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## **Karelian: A pluricentric language?**

### **Abstract**

Karelian is a Baltic-Finnic language spoken in the Republic of Finland and in the Russian Federation. Neither in Finland nor in Russia has it the status of an official or at least a regional language. The number of speakers is rather low: The most reliable estimates are about 25,000 individuals in Russia and 5,000 in Finland. Due to demographic and social reasons, there has been recorded a rapid decline of speakers in the recent past. This leads to the classification of Karelian, both in Russia and Finland, as an endangered language. However, there are some positive signs that the downward trend could be stopped or even reverted. Based on the sociolinguistic data and applying the criteria established by Clyne and Muhr, there are good arguments to consider Karelian as a pluricentric language, although the fulfilment of the criteria is not very strong.

### **1. Introduction**

The aim of this contribution is to find out whether Karelian should be considered as a pluricentric language.

I will start by a short presentation of the geographic and historical concept of Karelia, because the history of the region Karelia and of the speakers of Karelian plays an important role in today's situation of the language. After that, an overview of the language and its varieties will follow.

In presenting the sociolinguistic situation of Karelian, I rely on the reports of ELDIA. ELDIA (European Language Diversity for All) is an interdisciplinary research project for reconceptualizing, promoting and re-evaluating individual and societal multilingualism. Experts on applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, law, social studies and statistics, drawn from eight universities in six European countries, work together to contribute to a better understanding of how local, national and international (vehicular) languages interact in contemporary Europe (ELDIA Homepage, 2019). Based on the sociolinguistic data, I will answer the question of the pluricentricity of Karelian applying the criteria developed by Clyne, which were extended and specified by Muhr.

## 2. Geographical and historical concept of Karelia

It is supposed that today's East Finland and the region of Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega in the millennia BC were inhabited by Baltic Finns, whose successors are the Karelians, East Finns and Veps. The end of the first and the beginning of the second millennium AD was the golden period of the Karelians, who lived in this region. As a result of their hunting and trade expeditions, the Karelians expanded their settlement areas far northward but also west and eastwards. As an evidence of this expansion, in the dialects spoken in East and Northern Finland today many clear features of Karelian origin can be found. Later, a part of the Karelians traveled to the river Neva and the South shore of the Gulf of Finland and formed the Ingrish tribe (Laanest 1975:32).

From the Age of the Crusades (circa 1050/115 – 1300 A.D.) the region became the object of two competing forms of temporal and religious power from the East and from the West. The starting point was the crusade led by King Erik of Sweden and Bishop Henry of Uppsala across the Gulf of Bothnia. From the East, Orthodox Christianity spread to the east of the region, and the principality of Novgorod was expanding its political and economic influence westward among the Karelians (Lavery, 2006:26-27).

By the mid-seventeenth century, the Kingdom of Sweden, after winning wars against Denmark, Norway and Russia, had become the dominant power in the Baltic region. War with Russia moved the borders eastward to regions with populations that were orthodox, among them Karelians. In the Peace of Stolbova (1617), Sweden gained the region around Ladoga and the area along the Gulf of Finland's southeastern coast (Ingria). Many orthodox Karelians fled into Russia in order to avoid living under the Lutheran Swedish Crown (Lavery, 2006:41).

However, Swedish power declined steadily in the second half of the seventeenth century in the face of the rise of France, Prussia and Russia. Before the end of the 17th Century, an alliance between Denmark, Norway, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia was formed against Sweden. The Swedish king Charles was defeated by Russia in the Battle of Poltava in June 1709 and had to retreat out of Russia, which occupied Finland between 1713 and 1721. With the signing of the Peace Treaty of Nystad (1721) Russia was able to annex the Swedish territories of Estonia, Livonia, Ingria and Karelia, drawing a new border that corresponds to Finland's southeastern border with Russia (Lavery, 2006:43).

After the invasion of Finland by Alexander I in 1808, Sweden signed the Peace Treaty of Fredrikshamn (1809) with Russia, recognizing that Finland belonged to the Russian Empire as the Grand Duchy of Finland (Lavery, 2006:52). In

1812, the territories of southeastern Finland (“Old Finland”) were appended to the Grand Duchy (Lavery, 2006:53). This opening of the border to the east was also important from a cultural point of view. Elias Lönnrot published the famous Finnish national epic poem Kalevala after having traveled through Karelia, Estonia and Ingria in order to collect poems. Kalevala was not only understood as a literary work, but rather as a chronicle of Finland’s lost past. (Lavery, 2006:57).

The October Revolution had important effects on Finland. In December 1918, the Parliament declared Finland’s independence, which was recognized by the Soviet Government on December 31 and immediately later by other countries (Lavery, 2006:84). In the beginning, there were problems and border incidents between Finland and the young Soviet Republic, but relations improved with the Peace Treaty of Tartu (1920). The Finnish side went into the negotiations with the claim to create a so-called Greater Finland demanding Russian Karelia and the Kola Peninsula. Both countries compromised, and Finland withdrew her demands for Karelia, establishing again the pre-independence border between the two countries (Lavery, 2006:84). The Second World War had serious consequences for Finland. After the so-called Winter War Finland lost approximately 12% of her prewar land area and had to resettle more than 400.000 Karelians from the ceded areas (Häikiö, 1992:29). Today there are three territorial-administrative units bearing the name of Karelia, which are shown in the map below. Two of them are in Finland and one in the Russian Federation:



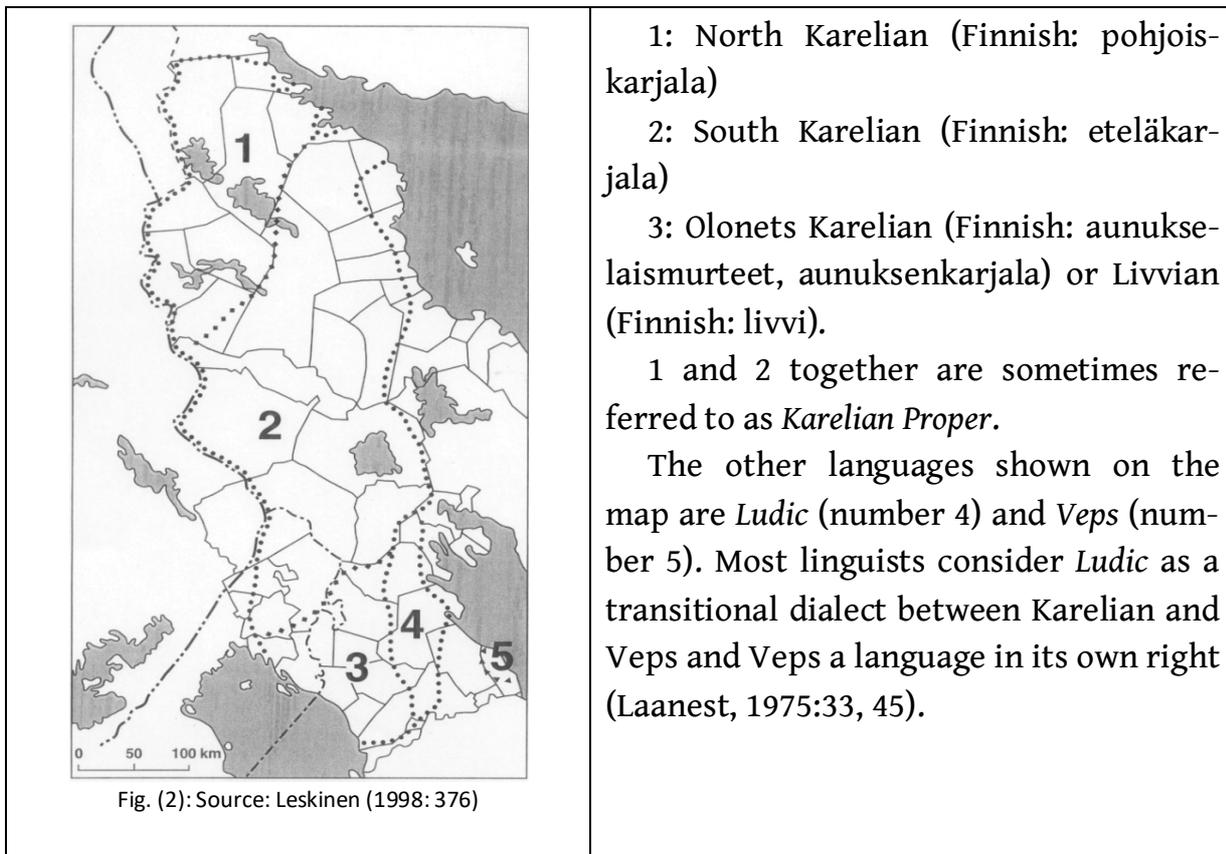
Fig. (1): Source: Karelia\_today.png

Finland is divided into 18 regions (Finnish: maakunnat) and Åland (Varsinais-Suomen liitto, 2019). The region of North Karelia (Finnish: Pohjois-Karjala), with its capital Joensuu, has an area of 17,761 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 160,000; South Karelia (Finnish: Etelä-Karjala), capital Lappeenranta, has an area of 51,327 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 129,000 (Finland: Administrative Division 2019). According to Article 63 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Karelia (Russian: Республика Карелия) is one of the 22 Republics of the Russian Federation. The capital of the Republic of Karelia is Petrozavodsk (Russian: Петрозаводск, Karelian: Petroskoi).

### 3. The Karelian language

#### 3.1 The varieties of Karelian

Karelian is a Baltic-Finnic language. This language group is formed by *Finnish, Karelian, Ludic, Veps, Ingrian, Votic, Estonian and Livonian*. Karelian is the third largest language of this group (Décsy, 1965:7). As shown in the map below, Karelian has three main varieties:



All three varieties of Karelian are spoken in the Republic of Karelia in Russia. South Karelian is also spoken in the Tver district, that is situated in Central

Russia, and in territories between St. Petersburg and Moscow. The varieties spoken in former Finnish Border Karelia were South and Olonets Karelian.

Koivisto (2018:56) describes the so-called Border Karelian dialects, varieties of Karelian spoken in Border Karelia (Finnish: Raja Karalja) before World War II. After the cession of this area to Russia and the evacuation of large parts of its population to Finland, Border Karelian dialects became a vernacular that no longer exists in its original area. In present-day Finland, these varieties are still spoken to some extent by elderly people who were born and lived in Border Karelia before World War II or who acquired the language after the war in their Karelian-speaking families (Koivisto, 2018:57).

### 3.2 The Karelian language

In order to show some characteristic features of Karelian, I will give some examples of differences between Karelian and Standard Finnish (Décsy, 1965:43; Laavest, 1975: 134):

1. In the phoneme inventory, the voiced consonants *d*, *g* and *z* are present: *da-bakka* vs. *tupakka* ‘tobacco’.
2. Karelian has the alveolar consonants *š*, *ž* and *č*: *užon* vs. *uskon* ‘I believe’; *mečä* vs. *metsä* ‘forest’.
3. Diphthongisation of open vowels: *mua/moa* vs. *maa* ‘country’, ‘land’.
4. The following inflexion paradigms in table (1) show the close relationship between Karelian and Finnish: Noun *kala* ‘fish’ singular (Laanest, 1975:177).

Table (1)

	Finnish	Karelian
<b>nominative</b>	kala	kala
<b>genitive</b>	kalan	kalan
<b>partitive</b>	kalaa	kalua
<b>illative</b>	kalaan	kalah
<b>inessive</b>	kalassa	kalašša
<b>elative</b>	kalasta	kalašta
<b>allative</b>	kalalle	kalalla
<b>adessive</b>	kalalla	kalalla
<b>ablative</b>	kalalta	kalalda
<b>translative</b>	kalaksi	kalakši
<b>essive</b>	kalana	kalana
<b>abessive</b>	kalatta	kalatta

5. Verb *lukea/lugie* 'to read' present indicative (Laanest, 1975:253-257)

Table (2)

	<b>Finnish</b>	<b>Karelian</b>
<b>1 sg</b>	luen	luven
<b>2 sg</b>	luet	luvet
<b>3 sg</b>	lukee	lugou
<b>1 pl</b>	luemme	luvemma
<b>2 pl</b>	luette	luvetta
<b>3 pl</b>	lukevat	lugietah

Finally, I would also like to show the relationship between Finnish and Karelian by comparing the text of the beginning of the Gospel of John. For Karelian I have chosen the North Karelian and the Olonets Karelian versions:

<b>English</b>	<b>Finnish</b>	<b>North Karelian</b>	<b>Olonets Karelian</b>
1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.	1 Alussa oli Sana. Sana oli Jumalan luona, ja Sana oli Jumala.	1 Alušša oli Šana. Šana oli Jumalan kera, ta Šana oli Jumala.	1 Allus oli Sana. Sana oli Jumalan luo, i Sana oli Jumal.
2 He was with God in the beginning.	2 Jo alussa Sana oli Jumalan luona.	2 Aivan alušta šuate Šana oli Jumalan kera.	2 Alguu müö Sana oli Jumalan luo.
3 Through him all things were made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made.	3 Kaikki syntyi Sanan voimalla. Mikään, mikä on syntynyt, ei ole syntynyt ilman häntä.	3 Kaikki šynty Šanan voimalla. Mitänä, mi on šyntyn, ei ole šyntyn ilman Häntä.	3 Kai on tulluh Sanašpäi. Ni mi, mi on roinnuhes, ei ole roinnuhes Hänettäh.
4 In him was life, and that life was the light for humankind.	4 Hänessä oli elämä, ja elämä oli ihmisten valo.	4 Häneššä oli elämä, ta elämä oli ihmisillä valona.	4 Hänes oli elos, i elos oli rahvahan valgei.
5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not mastered it.	5 Valo loistaa pimeydessä, pimeys ei ole saanut sitä valtaansa.	5 Valo paistau pimeššä, eikä pimiellä ollun šiih valtua.	5 Valgei pastau pimies, pimei ei voittanuh sidä.
6 There came a man sent from God; his name was John.	Tuli mies, Jumalan lähettämä, hänen nimensä oli Johannes.	6 Tuli mieš, kumpasen työnsi Jumala. Hänen nimi oli livana.	6 Tuli ristikanzu, kudaman tüöndi Jumal, hänen nimi oli livan.

Source: Gospel of John (Finugorbib, 2019)

## 4. The situation of Karelian in Russia

### 4.1 Legal situation

The first sentence of Article 11 of the Constitution of Karelia states that Russian is the official language of the Republic of Karelia: “Государственным языком в Республике Карелия является русский”.

Theoretically, it would be possible to establish further official languages; in any case, the Republic of Karelia guarantees to the people living in the territory of the Republic the preservation of their own language, creating the conditions for its teaching and development.

After the amendment to Russia's language law on December 11, 2002, the status of a state language of a republic can only be given to languages written with the Cyrillic alphabet; Latin-script languages, such as Karelian, can become state languages only by special provisions in federal legislation. The position of the Karelian language in Russia is exceptional: Karelian is the only titular language of an autonomous republic of Russia that did not become officially a state language at the beginning of the 1990s. (Klementyev, 2012:4).

The Republic of Karelia has taken a number of measures in order to fulfil this guarantee. Karjalainen et al. (2013:99) mention the so-called Law on Support, “On the State Support of the Karelian, Veps, and Finnish languages in the Republic of Karelia”, of 2004. In 2009, the explanatory note to the order expresses strong concern for the loss of Karelian among citizens living in the Republic. This led to the adoption of a Plan with the title “Development of the Karelian Language in the Republic of Karelia for the Years 2009–2020”, which should counteract the declining use of the Karelian language.

### 4.2 Codification of Karelian

The literary languages used in Karelia were Russian and Finnish. From the first half of the 19th century there were attempts to create a written Karelian language (Karjalainen et al., 2013:36):

The Orthodox Church began publishing religious literature, e.g. a “Translation of some prayers and shortened Catechism to the Karelian language” in Olonets Karelian (1804), the Gospels (1820), a “Karelian-Russian Prayer Book for the Orthodox Karelians” (1870) and the “Foundations of the Christian Doctrine” (1882).

In 1937, Karelian became the third official language (along with Russian and Finnish) in the first Constitution of the Karelian ASSR. This led to the creation of a unified Karelian literary language based on South Karelian and the Cyrillic script.

There was a second attempt to create a literary standard, based on Olonets Karelian and the Cyrillic script in 1939, and a third one, which used the Latin script, from 1931 till 1939 (Karjalainen et al., 2013:36-37).

Starting from the end of the 1980s, there was a revitalisation of the Karelian literary language, which before had been largely restricted to the private sphere. Since then, Karelian has been used in the education system. There is a new literary standard, which is used in textbooks and other didactic material, but also in fiction, poetry and newspaper articles (Karjalainen et al., 2013:38).

### 4.3 Present day use of the language

Starting in the 1960s, there have been regular TV and radio broadcasting in Karelian. Karjalainen et al. (2013:39) mention three newspapers published in Karelian and two magazines, which include material in Karelian. However, the circulation of the press products seems to be rather low. For example, according to Karjalainen et al. (2013:39) the weekly newspaper *Oma mua* has an average circulation of 900 copies and the monthly newspaper *Vienan Karjala* a circulation of 500 copies. Only few books are published in Karelian.

As education is concerned, the Karelian language is used in educational institutions such as kindergartens, schools, professional and higher education institutions and language courses. The Karelian language is taught in rural and urban schools in Karelia, both as a compulsory and optional subject. After a positive change in the 1990s, when the percentage of ethnic Karelian children learning their native language increased in 13 years from 3.4% to 17.6%, there has been a continuous decrease of children learning Karelian since 2002.

Karjalainen et al. (2013:42) explain this phenomenon by demographic reasons and also by the fact that school children often prefer learning the Finnish language to learning Karelian, because Finnish has a higher social status and allows further education in Finland.

As opposed to a short period in the 1930s, Karelian is not used as a working language by federal or republican authorities nor in court (Karjalainen et al., 2013:44).

### 4.4 Number of speakers and knowledge of the language

In the census of 2010, 60,815 individuals were reported as Karelians in the Russian Federation, which marks a considerable decline from 2002, when this number was 93,344 people. The biggest group of Karelians resided in the Republic of Karelia: 45,570 individuals (74.9% of all Karelians in the Russian Federation).

7,394 Karelians lived in Tver oblast and small groups in other regions of Russia, such as Leningrad oblast, Murmansk oblast and the city of St Petersburg.

According to the mentioned census, the total number of inhabitants in the Republic of Karelia was 645,000. The largest ethnic group are Russians (82,2%), the percentage of Karelians is 7.4%, down from 9,2% in the census of 2002 (Klementyev, 2012:2). According to Karjalainen et al. (2013:22), in the Russian population census of 2010, knowledge of the Karelian language was reported by 25.605 people, down from 52.880 in 2002. This number includes the three varieties of the Karelian language, because they are not seen as separate categories.

Karelian is typically used in the private sphere by families, mostly in rural areas. Primarily elderly generations use it, in communication among each other, while it is rarely spoken by younger generations, and only occasionally between young parents and their children, with the result that the cross-generational transmission of language has largely ceased (Karjalainen et al., 2013:58).

A similar number is given by Koivisto (2018:57): The author estimates that there are 20,000 to 30,000 speakers of Karelian in Russia today, mentioning that this number is somewhat lower than the estimates presented in recent decades.

#### 4.5 Karelian identity

There are signs of identity-connected behaviour in public. Karjalainen et al. (2013:46) mention some pop-music groups that use the Karelian language in their performances, the creation of internet forums on learning the Karelian language, such as “We are the Karelians and we are proud of this!”. In an academic context, Karelian is mainly used in course books and articles focusing on the Karelian language. Of course, the loss of language leads to the loss of identity.

However, one has to bear in mind that, although state policy in the Republic of Karelia considers all Karelians to be one people, there are voices which deny that there is such a thing as a distinct and overall Karelian identity, because, for example, Olonets Karelian and Ludic national elites emphasise their linguistic and cultural differences, striving for recognition of their groups as distinct from Karelians (Karjalainen et al., 2013:7).

#### 4.6 Summary

Karjalainen et al. (2013:189) come to the conclusion that, without doubt, Karelian – in all its varieties – spoken in Russia is a severely endangered language. According to the data of the last censuses, less than half of ethnic Karelians living

in the Republic of Karelia (and even fewer living outside the borders of the Republic) know their native language.

- A rapid language shift to monolingualism in Russian is currently under way. The reasons are an intensive policy of assimilation, the historical location of Karelia between Russia and Finland, mixed marriages, and a certain stigmatisation of the Karelian language.
- Although some sources report higher figures, I consider the estimates of about 25,000 speakers presented by ELDIA and Koivisto to be the most reliable ones.
- Karelian is not an official language, but the Republic of Karelia guarantees the preservation of the language and promises to create the conditions for its teaching and development.
- The language is codified, and there exists a literary standard.
- The Karelian language plays a certain role for the creation of a Karelian identity.
- However, one cannot be sure whether the measures taken in order to revitalise the language can effect a reversal of the negative trend regarding the number of speakers.

## 5. The situation of Karelian in Finland

### 5.1 Legal situation

The first sentence of section 17 of the Finnish Constitution states that the national languages of Finland are *Finnish* and *Swedish*: “Suomen kansalliskielet ovat suomi ja ruotsi”.

The Constitution mentions further that the *Sami*, as an indigenous people, as well as the *Roma* and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Their rights are regulated by special Language Acts. Karelian is not mentioned in the Constitution.

In 2009, by an amendment to the Decree on the Implementation of the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, Karelian was included as a non-regional minority language. Although this does not change the legal status of Karelian, which would require legislation, it has practical implications, such as the possibility of obtaining a state subsidy for teaching Karelian, and it gives more visibility to the language (Sarhima, 2016:50).

### 5.2 Codification

Since 2005, when the Karelian Language Society established its own series of publications called *Karjalan Kielen Seuran julkavot* (‘Publications of the Karelian

Language Society'), a number of books in Karelian have been published in Finland. These include several textbooks and other sets of learning materials for studying Karelian and updating one's knowledge of traditional Karelian culture, a grammar book (Pyöli 2011) and several dictionaries (Sarhimaa, 2016:40).

The large Karelian dictionary *Karjalan kielen sanakirja* (Virtaranta, 1968–2005) is available in a print and an electronic version.

### 5.3 Use of the language

Karelian is mainly used at home among family members and to some extent with friends or acquaintances, especially within the framework of the municipality associations.

However, in the majority of the most central public domains, i.e. in school education, research, court, local or state administration, public institutions and the work place, the opportunity to use Karelian is practically non-existent. The sole public domain in which Karelian is used, although only in some places and to a limited extent, is that of religion (Sarhimaa, 2016:65).

The presence of Karelian in mass media is rather low. Sarhimaa (2016:66) mentions the magazines *Karjalan Heimo* and *Oma Suojärvi* and the online journal of the Karelian Language Society.

However, on the Internet, Karelian is used thanks to the various online activities of the Karelian Language Society and a number of individual activists. The online journal *Karjal Žurnualu* publishes news in Karelian language. Karelian is not taught in schools (Sarhimaa, 2016:68), but there are initiatives to spread information on the Karelian language.

### 5.4 Number of speakers and knowledge of the language

Up to the Second World War, Karelian was an autochthonous territorial minority language in Finland, which was spoken by approximately 40,000 people (Koivisto, 2018:57). Due to the surrender of territory to the Soviet Union, it became a non-territorial, autochthonous language whose speakers are spread all over the country, with concentrations in North Karelia and the largest Finnish cities (Sarhimaa, 2016:80).

As to the number of speakers, Koivisto (2018:57) quotes estimates ranging from less than 2,000 up to more than 10,000. Sarhimaa (2016:80) states that today Karelian is used as a vernacular language by approximately 5,000 people. It is estimated that there are thousands more potential speakers of the language and people who have a passive knowledge of it. The main vehicular language is Finnish, and Karelian is typically spoken by members of the older generation, but it

also appears to be used actively by some young people, especially in Eastern Finland.

In the ELDIA minority-survey questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate how well they understand, speak, read and write Karelian and Finnish (among other languages). Self-reported skills in Karelian were consistently lower than those in Finnish. So, for example, only 12.69% of the Karelian Finn respondents reported understanding Karelian at the highest level defined in the questionnaire, i.e. fluently, as compared to 94.87% for Finnish (Sarhimaa, 2016:136).

### 5.5 Karelian identity

Although Karelian-speaking Finns constitute a rather heterogeneous group, there exists some sort of Karelian identity. Sarhimaa (2016:35) writes that the Karelian language, Border Karelian roots and Orthodoxy traditionally form the basis of being Karelian in Finland. The author (Sarhimaa, 2016:23) stresses the work of the Karelian Language Society to promote the revitalisation of Karelian by strengthening Karelian identity and to intensify the role of Karelian culture in Finnish society by means of educational and cultural cooperation projects.

Speaking the language plays an important role in showing Karelian identity. In the ELDIA Report on Karelian in Finland respondents reported how their parents had explained that one should not forget one's own language ("ela unoha omua kiely"). A number of respondents also wrote that although only one of their parents had known Karelian, they had been encouraged to learn it and use it alongside Finnish (Sarhimaa, 2016:193).

### 5.6 Summary

- Karelian in Finland is a non-territorial, autochthonous language, which is used as a vernacular by about 5,000 people.
- Also in Finland, Karelian does not have the status of an official language, but is recognised as a non-regional minority language.
- The main vehicular language is Finnish, and Karelian is typically spoken by members of the older generation and almost exclusively used in private domains.
- As in Russia, the language is codified with a literary standard, and language plays a certain role for the creation of a Karelian identity.
- However, also in Finland Karelian has to be considered as endangered, although there are signs that the language is slowly gaining more visibility as an independent language, distinct from Finnish. It has to be seen whether the

status of a non-regional minority language will help to improve the situation of Karelian in Finland.

## 6. Is Karelian a pluricentric language?

### 6.1 Definition of pluricentricity

In order to answer the question whether Karelian is a pluricentric language, I will apply the definition developed by Clyne, which was extended and specified by Muhr and covers “external pluricentricity” or “first-level pluricentricity”. This type of pluricentricity can be described as the variability of a certain language being used in different nations and is defined as follows (Muhr, 2016:20):

A pluricentric language is a language that is used in at least two nations where it has an official status as state language, co-state language, or regional language with its own (codified) norms that usually contribute to the national/personal identity, making the nation a norm-setting centre by the deliberate use of the norms native to this specific nation.

Muhr (2016:20) calls a language pluricentric, if it fulfils some or all of the following criteria (with (1) and (2) as a minimum):

1. Criterion (1) Occurrence: A certain language occurs in at least 2 nations that function as interacting centers.
2. Criterion (2): Official status or strong ethno-linguistic awareness.
3. Criterion (3): Linguistic distance (Abstand).
4. Criterion (4): Acceptance of pluricentricity.
5. Criterion (5): Relevance for identity.
6. Criterion (6): Codification on norms.

### 6.2 The Criteria

Karelian fulfils Criterion (1) at least in the sense that it occurs in two countries, i.e. in Finland and in the Russian Federation.

Muhr (2016:21) defines official status [Criterion (2)] as the status of a state language or a co-state language or at least of a regional language quoting German in Italy and Catalan in France as examples of a regional language and adding that “the language therefore must have official recognition that exceeds the status of a minority language”.

The Law on Support and the other legal measures taken in the Republic of Karelia do not qualify Karelian as a regional language, and in Finland, Karelian is defined as a non-regional minority language.

However, in nations where the national variety does not have the appropriate formal status, strong linguistic awareness of the language community can act as a replacement for the acknowledgement and the official status (Muhr, 2016:21). The studies of ELDIA have shown that people are aware of the importance of their language, which would speak in favour of the fulfilment of Criterion (2).

It must be said that despite the fact that some criteria are met, Karelian is a borderline case of a pluricentric language as none of the criteria is fully met and the number of speakers is small as well the use of the language has become very reduced. In addition to that, it is a minority language with very little use.

As to the other criteria, we have seen that Karelian plays a certain role in the creation of a national identity, which would fulfil Criterion (5), and that the language is codified [Criterion (6)] to the extent that there is a literary standard.

## 7. Conclusions

There are good arguments to claim that Karelian fulfils the minimum requirements of the Criteria (1) and (2) and, additionally, the Criteria (5) and (6) established by Clyne and Muhr, which will allow us to consider Karelian as a pluricentric language.

Even so, one has to admit that the fulfilment of the criteria is not very strong. Another important caveat is the small number of speakers: 5,000 individuals in Finland and 25.000 in Russia. Therefore, one might consider Karelian as a borderline case of a pluricentric language.

Together with the rapid decline in the recent past, this leads to the classification of Karelian as an endangered language both in Russia and Finland. On the other hand, there are some positive signs that the downward trend might be stopped or even reverted.

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