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Modernization, the minor Finnic languages and their study

Guest lecture at a seminar of Prof. Dr. Anneli Sarhima, Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz / Sprachen Nordeuropas und des Baltikums, also attended to by the participants of the first planning meeting of the research consortium FUDE (Finno-Ugric Diversity in Europe), May 5, 2007.

Introduction: The Finnic languages

For those of you who are not so well acquainted with the subject matter of this talk, a very brief introduction to the Finnic languages. For more extensive information, two books in German are highly recommended: Laanest (1982) as a linguistic introduction, and Bartens (1998) with general information on not only Finnic but also other Finno-Ugric peoples in Europe.

The Finnic languages are a subgroup of the Finno-Ugric language family, originally spoken on all three sides of the Gulf of Finland. During the last two millennia, this area of interrelated and contacting dialects has broken into parts: two state languages, Finnish and Estonian, and numerous minority languages. The decisive factors were the expansion of East Slavic (Russian) in the east and southeast, the expansion of Baltic (Latvian) in the south, and, finally, the political borders which gave rise to the two Finnic states, Estonia, i.e. most of the Finnic part of the German-colonised Baltic states, and Finland, i.e. the Swedish-governed part of the Finnic area. This language-political development is not unlike what happened in the continental Germanic area – as you know, it is for political reasons that we now have two standard languages, German and Dutch, covering the originally continuous Continental West Germanic (Dutch-Low German-High German) dialect area, and had the political developments in the last thousand years been different, we might have, for instance, different standard languages for Western and Eastern Finland and a common standard language for Eastern Finland and Karelia.

Outside the two nascent nation-states, some minorities remained. In Northwest Russia, Karelian, the closest sister variety of Finnish, is spoken. From the Northern or White Sea Karelian dialects, which are more or less mutually intelligible with Finnish, a rather smooth dialect continuum leads, through the more southern transitional dialects of Olonets Karelia and Lude, to the easternmost Finnic variety, Veps. In Ingria, i.e. in the region of St. Petersburg, two Finnic languages were spoken, Ingrian (closely related with Karelian and Finnish) and Vot (the nearest relative of Estonian), plus a Finnish variety of immigrants who settled in Ingria in the 17th century. In Latvia, the last remnant of the Finnic languages is, or was, represented by the now almost extinct Livonian, spoken until WWII in a few coast villages of the Courland peninsula.

The Finnic languages offer a wide spectrum of different sociolinguistic and language contact situations, from practically monolingual nation-states to endangered minorities. For many minor Finnic languages the catastrophes of the 20th century, the Stalinist terror and WWII were a fatal blow, and some of them are only spoken by the oldest generation and now facing extinction. On the other hand, there are not only language deaths but also language births going on: similar processes of emancipation by status-raising as in other parts of Europe can be seen in the Finnic area, too. The language of the old autochthonous Finnish minority in Tornedal in the North of Sweden, a.k.a. *meänkieli* ‘our language’, and another

Finnish variety also belonging to the so-called Far North group of Finnish dialects, Kven in Northern Norway, are developing standards of their own, and in Southeast Estonia, a similar emancipation process is taking place with the Võro-Seto dialect, the Southern dialect which most distinctly deviates from the Northern-based Standard Estonian language.

Defining central concepts

In American comedy shows, stupid people who have been asked to give a speech or a lecture always begin by quoting the Webster dictionary definition for the main word of the title. I will go just one small step further and start by exploring how “modernization” is defined in connection with language. There seem to be two main approaches: “language of modernization”, i.e. a certain language as symptomatic of the modernization of society and culture, and “modernization of language”, i.e. those changes in language that are most often associated with the modernization of society and culture. The former goes with the questions of language shift in terms of individual speakers choosing between modern or less modern languages, endangerment of languages regarded as less modern, together with the questions of national and international language policies. The second approach deals with questions such as language planning, standardization, developing orthographies or new words, placing the existing language varieties in a social order of, say, literary languages vs. vernaculars or dialects. But, thirdly, I would also like to deal with questions of modernization in linguistics, of areas of study perceived as more or less modern, and with their possible repercussions in language policies and maybe even in the linguistic landscapes in which the speakers live.

What is meant by modernization itself is, of course, a phenomenon with innumerable facets. The term *modernization* is often reserved for socio-economic phenomena such as the development of technology, industrialization, urbanization and greater individual mobility, and the development of the nation-state, with its ideas of democracy, i.e. shared political responsibility of each citizen. These phenomena are connected with the rise of capitalism and state bureaucracy, both interfering with the dynamics of families and traditional communities. Modernization thus subdues the individual citizen more and more immediately to the market forces and to the controlling organs of the state, but the same process also means new perspectives of social emancipation – for instance, for women, for the working class or for ethnic minorities. Modernization, thus, is something multi-faceted and controversial.

In many parts of Europe, these socio-economic phenomena coincided with *modernism*, which is an umbrella term for various schools in late 19th-century art, characterized by an aesthetic consciousness and self-reflection as well as a critical attitude towards “figurative” art – the art is about the art, not about reality. The French term *modernité* is sometimes used to denote the sense of the loss of continuity in urban culture and everyday life – some essential aspects of our life, so it seems to us, are so radically different from the life of our forefathers that a genealogical lineage seems to be inevitably broken, heritage lost, tradition gone. All these phenomena can be subsumed under the term *modernity*, denoting an era that is characterized by secularization, the disintegration of traditional communities and the rise of the individual as a subject. (Felski 1995: 12–13.)

Many people in the 20th century grew up in a culture in which *modern* – in particular in politics, technology, and the world of work, less in the field of culture – was a word with distinctly positive connotations, something inherently good and worth striving to (and also something inevitable, according to the natural order of things). Later, these ideas were challenged by the concept of *post-modern* (used mainly in the field of culture, less in linguistics in strict sense and even less in politics, technology or the world of work). *Post-modern* refers to the loss of even implicit hierarchies, orders, continuities and Great Narratives, abandoning all attempts at explanation in a traditional sense and turning the relationship between language and the phenomena it describes upside down. I have even

heard some culture researchers speak about *trans-modernity*, which could – if I have understood it right – mean something like challenging post-modernity and admitting that the loss of the Great Narrative is a Great Narrative, too. And of course, there are critical thinkers such as Bruno Latour (1993) who deny the usability of concepts such as “modern” altogether.

Modernization on the time axis

All this makes it seem that modernity and modernization are some clearly delimitable phases in a chronological order, preceded by something else and inevitably followed by something else. In fact, however, they are rather epiphenomena that only make sense in relation to something. Above all, these phenomena do not belong to a fixed chronology. What can be understood as “language of modernization” or “modernization of language”, or “modernization of linguistics”, takes place at different times in different communities and places.

We might claim that many minor languages spoken in the peripheries of Europe are lagging behind in the process of modernization. In particular, we could make this claim about the peripheries of the former Soviet Union (such as the regions where minor Finnic peoples such as the Karelians and the Veps are living), where the authoritarian political structures hindering the process of political emancipation have coincided – of course, not accidentally – with economical problems hindering the modernization in terms of technology, infrastructure and welfare services. That means: people do not read newspapers in their language, although they speak it in their everyday life, and they do not buy their milk in the local store but keep a private cow in their backyard (and milk it by hand), and these two things might be interconnected. This being so, we could state that some minority peoples are only now going through the process which some young nation states such as Finland or Estonia already experienced in the late 19th or early 20th century: the standardization of language, new applications of the language in writing, the extension of the use of the language to new domains, development of lexicon etc.

However, the situation is not that simple. It might be that some minor languages in their current revitalization are already now facing the problems that for some “major” languages are only slowly becoming reality. Languages such as the minor Finnic languages must not only fight for official recognition, they must gain use in domains outside the homely sphere. The homepage of the Võro Instituut' in South Estonia proudly announces that “academic dissertations have been defended and conferences held in the Võro language”. At the same time, as we all know, practically every language in Europe except English is endangered in the globalizing domains of business, learning and science, and even German and French language authorities are concerned about the narrowing academic use of these major European languages – despite their rich tradition and millions of speakers.

Another typical domain used as a battleground of cultures is the language of young people. The Finnish linguist Petri Lauerma (1995) makes a good point in comparing the bilingualism of the last Votes with the bilingualism of modern Finnish youth. (Actually, he is not directly dealing with the questions of language and social change but simply asks whether it is meaningful to include recent Russian loanwords in a dictionary of Vote – but a good point is, nevertheless, a good point.) Vote, the “dying minor Finnic language” par excellence in Ingria, i.e. between the eastern border of Estonia and St. Petersburg, has been spoken “by a handful of old people”, according to all handbooks, as long as I have been reading the handbooks (and as long as there have been handbooks of Finnic/Finno-Ugric languages): the normal transmission to next generations already ceased before World War II, and today’s last speakers are hardly able to speak “classical pure Vote” as described by linguists a hundred years ago, without resorting to Ingrian, Finnish or even Estonian elements – and, of course, Russian. But, as Lauerma asks, are the code-switchings into Russian in the language of the

last old Votes something different from the English elements in the language use of today's Finnish youth? (We might answer "yes", but nevertheless, the question deserves to be asked.)

In the case of minorities in the former Soviet Union in particular, we should not forget that many of these languages experienced a very forceful modernization process already in the 1920s or 1930s. The October Revolution in Russia started the greatest language-political experiment ever seen. New literary languages were created – together with a school system – for previously illiterate peoples. Not only grammar books, dictionaries and school textbooks appeared but even original literature as well as translations of Russian and international classical writers (of course, ideologically selected and edited, so that the Ingrians, for instance, could read passages of Finnish realist writers as truthful descriptions of the dreadful conditions in which the working class in capitalist Finland lived). National intelligentsias were educated, and whole peoples were taught to regard themselves as representatives of a certain nationality who spoke a certain ethnic language (beside Russian). This is particularly interesting with respect to peoples who never had a clear unified ethnic identity before the October Revolution (as Sarhimaa [2000] has argued in detail about the Karelians). Some minorities in Russia did not even have a common ethnonym or name for their language (for instance, some Veps groups had only used expressions like "speaks our way") or they had identified themselves mainly in terms of religion and citizenship (like some Ingrians who had called themselves "Russians").

Of the minor Finnic peoples, particularly the Veps and the Ingrians were involved in this ethno-lingual planning process, partly also the Karelians, whose language policy, however, was seriously hampered by the closeness of Finland and the Finnish language. (The Votes were already by then too small and dwindling a group to be taken into consideration, the Livonians – who did have a national renaissance on another ideological basis – did not belong to the Soviet Union before World War II, and of course the Meänkieli speakers in Sweden and the Kven in Norway had nothing to do with the developments in the Soviet Union.)

Of course, the gigantic ethno-lingual modernization project in the Soviet Union was much more top-to-bottom than the Western European ideas of modernization as an interaction of the state, market forces, civil non-profit organizations and private individuals. The ideological framework was given, and diverting from it could literally risk your life. Behind the proclaimed goal – emancipating the language and the nation – there was a less openly proclaimed long-term goal of assimilating all nations and languages united by Communism into one unified Communist nation speaking one language (which, considering the general glorification of the Russian language and Russian-language culture in the former Soviet Union, could hardly have been anything else but some kind of a future form of Russian). And, finally, the rise of the Stalinist ethnopolitics and the great terror in the 1930s put an end to this language-political experiment in many cases, especially with the smallest minority languages such as Ingrian or Veps. Books were collected away and burnt, the new intelligentsia imprisoned or executed. (Karelian, again, is different, because of individual political reasons connected with the closeness of Finland.) But, in any case, the speakers of many minority languages in the former Soviet Union, languages like Karelian, Veps or even the almost extinct Ingrian, have already experienced something like an ambitious modernization project in language planning, and today's revitalization of Karelian and Veps thus does have precedents.

Thus, we should not reify modernization and regard it as a kind of a natural law or a straightforward historical development. Nor should we yield to the temptation of placing individual ethnic groups or their languages on one single time axis of modernization. Modernization is a multi-faceted phenomenon, not only with numerous positive and negative connotations and consequences but also of a deeply paradoxical and controversial character.

Modern vs. less modern languages

In terms of language use, modernization sometimes implies considering a certain language more modern than another language – which, in turn, may lead to language shift, that is: abandoning the language perceived as less modern. The concept of “modernity” is rarely explicitly mentioned in this connection, but the complex factors which cause a speaker to give up using and transmitting his/her language are connected with certain aspects of modernization.

One central aspect of modernity in this respect might be the “usefulness” of a language. (This, of course, is directly connected with the size of the speaker community – a language with more speakers is probably more useful than a language spoken by a handful of people – and the problematic concept of the prestige of a language.) As researchers of endangered or dying languages sometimes have experienced (although by far not always, as informants of endangered languages are, for understandable reasons, often unwilling to give negative statements about their language in the presence of a field linguist), some speakers who give up their heritage language – for instance, choose not to speak it with their children – have clear practical or even financial arguments to present. The “old language”, they say, is of no use, it does not bring you friends, influence or wealth, and it does not help you get the education or the job you want.

Behind choices like this, there lurks, of course, the modern view of an individual making independent choices for his/her own profit, in her/his free pursuit of individual happiness. Furthermore, what might also be called modern is the view of language as a tool: language, like other products of nature and culture, does not have a *raison d'être* of its own. It is made to serve, for use, for achieving goals.

Usefulness is also part of the technical, political and aesthetic considerations dealing with, as it seems, the language itself: Does my language have the vocabulary needed for diverse goals? Can I use this language for talking about modern matters: urban culture, technology, politics? And does the language really have proper counterparts for technological or political terms in the majority language, or do I have to make concessions in the style of “well, my language has no word for that”, or “you could call it ... in my language, but actually, it doesn't mean quite the same thing”? Can I speak this language without stigmatizing myself, without showing myself as a backward villager – be it in the eyes of outsiders or among our own people who, nevertheless, have internalized the perspective of the majority? Can I speak my language without feeling ridiculous? Can I take pride in my language, can I call it beautiful and rich, or have I been taught to call it a “sort of an ugly dialect”? For the speakers of many minority languages, the answer is often “no”.

Paradoxically enough, defending minority languages against the prejudices of the majority often pushes them into the folklore corner, making them the symbol and carrier of ethno-cultural traditions which belong to a pre-historic, timeless past. Thus, these languages become a polar opposite of modernity. The language can be rich and beautiful, but these qualities only serve to make it a better vehicle for the traditional folklore – I have heard Hungarian speakers in Austria talk with moist eyes about how “melodious” their language is, and read statements of Karelians calling their language “soft, like the folk-songs”, but I have actually never heard minority languages being called “strong” or “tough” or “efficient” or particularly suitable for getting the message through quickly, for selling cars or talking about computers.

The role of many minority languages in nation states (to be), thus, strangely resembles the position of woman in patriarchal societies – what Finnish feminists have called *ylistämällä alistaminen*, “oppressing by praising”, that is: restricting them into a minor role, cutting them off from progress and modernization into a timeless past, and then concealing

the real consequences of this action by sentimentally glorifying this role. To quote a famous feminist, “being put on a pedestal from which you are not allowed to step down is the worst humiliation”. In Russia, the folklore corner effect can currently be observed in the situation of many minority languages; it is expressed, sometimes even explicitly, that the minority languages, in all their beauty and richness duly acknowledged, belong to the villages, to the traditional culture as preserved in museums and folklore shows, but they have nothing to do with modern urban life. It may be important and beautiful that Karelian or Mari or Khanty children learn some folk-songs in their language and wear the national costume when dancing in a festival or bringing flowers to visiting V.I.P.s, but nobody seems to be particularly concerned about whether they can talk about politics or mathematics or space flights in their language or, in fact, whether they actually speak the language in their homes at all.

Of course, this phenomenon is by no means typical of Russia only. Actually, this is what the tradition of Finnish linguistics and folkloristics largely made of Karelia. The North-Karelian epic folklore formed the major basis for the Finnish (!) national epic *Kalevala*, and it also gave rise to the idea of “Karelianism” in Finnish National Romantic culture, i.e. the idea of Karelia as a pre-modern, timeless repository of the purest and most ancient Finnish culture. In this respect, Karelian – like the other Finnic languages – only serves as material for the national root-seeking of the Finns. As this view is closely connected with the history of Finnic linguists, I will return to these questions in the last part of my talk, in connection with the modernization of linguistics.

Modernization of language

Modernization may thus lead to language shift, but also to language change. In Finland and Estonia, for instance, the modernization of society and the national awakening in the 19th century triggered a very intensive language planning process: orthography and grammar were standardized, hundreds of new words created for “modern” concepts such as “railway”, “science” or “individual”, so that the languages themselves changed considerably, and modern Finns or Estonians find texts from the early 19th century very strange or even difficult to understand, while texts from the early 20th century do not differ very much from today’s written language. All this implies a deep-going change in the role of the language: The language is not a natural, very pragmatically conditioned way of communicating, but a tool, consciously planned and fabricated and, perhaps, packed in a tool-box together with other, almost similar tools – and which tool you pick for your use is not a simple, pragmatic matter any more but a deed which carries a symbolic, political or ideological significance. By choosing the language you use, you mark your identity.

Some linguists (e.g. Garner 2004) speak of *linguageness*, an idea which speakers of pre-modern languages do not share: they do not think of languages as autonomous entities. For example, speakers of unwritten languages may refuse to produce a semantically or pragmatically meaningless utterance because the language *an sich* does not exist for them. (Many Finns know an anecdote about the famous 19th-century Finno-Ugrist M. A. Castrén and his Samoyed informant who could not translate the sentence “my wife is dead” into his language – the sentence did not make sense to him, as his wife was alive. Garner (op.cit.) reports having similar experiences when trying to elicit pragmatically meaningless sentences from his Australian informants: “How would you ask your brother to go hunting with you?” – “But I never go hunting with him!”) In this sense, modernization of language might be understood as establishing linguageness or making speakers conscious of it. For these processes, of course, standardization of language, institutionalized language planning and education – and, needless to say, literacy – play an essential role.

It might seem that endangered languages of our days must either participate in this modernization process, establishing literary standards, literatures and certain positions in the

educational system, or stay outside, in the pre-modern world of nostalgia. However, modernity is a multifaceted and ambiguous phenomenon in this respect, too. Urban mobility of our days creates new minorities and expatriate groups, *Gastarbeiter*, refugees or educated urban nomads, with pre-modern pragmatic views of moving between languages, code-switching and “language-crossing” (i.e. using elements from a language which you “don’t actually speak”; see e.g. Rampton 1995, Lehtonen 2006). For these people, perhaps, the borders between languages become fluid again and acquiring a new language is not seen as a clear-cut, challenging mission – alternating between languages means just alternating between different ways of speaking. This modern urban multilingualism might concern Finnish and Estonian, but also the Finnish varieties in Sweden and Norway – and, perhaps, even the minorities of Russia, provided they can find their way out of the “folklore corner”. (As it seems, the Finnic minority languages in Russia are mainly used as “grandmother languages” in elderly rural communities, the percentage of urban active speakers is very small and the urban presence of these languages almost non-existent.) All in all, this means that modernization does not inevitably raise the “linguageness” of a language but might, also in this respect, have opposite effects as well.

Standardization of an endangered minority language, of course, is the ultimate linguageness raiser. It is usually understood as a means of supporting the language and raising its status. It makes a spoken variety, a “dialect”, into “a real modern language”, complete with grammars, dictionaries, and rules of orthography. For linguistically uneducated speakers, this seems to be an essential criterion of “linguageness”, as languages in their view are often something like Platonic ideas of a standard “existing” somewhere, and only standard forms really “exist” – “*ain’t ain’t a word*” (Niedzielski & Preston 2000: 17–22). However, standardizing also involves dangers that are all too well known in the practice of language revitalization.

Choosing one dialectal form for the standard may push the competing forms into “non-existence” and alienate their users from the standard-to-be – “we don’t like that strange dialect, we’ll rather speak the majority language, if ours is not good enough”. Another strategy, creating compromise forms to bridge the gap between dialects, requires a lot of resources, time and an intensive debate between actively participating stakeholder groups, so that the constructed new standard language will really “travel” to the actual speakers. It is not certain whether the Finnic minority languages have these resources at their disposal – a functioning school system with teachers eager to teach the new standard, teaching material and media – and whether the policy-makers are interested enough in a forceful implementation of a new standard. In Finland, where the internal dialect differences are considerable, this strategy worked in the 19th century (given the political motivation, time and resources), but in the Karelian area, which is both dialectally and administratively fragmented, a similar attempt to create a common Karelian language at the end of the 1930s failed – within the few years granted by the policy-makers for this experiment, the new language could not establish itself, before the next turn of the capricious language policies made it useless.

The alternative is a fragmentation of resources between numerous new standards. A *par excellence* example is Karelian with great internal dialectal differences and, correspondingly, emerging literary standards for three to five different dialects since the late 1980s: Olonets Karelian, White Sea Karelian, Tver Karelian, to some extent also South Karelian, and Ludian, unless not considered a separate language. In addition, there is the activism of a handful of expatriate Karelians in Finland, who may, for instance, devise new words for their own, words which perhaps will not cross the state border to the Russian side.

For many small speaker communities, creating new standards is particularly difficult, because – as it seems – the smaller the speaker community, the less tolerance there is towards deviant forms. Within the Veps language, the dialect differences do not seem very great to an

outsider; however, Glebova (2001) reports that many speakers of the easternmost Veps dialect reject the new Veps literary language and refuse to understand it. Perhaps we might state that modernization also implies acknowledging stratification and variation: within a modern language, there are dialects or sociolects or stylistically conditioned varieties. Maybe we have found another paradox of modernity: language standardization and languageness raising lead *both* to a more unified view of *our* language (vs. other languages) as a fixed unit *and* to a more differentiated view of our language including varieties and dialects.

Interestingly enough, the most recently emerging varieties of Finnic do not attempt a clearly more pluralistic approach but depart from a clear division between the standard form(s) and unacceptable forms. The South Estonian grammar by Keem (1997) gives tables showing “authentic” and non-authentic forms, and the Tornedal Finnish grammar by Kenttä & Pohjanen (1996) pleads for allowing different, competing forms in speech but not in writing – you may speak as you will, but you must know what belongs to the written language and what doesn’t. The new dynamic and decentralized views of language planning (that is, seeing language planning as a collective process in which the whole speaker community participates) seem to be missing – but this may be understandable, as these speaker communities are not used to democratic decisions in language planning and it is not very easy to engage them in a civil debate...

But the standardization of a language also involves problems other than choosing between different dialectal forms. Modernization creates new concepts and phenomena which require new words. To give just one example: as the Finnish Literature Society was founded in 1831, there was no word in the Finnish language for ‘literature’, the word *kirjallisuus* had to be devised for this occasion. These new words must either be borrowed from the majority language or created from inherited elements (for which, given the rich derivational morphology of the Finnic languages, there are many possibilities). Both solutions are problematic. Identifiable loanwords may stigmatize a minority language or a minority variety – “they don’t even have words of their own for these things, they just take the words from the majority language”. In the worst case, linguistically uneducated speakers or outsiders – who often rely on the vocabulary when passing judgments of a language, as they are unable to analyze morphosyntactic structures or phonology – consider *meänkieli* “just a mixture of Finnish and Swedish” or Karelian “just a mixture of Finnish and Russian”. In the case of varieties spoken in many countries, the choice of donor language may be a crucial issue. A Karelian activist born and bred in Finland¹ may use *tijosto*, a Karelianized version of the Finnish neologism *tiedosto* ‘(data) file’, and Karelians exposed to modern Finnish will understand him (the word is transparently derived from the word stem for ‘know’, amply attested in both Finnish and Karelian, and is, in principle, a viable derivative in Karelian as well) – but will those Karelians for whom the language of modern technology is Russian understand this new word?

The other solution, creating a new word from inherited elements, has been successfully applied in the development of Finnish and Estonian, especially in the 19th and early 20th century – both national languages have experienced a very intensive lexicon planning. In fact, the tradition of language planning has been rather puristic and lexicocentric, that is: language planning means, above all, finding new indigenous counterparts for international words, in order to avoid using foreign words. (The Estonian poet and philosopher Jaan Kaplinski [1984] called this strategy, sarcastically, “Estoranto” – making Estonian into an artificial language that nobody will understand without consulting a dictionary.) At least in South Estonia, this tradition of strong lexicon planning goes on. During the last few weeks I have been reading the e-mail list of South Estonian language activists and enjoyed various discussions on possible new words: How could you call

¹ Matti Saveljev’s Karelian-language home page at <http://koti.mbnet.fi/savelma/index2.html> .

‘trampoline’ in Võro-Seto? Could anyone help a song writer find an expression for “a night full of demons” with so and so many syllables? What is the appropriate word for a ‘snack buffet’ in Võro-Seto (the existing dictionaries only give a reflex of the Russian *zakuska*, i.e. ‘something to be washed down with vodka’, but this snack buffet will be served in a family occasion without vodka drinking)? Now it goes without saying that the crucial issue is how to market these fancy new words to the speaker community. Are the speakers interested in learning and using the new words, or will they just ignore them (as a kind of fashionable waste of time for city intellectuals) and find themselves alienated and/or discredit the whole attempt of establishing a new standard language? Finally, this question of language planning, as questions of language planning in general, boils down to the question: *whose* language?

Modernization of (Finnic) linguistics

The most unquestioned “proprietors” of language, the most esteemed authorities in the Finnic world are, of course, the linguists. The last question to be dealt with concerns the relationship of modernization and linguistics in the Finnic language area and what kind of role it has played for the Finnic languages.

The most central factor is probably Finnocentrism, the decisive role of the Finnish language. Finnish is not only the numerically strongest Finnic language but also politically the strongest one. The Finns were the first Finnic nation to experience a national awakening in the 19th century, in circumstances which were politically much more favourable than in contemporary Estonia (not to speak of the minor Finnic languages) – and, in fact, we might state that the Finns were the first Finnic nation to experience modernization. The dialectal fragmentation of Finnish – the deep dialect boundary between East and West – was overcome with a compromise strategy, often resorting to the most conservative, most original forms, which means that the Finnish standard language contains many implicit reconstructions. This, in turn, makes Finnish particularly suitable for a “key language” in historical-comparative Finnic reconstruction. In 19th-century Estonia in particular, where the national language planning was puristic and emancipatory and directed against the obvious influences from German, the dominant language of culture and education throughout centuries, Finnish was regarded not only as a paragon of language reform but also as a source of “pure”, more original or more authentic elements. Estonian borrowed hundreds of words from Finnish – or formed new words with Finnish models – and even imported some grammatical categories from Finnish, such as the morphological superlative or the essive case.

The historical developments and the political circumstances thus conspired with the internal qualities of the Finnish language: Finnish was not only politically the strongest but also linguistically the most suitable language for the key role. The latter, of course, was connected with the historical developments within linguistics. The late 19th century, as we all know, was the golden era of historical-comparative linguistics – in countries like Finland, coinciding with the Romantic Nationalism and thus understood as the supreme method for national root-seeking and identity-building. Historicism in general was the leading principle and the great breakthrough in 19th-century science: the idea that things were not always as they are now but that they (biological species, languages, geological formations etc.) had developed to their present state from an *Urform* which could be discovered by scientific methods. This idea gave rise to the Comparative Method, which made linguistics a science.

At the same time, linguistics became a paragon for scientificness in the humanities. In folkloristics, the so-called Finnish method (the historical-geographic method) was essentially an application of historical-comparative linguistics, that is: folksongs and tales were compared in order to reconstruct the original redaction and determine its origin. As the ideological framework of Romantic Nationalism encouraged equating linguistic heritage with national origins, the family-trees of languages could be taken as family-trees of nations. Thus,

historical linguistics became the leading means of national identity-building – not only in the Finnic area but also in other parts of Europe, where ideas of community based on linguistic relatedness, such as Pan-Germanism, Pan-Scandinavism or Pan-Slavism, came into being.

Within Finnic, the leading position of historical linguistics led to an ideological dominance of the Finnish language, or a cultural imperialism. Finnish nationalism attempted to engulf the closest relatives. The best example is probably the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, which is mainly based on folk poetry gathered in White Sea Karelia, that is, outside the Finnish language area proper. This Karelian material, in slightly Finnicized form, was used to build the Finnish national identity, and, in fact, many Finns wanted to see Karelian as merely a dialect of Finnish. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, the Finns' scientific interest towards Karelia was largely motivated by romantic ideas of Karelia as a repository conserving Finnish traditions in a purer form than in Scandinavian-influenced Finland proper.

In the case of Karelia, Finnocentrism had direct political consequences: Finnish was used as an official language both by Soviet authorities until the 1930s and by the Finnish occupation forces during WWII, which served to block the development of Karelian, so that Karelian remained the only ethnic language of a Soviet Republic without a viable literary standard. For other Finnic languages, the dominance of Finnish was of a more indirect kind. In Estonia, Finnish was explicitly acknowledged as the “mother” of Estonian; playful references to this mother-daughter-relationship abound in the works of 19th-century Estonian intelligentsia. Even in the late 20th century, some Estonian scholars have complained about the dominance of Finnish in the description of the Estonian language. Together with Estonia, Finnish institutions supported the short cultural renaissance of the Livonians between the two world wars, helping Livonians publish literature and providing scholarships for Livonian youth – and, of course, Finnish scholars such as Lauri Kettunen or Lauri Posti played an important role in the research of other minor Finnic languages.

Together with the historicist framework of linguistics, the political dominance of the Finnish language almost inevitably reduced the minor Finnic languages to an ancillary function – to serve the national root-seeking of the Finns, shedding light on the past of the Finnish language. This is eloquently illustrated by the state-of-art in etymological research: other Finnic languages are used as comparative material for the history of the Finnish lexicon, but not vice versa. For Finnish, three different etymological dictionaries (albeit partly based on each other) have appeared since World War II, and they contain a lot of material from other Finnic languages, including etymological remarks and hypotheses concerning these languages. For Estonian, there is one etymological dictionary in planning (after the facsimile edition of an unfinished posthumous manuscript by Julius Mägiste in the 1980s), and for the minor Finnic languages, no systematic etymological research has been attempted (the only exception being Koponen (1998), which is only the beginning of what would mean an immense project). This process of “historicization” may also have implied pushing these languages into the pre-modern, timeless past – that is, in effect, the “folklore corner phenomenon” already discussed. The next turn came with the paradigm shift within linguistics.

In Finland, the neogrammarian paradigm of linguistics, dominated by the historical-comparative approach, persisted until the second half of the 20th century, and when the structuralist and generativist schools finally found their way to Finland in the 1960s, the paradigm shift was particularly dramatic, characterized by controversies and conflicts also of an unpleasantly personal kind. For my generation, the story we were told in our student years could sound almost like a linguistic salvation history – how the Good Guys brought progress and modern linguistic science from America to the stagnated linguistics of Finland (cf. Esa Itkonen 1999, Laakso 2003). In this process, the opposition between “modern” and “premodern past” was applied once again.

Now, what represented the “modern” was characterized by a practically complete lack of the diachronic (historical) dimension. The primary object of linguistic interest was the language system here and now, the system that was accessible by introspection and grammaticality judgments. Its history was not interesting, and so the related languages were not needed. And as most of the related languages were behind the iron curtain, Finnish linguists had no access to native-speaker language production or grammaticality judgments and, thus, no reason to pursue what was regarded as “modern” research into these languages for their own sake. Those few Finnish linguists who continued researching the minor Finnic languages, did it from a historical-comparative perspective. Of course, this does not mean that works by linguists such as Terho Itkonen would have been theoretically less ambitious or less interesting – but a great part of this research was dominated by the material, in the vein of the Neogrammarian tradition. The best example is probably the dictionary of Karelian (*Karjalan kielen sanakirja*), which is a wonderful, expertly edited and extremely valuable collection of the word stock of the diverse Karelian dialects – but all too obviously conceived as a “lexical museum” salvaging endangered tradition, and also quite obviously composed from a Finnish perspective, to serve Finnish linguists and interested Finnish laymen. The Karelian dictionary, of course, is a child of its time, a time when nobody could foresee that the Karelian language would be revitalized, emancipated and standardized.

In Estonia, the situation was somewhat different, as the linguists of Sovietized Estonia were able to continue field research among Finnic minorities in the Soviet Union and thus assume the leading role in the research of, in particular, Votic and Livonian. What happened in Estonian linguistics in the 1960s was, in fact, quite remarkable in the Soviet context, as Kasik (1999) points out in her handbook of Estonian linguistics – new winds from Western linguistics reached Estonia relatively early, and enthusiastic young linguists applied the theories of generative grammar, for instance, already in the 1960s. Due to the traumatic Sovietization and the massive emigration of older-generation linguists (together with a great part of the intelligentsia in general) especially in 1944, there could be no nationalist-conservative front of old professors in Estonia opposing the modern directions of linguistics, and thanks to their contacts with exile Estonian colleagues, Estonian linguists succeeded in “modernizing” their discipline without greater conflicts. Some of them also applied theoretically ambitious new approaches to minor Finnic languages, such as Veps (Aime Kährik, Tiit-Rein Viitso) or Livonian (Tiit-Rein Viitso). And then, of course, there were linguists in Northwestern Russia – including some native speakers of the minor Finnic languages – who did what they could with their scanty resources. This, however, was mainly salvaging and documenting languages which – as it was thought then – would hardly stand any chance of being “modernized” themselves.

We have thus seen two paradigm shifts in Finnic linguistics, which – conspiring with political processes – both have helped to push the minor Finnic languages into the opposite side of modernization, into the pre-modern, timeless, traditional past. First, the national awakening in Finland and Estonia, coinciding with the triumphs of the neogrammarian historical-comparative linguistics, reduced the Finnic minority languages into comparative and illustrative material serving the research into the past of the Finnish (or Estonian) language (or encouraged Finnish linguists to regard Karelian, for instance, simply as a dialect of the Finnish language).

Second, the paradigm shift into synchrony-dominated, “autonomistic” (structuralist, generativist) schools of linguistics in the last decades of the 20th century marginalized the research into the minor Finnic languages (at least in Finland). “Modern” linguistic research would have required native-speaker intuition for grammaticality judgments or elicitation tests, but the native speakers were practically inaccessible behind the Iron Curtain. What remained of the research into the minor Finnic languages in Finland was the kind of research that was frowned upon by “modern” linguists as “old-fashioned” or “unscientific”. The available

material had been gathered within the old historical-comparative framework, and most of it consisted of folklore texts or reminiscences of olden times. The result was, also in this case, that the minor Finnic languages were shown as polar opposites of modernity and modernization – something belonging to a timeless pre-modern tradition.

We are now coming to the final question: what will happen to the modernization of the minor Finnic languages, and what should or could be done? The answers that I can give – further answers will be discussed in the hours (and weeks, months, and years) to come – were actually hinted at already earlier in this talk. First: we should deconstruct modernization, that is, avoid reifying it, seeing it as a force of nature proceeding on a one-dimensional time axis. Modernization and modernity are complex and deeply controversial phenomena: Maybe it is only through modernization that we learn to see the pre-modern past (and develop a nostalgic longing for it). As many researchers of endangered languages know, modernization may kill minority languages – but, on the other hand, it is only through modernization that the famous last-minute interest towards “pre-modern” languages awakens, so that city intelligentsia starts supporting immersion kindergartens and developing computer terminology in endangered languages. Modernization kills traditions and destroys traditional networks – at the same time, it gives rise to new traditions and creates new ways of communication and networking. Modernization may push minority languages into the folklore corner but, at the same time, it opens new ways out of the folklore corner.

Second, we should realize the dangers and the potential of globalization. It is not impossible that all (or most) European languages except English will find themselves on the same side with endangered languages, struggling with problems of a very similar kind: how to raise the status of our language, ensure the development of terminology, encourage people to use the language in as many domains as possible. Globalization, together with new kinds and quantities of international mobility, challenges the position of established “modern” nation-state languages – and might, in the best case, help pulling down the wall between national languages and minority languages.

Finally, if modernization in linguistics means making linguistics a nature science – something that was characteristic of both Neogrammarian historical-comparative linguistics from the late 19th century on and most of 20th-century mainstream “linguistic science” – we might plead for a “post-modern” de-naturalization of linguistics. Signs of change have been in the air already for many years: in linguistic research, new “connectionist” approaches challenge the traditional positivist view of language. Language is, perhaps, no more an object of study which is completely distinct of and detached from the conscious subject. Both in linguistics and in cultural studies, new views – now receiving their political motivation from emancipatory movements, feminism, emancipation of minorities and colonized peoples etc. – emphasizing interaction, the individual’s conscious choices and actions, are emerging. And as sweeping generalizations give way to a more complex view on languages and cultures, small may become beautiful – small languages as well.

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