

# DISAPPEARING DIALECT: ATTRITION AND SCATTERING OF INGRIAN FINNISH

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## 1. THE INGRIAN FINNISH DIALECT

Ingrian Finnish is one of the old Southeastern Finnish dialects. It was originally spoken by 17th century immigrants to Ingria (Finn. *Inkerinmaa*) in the Province of St. Petersburg, Russia (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> At most, there were about 130,000 speakers of Ingrian Finnish in the mid 1920s. However, after the founding of the Soviet Union there was a great upheaval. Use of Ingrian Finnish was prohibited in the 1930s and Russian became an obligatory language in everyday life including school and in the home. There was also cultural oppression: thousands of Ingrian Finns were transported to the far east of Russia. During World War II Ingria was a battlefield between Germany and Russia (siege of Leningrad). Ingrians were moved to Germany, evacuated to inner Russia, or they emigrated to Finland.

After World War II Ingrian Finns were not allowed to return to their home region, but they were settled in different parts of Russia. Today the remaining approximately 50,000 Ingrian Finns live scattered in various countries (mostly Russia, Estonia, and Finland). The Ingrian Finnish dialect is not transmitted between generations; only the old speak Ingrian Finnish “fluently”. Young people speak Russian, Estonian or Standard Finnish (see Savijärvi and Savijärvi 1999).

It is not clear whether we can speak about the Ingrian Finnish speech community, if this means a group of people who use the same language to communicate with each other, because the Ingrian Finnish community and language have disintegrated and social norms are not very strong. So, there are no control mechanisms that prevent language from scattering (see Kokko 1998, 2007).

## 2. THE INGRIAN FINNISH LINGUISTIC SYSTEM

Because Ingrian Finns form a scattered minority among the majorities, it means that there is no Ingrian Finnish speech community. Only a few domains of use of Ingrian Finnish are available. Social control (norms) has emerged and the linguistic intuition of individual speakers has changed. This has led to a situation where

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper *disappearing* means individual’s L1 disappearance; second language disappearing is excluded.

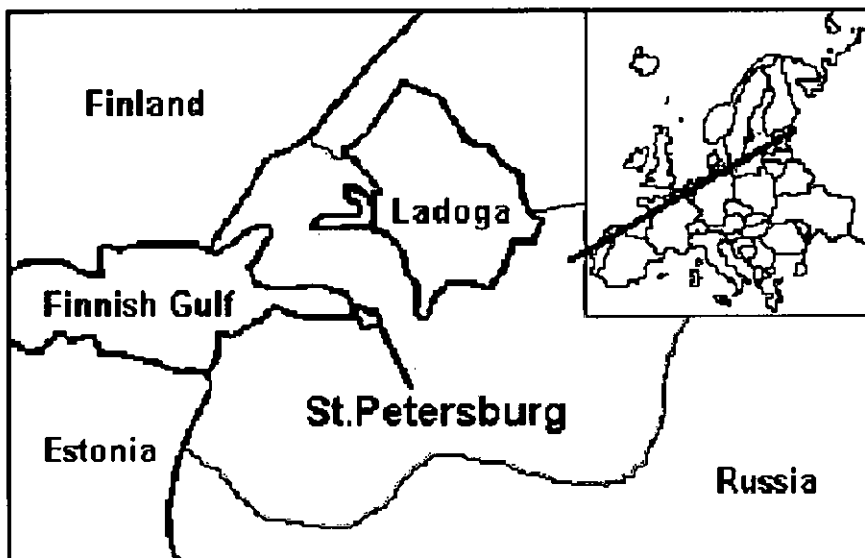


FIGURE 1  
Map of Ingria

there are many linguistic innovations, but they do not develop into changes. By an innovation I mean a process that alters a linguistic feature at an individual level; a language change is a process that alters a linguistic feature at a community level (see also Andersen 1973, 1988; Milroy and Milroy 1985).

There is a lot of room for both internal and external innovations, and neither one is necessarily primary, but often they are working together in the same direction. Features that involve both types of innovations change most easily. Innovations can be categorized into three main groups. First, there are language internal changes that developed on the base of old linguistic systems, like phonological and grammatical patterns. For example, case syncretism has developed between adessive and allative: former endings were adessive *-la* (vocal harmony ending *-lä*) and allative *-le*. Nowadays the ending *-l* is mostly used in both meanings. Second, in this kind of scattered community, language attrition is also influential. For example, the whole case system has emerged, and the most frequent cases (nominative and adessive) are expanding, while peripheral cases are disappearing. Third, contacts with other languages create innovations in Ingrian Finnish. This means strong bilingualism in the community of Ingrian Finns. Most of them speak at least two languages, many are trilingual (for example Finnish-Russian-Estonian). Because of the great domination of prestige languages, the resources of these languages are always available for Ingrian Finns. So, if production problems occur, code shifting is easy. This means that many different transfer effects are involved in Ingrian Finnish all the time.

### 3. CONCURRENT INNOVATIONS

As implied earlier these three innovation types do not work separately but together. Next I give some examples about these concurrent innovations in the Ingrian Finnish case system. First, internal innovations and attrition work together in expanding the adessive case, as mentioned above. Phonological change (apocope) results in case mixing (adessive *-la* > *-l* and allative *-le* > *-l*), while at the same time the most frequent locative case becomes prominent (because of attrition). So, the adessive-like case expands. This expanding process is also influenced by language contacts; the adessive-like ending *-l* is used as a “general locative” case when the systems in contact languages (for example Estonian and Finnish) differ from each other. Moreover, when the speakers’ linguistic intuition about Ingrian Finnish weakens, L2 patterns replace it. This also happens at the morphosyntactic level, as in the case of Russian and Finnish when some Russian patterns are “translated” in Finnish. For example, the Russian preposition *na* ‘on’ is usually translated with the adessive, although it is not always used originally in Finnish in these structures (see Kokko 2007).

### 4. SUMMARY

The main point of this presentation is that in a scattered speech community there are a lot of different kinds of innovations in the linguistic system, and the innovations are not separate. It is unclear whether we can speak of the Ingrian Finnish speech community at all, when the speakers do not have everyday contact with their native language. Anyhow, emerging social norms and second language transfers change language rapidly from a homogenous entity to many individual language variants.

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