes des îles du Commandeur afin de retracer le processus d'installation sur ces îles à un niveau familial et individuel. En d'autres termes, je me suis donné comme tâche d'identifier une population russophone sur l'île Medny pour qui le groupe de référence serait une autre population, cette fois aléoutophone et locutrice du dialecte attuan, vivant sur un même territoire et exerçant les mêmes activités économiques. Autrement, on aurait pu s'attendre à l'émergence d'une sorte de « pidgin russe » pour lequel le vocabulaire russe serait utilisé avec des éléments morphologiques aléoutes, ou avec des constructions morphologiques caractéristiques des langues créoles et pidgin. Du point de vue d'un linguiste, le cas de l'île Medny représente non pas un « pidgin russe » mais un « pidgin aléoute ».

A 150-Year-Old Kuril Islands Tragedy: Yet Another Solution to the Copper Island Aleut Enigma

M.A. Chlenovⁱ

ABSTRACTⁱⁱ

The paper focuses on the origins of the peculiar contact variant of the Aleutian language spoken on Medny or Copper Island in the Commander Islands. Russian linguists and anthropologists managed to study and record this unusual language in the final stage of its existence, defining it not as a pidgin or a creole language, as might reasonably have been assumed, but as a peculiar “mixed” language, in which the lexical material had an Aleutian (Attuan) origin while the verbal paradigm and inflectional morphemes were Russian, and the derivational morphemes were Aleutian. Today, the Medny Aleutian language is on the verge of extinction, with only five speakers having been recorded in 2004. It is quite possible that this language has since fallen completely out of use. But it was nevertheless a huge achievement that scholars documented it, studied its structure and vocabulary, and wrote down texts literally on the eve of its disappearance. The problem, however, lies in its unusual character, that of a reverse “mirror-image” of a creole language, where one would expect Russian vocabulary with elements of Aleutian morphology rather than the reverse situation, which is actually the case. Accordingly, the question of its origin remains unresolved. The author of the paper compiled full genealogical trees of the Commander Aleuts, making it possible to trace the process of settling the islands at the family and individual level. In other words, he set himself the task of finding that Russian-speaking population on Medny Island for which the socially dominant and reference population, existing alongside it on the same territory and engaged in the same economic activity, would be native speakers of the Attuan dialect of Aleutian. Otherwise, one would have expected the emergence of a kind of “pidgin Russian,” in which Russian vocabulary would be used with elements of Aleutian morphology, or with the morphological constructions that generally characterize pidgin and creole languages. In the case of Copper Island, however, as linguists note, we are faced not with a “Russian pidgin” but an “Aleutian pidgin”.

KEYWORDS

Aleut, Creole language, pidgin language, history of the Russian Empire, colonization

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РÉSUMÉ

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Cet article s'intéresse aux origines d'une variante particulière de l'aléoute issue d'un contact linguistique et uniquement parlée sur l'île Medny ou l'île Copper, au sein des îles du Commandeur. Les linguistes et anthropologues russes ont réussi à étudier et documenter cette langue inhabituelle dans ses derniers instants d'existence, la définissant non pas comme un pidgin ou une langue créole, comme cela avait pu être assumé de manière raisonnable, mais comme une langue « mixte » particulière. Son matériel lexical avait une origine aléoute (dialecte attuan) alors que le paradigme verbal et le morphème flexionnel étaient russes, et les morphèmes dérivationnels étaient aléoutes. L'aléoute de Medny est aujourd'hui au bord de la disparition : avec seulement cinq locuteurs enregistrés en 2004, il est possible que la langue ne soit même déjà plus en usage. Toutefois, les chercheurs ayant documenté, étudié la structure et le vocabulaire de cette langue et rédigé des articles à la veille de sa disparition ont réalisé un exploit incroyable. Pour autant, la difficulté réside dans la nature inhabituelle d'effet de miroir inversé d'une langue créole : on s'attend ainsi à un vocabulaire russe enrichi d'éléments morphologiques aléoutes plutôt que la situation inverse, ce qui se passe ici. Par conséquent, la question de ses origines demeure irrésolue. J'ai recueilli des arbres généalogiques entiers des Aléoutes des îles du Commandeur afin de retracer le processus d'installation sur ces îles à un niveau familial et individuel. En d'autres termes, je me suis donné comme tâche d'identifier une population russophone sur l'île Medny pour qui le groupe de référence serait une autre population, cette fois aléoutophone et locutrice du dialecte attuan, vivant sur un même territoire et exerçant les mêmes activités économiques. Autrement, on aurait pu s'attendre à l'émergence d'une sorte de « pidgin russe » pour lequel le vocabulaire russe serait utilisé avec des éléments morphologiques aléoutes, ou avec des constructions morphologiques caractéristiques des langues créoles et pidgin. Du point de vue d'un linguiste, le cas de l'île Medny représente non pas un « pidgin russe » mais un « pidgin aléoute ».

MOTS-CLÉS

Aléoute, langue créole, pidgin, histoire de l'empire russe, colonisation

АННОТАЦИЯ

Курильская трагедия 150-летней давности: еще одно решение «тайны медновско-алеутского языка»

Михаил Членов

Статья посвящена происхождению своеобразного контактного варианта алеутского языка на острове Медном в группе Командорских островов. Российские лингвисты и антропологи исследовали и зафиксировали этот необычный язык в финальной стадии его существования. Они определили его не как пиджин или креольский язык, как было бы резонно предположить, а как специфический «смешанный» язык, в котором лексический материал имел алеутско-аттуанское происхождение, а глагольная парадигма – русское, словоизменительные морфемы русские, а словообразовательные – алеутские. Сегодня медновско-алеутский язык находится на грани исчезновения, в 2004 году были зафиксированы всего 5 носителей, так что в настоящее время возможно этот язык исчез из употребления. Но огромным научным достижением является то, что удалось его задокументировать, исследовать его структуру и лексику, записать тексты буквально накануне его исчезновения. Проблемой, однако, остается его необычный характер,

«зеркальный» по сравнению с креольскими языками, в которых следовало бы ожидать русскую лексику с элементами алеутской морфологии, а не наоборот. Соответственно, нерешенной остается проблема его происхождения. Автором этой статьи были составлены сплошные генеалогические карты командорских алеутов, позволяющие отследить процесс заселения островов на уровне семей и отдельных личностей. Я поставил перед собой задачу найти такую русскоязычную популяцию на острове Медном, для которой референтной популяцией была бы сосуществующая с ней на одной территории и вовлеченная в одну хозяйственную деятельность алеутоязычная популяция с родным аттуанским диалектом. В противном случае следовало бы ожидать появления некоего «пиджин русского», в котором русская лексика соседствовала бы с элементами алеутской морфологии, или с характерными вообще для пиджин и креольских языков морфологическими конструкциями. В случае с медновским, однако, как отмечают лингвисты, мы видим не «пиджин русский», а «пиджин-алеутский».

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Алеуты, креольские языки, пиджин, история Российской империи, колонизация

The Aleutian language (Unangam tunuu), usually included in the Eskimo-Aleut language family, is divided into two main dialects: an eastern dialect spoken on the Alaska Peninsula, neighbouring islands, and the Pribilof archipelago; and a western dialect spoken on the Aleutian Islands to the west of the Fox Islands. The western dialect, in turn, was subdivided into two subdialects: Atkan on Atka Island in the Andreanof Islands group, and Attuan on Attu Island in the Blizhniye or Near Islands group (Bergsland 1959). The latter subdialect became extinct after World War II, while Atkan is still used on Atka and in a somewhat distinct form on Bering Island, in the Commander Islands group. The peculiar contact variant of the Aleutian language spoken on Medny or Copper Island in the Commander Islands, which was first discovered and described by G.A. Menovshchikov, the father of Russian eskimology, stands apart from the rest (Menovshchikov 1964, 1965, 1968, 1969). In subsequent years, a group of Russian linguists and anthropologists managed to study and record this unusual language in the final stage of its existence, defining it not as a pidgin or a creole language, as might reasonably have been assumed, but as a peculiar “mixed” language, in which the lexical material had an Aleutian (Attuan) origin while the verbal paradigm and inflectional morphemes were Russian, and the derivational morphemes were Aleutian (Golovko 1982, 1996, 1997; Asinovsky, Vakhtin, and Golovko 1984; Vakhtin 1985; Golovko and Vakhtin 1987; Golovko and Vakhtin 1990). This language functioned and, apparently, had been formed, only on Medny Island, while the Atka dialect of Aleutian was spoken until recently on the larger, more populated, and administratively and economically central Bering Island.

Today, the Medny Aleutian language is on the verge of extinction, with only five speakers having been recorded in 2004. It is quite possible that this language has since fallen completely out of use. But it was nevertheless a huge achievement that scholars documented it, studied its structure and vocabulary, and wrote down texts literally on the eve of its disappearance. The problem, however, lies in its unusual character, that of a reverse “mirror-image” of a creole language, where one would expect Russian vocabulary with elements of Aleutian morphology rather than the reverse situation, which is actually the case. Accordingly, the question of its origin remains unresolved. The various scenarios authors have proposed for the formation of such an unusual language, to be considered below, likewise leave a number of historical and theoretical questions unresolved. N.B. Vakhtin (1985, 43) correctly formulated the main conditions for the appearance of such a language: “the formation of the Copper Island Aleutian language could only have been the result of the impact of the Attuan dialect on a linguistic community for which Russian was the native (although perhaps not the only) language.” But such a “linguistic community” is rather difficult to imagine in the conditions of the Russian Empire, and so the same author makes the following observation: “The ideal evidence...would be archival materials pinpointing the origins, in terms of which island they were from and their social status, of all the Aleut families who were resettled on Medny Island in 1826, and who moved there over subsequent years. Without evidence of this kind, no model... can be considered definitive” (Vakhtin 1985, 43).

The first attempt at just such a population analysis is given below. Its sources were the field materials collected by the author and I.I. Krupnik during an expedition in 1983, organized by the Soviet Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Ethnography, and archival materials from the Kamchatka State Archives in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and the US Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Based on these sources, I compiled full genealogical trees of the Commander Aleuts, making it possible to trace the process of settling the islands at the family and individual level. In other words, I set myself the task of finding that Russian-speaking population on Medny Island for which the socially dominant and reference population, existing alongside it on the same territory and engaged in the same economic activity, would be native speakers of the Attuan dialect of Aleutian. Otherwise, one would have expected the emergence of a kind of “pidgin Russian,” in which Russian vocabulary would be used with elements of Aleutian morphology, or with the morphological constructions that generally characterize pidgin and creole languages. In the case of Copper Island, however, as linguists note, we are faced not with a “Russian pidgin” but an “Aleutian pidgin” (Golovko and Vakhtin 1990, 115).

The Establishment of a Permanent Population on Medny Island

The generally accepted date for the establishment of permanent human settlement on Bering Island is 1827, as was reported by F. Litke and K. Khlebnikov (Litke 1835, 143, 345, 347; Khlebnikov 1979, 168–69; Litke 1987; Khlebnikov 1994). The dating of the first permanent settlement on Medny Island remains unknown and those authors who have asked this question usually limited themselves to indicating a date several years later than on Bering Island, or believed that Medny's first permanent settlement was founded in 1828 (Liapunova 1987, 180–81). Analysis of the available sources has enabled us to make some refinements to this historical scheme. Soon after the end of the second Kamchatka expedition and the tragic death of its leader, V. Bering, in 1741 on the island that would later be named in his honour, Russian industrialists set about the intensive commercial development of the archipelago. As early as 1743, non-commissioned officer Emelian Basov was in charge of the fishing industry off both Commander Islands, and he and his companions should be considered the first Europeans to have visited Medny. In 1746 a fishing team headed, according to some sources, by Andrei Vsevidov, and, according to others, by E. Savenkov, was already wintering on Medny Island. It was also this group that gave the island its present name, referring to the finds of native copper (Russian *med'*) there (Litke 1835, 347; Khlebnikov 1979, 149; Bolkhovitinova 1997, 1:70).

Over the seventeen years between 1743 and 1760, the Commander Islands were visited by at least twenty-six fishing parties led by Russian merchants and fishermen from Kamchatka (Khlebnikov 1979, 149–51). Although there were no permanent settlements on either island of the archipelago at that time, fishing brigades would stay there on a long-term basis, some for several years at a time. Initially, these parties seem to have been dominated by Russian, in the broadest sense of the word, fishermen who were occasionally accompanied by Kamchadals—that is, people of mixed Russian-Itelmen or Russian-Koryak stock. But we may assume that by the mid-eighteenth century the composition of these groups began to include, beside the Russian fishermen themselves, local Aleut residents too, including women. Fragmentary data from descriptions of these fishing parties indicate that the Aleuts from the Near Islands, where the Attuan dialect of the Aleutian language was prevalent, were the first to be recruited for fishing crews in the Commanders region. The beginnings of the intensive Russification of all Aleuts should be attributed to the same period, more precisely to the end of the eighteenth century, along with the decline and rapid loss of traditional culture, and the formation of the Alaskan Creoles as a special ethnosocial group in the Russian-American Company (RAC) population, which would subsequently receive legally enshrined status as part of the population of the RAC (Piterskaia 2007). The Creoles were

converted to Orthodox Christianity and, as a rule, represented the meticized native inhabitants of Russian America. Most were of Aleut origin, although with time Creoles began to appear with ancestors drawn from among the Eskimos, mostly Kodiaks, or, in small numbers, American Indians.

One way or another, it may be regarded as proven that between 1743 and 1799 both islands of the Commander archipelago were regularly visited by fishing groups that included Russian fishermen and Aleuts from the nearby islands, mainly the Near and Andreanof Islands. At this time, however, there were no permanent settlements on the islands, although both islands apparently had some temporary settlements to accommodate fur trappers, sometimes for extended periods. The emergence of a permanent population on the Commander Islands, as with the entire history of the islands in the first half of the nineteenth century, is inextricably linked with the activities of RAC, or more precisely, its western section, which covered vast territories from Atka Island in the east to Sakhalin and the Kurils in the west. But in these first few decades of the RAC's existence, its power did not really extend to that part of the Aleutian chain located westward of the Fox Islands. Between 1799 and 1823 all this territory remained almost ownerless, under the nominal control of those in charge of the Okhotsk office, but in reality governed by freebooter Russian fishermen who relied on an Aleutian elite represented by *toyons* (local leaders) and the growing Creole stratum hailing from Attu and Atka.

There is no doubt that the Commanders were uninhabited up until the arrival of Bering's expedition there, after which they continued to remain uninhabited for almost a century. However, the concept of "uninhabited" requires some clarification. The very rapid extermination of the island's population of sea otters and the Steller's sea cow apparently led to a weakening of interest in the islands in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, during which both islands remained unpopulated. Nevertheless, there are indications that there could well have been short-term settlements on the islands during this period, involving more or less family groups as opposed to just working crews or fishing brigades. Thus, for example, N. Grebnitsky cites data for the early 1880s indicating that a number of Commander Aleuts had been born on Medny, among which was a Creole by the name of Burdukovsky, who was aged sixty-two in 1880. According to these data, Burdukovsky would have been born on Medny in 1818/1819, and was living on Bering Island in 1880. From this it follows that his birth on Medny had taken place even before the appearance of a permanent population on the Commander Islands, generally accepted to date from 1827 (Grebnitsky 1882, 46–48). This is also confirmed by various genealogies, in which the lineage founder, Pëtr Vasilevich Burdukovsky (1819–1899), was recorded as having been born even before the appearance of a permanent population on Bering Island. It should therefore be assumed that there were

temporary camps of fishermen with Aleutian wives on Medny Island before the 1820s. Pëtr and his brother Stepan had apparently moved to Bering Island as children, where they lived until their death, and their descendants were still living in the village of Nikolskoe on Bering Island in 1983 when I conducted field research there with I. Krupnik. However, despite the birth of Pëtr Vasilevich on Medny in 1819, this entire lineage of the Burdukovskys has nothing to do with the genealogical history of Medny, as this family are always listed as “Bering Creoles.”

Clearly, the stimulus for the establishment of permanent settlements on the western edges of Russian America is to be found in the administrative reforms of the 1820s. In 1823 the RAC’s board of administration decided to place the Atka fishing and trapping section under the direct control of the Senior Governor, having previously been controlled from Okhotsk, apparently by local fishermen. In 1825 this section was taken into the colonial office, but it was only after the death on Atka in 1826 of the Okhotsk governor Mershenin that a colonial ruler would be appointed over the entire section, running the islands of Attu and Bering, though this administration was replaced with new people a year later in 1827. In 1827–28, timber from Sitka was brought into the newly created centres to build wooden houses for the Russians, replacing the “earthen yurts” everyone had been living in up to that point. Nor were the Commanders spared a flurry of construction activity. On “Bering and Medny Island,” according to K. Khlebnikov (1979, 177), a master’s house and barracks for the Russians were built from planks and lined with turf, and fitted with stoves, windows, and light hatches, while barracks were also built for the Aleuts along with outbuildings for storing goods and supplies, all of the same type. In all these cases, churches had either yet to be built, although plans were made for them, or temporary small chapels were constructed, as on Attu.

When exactly were colonies established? That is, when were there permanent populations made up of families with dwellings and a chapel? It is evident nothing of this sort was to be found in 1812, a date for which a dramatic description of the calamities of a group of Russian fishermen on Medny has survived (Khlebnikov 1979, 156–58). But fifteen years on, in 1827, K. Khlebnikov cites data on the inhabitants of all the Aleutian Islands that indicates the presence of 110 people on “Beringov,” including 17 Russians (all men), 48 Creoles (13 men, 35 women), and 45 Aleuts (24 men, 21 women). There is, however, a note to the effect that “at the current state of affairs the inhabited islands are those of Atkha, Adakh, Chugul, Amchitka and Attu, and temporarily the Bering Islands” (Khlebnikov 1979, 160–61). It is not clear from this text whether this population existed only on Bering Island or on Medny too. In his description of the Commander Islands (which should be dated between 1827 and 1830), Khlebnikov (1979, 169) mentions a “settlement” on Bering while only a harbour is mentioned on Medny.

By the early 1820s, sea otters had reappeared in the vicinity of Medny Island. A large party of Aleuts with their families (filling seventeen kayaks) was accordingly transferred there from Attu Island in 1825. This date should clearly be considered the foundation date of the first permanent settlement on Medny. This first Attuan settlement did not last long however, as a year later the settlers had moved to the neighbouring Bering Island to hunt seals and Arctic foxes. The Aleuts missed their native islands greatly, and the governor of the Atka section decided to return them home. His proposal was approved by the head of the Novoarkhangelsk office (Sitka), K.T. Khlebnikov, who visited the Commander Islands on an inspection trip in 1827. The latter was against the complete evacuation of RAC employees from the islands, though: “Leaving the islands without any people at all is dangerous,” wrote Khlebnikov, “because the everywhere-penetrating Americans might learn, either by news or happenstance, that they had been abandoned and will not miss the chance afforded, causing us irreparable harm” (Bolkhovitinova 1997, 3:26). Therefore, in his opinion, only the Russian fishermen with their Aleutian wives should have remained on the Commanders. It appears that it was precisely this plan of Khlebnikov that served as the starting point for the founding of a permanent Russian-Creole settlement, rather than an Indigenous one, on the Commanders. Its implementation dates to 1827, or at least this is the date that is given in all subsequent publications for the beginning of colonization of the Commander Islands.

In the same year, settlement was already underway on Medny. I. Sizov and A. Ingestrom, who visited the island late in July 1828, reported that, “A barracks for the Russians has been set up for us on this island made from planks covered with earth, with hatches to let light in, and is kept clean. For the Aleuts there are separate yurts” (Khlebnikov 1979, 187). This account, which has gone almost unnoticed by researchers despite its publication more than fifty years ago, is direct evidence that both islands of the Commander archipelago were inhabited by permanent residents almost simultaneously—around 1826 to 1828—and that on both islands the population initially consisted of both Russians and Aleuts, and Creoles.

The Era of the Russian-American Company (1828–1867)

There is a commonly held opinion that Bering Island was originally inhabited by Aleuts and Creoles from the Andreanof Islands, while Medny Island was settled from the Near Islands, particularly Attu (see, e.g., Liapunova 1987, 183; Korsun 2014, 24). This version evidently goes back to a statement made by Ya. Netsvetov, who reported that in 1830 the population of Medny numbered approximately sixty people of both sexes, led by the Russian chief Kuzmichev, and all of the Aleuts had moved there from Attu (Black 1980, 38). But, as other materials show, the population of the island in subsequent

years, from 1850 to 1867, did not consist solely of Attuans, who may not even have made up the main part of the population. We have at our disposal baptismal records from the island from the period 1856 to 1867; a list of names of the inhabitants of the island in 1866 (a year before the sale of Alaska) (Alaskan Russian Church, D28, reel 57); a later list of the island's inhabitants compiled in the early 1880s by the governor of the Commander Islands, N.A. Grebnitsky (1882, 46–48); a list of names of the inhabitants of Attu Island in 1871; the list of names of settlers moving from Attu to Medny in 1872 (Alaskan Russian Church, D28, reel 57), as well as my own family genealogies of the Medny Aleuts dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century. From these sources, the following conclusions can be drawn.

From the mid-1850s to 1871, the island was inhabited by Aleuts and Creoles with the following surnames:

- **Artamonov**—Aleuts, recorded on the Commander Islands since 1863, but only on Medny, not being found on Bering. One large family is mentioned, headed by Ignaty Artamonov, born in 1817, with another family recorded in 1863, headed by Alexander Artamonov, which is not subsequently mentioned. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), “they were born on Medny, the father is a Russian from Sitkha,” though this did not lead to them adopting Creole status. One family with this surname is also listed among the inhabitants of Attu in 1871. It is likely that the Medny Artamonovs were Attuan in origin and spoke the Attuan dialect. Descendants of Ignaty Artamonov were still living on the Commanders in 1983.
- **Golodov**—Creoles, known on Attu, where they occupied the position of the island's *toyon* (Khlebnikov 1979, 173), with one family being recorded on Medny as early as 1860. After 1872, three more Golodov families appeared on Medny, where they then remained. Definitely Attuans, they were speakers of the Attuan dialect. Descendants were living on the Commanders in 1983.
- **Zaikov**—Creoles and Aleuts, with one family headed by Nikolai Zaikov recorded on Medny from 1860 onwards. But a large family of eleven people, all Creoles, moved again from Attu to Medny in 1872, and was headed by a Nikolai Zaikov born in 1816, possibly the same person who had been living on Medny in 1860. His children were recorded as either Creoles or Aleuts. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), he was “58 years old from Attu, [his] children were 28 years old, and were born on Medny”; fifty-eight years old here obviously refers to Nikolai himself, while his twenty-eight-year-old son was Ivan (1848–1899). In the 1871 list for Attu, there was only one Zaikov, a young widower. But back in 1774, there was a reconnoitrer named Potap Zaikov from Unalaska, who collected

yasak on Attu, while in 1776 Attu's *toyon* was a certain Alexander Zaikov. The Zaikovs were Attuans and spoke the Attuan dialect. Descendants of the Zaikovs were living on the Commanders in 1983.

- **Kadin**—Aleuts, with the family of Yakov Kadin, born in 1817, being recorded on Medny from 1860. Yakov's son Anastasy was later listed as the "*toyon* of Medny Island." According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), he was "from Atkha, [his] children (30 years old) were born on Medny." No Kadins are recorded in the 1871 list of Attu inhabitants. By origin, they were apparently Atkans. Descendants were living on Medny until the mid-twentieth century.
- **Klimov**—Aleuts, recorded on Medny since 1866, a large family headed by Ivan Klimov, born in 1816. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), they were "from Atkha." Ivan Ivanov Klimov, born 1861, was also listed under the surname Kulikalov. No Klimovs are found on the list of Attu inhabitants. By origin, they were apparently Atkans. Descendants were living on Medny until the early twentieth century.
- **Kulikalov**—Aleuts, with the family of Trofim Kulikalov, born in 1814, being recorded on Medny since 1860. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), they were "from Atkha, the children were born on Medny, the eldest is 31 years old," where the "eldest" clearly refers to Trofim's brother Nikita Kulikalov. None of them are recorded in the lists of Attu inhabitants. By origin, they were apparently Atkans. Descendants were living on Medny until the early twentieth century.
- **Nevzorov**—Aleuts, recorded on Medny since 1859, a family headed by Yefim Nevzorov. Nevzorovs are no longer present in the 1866 list of Medny residents, and Yefim or his children are further recorded only on Bering Island. According to Grebnitsky (1882), a certain twenty-five-year-old Nevzorov living on Bering, apparently one of Yefim's sons, was considered a native of Attu. By origin, they were apparently Attuans. Descendants were living on Bering Island until the 1930s.
- **Pankov**—Aleuts and Creoles, with three families recorded on Medny in 1858–1860, later recorded only on Bering Island, where their descendants were living up until 1983. From 1786 to 1792, Sergei Dmitrievich Pankov, the son of Tayagul Ayagitku, was *toyon* of the Andreanof Islands, and Ivan Pankov was *toyon* of Atka from 1809 to 1825. (Khlebnikov 1979, 152, 189, 190). The 1871 list of Attu inhabitants only includes a widow Pankova. By origin, they were Atkans.
- **Petelin**—Creoles, recorded on Medny in 1863. From 1862 to 1865, the headman of Medny Island was a certain Lev Petelin (Alaskan Russian Church 1862, 167). The same details feature in the baptismal records as follows: "Petelin Lev Simeonov and his wife Petelina

Yevdokia Agrifova, son Vasily, applicant Petelin Mikhail L'vov, all Creoles, 1863.” Later, this surname is no longer found among the inhabitants of the Commander Islands or on Attu. Their origins are uncertain.

- **Popov**—Aleuts, with one family headed by Denis Popov recorded on Medny from 1863. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), “they were born on Medny,” while according to my own materials, they were considered the first settlers. Subsequently, other Popovs moved from Attu to Medny in 1872. By origin, all the Popovs on Medny were Attuans. Descendants were still living on the Commanders in 1983.
- **Proshin**—One family, headed by Pavel Proshin, was recorded on Medny in 1860. This surname is not found in later sources, where there are only Proshevs, but no Pavel Proshev is found among these. All the Proshevs were Bering Creoles, and according to Grebnitsky (1882), they were also known only on Bering Island as having come “from Attu.” They do not feature in the lists of Attu residents, nor are they found among those who moved from Attu to Medny. Their origins are uncertain, possibly Attuans.
- **Sushkov (or Shushkov)**—Creoles, recorded up until 1867 on Medny, with one family headed by Anastasia, the widow of Aleksei Sushkov, with her six children. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), they were “from Bering, the father is Russian.” There were no Sushkovs on the Attu list of 1871. Their origins are uncertain, most likely Atkans. Descendants were still living on the Commanders in 1983.
- **Khabarov**—Creoles, with the large family of Yakov Ignatiyev Khabarov recorded on Medny from 1864. According to Grebnitsky (1882, 48), they were “from Atkha, all the children were born on Medny.” Khabarovs are recorded in the Medny list of 1866, but not on Attu. They were Atkans by origin. Descendants were still living on the Commanders in 1983.
- **Khoroshev**—Aleuts, with one family headed by Aleksei Khoroshev recorded in 1860. Later on, there was another Khoroshev family living on Medny. Most of the Khoroshevs lived on Bering Island and were listed as Bering Aleuts. Grebnitsky does not mention this surname. It is also missing from the list of Attu residents. According to my sources, its origins are Atkan. Descendants were still living on the Commanders in 1983.
- **Khudyakov**—Aleuts, with several families recorded on Medny since 1859, and one family on Bering Island. According to Grebnitsky, both these and the others had come from Attu. They were Attuans by origin. Descendants were living on the Commanders up until the 1910s.

In sum, before the sale of the islands and the liquidation of the RAC, 7 lineages of Attuans, 6 of Atkans, and 2 of unknown origin were recorded on Medny. A list of the inhabitants of Medny Island in 1866 has been preserved (see Appendix 1). Of the surnames recorded in the church records on Medny from 1858 to 1867, the following surnames are missing from the 1866 list: of the Atkans: the Khoroshevs and the Pankovs; of the Attuans: the Nevzorovs, Golodovs, and Zaikovs; and of those of unknown origins: the Proshins and Petelins. Of the 93 people who were living on Medny in 1866, 54 people were Atkans or of unknown origins, and 39 people were Attuans. But if we count only adults (over 15 years of age), then the ratio is somewhat different: for the men, there are 13 Atkans and 13 Attuans; for the women, 14 Atkans and 8 Attuans. In any case, these data do not support the commonly held opinion that Medny was inhabited exclusively by people from Attu during the RAC period. The situation changes in the next 20 years—that is, the period in which the origins of the Medny-Aleutian Creole should clearly be sought.

The Era of “Timelessness” (1867–1872)

The sources are few and far between for the period from 1867 to 1872. The RAC ceased its activities on the Commanders immediately following the sale of Alaska, but it was only in 1871 that the islands were leased to the American company Hutchinson & Co. For the previous four and a half years, the fate of the islanders seems to have been left in their own hands. As early as 1872, most likely on the initiative of the company’s management, but perhaps on the initiative of the islanders themselves, the next migration from Attu to Medny took place, with thirty-five people taking part (15 Creoles and 10 Aleuts, see Appendix 2).

For the first time in the population history of Medny, this migration resulted in the island having an Attuan majority, not only numerically but also socially. In a total population of 127 people in 1872, there were 74 Attuans, including 24 Creoles (58% of the whole), while Atkans and other Aleuts numbered 54 people (42% of the whole). Among adults over 15 years old, there were 21 Attuan men and 19 women, whereas the Atkans and other Aleuts numbered 13 men and 14 women. It was clearly this migration that ensured the predominance of the Attuan dialect as the main means of communication, something to which R.G. Liapunova (1987, 185) first drew attention. There is a notion present in the literature that Creoles, in contrast to the “Aleuts,” were Russian-speaking (e.g., Vakhtin 1985, 42). However, the only attempt that has been made to assess the linguistic situation on the Commander Islands, including Medny, indicates that even in 1896 (never mind 1872) 100% of local residents, both “Aleuts” and “Creoles,” spoke Aleutian. Only one person was noted as Russian-speaking and was, moreover,

not resident on Medny, but on Bering Island (Patkanov 1912, 906). Although it seems realistic to assume that the majority of the inhabitants of Medny also spoke Russian, this in itself does not provide grounds for explaining the appearance of a creolized Aleutian language on Medny. We do not find Russian-speaking residents at that time on Medny Island, with the exception of the lone Russian administrator, Alexander Grabezhev, and so the emergence of the Copper Island Aleutian language should therefore be attributed to a later time.

The final cementing of the dialectal differentiation between the populations on the two islands of the Commander archipelago—Atkan on Bering and Attuan on Medny—should be regarded as the defining feature of the linguistic situation in the 1870s. In popular awareness, this linguistic transformation was preserved until the mid-twentieth century in the form of a memory that “in the beginning, Creoles were brought to Medny, followed by people called ‘Saksinnan,’ and the Aleuts then formed from these” (Liapunova (1987, 185). The “Saksinnan” should be understood as referring to the Attuan Aleuts who had relocated to Medny in 1872. R.G. Liapunova (1987, 185) rightly notes that “numerical dominance on Medny Island aside, the Attuans’ influence on ethnic traditions (including language) began only in 1872.” The emergence of a Russian-speaking “native” population in the archipelago is associated with the dramatic fate of the inhabitants of the Kuril Islands, transferred by Russia to Japan in exchange for exclusive Russian possession of South Sakhalin according to the 1875 Treaty of Saint Petersburg.

The RAC Settlements on the Kuril Islands

The initial border between Russian and Japanese possessions in the Kuril Islands had been established in 1855 by the Treaty of Shimoda and passed through the Vries Strait, assigning the island of Urup to Russia and Iturup to the Japanese. Under this agreement, Russian settlements could be established on the islands from Urup northwards, up to and including Shumshu, immediately off the Kamchatkan mainland. Russian settlements consequently existed on three islands only: Urup, Simushir, and Shumshu. All of these were founded in the period from 1795 to 1877, and were found from 1799 to 1867 within and under the control of the RAC (Shubin 1990, 1992a). Initially, the islands had been inhabited exclusively by the Ainu, the local aboriginal population. Ainu were living on Urup, Simushir, Shumshu, Shiashkotan, and Paramushir, with the latter island also having some Kamchadal-Itelmen settlements. Besides these, another ethnographic group of Ainu were resident in the southern Kurils (Iturup, Kunashir, and Shikotan), found under Japanese rule since 1855. Apart from an aborted attempt to found a purely ethnic-Russian settlement on Urup at the end of the eighteenth century to the

beginning of the nineteenth century, the so-called Kurilorossia, the bringing of “Aleuts” to the Kurils to exploit the natural resources, began at about the same time as the settlement of the Commander Islands, in 1828, when thirty-nine Kodiak Eskimos (Sugpiat) and thirteen Russian fishermen were transferred to Urup. Subsequent years saw groups of Kodiak Eskimos, along with a small number of Aleuts proper, resettled on all three islands. The list of so-called *Partovyye Aleuty* [“Party-” or “Work-Brigade-Aleuts”] on Urup in 1828 gives forty-nine people, excluding Russians, of which thirty-two were from Kodiak (i.e., Kodiak Eskimos), four were Eskimos from the Bristol Bay region and the Kuskokwim basin, eleven were Eastern Aleuts, and two were “Sitkans,” most likely also Kodiak Eskimos by origin (Shubin 1992a, 61–62). The new policy of the RAC, then being implemented, foresaw the mass resettlement of Aleuts and Kodiakians wherever commercial fishing grounds had been established, mainly in the Kurils, in Fort Ross in California, and on the Pribilof Islands (Veltre and McCartney 2002).

The anthroponymic model, which differs for the various ethnic groups involved, can help determine the ethnic origins of the imported workers. Among the Aleuts, we find the latest data on the official usage of pre-Christian Aleutian names in the 1760s and 1770s, and even then these native Aleut names alternated with Orthodox Christian ones. According to some sources, the first Aleut baptized in Bolsherechensk in 1752 had originated from the island of Attu (Bolkhovitina 1997, 2:252). After that, the conversion of the Aleuts proceeded rapidly, so that by the 1820s, all the Aleuts proper bore canonical Christian names as well as surnames taken from their godparents or spouses. The same system was likewise introduced in the nineteenth century for the Ainu, but the set of surnames adopted among the Ainu was specific and differed from those found among the Aleuts. By way of contrast, among the Kodiak and Central Eskimos, their pre-Christian names were called into use as surnames alongside their Orthodox Christian names, though these were not applied to their wives or necessarily inherited as surnames by their descendants. For example, Golodov, Ivan—an Attuan Aleut; Chevykhtak, Aleksei—a Kodiak Eskimo; Krasilnikov, Yemelyan—an Ainu from Shumshu.

The linguistic situation in the Russian settlements on the Kuril Islands was thus more complicated than on the Commanders and the Aleutian Islands, and included at least the following mutually incomprehensible languages: Russian (as the language of interethnic communication), Ainu, Kodiak “Alutiiq,” Central Yupik, Aleutian, and possibly some Athabaskan languages. The Russian language clearly played a more dominant role in these circumstances than on the Commanders, where both the Aleuts proper and the Creoles continued to use Aleutian dialects in everyday life up until the middle of the twentieth century, while Russian was only employed as the language of communication with the authorities.

In accordance with the privileges granted to the RAC in 1821, the Aleuts and Eskimos, united under the common ethnonym “Aleuts,” as well as the Ainu, referred to as “Kurilians,” all belonged to the class of “islanders” and were obliged to serve the company between the ages of eighteen and fifty. According to the RAC charter of 1844, these “islanders” were thenceforth included in the category of *inorodtsy* or “non-Russians,” though this involved little practical change in their status. The majority population in the Northern Kurils during the period of the islands’ possession by the RAC were Kurilians, followed by the “Kodiak Aleuts” (Sugpiat), then the Aleuts proper, Creoles and, finally, Russians. So, for example, out of 134 people living on the island of Shumshu in 1842 there were 5 Creoles, 91 Kurilians, and 38 “Kodiak Aleuts” (i.e. Eskimos) (Alaskan Russian Church, D2, reel 56, 520). It is characteristic that the list of Kodiakians on Shumshu in 1842 is made up of a host of young unmarried men (27 persons) with only 6 women and the same number of small children. Of the women, 3 have a Kodiak “surname” (i.e., were brought from there), while 2 are known only by Orthodox Christian names (i.e., indicating that they were either Kodiak Eskimos or Aleuts, or less likely of Ainu origins). It follows that the Kodiak population on Shumshu was clearly temporary by that point, essentially constituting a brigade of young workers brought in for a limited period; otherwise, they would have been living in family groups. The absence of families among the majority of Kodiaks suggests that they had been brought to Shumshu at a date not long before the document was compiled. It may be assumed that this had taken place in the 1830s—that is, at approximately the same time as the establishment of a permanent population on Medny. Further evidence on the specific position of the Kodiak people is afforded by the fact that in the 1840s deaths were only recorded among the Aleuts on Shumshu, with not a single death being registered for the Kurilians. This may admittedly be due to the Aleuts informing the priest about the deaths on his annual visit to the island, while the Kurilians did not do so. In contrast, the Ainu demonstrate exactly the model expected of a permanent population. They numbered 44 males (including children) and 45 females (also including children). Noteworthy here are the small number of children in Ainu families, as well as the frequency of marriages in which the wife is older than her husband. The temporary character of the newcomer population on the Kurils continued to be a feature until the sale of Alaska in 1867, despite the several occasions on which the RAC brought fishermen’s wives who had remained in Alaska to rejoin their husbands on Urup, Simushir, and Shumshu (Shubin 1992a, 61–64).

In 1867, under the agreement on the sale of Russia’s American possessions to the United States, the Commander and Kuril Islands remained in Russian hands. For an extended period of time, the Russian authorities decided the fate of the Kurils, a little-known archipelago of apparently little

interest to anyone, which ultimately led to the 1875 Treaty of Saint Petersburg, whereby all the Kurils from Urup to Shumshu and Paramushir, inclusive, were transferred to Japan. By that time, there were several families of Russians and Creoles living on the islands, with around seventy Aleuts and Kodiaks (brought in as employees of the RAC from 1828 to 1867) and about a hundred Kurilian Ainus—the aborigines of the Kuril Islands (Shubin 1992b, 4). One of the articles of the Petersburg Treaty provided for the possibility of the local population choosing their preferred citizenship themselves—to opt to be Japanese subjects, if they stayed where they were, or Russian, which implied their evacuation from the islands to the Russian Empire. In 1875 a survey was conducted of the Kurilians, as a result of which the majority of the Ainu (on the northern islands of Shumshu, Paramushir, and Shiashkotan) decided to remain where they had always lived, while the Kodiaks and Aleuts, as well as the Ainu of Urup and Simushir, were in favour of keeping their Russian citizenship and accepting evacuation, but to somewhere in Russia, Alaska no longer being an option (Shubin 1985, 1987a, 1987b, 1992b). Omitting in this brief sketch the details of the evacuation to Kamchatka and the lives of those Ainu who remained on the Kurils, we may only note here that the fate of both groups was ultimately tragic, leading to the complete extinction of the Indigenous and native newcomer population of the Kuril archipelago.

The main evacuation of the greater part of the residents of the Kuril Islands to Kamchatka took place in 1877, and continued for separate groups to 1878, when, according to official data, a settlement of eighty-nine Kurilian “Aleuts” was founded in the Petropavlovsk region. Living conditions in Kamchatka proved dire, to the extent that this group of immigrants began to experience a rapid collapse in numbers. We shall quote here the brief description made by B. Dybovsky, who inquired into their condition in Avachinskaya Bay:

They were abandoned in Petropavlovsk without any means of subsistence, not provided with work, and lacking supplies for the winter. There was a tavern nearby, where they drank away all that they had brought with them. Settled in for the winter in a rotten old house without heating, they began to fall sick, and in the first year on arrival alone more than a dozen (from 10 to 19 people) died, whereupon they were transferred to Seroglazka, to a settlement three versts away from Petropavlovsk. There they lived in pits similar to wolf dens, dressed in rags, and ate unhealthy food (stale, sour fish and *yukola* [sun-dried fish] for dogs). Unsurprisingly, the spring of 1879 saw them fall ill with typhus. (Dybovsky 1884, 15–16)

In 1881 the remainder were resettled south of Petropavlovsk to Cape Zhyolty, from whence the remaining twenty-six individuals were finally, after lengthy bureaucratic dithering, resettled to the Commanders in 1888, moving according to official sources in two parties to the islands of Bering and Medny. Note here that the official data on the number of “Aleuts” who eventually migrated from the Kurils to the Commanders are not absolutely accurate. The genealogies I have compiled for the Commander Aleuts feature a larger number of people who had moved from Kamchatka to the Commanders, indicating a degree of natural connections and contacts between the Kamchatka “Kurilians” and the Commanders, including spontaneous individual migrations, apparently made without official sanction. We have at our disposal a list of sixty-seven “Aleuts” who were living on Cape Zhyolty in 1888 (Alaskan Russian Church 1887, cont. D27, reel 56) (see Appendix 3) and genealogical tables compiled from nineteenth-century archival materials of the Russian Orthodox Church covering the Commander Islands. Using these sources, it has proven possible to reconstruct the last major migration to the Commanders made by former inhabitants of the Kuril Islands following the surrender of the Kuril chain to Japan. This migration took place during the 1880s, coming to an end in 1888. Around thirty people settled on Medny and about ten on Bering, and we were able to reconstruct the personal composition of these groups on the basis of archival documents and genealogical analysis. The approximate figures are explained by the difficulty of keeping track of young children who could have been born in Kamchatka or immediately after arriving on the Commanders (see Appendix 4). This migration altered the ethnic and linguistic environment on Medny Island, where the prevailing Attuan majority, which as we have seen had been established after 1872, was joined by a socially degraded, apparently already Russian-speaking and multi-ethnic group, composed of an assorted array of Aleuts, Kodiak Eskimos, and possibly a small number of Ainu, which then determined the social environment in which, from 1880 to 1890, the Medny Aleutian language was formed.

Conclusion

Without doubt, the Copper Island Aleutian language is an unusual phenomenon, the main peculiarity of which lies in its “inverted” structure in comparison with ordinary pidgin-creole languages, which are highly numerous in various different regions of the world. These languages, which emerge as a result of contact between two or more languages that differ in structure and vocabulary, tend, as a rule, to borrow vocabulary from the socially dominant language, while exhibiting a grammatical structure that either derives from the model of the socially subordinate language in this pairing, or else demonstrates properties specific to this kind of linguistic

formation (such as reduplication as a means of plural formation, simplification of complex grammatical structures, etc.). It is no coincidence that creole languages have arisen almost everywhere as a result of the pidginization of European languages (English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Russian, etc.) spoken by socially dominant colonialists or societies in control of international trade. But these languages themselves appeared and functioned in societies occupying a socially subordinate position. This rule can be illustrated by the example of Tok Pisin, the English creole of New Guinea, where English was the dominant language under British and later Australian colonial rule. Here is an excerpt from a popular song in this language:

O meri vantok mi sori long yu!—O, my female compatriot, I love you!

Where

O—an international interjection,

Meri—“woman” < the common English personal name,

Vantok—“compatriot,” i.e., a speaker of the same language, < English *one talk*

Mi—1st person singular personal pronoun, < English *me*

Sori—“to love,” < English *sorry*

Yu—2nd person singular personal pronoun

long—an accusative indicator, absent in English but obligatory for Papuan languages.

It is clear that the community in which Tok Pisin arose was Papuan-speaking and socially subordinate. In the case of the Commander Islands it would seem logical to expect the same model, whereby the vocabulary would be Russian—that is, borrowed from the language of the dominant society in Russian America and in the Russian Empire in general—while in morphology we would observe the influence of the Aleutian grammatical model. But the reality turned out to be quite different, a mirror image of the example given from New Guinea: the vocabulary in the Medny creole is Aleutian and the verbal paradigm is Russian. In other words, the Aleutian-speaking population was the socially dominant group at the time of the emergence of this language, and the Russian-speaking population was socially subordinate. As we have noted above, referring to N.B. Vakhtin, a language like Mednian could only have appeared among native speakers of the Russian language. However, it is rather difficult to imagine a group of Russians, especially ethnic Russians on the Commander Islands of the nineteenth century, as a socially subordinate group; for this, the Russian-speaking group would have to have found itself in a completely different social position than the one it occupied in Russian America. Granted, the notion of some Russian-speaking population in a non-dominant position is not in itself unthinkable. Vakhtin (1985, 43), for example, gives the interesting

example of a Russian-speaking girl in Chukotka talking with her Eskimo-speaking mother in a language structurally reminiscent of Medny Aleutian. For the girl, her mother is of course a socially dominant figure. Further examples of this type can be given. In the 1960s, for example, I heard the phrases like the following from my Russian colleagues who had been working on a construction site in Indonesia: *Oleg, pora makánit', orángi uzbe posbli v rúmu* [Oleg, it's time to makan, the oranges have already gone into the rumah]—from the Indonesian *makan* “eat,” *orang* “man,” and *rumah* “house”.

Or the phrase I once overheard in Israel, spoken by a hired worker from Russia:

Ne mogu bol'she nikayónit', mashkántu dayut tol'ko olímkam, a ya gastarbáiterka [I can't nikayon anymore, only olimkas are given the mashkanta, and I'm a female guest worker]—from the Hebrew *nikayon* “cleaning a room,” *mashkanta* “mortgage loan,” *olim* “repatriates,” and German *Gastarbeiter* “a temporary foreign worker.”

In both cases, the Russian speakers were not in a dominant position in the environment but were found in a state of dependence on a local population that spoke a different language.

Once again, Vakhtin and his colleagues no less rightly believe that, in order to solve the “Mednovskaia enigma,” a population study of the history of the settlement of the Commander Islands, especially Medny Island, is necessary, and would have to extend from at least the 1820s up to the end of the nineteenth century (Vakhtin 1985, 43). In other words, the specific non-dominant Russian-speaking group that created the Medny Aleutian language had to be found. I have presented an attempt at just such an investigation in this paper. The Russian-speaking group concerned turned out to be the migrants who had been forced to leave the Kuril Islands, and who included in their number representatives of several different ethnic groups (Aleuts, Eskimos, and Ainu), who found themselves in the late 1880s on Medny Island, where Aleuts speaking their native Attuan dialect of the Aleutian language were the dominant group.

I have discussed possible scenarios for solving the “Copper Island Aleut enigma” extensively with my colleagues I.I. Krupnik, an ethnographer with whom I conducted field research on the Commanders in 1983, and the linguists N.B. Vakhtin and E.V. Golovko, who had worked on the islands the previous year. These discussions led to several hypotheses which, I now believe, are not supported by the evidence.

The first hypothesis was based on the assumption of the former existence of a certain mixed “Pidgin-Aleutian” across the entirety of Russian America, or at least on Attu Island, which was then brought to Medny Island

by settlers from Attu. Firstly, none of the very numerous sources available mention the existence of such a language. Secondly, even if it had existed, it would still be necessary to find the Russian-speaking group that had created it there, which has not been possible. Pidginization of the Aleutian language in the Aleutian Islands in the mid-twentieth century took place according to the usual model for creole languages, producing an “English pidgin,” not an “Aleutian pidgin.”

Another, more popular hypothesis, set forth in a number of works by our linguistic colleagues, the same specialists who were responsible for successfully bringing the almost extinct Medny Aleut language to the scientific community today, invokes the social status of the “Creoles” of Russian America, who then occupied an intermediate position between the “Russian” rulers of the colony and the “Natives”—the Aleuts (Vakhtin 1985; Golovko 1997, etc.). According to this hypothesis, these Creoles, who had lost their privileged status after the sale of Alaska in 1867 and were subject to the influence of the numerically predominant “Aleutian” population, were the group that was responsible for the emergence of the Medny Aleut language. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that, even before 1867, the Creoles had been bilingual “with a predominance of the Russian language” (Vakhtin 1985, 42), and is also not confirmed by any sources. The genealogical analysis I have carried out indicates that as early as the mid-nineteenth century, at least in the Commanders, assignment of “Creole” status was quite arbitrary, to the extent that people regarded as “Aleuts” often assumed the title of “Creole” without any basis whatsoever. In addition, we nowhere find mention of any linguistic differences between Creoles and Aleuts. Up until the middle of the twentieth century, the descendants of both communities used Aleutian vernaculars for social intercourse.

The solution to the “Medny enigma,” as detailed analysis of the population history of the island shows, lies in the events of the 1870s and 1880s, particularly in two migrations: that of 1872, which led to the local dominance of Attuans and the Attuan dialect; and that of 1888, which led to the settlement on the island of a relatively large group of former Kuril Islands residents. This group was originally multilingual when living on the Kurils. It was dominated by Kodiak Eskimos, who were called “Kodiak Aleuts” but who spoke a dialect of the Eskimo Yupik language that the Aleuts did not understand. In the Kuril Islands they encountered the Ainu, who spoke a completely different and incomprehensible language to them, along with assorted Aleuts, mostly from the Andreanof Islands but partly made up of speakers of eastern Aleutian dialects, and, finally, small numbers of “Russians,” among whom there were not only ethnic Russians but also other immigrants from European Russia, particularly Baltic Germans. This linguistic situation was bound to lead, and evidently did lead, to the Russian language

playing a much more important role as a language of interethnic communication in the Kurils than it did in Alaska or on the Commanders. This role increased all the more so after the eviction of the “indigenous” Kurilian population to Kamchatka, where they found themselves surrounded by a Russian-speaking population and shifted to speaking mainly Russian themselves, a situation that was further aggravated by the high death rate, severe social degradation, and impoverishment experienced during their eleven-year stay in Kamchatka. Most of the former “Kurilians,” about thirty people in all, then ended up on Medny, with only eight people settling on Bering Island, of which seven were Aleuts and Creoles, mainly from Atka. The Russian-speaking population that created the Medny Aleutian language thus consisted precisely of the former inhabitants of the Kuril Islands, predominantly Kodiak Eskimos, with perhaps several Ainu and Aleuts, as well as that part of the initial group of settlers on Medny that were Aleuts of non-Attuan origin. This situation was peculiar to Medny Island and was not paralleled on the Aleutian Islands or in Alaska, or even on Bering Island, where, as we have seen, the Atkan dialect of Aleutian survived until very recently. Full demonstration of the details of the ethnolinguistic situation following the resettlement of the “Kurilians” on the Commander Islands remains beyond the scope of this study, but it may be noted that the formation of the Mednian language was a rather rapid phenomenon that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, had turned it into the dominant vernacular for all inhabitants of Medny Island, not only for the immigrants from the Kurils.

In the decades that followed the resettlement of this group of immigrants, their difficult integration into the Medny Aleut community took place on the basis of the emerging Medny Aleutian Creole, although some families moved in the late 1800s to Bering Island. The first two decades saw a persistence of marital ties within the resettlement community; later, these ties weakened, although they did not completely disappear. One apparent obstacle to integration in the beginning was the unusual Kodiak “surnames,” which led to the adoption of other surnames more acceptable to the Aleuts of the Commander Islands over these first two decades. It is characteristic that their new surnames were formed in a number of cases from the names of birds and animals—a characteristic of Kodiak, and perhaps Ainu anthroponyms. For example, Otsuka Kazuyoshi noted that *Ishku* in Ainu means “a kind of bird” (Torii 1903, 113). Once settled on Medny, the Ishkus changed their surname to Kulikov [from *kulik*—a curlew], while the Kontuyaks and Katipizyaks changed theirs to Seleznev [from *selezen*’—a drake], and the Katynchaks to Losev [*los*’—an elk], with only the Pazhuk family opting for the non-zoonymic surname of Shangin. By the time of our fieldwork on the Commanders in 1983 all these surnames had since fallen

out of use, with only the Aleutian surname of the Kichins remaining current, and that in a family that had early on moved to Bering Island. We were unable to record any oral tradition of the resettlement from the Kuril Islands.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to those colleagues who encouraged and helped me to write this article. First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Igor Krupnik, with whom I conducted field research on Bering Island in 1983, and with whom I evaluated the possible scenarios for the appearance of the Medny creole from an anthropological perspective. Of particular use were the numerous discussions of this problem I enjoyed with Professors Nikolai Vakhtin and Evgeniy Golovko, who preserved materials on the Medny creole for subsequent generations. The field research materials on the genealogy of the Commander Islands Aleuts kindly provided to me by the director of the Commander Islands Museum, Natalia Tatarenkova, were likewise very useful. I would especially like to note here the assistance and cooperation of two scholars who are now, alas, no longer with us—Professors Roza Liapunova and Michael Krauss, who shared with me their views on the Copper Island “enigma” and helped me in my search for archival materials on the history of the Commander Islands in the nineteenth century.

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