

Border Karelian recognition test

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Karelian is the closest cognate language of Finnish with 5,000 speakers in Finland and ca. 25,000 in Russia. It is endangered in both countries (ELDIA report: 4648). In Finland, Karelian speakers are mainly evacuees who before World War II lived in Border Karelia, the easternmost part of Finland. After the war, Border Karelia was incorporated into the Soviet Union and the Karelian inhabitants were resettled into other parts of Finland, especially the eastern provinces of North Karelia and North Savo. In this situation, Karelian started rapidly to assimilate into the dialects of Finnish. At present, the second and third generations in most families do not speak Karelian any more but they are rememberers of Karelian spoken by their parents or grandparents (see Craig 1997: 259). The evacuees who were born in Border Karelia are now over seventy years old.

Our folk linguistic study will shed light on speakers awareness of a language which is becoming forgotten. What kinds of features of Karelian do laymen pay attention to and which features do they consider different from the eastern Finnish dialects? The research material consists of thirty-one free thematic interviews either with evacuees born in Border Karelia or their descendants. The informants were born in 1917-1969 and they live in North Karelia and North Savo. The tape-recorded interviews include a recognition test and a variety imitation task. The recognition test involved playing a sample of the speech of a first-generation immigrant, recorded in the 1970s, and asking the informants to point out linguistic features characteristic of the Karelian language. The results show which details are salient to non-linguists in a language that was used in their childhood families and how well they command it (Preston 1996).