

## Social Network Theory as a framework for studying minor Finnic languages with special reference to Karelian

*Kalahan se ettšiy verkkuo, ei verkko kaloa.*

‘It’s the fish that seeks for the net,  
not the net that seeks for the fish.’

(A proverb from Rugarv, Republic of Karelia;  
KKS s.v. *verkko*)

### 1. Netting together Finnic and micro-sociolinguistics

The Finno-Ugric languages belong to the lesser-known and globally most threatened vernaculars (see, e.g., Council of Europe 2006). Yet, the majority of the Finno-Ugric varieties are still very weakly trademarked in the knowledge inventory of the worldwide linguistic community. This is particularly true of the minor Finnic (formerly also called Baltic-Finnic) varieties (i.e., all Finnic languages except Finnish and Estonian): even in authoritative sources the information available on them is far too often sporadic or misunderstood, or has very little if any foundation at all. However, in their reducing linguistic and geographic compactness which in part ultimately is due to the universal processes of modernisation, urbanisation and the ageing of the population especially in rural areas, contemporary minor Finnic speech communities mirror the very effects of the major socio-historical processes emblematic to our time. Thus, on the one hand, the minor Finnic languages offer intriguing insights into understanding the complicated dialogism of social factors and language-diversity endangerment in general.

On the other hand, however, minor Finnic speech communities in Russia are characterised by increasing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity triggered by socio-historical processes that are local rather than global in nature. Amongst the most important of these have been the growth of industry in their traditional environment rich with natural resources, the Russian and the Soviet policies of (forced) assimilation of non-Russian citizens, Stalinist purges and deportations in the 1920s, 1930s and during World War II, the liquidation of perspectiveless

villages in the 1960s and 1970s, and, as pointed out by Heikkinen (2000), the conscious eradication of traditional values that used to maintain minority cultures and languages prior to the Communist era. Consequently, in spite of the similarities between modern socio-historical processes in the West and in Russia, studies concerned with the minor Finnic languages and speech communities inescapably involve aspects that are not necessarily taken into account in the standard sociolinguistic methodological and conceptual procedures which have been mainly developed in modern Western societies.

The current paper is anchored to the ongoing discussion of new viewpoints and methodologies in Finno-Ugric studies, and is concerned with some perspectives opened up by one prominent sociolinguistic framework, viz. Social Network Theory. This theory was born in the social sciences within the paradigm of structural functionalism, and was gradually adopted into a wide variety of further scholarly disciplines (including linguistics via anthropology, see Milroy 2000: 217), so that today 'Network Theory' actually is used as a rather general term referring to several theories and models of social relationships (see, e.g., Levinson & Ember 1996: 510 ff.). As an analytic approach network theories seek to shed light on the nature and direction of social influence by investigating the micro-level of social networks between individuals as a significant part of the macro-level represented by large social units, such as a social class or a minority group in its entirety. To put it very generally, the underlying idea is that certain social structures correlate with certain cultural (e.g., linguistic) constructions so that regularities between social relationships and their effects on cultural constructions can be established. These regularities can be approached by means of Social Network Analysis, that is, thorough investigation of the interdependencies of variable social structures, the characteristic features of individuals' networks, and the individual's behaviour (e.g., language use). The main aim is, in brief, to show how local practices interact with global patterns.

The primary hypothesis of Social Network Theory is that individuals are embedded in their very personal social clusters which provide them with structures that help them cope with their everyday lives which also effect members' behaviour (e.g., language use). One current sociolinguistic characterisation of the concept is that of Milroy and Gordon (2003: 117) who define a social network as "the aggregate of relationships contracted with others, a boundless web of ties which reaches out through social and geographical space linking many individuals, sometimes remotely". In other words, social networks are structures of involvement and interaction which are based on the mutual engagement of people who come together either directly or indirectly via other people, and who share a repertoire of norms and patterns of behaviour. Seen horizontally, networks can encompass age groups and involve people belonging to different

social cohorts (e.g., work, special interest groups); viewed vertically, they cross over generations (e.g., family, kin) and can intersect social partitions, especially in cases involving social movement upwards or downwards. (Meyerhoff 2006: 185.) Each individual simultaneously belongs to numerous social networks which often overlap to some extent. The initial primary-function network is usually that of the family of birth; growing up, each individual constantly joins new networks, so that everyone ends up having her/his very own combination of macro-level, large-scale networks and micro-level, interpersonal networks. In regard to the relative impact of networks, it has recently been suggested by Meyerhoff (2006: 195) that childhood networks have a greater effect on linguistic patterns than adult networks. In my view, this assumption is not particularly tenable: As shown in, for example, Bortoni-Ricardo's (1985) study of changes in individual network structures and their effects on language use, the personal mixture of networks may vary considerably even during an individual's own lifetime. As shown by a wealth of further sociolinguistic studies, some of which will be discussed below, the potency of the impact of a specific social network on an individual's behaviour and values is a highly individual matter and cannot be reduced to generalisations such as this.

As the above definitions show, because networks are extremely variable, they can also be classified in a variety of ways. A very typical type of network is the *egocentric network*: the anchorage point is the individual (*ego*) and all further nodes (i.e., other persons belonging to the network of the *ego*) become described in relation to their position in regard to the anchorage point. *Total networks* map all possible types of relationships between social entities. Therefore, one might seek to describe the network of an *ego* in absolute terms; in practice, however, this would hardly be possible, because each individual belongs simultaneously to numerous networks and it would be almost impossible to map all of these with the same degree of accuracy. *Partial networks* concentrate on only part of a network of one or more actors which is relevant to the research in question. Yet another type of network, the *joint network*, is a macro-level network mapping the social relationships within a village or town. The *referential network* depicts the relationships of the *ego* to abstract social constructs, for example, to a certain ethnic group or nation; for instance, two Estonians who do not know each other but meet accidentally abroad are bound to one another through membership in the category 'Estonian'. There are also networks that are possible but do not (yet) exist in real-life interactions; in the literature these are sometimes called *potential networks*. Other types of networks which will be introduced below in more detail include *experiential*, *insulated* and *integrated networks*.

Personal social networks comprise ties of different sorts and with diverse strengths. The direct contacts of an individual are said to belong to the first-

order zone of nodes where, as indirect contacts via a first-order contact person, they belong to a second-order zone. The ties within the network can be strong (intensive contact) or weak (less intensive contact); in a sociometric network diagram a single line between two nodes often (but not always, cf., e.g., Labov 2001: 349, 356) denotes a weak tie and a double line marks a strong tie. Structural relationships between the links can also vary in their nature; for instance, as stressed by Fitzmaurice (2000a), a contact can be reciprocal (“friendship” or “coalition”) or it can asymmetrical, for example, if one of the participants has considerable power and the other is a somewhat passive object in terms of power measurement. As an entity a network can be dense, meaning that all its members are in contact with each other, or it can be loose in the sense that not all members know each other. A network is said to be multiplex when the network ties within it are based on more than one relationship, similarity or activity; a uniplex network is based on only one relationship. (Milroy 1987: 50–51.)

In linguistics the impact of people’s social engagement in respect of their language use is not actually a new idea: even in 1905 Gauchat, who analysed the vernacular (*le patois*) of Charmey, a small Swiss village, established a correlation between an individual’s language use and her/his membership in a certain local network. In his famous 1958 study concerning the influence of the caste system on language use, Gumperz found out that in informal interaction between members of different social fractions the caste-based differences in linguistic behaviour levelled out. Yet, systematic sociolinguistic Social Network Analysis only began when the Belfast vernacular projects were carried out by Lesley and James Milroy (henceforth: Milroy and J. Milroy, respectively) in the 1970s (Milroy 1980; Milroy & Milroy 1985; some further linguistic network studies are reviewed in, e.g., Chambers 2003: 74–115). In linguistics the hay-day of Social Network Theory was the 1980s when it was seen as an individual-oriented alternative to quantitative Labovian sociolinguistics (e.g., Gal 1979; Milroy 1980; Bortoni-Ricardo 1985); later on in the 1990s, Social Network Theory has more and more been seen as a modification of the Labovian paradigm (see J. Milroy 1992). Linguistically, two major interests seem to have been ruling the field, namely, variety maintenance and language change, the former especially in regard to the continuance of traditional dialectal and sociolectal varieties or minority languages, and the latter specifically in regard to emblematic sociolects such as Ebonics (African-American Vernacular English, AAVE, also known as Black English Vernacular, BEV). Lately, Social Network Analyses have been carried out on the basis of older written documents to shed new light on the history of English by showing how innovations have spread within a specific network of writers (see, e.g., Fitzmaurice 2000b; Nevalainen 2000; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2000; Lenker 2000; Bergs 2000).

By and large, the aim of sociolinguistic Social Network studies has traditionally been to explain the informal social mechanisms that encourage speakers to maintain their non-standard variety under pressure from a more prestigious language, or to show that change in the functioning of certain social mechanisms has created a social precondition for a specific linguistic change. A fairly new trend is the investigation of varieties evolving as a consequence of globalisation; these include, for instance, multilingual varieties evolving within urban networks (as for Finland, see Lehtonen's 2004 study of multinational youth groups in Helsinki) and those medial varieties that are currently developing within internet networks (see, e.g., Bergs 2006; Paolillo 2001; Couver 2006; Stein 2006; McNeill 2005).

So far the relationship between social networking and language use has been systematically examined in at least two case studies involving a Finno-Ugric variety. The pathbreaking investigation by Gal (1979) on Hungarian-German bilinguals in Austria confirmed that the decisive factor behind minority-language maintenance was an active membership in the traditional rural network. Aikio's (1988) survey of language-shift processes in five reindeer-herding Saami villages in Finland showed that one of the causes for the final breakthrough in the language shift of the Northern Saamis was that their rural networks broke in splinters when the artificial lakes of Lokka and Porttipahta were made in 1967 and 1970s. Contrary to Gal's, Aikio's study did not involve linguistic analyses but was purely sociological in nature. It focused on the informants' choice of language in communication with a certain other individual (each individual family member, relative, neighbour, etc.) in a variety of concrete interaction contexts; the problematics was analysed at the levels of individual, family and entire village. As innovative and methodologically novel as Aikio's survey was in its time, in this paper the focus is on sociolinguistic network studies, and I shall concentrate on discussing their methods and findings. The alleged effects of social ties on language use and the attitudes of Karelians have been referred to briefly in a paper by Pyöli (1999); there is also a sociolinguistic network project currently being carried out amongst the Karelians and Veps (Grünthal 2005: 33–34; 2007; forthcoming).

In what follows I shall discuss the prospects that the sociolinguistic application of Network Theory seems to hold, in my opinion, for the study of contemporary minor Finnic-speaking communities. The discussion draws on experiences I had during my fieldwork periods in central Karelian and Tver Karelian speech communities at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Given that my own empirical research has always focused on linguistic and discursive rather than language-sociological aspects, systematic network analyses have remained outside the scope of my Karelian research; my 60-hour Karelian interview corpus

would not even be suitable for a Social Network Analysis. Consequently, I shall confine myself here to examining some of the pros and cons of Social Network Analysis in regard to minor Finnic languages at a rather general methodological level: as I thread my way through I shall refer to experiences and results reaped from a selection of sociolinguistic network studies, in order to show what is assumed in the linguistic applications of Network Theory and what kind of problems one might encounter when trying to apply these hypotheses to the study of contemporary Karelian contexts.

Section 2 is dedicated to one of the very central characteristics of Network Analysis, namely, its asserted flexibility. The questions I wish to elucidate here are concerned with defining and characterising network memberships, adjusting Network Analysis methodology to linguistic research questions relevant to contemporary Karelian, issues connected with measuring network integration, and the impact of vernacular cultures and social categories on the individual's linguistic behaviour. Section 3 brings us to the motto of this paper—*It's the fish that seeks for the net, not the net that seeks for the fish*—and is concerned with two interactionally and socially significant factors which in my view so far have not been taken into account adequately in most linguistic network analyses, namely, the intentionality of human interaction and the dialogic, bidirectional relationship of language use and social structures.

## 2. Social Network Analysis —the flexible methodological tool

As pointed out by Bergs (2006), one of the characteristic features of Social Network Analysis (SNA) is its suppleness to case-specific adjustments:

SNA is and should be methodologically (and theoretically) open and flexible, since measurements and criteria for social networks may have to be adjusted for different research questions as well as for different regional, social, or temporal (perhaps even medial) environments. In other words: factors that have been identified for 20th century Belfast need not apply, at least to same extent, to 15th century Norfolk (Bergs 2005<sup>1</sup>), 17th century Navarro (Imhoff 2000<sup>2</sup>), or 20th century Brazil (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985), and vice versa.

Thus, when applying Social Network Theory to minor Finnic contexts, it is necessary to first carry out thorough context analyses to map how the methodology

<sup>1</sup> Bergs, Alexander 2005: *Social Networks and Historical Sociolinguistics: Studies in Morphosyntactic Variation in the Paston Letters 1421–1503*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

<sup>2</sup> Imhoff, Brian 2000: Socio-historic network ties and medieval Navarro Aragonese. – *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 101: 443–450.

should be modified in order to do due justice to the regional, social and temporal special traits of the case(s) in point. As for those contemporary Karelian speech communities in which I have worked, one should not only bear in mind that social structures in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia may require the employment of different social variables than those in western class-societies such as Britain or the USA, but one must also take into account that central Karelia and Tver Karelia differ greatly from one another socio-historically. Most notably, after World War II, Karelian villages in central Karelia multinationalised very rapidly, because big timber-cutting *kolkhozes* brought masses of non-Karelian workers from other parts of the Soviet Union; as a consequence, for instance, in the village of Poodene where I recorded a part of my interviews, the population consists of over 60 nationalities. Tver Karelian villages, on the other hand, have for the most part preserved their Karelian identity up to our day, and did remain relatively stable until the late 1960s when Karelians were at last granted domestic passports and thus allowed to move into towns, a process which gradually led to an intensification of language shift towards Russian for the young and educated Karelians, even in Tver Karelia.

As for the similarities between these two contexts, in addition to those major socio-historical processes characteristic of the Soviet Union that were outlined at the beginning of Section 1 above, the analysis tool should also make it possible to deal in a case-specific way with the linguistic effects of the stigmatisation of rural dwellers, especially those with “broken” (non-native) or accentuated (non-native or dialectal) Russian (see Heikkinen 1982/1983, 2000), and the ever-strengthening dominance of Russian over other languages in all domains of language use. The present state of all Karelian speech communities is characterised by a briskly proceeding assimilation towards other nationalities and a language shift towards Russian. This is clearly reflected in the demography of speakers of Karelian: native speakers are increasingly elderly people and, in spite of the revitalisation efforts since the 1990s, there are still fewer and fewer younger-generation Karelians who know the ethnic language at all. Yet, investigating Karelian we obviously are concerned with radical changes in language use which clearly seem to parallel radical changes in social structures which, however, have not only affected Karelians and other minority nationals, but also all rural dwellers in Russia. Given all this, it is possible that an analytical tool ought to be constructed so that minority group membership and rurality would not be classified as equal to the same extent as suggested by Gal’s study concerning the Austro-Hungarian village of Oberwart (Gal 1979).

As shown in numerous studies, such as Pyöli (1996) and Sarhimaa (1999), in Karelian speech communities the changes in language-use patterns have led to drastic changes in the language itself, as well. This has been testified in a variety of forms of language erosion (according to my observations, this concerns, for

instance, the rules of consonant gradation) as well as intensifying Russian interference in all present-day Karelian vernaculars. Consequently, for the purposes of minor Finnic, the flexible and open method of Social Network Analysis should be also adjusted to allow for examining processes of bilingual or even multilingual language variation in highly dynamic speech communities characterised by the multilingual and multinational social networks of their individual members.

## 2.1. Defining and characterising network memberships

A further point related to the potential need for the case-specific adjustment mentioned by Bergs (2006) is defining what a Social Network is in a certain context and, ultimately, who counts as a member of a local team. In sociolinguistics Social Network Analysis has primarily been applied to micro-dimensions of social structures such as small villages, urban neighbourhoods or social sub-groups; the sole exception of which I am aware is Bortoni-Ricardo's 1985 study concerning the settling of internal migrants into the urban surroundings of a suburb within the macro-structure of the city Brazlandia in Brazil. If one wishes to study the effects of social networks on the use and the present-day *habitus* of Karelian, one should concentrate on the micro-dimensions as well. One possible starting point is the very loose and flexible definition of Croft (2000: 20) which identifies a social network as a group of individuals who have a common language and have the same probability of communicating with each other if there is a reason to linguistically interact. Yet, approaching issues concerning Karelian using such a wide definition might not be the best possible solution after all: All Karelians know Russian, the local (Soviet) *lingua franca*, as do all further inhabitants of their home villages and towns. Given this condition, in principle Russian and not Karelian would be the language that holds the social networks of Karelians together. In practice, Croft's definition could be employed in Karelian contexts to identify the joint social network of a village, or the potential social network of each of its inhabitants. But for mapping the kind of egocentric, partial or total networks which have been investigated in former sociolinguistic network studies, one must develop a functionally more suitable way of delineating team members from non-members.

Given the national and linguistic heterogeneity of Karelian contexts, defining who belongs to a specific "Karelian" social network is, indeed, a very interesting issue which potentially could be fruitfully approached from the viewpoint of Fishman (1972: 22 ff.). Stressing the multitude of networks within any speech community, he speaks of 'experiential networks' which show concrete integration and interactive relationships within the network structures, and 'referential

networks' which are characterised by abstract integration through shared values. These values become expressed through language, and this leads to a symbolic integration; a certain variety (e.g., standard language) integrates its speakers into a symbolic community. The central role of experiential and referential networks has been attested, for instance, in Blom and Gumperz's (1972) study of dialect maintenance in Hemnesberget, Norway. Those working-class informants who defined themselves as local-team members maintained the local dialect in all domains, whereas university students who reported that their referential network was the same local team but who also identified themselves with pan-Norwegian values and had experiential networks consisting of substantial contacts outside of the local community used standard language when discussing topics of national significance.

In Karelian contexts, however, one problem with a referential network(s) could be the lack of a pan-Karelian identity. Amongst Karelians a distinctively Karelian group identity or group solidarity which would cover the entire ethnic entity "we, Karelians" is extremely weak (see, e.g., Nygård 1978; Heikkinen 1986; Sarhimaa 2000, 2008). Furthermore, group identities appear to be based on locality rather than ethnic background: people feel a keen solidarity towards their close network (family, kin, friends and neighbours) with no special regard for ethnicity or nationality. This is very understandable: for instance in the central Karelian village of Poodene where I recorded a significant part of my data, more than 60 different nationalities are represented amongst the 2,000 inhabitants; consequently, there are naturally also a vast number of families in which one of the spouses is Karelian and the other Russian or something else.

Consequently, one of the challenges would be to find a sound way to cope with the fact that contrary to classical sociolinguistic network studies concerning bilingual contexts (e.g., Gal 1979 on Hungarians in Oberwart, Austria), the linguistic and ethnic background of further members of the social networks of Karelian informants would often be highly variegated. Furthermore, as the study by Gal (1979) testifies, the social contents with which different languages or varieties, or ethnicity terms become associated can change over time, and so one should perhaps not consider the lack of a pan-Karelian identity a given fact true for the present situation as well, but rather try to show through empirical analyses what being Karelian today means to those who identify themselves as Karelians. In sum, anyone trying to conduct research in terms of referential networks would first have to find out precisely what constitutes the symbolic, referential entity in Karelian contexts, and second explore whether such an entity as a purely Karelian network that could serve as a referential social cluster for those who have maintained Karelian as one of their means of every-day communication even exists.

In my view, it might be possible to find not only experiential but also referential networks amongst Karelians by tracing local sub-groups joined by shared sets of activities, creeds or values. Such classic sociolinguistic network studies concerned with rural speech communities as Gal (1979) and Labov (1963) revealed the linguistic significance of local-team memberships: those most dedicated to the traditional way of life were clearly the primary maintainers of the traditional language varieties as well. In other contexts a rebellion, an overt linguistic manifestation of maximal isolation of a sub-group from members of other groups has been playing a linguistically decisive role; this has been attested amongst adolescents in Harlem (Labov 1972), Reading (Cheshire 1982) and Detroit (Eckert 1989, 2000). I doubt if one could find groups of teenagers sharing Karelian-supporting dogmas and values (maybe with the exception of the putative fans of rock bands such as *Talvisovat*, provided there are fans that form something like a fan club and in which Karelians are found). In the light of the results I got analysing the intensity and forms of Russian interference in Karelian, I am somewhat sceptical when it comes to the possibility of establishing networks of Karelians parallel to those of Hungarians in Austria (Gal 1979) or true islanders in Martha's Vineyard (Labov 1963) who would be both dedicated to the traditional Karelian way of life and to the maintenance of monolingual Karelian. My results rather suggested that irrespective of their occupation and domicile, and their general fluency in Karelian, all Karelians switch between traditional Karelian and several Russian-influenced codes (for details, see Sarhima 1999). In this respect the majority of my informants regardless of their age greatly resemble Gal's (1979) middle-generation informants who hung in between the traditional and the modern: They were neither strongly nor weakly bound to the emblematically Karelian rural lifestyle, and shifted from one language to the other in a way that suggested that each is an equally good alternative for expressing themselves (Sarhima 1999, 2008).

Yet, I am pretty sure one might find sub-groups built up around a local choir, or sub-groups of those who wish to keep alive, say, traditional Karelian handicraft. Further potential networks with Karelian-maintaining "doctrines" could be found by mapping the clusters of those who work for the revitalisation of Karelian and are active in Karelian associations, who teach or study Karelian at school or at the university. When concentrating on such highly localised social networks, one would definitely benefit from the concepts of *communities of practice* which was introduced to sociolinguistics by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) and *coalition* brought in by Fitzmaurice (2000a). Each of these terms stresses the joint engagement of group members in a common project: practices (that is: ways of doing things), as well as the construction of a shared orientation to the world, emerge gradually in the course of the shared activity around the enterprise.

In the study of coalitions of Karelians a possible concrete approach would involve two stages: one could start with mapping the members of the coalition at issue, and proceed then by mapping the egocentric and probably partially overlapping personal networks of the coalition members as fully as possible. The resulting database would resemble that of Lippi-Green's (1989) study of the 760-inhabitant Austrian village of Grossdorf, in that it would be possible to keep apart data concerning occupational networks, relative networks and leisure activities. This would allow for carrying out independent analyses of different types of networks in order to establish their correlations with linguistic variables. It also would be possible to test whether conclusions could be drawn regarding the personal meaning of network relationships for the individual in question, as did Lippi-Green. A further benefit of the coalition-centred approach would be that the social networks of urban Karelians could be mapped following the same procedure.

## 2.2. Adjusting methodology to linguistic research questions

What could and what should be mapped in order to sample network data whose analyses would reveal something linguistically relevant are two different though intertwined questions. As pointed out by Bergs in the citation above, before rushing to gather empirical material one also needs to fine-tune the methodological tool of Network Analysis to match the concrete linguistic research questions. Here the key question is: What kind of linguistic research problems would make sense in contemporary Karelian contexts? As was outlined above in Section 1, three major avenues of research can be seen in the fields of sociolinguistic network studies: language variation and change, minority-language maintenance and shift, and the birth of new varieties.

As to questions regarding language variation and change, finding linguistic variables with much still unstable variation is no problem at all in Karelian contexts; one case in point could be the earlier mentioned very apparent decay in the rules of consonant gradation. Yet, finding linguistic variables that might show variation which might correlate with a network membership rather than with some macro-social variables or some other individual linguistic or extralinguistic variable is a trickier issue. Very little, if anything, is currently known of the social values of linguistic variants in Karelian varieties. Thus, one would have to first find out what the social value of a variant for the members of the speech community at issue really is, and then be able to show convincingly that these social values correlate with certain features of local social structures. In attempting to define a variant's social value within the network, one would have to develop an academically acceptable method for investigating the subjective atti-

tudes of individuals towards linguistic variants. I do not find it methodologically particularly sound to state categorically on the basis of a researcher's conviction that a certain variant is an important marker of a certain social identity, simply because it is the most frequent of the variants in the speech of the informants with the highest degree of network integration, as, for example, Milroy (1980) did. One could, of course, also abandon the strictest Milroyan approach which presupposes a direct relationship between network structure and language use, and decide to proceed following the ontology of Gal (1979, esp. 15 ff.) and Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) who assumed that the decisive factor is the effects of networks on the social categories with which speakers wish to identify themselves, and the capacity of these to show an influence on individual language use. This approach is supported also by the results of Lippi-Green (1989) whose analyses revealed that a general network-integration score drawn from the structure of individual networks can lead to deficits in the interpretation of the "true" meaning of different sorts of social relationships to the individuals themselves. If one adopts this approach, one will again be dealing with the personal meanings of network relationships for the concerned individual which is what, for instance, Lippi-Green (1989) did in her analyses as well.

Research settings concerned with language maintenance in regard to the mere extensive use of Karelian seem more promising than examining network-bound language variation and change. Yet, simply mapping who is in contact with whom and who reports speaking which language with whom is pretty simplistic. In my view, such mappings can only serve as an initial phase; the data sampling should involve not only questionnaires but interviews as well, preferably individual as well as group interviews, possibly supported by language-elicitation tasks, and definitely accompanied by long-term participant observation. Thus, as has been customary in sociolinguistic network studies, long fieldwork periods would be required (for instance, Gal's (1979) intensive fieldwork period lasted one year, Lippi-Greene's (1989) and Labov's (2001) three years).

Studies dedicated to the third set of problems concerned with the birth of new, mixed varieties would be complicated by the very same problem as those dealing with language variation and change, viz. finding relevant linguistic variables. Here, however, one could make good use of the variable *dolžen*-construction or of the modes of code switching that I found in my 1999 study, and try to find out if the variation in the use of the established variants (which did not correlate with any standard social variable such as age, gender, education) could be explained in terms of network memberships. In the light of my analyses, the variation in combining Russian elements with Karelian elements correlated with the general interview mode of the informant: those who sought to keep the two languages separate (i.e., clearly employed two different grammars, Karelian and

Russian) preferred to code switch within the *dolžen*-construction, whereas those whose interview mode was one of the bilingual mixed varieties clearly tended to adapt the Russian-origin construction to the grammatical rules of Karelian, that is, employed just one grammar within the *dolžen*-construction. One should perhaps seek out those individuals who belong to a certain village or town sub-group wherein Karelian is highly valued, as well as those individuals who do not place a high value, and then compare these two groups in regard to their use of the variants. One should also try to find out if the variants carry a social value in the speech community (i.e., is one of them more stigmatised as “bad language use” which should be avoided by “proper Karelians”). And, last but not least, one should develop a suitable tool for measuring the degree of integration of an individual into a specific sub-group.

### 2.3. Measuring network integration

Measuring an individual's degree of network integration and predicting its effects on her/his grammatical choices has been one of the central issues in sociolinguistic network studies. A very common research result has stated that strong network ties have high norm-enforcing capacities. For instance, Blom and Gumperz (1972), Gal (1979) and Milroy (1980) all found out that tightly knit networks clearly supported variety maintenance, especially in the case of core-members with multiple strong ties within the network. Loosely knit groups whose members are linked mainly by weak ties, individuals whose ties to the network are uniplex and who thus are less integrated into the group, as well as those who are not at all integrated into the group at issue (in Labov's (1972) terms ‘lames’, Eckert's (1989, 2000) ‘Burnouts’) are reported to be more prone to develop and adopt innovations (see especially Milroy 1980 and Labov 2001).

Milroy (1980: 136, 175) explained the norm-enforcement mechanism of tight-knit networks in terms of network loyalty which becomes reflected in the conformity to collective values, including language use: “the closer an individual's network ties are with his local community, the closer his language approximates to localized vernacular norms” (Milroy 1980: 175). Lifestyle loyalty was one of the key terms in Gal's (1979) explanation of her Oberwart case, too. Her informants identified Hungarian with the traditional rural style of life and German with the modern style of life and with urban, modern working conditions; this dichotomy also acquired a symbolic reflection in language use, so that for the speech community the local variety of Hungarian was often used as a symbol of loyalty. As stated above, amongst Karelians loyalty to the traditional way of life cannot play any major role since the traditional way of life was crushed many

decades ago by Soviet policies aimed at the construction of a *Homo Sovieticus*. I suppose one should attempt to discern whether loyalty to speaking Karelian (in any of its more or less Russian-influenced varieties) is the primary means of identification in the first place, if one wishes to manifest her/his membership in a “Karelian team”.

Contrary to strong network integration, it has been proven that weak network ties are likely to play an important role in language change and in the adaptation and diffusion of innovations born outside of the network. For instance, Milroy’s (1980), Gal’s (1979) and Lippi-Green’s (1989) studies showed how the loosening of tense, multiplex networks opened the way to innovations and to an individual’s development away from the local vernacular; later on, Labov (2001) attested that those who have multiple relationships inside as well as outside of the local group operate as potential vehicles through which innovative variables can spread into and within a group.

What should not be forgotten, however, is that an individual with loose local-network ties is not necessarily under heavy pressure from another source, nor will that individual automatically adopt new variants or abandon a minority language, as it would seem to be assumed especially within the Milroyan approach. The personality, the life story, the experiences and (conscious) choices of the individual may as well contribute to the preservation of the network variety even if the ties to a former local-team network loosen. This has been attested, for example, by Bortoni-Ricardo (1985: 117) who speaks of ‘insulated networks’ of migrants in Brazil, and shows that these work in favour of the maintenance of the rural vernacular within the new urban surroundings; as examples of long-living insulated networks she discusses social clusters of women who often tend to preserve their pre-migration network structures with the focus on family, kin and other migrants coming from their original home area.

In Karelian contexts, I assume it is fairly common to be a member simultaneously of an insulated network and an integrated network, the double-membership reducing the generalisability of Bortoni-Ricardo’s conclusion. A good example of this is a family with which I became familiar during one of my fieldwork periods in central Karelia. It consisted of two sisters and the husband and the children of one of them. This family originally came from the central Karelian village of Poodene, had lived over 30 years in Moscow where they all had been working, and had had some contact with other Karelians (insulated network), although primarily with non-Karelians (integrated network). They returned to the capital of Karelia, Petrozavodsk, some ten years before I met them. All members of this family spoke fluent Karelian with very little mixing of Russian, they reported having always spoken Karelian at home and with their Karelian acquaintances in Moscow and Petrozavodsk. None of the family

members had any problem in discussing topics such as current politics in Karelian, their old-age complaints or, the at that time (1988–1989) in Russia, the very popular Brazilian television soap opera ‘Slave Isaura’ (Portug. *Escrava Isaura*, Russ. *Rabynya Izaura*) which—as I learned during my fieldwork trips—was the very complicated and melodramatic story of a wicked coffee plantation owner’s obsession on one of his slaves.

All the above described factors characteristic of the family situation could count as typical features of an insulated network which supported the maintenance of the minority variety. Yet, during my sessions with the family, I witnessed several discussions with non-Karelians on the very same topics in Russian—again, without any language problems at all. Bortoni-Ricardo (1985: 117) assumed that the function of mutual reinforcement supporting the maintenance of the sub-standard variety (here: the minority language) is likely to be less influential in an integrated than in an insulated network, because in integrated networks the migrant is exposed to a larger range of outside influences. Thus, integrated networks should be characterised by a higher level of diffusion of innovations from the standard (here: the dominant language) to the sub-standard variety (here: the minority language). Yet, as this Karelian example shows, people can simultaneously share an insulated network and an integrated network, and the linguistic outcome of networking does not necessarily depend directly on the type of network ties they have with one another.

A number of quantitative instruments have been developed in sociolinguistic network studies for measuring network strength, the relationship between the degree of network integration of individual speakers and their grammatical choices, and the relationship of network integration, language use and macro-sociological variables such as age, gender, education, domicile, etc. In her pioneering 1980 study Milroy sought to define the social factors that constitute a multiplex network link. She came up with a list of micro-social variables such as ‘membership in a high density, territorially based cluster’, ‘kinship ties with more than one household in the neighbourhood’, ‘the same workplace as at least two others in the neighbourhood’, ‘the same workplace as at least two others of the same gender’, ‘regular participation in a territorially based activity (street gangs, bingo games, football teams, etc.)’, and ‘voluntary association with workmates after working hours’ (Milroy 1980: 141–142). Each informant’s degree of network integration was evaluated using these criteria which gave as an outcome the person’s network strength scale score (*NSS score*). During the next phase, Milroy counted the frequency of the different variants of eight selected phonological variables in the informant’s speech; this gave as a result the frequency of the emblematically local forms. The linguistic variants were placed in a continuum with the vernacular at one end and the standard at the other; each

received an index value. Finally, using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Test, Milroy examined the correlations between the network integration scores and the individual's use of the linguistic variables.

Lippi-Green (1989) used an integration score that she developed along much the similar lines as Milroy. She refined the method with *network subsector scores* gained through distinct analyses of occupational networks, kinship networks and leisure time activity networks; the subsector scores were then compared with linguistic behaviour in order to find correlations between network structures and phonological variation. Two further indices were also developed by Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) who analysed the changes in the network structures of migrants in regard to two dimensions: the *integration index* and the *urbanisation index*. Her integration index described network ties within the 1st and the 2nd zone of the individual's network, and the urbanisation index corresponded to the average of the urbanisation grade which the individual had within her/his network. Each individual received points according to her/his accommodation to the conditions of life (e.g., education, social mobility, etc.). This instrument also allowed for taking into account whether the network ties existed within the family or had already existed before migration, or whether they had only been established in the city.

The most extensive effort so far to develop an instrument for measuring networks socio-linguistically has been made by Labov (2001) who sought to identify linguistically innovative actors in a Philadelphian neighbourhood by determining correlations between the social background of 112 informants, their social contexts and a number of phonetic variables. He developed a system consisting of five different communication factors. The first, C1, is concerned with the estimated number of neighbours with whom the informant has regular contact and reveals the individual's interaction rate within the neighbourhood. C2 concerns the interaction rate of potential contacts; this was investigated using questions such as "who is your best friend?" and "who would you invite to a party?", "who would you invite for a cup of coffee?". Factors C3 and C4 were related to the spatial spread of the informant's friendships (e.g., number of friends living in the nearest neighbourhood or within the neighbourhood); together, factors C3 and C4 sought to measure the degree of the informant's integration in network structures outside the immediate neighbourhood. Labov's quantitative analyses showed, in sum, that the higher the number of friendships within the neighbourhood, the more likely it is for a person to use the most innovative variables, and that especially individuals who have multiple relationships inside and outside of the speech community act as potential catalysts through whom innovative variables can spread within a neighbourhood.

Developing network indicators suited to studying the linguistic behaviour of Karelians in correlation to their multilingual sets of connections is a very

challenging task. If one shares Milroy's and Lippi-Greene's conviction that the very structure of the network is vitally significant for an individual's linguistic behaviour, network indicators should be able to distinguish different strengths of network ties and allow for discerning composite, multiplex networks wherein the same people occur in different primary groups (e.g., a friend also being a neighbour, colleague, etc.) from differentiated, uniplex networks where the various primary groups only coincide to a very limited extent. Additionally, if one also wishes to make good use of the refined methodology of Lippi-Green (1989), the network indicators would also have to be developed for distinguishing between the effects of the Karelian informants' different primary-group structures (family, neighbours, friendship networks, work networks, etc.).

If, however, one also wishes to benefit from the views presented by Labov (2001), Gal (1979) and Bortoni-Ricardo (1985), network indicators would have to be developed on the basis of the characteristic features of the members of a given network. As described above, Bortoni-Ricardo's urbanisation index drew an urbanisation profile of the members of each individual migrant worker's personal network, and could thus potentially serve as a starting point for developing the methodology of studying urbanised Karelians. Gal, for her part, looked at the matter from the opposite angle. She arranged the speakers systematically on a peasant-to-urbanite scale according to their commitment to peasant activities in order to measure how agricultural their networks were, that is, how high a number of their network contacts were farmers. For each of the altogether 11 indicators the informant received one point for the scale, so that the more points a person had (0 to 11), the more "farming" (s)he was. Furthermore, Gal also took into consideration the degree of farming relationships within individual networks, that is, the degree of contacts with others who had adopted and maintained the traditional rural life style. Given that the majority of active speakers of Karelian live in the countryside, even though, as shown earlier, they have not led the "traditional Karelian" rural way of life for decades, one could also test to what extent emblematic rural indicators still become connected to being a Karelian identity.

Anyone wishing to map the effects of the Karelians' networks on their language use, and in seeking to adjust the methodological tool of Network Analysis to her/his own case, will have to consider carefully how to employ the experiences of earlier sociolinguistic network studies. For many reasons I am not sure if quantification really is the ideal way to proceed. First, as mentioned above, one of the obvious weaknesses of the procedure in Milroy's study was the assumption that a high correlation between an integration value and the use of a certain linguistic variable is indisputably an indicator of the variant's social-symbolic value within the network. Secondly, the scores do not allow for keeping the two factors of density and multiplexity apart: for instance, in Milroy's

analyses an individual who shared a work place with two more individuals of the same sex from the same neighbourhood was interpreted as integrated in the community as an individual who had twenty relatives living next door. Furthermore, Milroy's sample was fairly small, 46 informants divided into sub-groups according to sex, age and domicile which led to subgroups consisting of three or four individuals.<sup>3</sup> Murray (1993) has also criticised the test used by Milroy: he analysed Milroy's data anew using another test and achieved totally different results: neighbourhood-integratedness played only a very marginal role, and age and sex were clearly statistically more significant than the integration value. Therefore, it seems to be questionable whether the integration value predicts or even explains linguistic behaviour after all, especially when one takes into account that although the results concerning two female informants who Milroy (1980: 131) discussed as example persons support her claims concerning the role of networks, many other individuals even in her own sample obviously did not; for instance, certain male informants from Ballymacarrett where the highest correlation between language and integration has been demonstrated, clearly do not fit into the scheme at all. In sum, in aiming to measure the strength of network ties and seeking correlations between them and linguistic variation amongst the Karelians, one should be extremely aware of the potential inherent weaknesses of network scoring. As I shall endeavour to show next, joining scoring with more hermeneutic and less quantification oriented approaches might even produce interesting results which are more far-reaching.

#### 2.4. Depicting vernacular cultures

Combining quantification with detailed qualitative ethnographic description has been one of the avenues of research within sociolinguistic Social Network studies since the late 1970s. As we have seen, except for the correlation analyses outlined in section 2.3, the method used by Gal was very study-object specific and actually rather ethnographic: she arranged her informants on a scale indicating the grade of rural life style on the basis of characteristics that she found to be emblematic of being a Hungarian in Austria. The criteria underlying the classification were based on clear indicators of farming life style, for example, owning cows, pigs and chickens, as well as on such overt indicators of "Hungarian identity" as wearing certain items of clothing, and, finally, on the macro-scale social indicator "dropping out of the educational system early on" which Gal dis-

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<sup>3</sup> Statistical validity of the results does not seem to be that questionable in Gal's (68 informants, 49 of them long-term observed), Lippi-Green's (84 informants, 42 male and 42 female) or Bortoni-Ricardo's studies (118 informants).

covered was highly characteristic of those who stayed in Oberwart as opposed to those who migrated to towns.

Other sociolinguists also have depicted vernacular cultures in their studies. Analysing her data gathered amongst working-class adolescents frequenting adventure playgrounds in Reading, England, Cheshire (1982: 91, 102) developed a Vernacular Culture Index based on the network rankings of informants and information about the informants' sociometric status. Combining the background variables with linguistic variants she was able to show that there are statistically significant correlations between the Vernacular Culture Index and the grammatical choices made by highly integrated core members, on the one hand, and less-tightly integrated secondary and peripheral members of the network at issue, on the other: Core members used the investigated key variants most frequently and secondary members significantly more than peripheral members (Cheshire 1982: 104–105). In his study of a Detroit African American neighbourhood Edwards (1992) also calculated a Vernacular Culture Index for each of his informants. For him the scoring basis was a person's responses to ten statements, five of which had to do with the degree of integration into the neighbourhood, four with the informant's attitudes towards the neighbourhood and living there, and one concerned whether the informant had interracial friendships or not. What his correlation analyses revealed, however, was that vernacular-culture integration was a less powerful variable in explaining linguistic choices than was the biological macro-level variable of age.

In order to create a Vernacular Culture Index for a specific group such as Karelians, one firstly would have to find a set of representative indicators. In order to be able to define the symbolic value of each indicator within the group itself, the qualitative circumstances and probably a wider set of social values of the group at issue should be examined. In order to find out what Karelians themselves see as the emblematic features of being Karelian, one could include in the interview format questions on what is conceived to be stereotypically Karelian, and then try to construct matrices showing the indicators of rural Karelian identity and the indicators of urban Karelian identity, and employ these in defining the traditional Karelian life styles and the modern, composite forms of Karelian life style. It should be kept in mind that there are clearly two very different macro-contexts, namely, the rural and the urban. However, there are also different types of villages, some being multinational and some still predominantly ethnically Karelian, and there are different types of towns as well, namely, those in areas surrounded by Karelian villages and thus potentially with living contacts to Karelian identity, and there are towns and cities in a totally non-Karelian environment.

At the moment I have no clear idea of what, in a Karelian context, the Vernacular Culture indicators might be. Yet, I dare say one would not find anything resembling the six network-culture indicators that Cheshire (1982) was able to define in her study of Reading adolescents; there the indicators, with one exception (“job aspirations”), concerned the overt manifestation of social sub-group membership, and included carrying weapons, style of clothing, participation in petty criminal activities, fighting skills and swearing. A possibly better clue as to what to look for might be the Vernacular Culture indicators used by Edwards (1992), although, as pointed out above, these appeared to be statistically insignificant as far as the linguistic behaviour of the local-team members of the investigated Afro-American suburb in Detroit is concerned. These indicators were locality-bound (most family, relatives and friends living in the neighbourhood, most jobs having been there, etc.) and socio-psychological (the will of the informant to stay in the neighbourhood, or if prepared to move, wishing to shift to a similar neighborhood; not being bothered by the street culture, etc.). Given the primary locality-loyalty of at least rural Karelians and the fact that especially urbanised Karelians tend to give up using Karelian, one might well find valid indicators in the same social and socio-psychological dimensions that Edwards did.

Another direction in which to seek potentially significant indicators might be that suggested by Douglas-Cowie’s (1978) finding that social ambition correlated with linguistic variation far better than social class in the village of Articlave in the County of Derry (Londonderry) in Northern Ireland. Given that many Karelians consider it better for children to learn Russian as their first language, allowing them to pass their time usefully by studying “important” foreign languages such as English and (especially in northern parts of Karelian Republic) Finnish rather than the ethnic language Karelian, one could also consider using social ambition as one of the Vernacular Culture indicators and test how far it correlates with language shift to Russian by socially ambitious individuals. What one may also wish to look at is whether social ambition somehow correlates with the sex of the individual. According to Gal’s (1979) findings, especially young Hungarian women in Oberwart tended to use German more than young men, even if their adaptation grade to the traditional rural style of life was high. The explanation given by Gal was that young women’s possibilities in life were dependent on the social status of the man to whom they were married: because Hungarian became associated with a hard rural life and German with better conditions of life, young women abandoned Hungarian as a means of communication, thus seeking to multiply their possibilities of finding a man to marry who could offer better prospects in life.

### 3. Woven rather than imposed

From a wider methodological perspective, accepting the possibility of intentionality as one of the fundamental features underlying language use means that we should not only pay attention to what social structures do to language use, but also be aware of the fact that speakers make more or less conscious linguistic choices in order to influence their own social categories as well as those of others. In other words, social roles and social-network memberships are clearly not unidirectionally forced on people, as implied by many applications of Network Theory, but the relationship between individuals and the social is dialogic in the traditional Bakhtinian sense of the term, and thus much more complex and less straightforward in nature. On the one hand, society, social networks and social roles are all constructed, manifested, reinforced and changed by individuals and groups in interaction. On the other hand, social structures created via interaction influence the forms of human interaction. As pointed out by Gal (1979: 15), however, social structures do not influence language use directly, but rather by shaping what people want and the ways in which they act in order to achieve that.

#### 3.1. Intentionality of human behaviour

Intentionality of human action has received rather much attention in socio-linguistic Network Analyses. The deliberateness of a speaker's linguistic choices, the ability to accommodate to new, wider networks characterised by heterogeneous norms, and an individual's freedom in network construction were all key issues in Labov's (1963) survey of Martha's Vineyard, Gal's (1979) survey of Oberwart and Bortoni-Ricardo's (1985) study of Brazlandia. The significance of speakers' agency in network construction was also one of the major findings in Lippi-Green (1989: 223) who concluded that "[...] age and gender are indicators of group alliance about which the individual has no choice, and within which he or she must function, the [...] network subsectors [...] represent a different aspect of the individual as a community member: that of a free agent." I assume that by 'gender' she is referring to one's biological sex, since today gender is generally understood as the social or psychological sex, and an individual is in most modern societies principally free to choose what kind of categorical identity to represent and to manifest. What one cannot choose is the initial primary-function network of family and kin, or the existence or the lack of it. All further networks, however, are mostly of free choice; yet, according to

the “laws” of dialogism, choices by individuals are always at least potentially affected by social structures, including networks.

In regard to Karelians, free social agency is an issue which can be discussed only in the socio-historical framework of the Soviet Union and pre-revolutionary and post-communist Russia. At the time I conducted my interviews, the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Karelians were only starting to see themselves as free agents with the right to have a language and culture of their own and to be allowed to manifest their ethnic identity. Due to the ever strengthening Russian nationalism during the past few years, the fear of renewed ethnic oppression may be stronger today; yet, even in the period of *perestroika*, quite a number of my informants spoke about their concern of being “persecuted” again. Given all this, anyone interested in societal and/or psycho-sociological ‘agency’ in a Karelian context will probably have to give deep thought to what the term really meant then at that point in time.

In addition to choices concerning every-day networking, Karelians today can choose to become members of one or more of the numerous associations that have taken it as their task to maintain and revitalise the Karelian language and culture. According to Fitzmaurice (2000b), it is typical of conscious coalitions of this kind that people intentionally bind themselves to network ties for specific purposes and then sometimes cancel them very easily, for instance, in the face of a (potential or actual) conflict with further network members. If so, one could assume that the linguistic effects of coalitions tended to remain fairly modest. On the other hand, the effects can also be decisive, if the coalition survives long and acquires as its members those people who operate as vehicles through whom innovative forms of language use can spread into and within further networks of Karelians. In the light of Labov’s (2001) findings, these typically are individuals who have multiple relationships inside as well as outside of the local group. In Karelia the core group of ethnic activists appears to be fairly concise and its members have wide fields of contact with speakers of Karelian who are not very active or not active at all. Thus, as I suggested earlier, too, I believe it is an idea worth considering that the activists should be chosen as anchorage points and attempts should be made to investigate the linguistic behaviour of people belonging to individual networks and to networks overlapping with these. When planning a survey of this kind, the articles by Fitzmaurice (2000a, 2000b) would definitely be a source of inspiration.

### 3.2. Focus on discourse

So far the concept of a dialogic, bidirectional relationship of language use and social structures has not gained as much attention in sociolinguistic Network Analyses as intentionality, although it has been, in fact, applied brilliantly methodologically already by Gal (1979). She connected speakers' agency in constructing social categories via language with the individual's freedom to choose the category with which she/he wants to identify and become identified by other people. In Gal's view, in case that such identification becomes habitually expressed through speech, social networks may influence people's communicative strategies, due to the fact that within the network at issue certain linguistic choices habitually get associated with particular social categories. (Gal 1979: 15 ff.) Consequently, Gal took symbolic and expressive language use as the scope of her analysis, all the way along the thread stressing the social dimension of language as a manifestation of social values. In order to investigate the complex, dialogic relationships between the speaker and her/his language use, she concentrated in her qualitative linguistic data analyses on two interrelated factors: the actors' self-representation through language and the linguistic constraints induced by the individual network (Gal 1979: 16). Relying on interview data and her year-long participant observations, Gal classified her informants on the basis of their language use in a language matrix consisting of three variety categories—Hungarian, German and both—and several social-role categories such as sales clerks, officials, siblings, spouses, grandparents, grandchildren. In order to reach subjective dimensions as well, during the interviews she asked questions concerning the language that the informant would use in a conversation with a person belonging to a certain category; interestingly enough, contrary to my experience and those of a many other linguists who have observed that actual language use often has nothing to do with claimed language use, Gal's male informants' subjective responses corresponded with 90% accuracy and female informants' responses with 80% accuracy to Gal's objective observations on the behaviour of informants outside the interview situation.

In some of my latest publications (Sarhimaa 2005, 2006, 2008) I have sought to develop discourse analytical approaches for the construction of social categories of Karelian identities.<sup>4</sup> Like Gal I have focused on certain types of discourses, namely, narrative passages concerned with the use, status and

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4 As a linguist it is my main aim to study identity work at play in linguistic choices; yet, I do not assume that any fixed identities underlie discourse strategies, or vice versa, but seek to approach identity as a decentred and shifting narrative which emerges through language-in-interaction and ultimately results from the complexities of multicultural and multilingual contexts. In saying this I do not mean to claim that individuals have no identity *per se*; I just think that studying the deep, inner identity is beyond the reach of the linguistic methods at my disposal.

characteristics of Karelian; these narratives occurred naturally, that is, without any direct elicitation on my part, during the interviews with Karelians that I conducted in 1989–1994. Unlike Gal, however, I did not work in terms of objective participant categories such as sales clerks, officials, or family members but rather tried to close-read the discursive meanings of ethnic categorisations (Karelian, non-Karelian, Russian) and other types of membership categories (“we”, “them”; “Self”, “Other”). What Gal showed was that the speaker’s social environment influenced her/his self-representation through language choice. However, contrary to what Labov (1963, 1972) had postulated, Gal was able to demonstrate that not only the extralinguistic context but also the interactant to a great extent is involved in the prediction of the choice of a certain way of speaking: The more one had dealings with people observing a traditional rural life style, the higher was the use of Hungarian, and vice versa. My findings, then, suggest that when constructing and manifesting identities in interaction, Karelians assign narrative roles to themselves as well as to other narrative characters in order to reflect and to reinforce their identities as minority nationals, and partly also in order to create a parallel world where their own minority identities are stronger than in the reality. In a systematic sociolinguistic study concerned with the social networks and language use of Karelians one might get rather far by combining Gal’s approach with mine; one could start by mapping language use in contexts involving further actors with very clear, objective social roles, and then proceed by having a closer look not only at what was said in which variety or which grammatical variant was used, but also by analysing what the discursive meaning of the variants in the given context was.

As I have sought to show elsewhere (Sarhima 2007), the effects of the various contextual dimensions (i.e., the immediate and the wider linguistic context, intertextuality, as well as the interactional context and the wider extralinguistic cultural context) all show multifarious effects on linguistic choices. These effects, however, are difficult to attest in a methodologically satisfactory manner; far too often, one has to be confined to researchers’ interpretations that in many cases cannot be verified by showing precisely which linguistic features of the utterance support the interpretation. Yet, as shown recently by Hiss (2008) in his study of Sea Saami, it is possible to find ways of coping with the complicated interplay between language, the social and the individual in a methodologically sound manner, namely, by combining interactional sociolinguistics and the methodological tools provided by Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG). Interestingly enough, although Hiss does not work within the framework of sociolinguistic Network Analysis, his approach to empirical data is somewhat similar to that of Gal and me, and his findings shed very interesting new light on the relationship between social networking and linguistic behaviour.

Hiss (2008) analyses interview extracts concerned with three topics, all meta-linguistic in nature: the Saami language as an identity marker, stereotypes, and the future of the Sea Saami language. In the analyses, special attention is constantly paid to revealing the different strategies that interviewees employ in order to place themselves and their self-identities in the wider social context. On the basis of the SFG analyses, Hiss shows, very convincingly and very accurately, how the interviewees constantly make certain functional linguistic choices specifically to construct their identities and to orient those within a dense contextual network of meanings. One of Hiss's most interesting empirical findings is that a specific grammatical choice is made consciously to build up contrasts through orienting oneself towards what the cultural scientific theoretician Stuart Hall calls *the constitutive outside*. Furthermore, the individual identities constructed by the interviewees manifest multiple aspects of social belongingness in a manner which clearly fits Stuart Hall's characterisation of the *Third Space*: Within their individual identities present-day Sea Saami do not seem to strictly demarcate 'Saami' and 'Norwegian' as distinct ethnicity labels, but they clearly have developed in-between identities.

All in all, Hiss's empirical analyses show that the highly complex and ever-changing socio-historical conditions (centuries-long bi- and multilingualism, the Norwegian policies of forced assimilation of minorities, and the current conscious revitalisation of North Saami) have led to the birth of a fair number of diverse Saami identities. More importantly, his analyses revealed that these identities are in a very complex but linguistically modellable dialogic relationship with the informant's attitude towards the ethnic language and with the discursive organisation of grammar in the informant's utterances. In brief, this is seen in the fact that those interviewees who are active speakers of Sea Saami tend to present their meta-linguistic considerations as interactive processes, whereas those informants who are politically active and work for the revitalisation of Sea Saami but do not speak the language (fluently), tend to favour meta-linguistic reflections built up by describing relationships. To put this into Network Theory terminology: individuals whose experiential networks are Saami-speaking are active users of the ethnic language and apparently experience using it a natural indicator of their Saami identity; those, then, for whom Saami is a second or a later learned language identify themselves as Saamis by means of referential networking and see the Saami language as an indicator which needs to be positioned in relation to further indicators of their identities.

According to the Karelian proverb that I chose as the motto for this paper, it is the fish that seeks the net, not the net that seeks the fish. Very accurate, very true. And yet: When the fish seeking the net is a human being willing to identify with a certain group, the net is also woven by the fish itself. Given the results

of Hiss (2008), I am prone to think that we indeed might ultimately be able to accumulate more information on the mechanisms of the use and maintenance of minority languages by analysing the linguistic choices in discourses than by mapping linguistic networks and trying to depict their effects on language and language use. Networks are, after all, just one by-product of actions triggered by the fundamental human need to be one of those we have a high regard for.

#### 4. A brief word in conclusion

A few years ago *The Economist* (24.12.2005) paid respect to the oppressed Finno-Ugric languages of Russia with an article entitled *The dying fish swims in water*. The title is a translation of the Hungarian, Estonian and Finnish sentences meaning that *A dying fish swims under the water*. This sentence consists of words that are recognisable as being of common origin in the three most widely-spoken Finno-Ugric languages. In spite of the general pessimism, the fish is not yet dead. One indication of this is the existence of those Finno-Ugric speech communities that provided, for instance, Gal, Hiss and me with living language data. Another indication is the existence of networks and coalitions with which the still surviving Finno-Ugric “fish” can seek and find the net with, in the hope that there will be a better future. One of these coalitions is the Finno-Ugric Society, the cross-generational network of Finno-Ugrists which this year celebrates its 125th anniversary.

It is already a cliché in linguistic literature that the acute threat with extinction of the greater part of the world’s languages urges an intensification of the empirical study of especially those varieties which have not been satisfactorily documented or, in many cases, not documented expansively enough in literature written in one of the universal scholarly *lingua francas*. In the framework of the 125th anniversary of the Finno-Ugric Society this is not just a widely-circulated truism but a practical agenda for future research as well: many an interesting linguistic phenomenon still awaits systematic examination. First and foremost, however, there is a burning need for modern sociolinguistic research of Finno-Ugric speech communities struggling to maintain their native varieties. By a stroke of fortune, the year of the 125th anniversary of the Finno-Ugric Society also marks the birth of a new Finno-Ugric coalition: the Uralic Sociolinguistic Society was established in Vienna on September 25th, 2008, with the aim of amalgamating the efforts of sociolinguists engaged in research on the Uralic peoples and languages. If this emerging organisation gradually becomes as successful as the now 125-year-old and still active Finno-Ugric Society, the future of Finno-Ugric studies seems very promising indeed.

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