

## **SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST? THE MAINTENANCE OF FINNISH IN CANADA AND NORWAY**

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### **1. Introduction**

This paper investigates the degree of maintenance of Finnish in Lappe and Bugøynes. In both communities Finnish is still actively used, though to varying degrees. Both Bugøynes and Lappe are small communities that were founded by Finns during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in many ways they are very different. Bugøynes is situated close to the Finnish border, but was relatively isolated until the late 60s. In spite of Lappe's geographical distance from Finland, there has been a continuous influx of new immigrants from Finland, whereas in Bugøynes this is a recent phenomenon.

### **2. Historical background**

#### **2.1. Push factors –reasons for leaving Finland**

Finland had been under Swedish dominion for 600 years when Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. Gradually Finland's independency decreased, and a policy of Russification was imposed on Finland; Finland's monetary system was abolished, the Finnish army became a part of the Russian Army, and Russian became the administrative language of Finland.

However, the main reasons for Finnish emigration were not political, but economical. At this time Finland experienced a period of great economic upheaval because the economy went through a process of industrialisation; the population increased, land and jobs were scarce, and in addition there were crop failures, so people left Finland to look for a better life somewhere else.

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## 2.2. Bugøynes

Large parts of Northern Norway are bi –or trilingual, and the languages in contact are Norwegian, Sámi and Finnish. The Arctic areas have been multilingual for centuries, and people have made seasonal travels between the inland and the coast for fishing, trading etc. From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and onwards, Finns from the Northern parts of Finland have settled along the coasts of the two northernmost counties of Norway; some of them settled before the final national frontiers were drawn (Saressalo, 1998). They came mainly due to starvation and crop failure, so they left their inland area in the North of Finland to travel even further north, to Ruija which was their term for Northern Norway. For those who fled from starvation and hardship, the term Ruija almost got to denote “the land which flows of milk and honey”, or in this case; of fish. The arctic soil is very barren, one can grow potatoes and some hardy vegetables and keep some livestock, but the immigrants’ main source of nourishment was the sea. The fish brought them there, and the fish kept them alive. This group of people and their descendants are called Kven.

The Finns settled in Bugøynes around 1860, and most of them came from the same area in Northern Finland.

Both the Kven and Sámi minorities went through a period of substantial linguistic and to some extent also social oppression. Until 1964 only people who spoke Norwegian could get permission to by land in Northern Norway. The Kven were not allowed to use their language at school, and in some cases children were beaten if they used their mother tongue (Seppola, 1996; Sundelin, 1998). In Bugøynes the attempt at assimilation into Norwegian culture and language usually was more subtle, but some have told me about getting spanked if they spoke Finnish. Parents were encouraged to speak Norwegian to their children, and the teachers would visit those who had children in school and advice that they did not speak Finnish to their children. One of my informants said:

se oli kauhea ankara alkaa kouluhn sitten me emme saanhe tuolla koulussakin, emmä me saimme puhua suomea ulkona – me pitime puhua norja ulkonaki –se piti puhua norja jos me meinamma kerran norjan koulussa olla ja norjan koulu kulki,- mutta se tuntu ni että se millonkan siitä tule mitä.

Starting school was very difficult because we were not allowed to speak Finnish there, not in school either; we had to speak Norwegian outside (in the breaks) as well. We had to speak Norwegian if we wanted to go to Norwegian school, but it felt as if we would never make it.

Today, Bugøynes is a small tightly knit community with about 250 inhabitants, and the adult population generally is Finnish speaking. Most of the people of Bugøynes are related as they generally have married others from the village and their ancestors came from the same area in Finland.

There are three different factories in Bugøynes processing fish and meat, and at the moment there is work for younger people who have stayed.

### **2.3. Lappe**

The settlement of Lappe was more gradual than in Bugøynes, lasting from about 1890 until 1930, and then a new wave arrived in the 50s and 60s.

Before World War I, about 330 000 Finns immigrated to North America, and more than half came from the Gulf of Bothnia. The majority of the immigrants went to the United States, but some found their way to Canada. 22 000 Finns immigrated to Canada between 1897 and 1914. Approximately 80% of the immigration to Canada went to Ontario, and most settled in the Thunder Bay area. Most of the first settlers were men who came to work on the construction of the Canadian Pacific railway, in the mines or in the lumber camps. Some had family in Finland who they brought over to Canada when they had got established, and other married Finnish women who had settled in Thunder Bay.

By the 1880s Port Arthur (now part of Thunder Bay) had become a thriving town with a population of 4500, depending on the surrounding countryside for agricultural goods. Lappe was one of the last rural settlements to be established, and the first settlers came from all over Finland. The soil in the Lappe area is rocky, but the farmers managed to grow potatoes, turnips and hay, and the only farm products sold in significant amounts were chicken and eggs. The farmers had jobs outside their farms to provide money for articles they could not produce themselves; they worked with pulp and lumber. Farming in Lappe was not a very productive business, and therefore many moved to Thunder Bay.

As in Bugøynes, one of the most powerful external sources of influence was the school, but when it came to the attitude to the Finnish language the situation seemed to be quite different in Lappe. The children had to learn to read and write English, but they were allowed to speak Finnish, and even some of the teachers were Finnish speaking. I interviewed someone who had been a teacher in Lappe before World War II, and

according to her, there were no official policies regarding the use of Finnish, and children were allowed to use Finnish, even in class if they did not speak English.

Today many of the 1000 inhabitants of Lappe commute to Thunder Bay where they work. Also a lot of pensioners move to apartments in town when they retire.

The following description of Lappe comes from the Internet site: <http://canada.xc.com/cross/online7.htm#Report%20From%20Norway>

Thunder Bay, Ontario boasts the largest Finnish population outside of Finland. Lappe, Ontario is a small mostly Finnish community consisting of a general store, the small white Lutheran church on the corner, Wildwaters Kayak and Canoe Shop, The Lappe Nordic Ski Center, the volunteer fire department, and a few good souls. Lappe stands proud and true about 15 miles to the west of Thunder Bay.

### **3. Social and geographical factors that have influenced the maintenance of Finnish**

#### **3.1. Bugøynes**

##### **3.1.1. Social networks**

Bugøynes is a small community with dense and multiple social networks, and everybody over the age of 50 speaks Finnish. Most of the people of Bugøynes are related and the social and emotional ties are strong. One relates to the same people at work and while socialising, and there are commonly accepted rules for social behaviour and a complex system of rights and obligations which creates strong social ties. The presence of close-knit and multiplex social networks are described by Milroy and Wei (Milroy & Wei, 1995: 139) as having the capacity of maintaining linguistic norms, and in Bugøynes this is a factor which has contributed to the maintenance of the Finnish language.

##### **3.1.2. Laestadianism**

Another factor which has contributed to language maintenance is the Christian movement known as the Laestadianism<sup>2</sup>. This is a revival movement which started in the last century, mainly associated with the minister Lars Levi Laestadius, and it exhibited (and in many ways still does) traits which were common for pietistic revival movements of this period; emphasis on repentance of sins, the need to be reborn as a

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this is a revival movement, not a church. The Laestadians attend the Lutheran state church services, and in numerous places they make up the majority of the regular church goers.

‘child of God’, forsaking the world and in general leading a pious life. Laestadianism spread to the Northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway. Finnish was the *lingua franca* for the movement, and Sunday afternoon gatherings were conducted in Finnish. In Bugøynes Finnish was the language of these gatherings until the late 1970s when the use of Finnish gradually declined, mainly because some people from the village had found Laestadian spouses from other parts of Norway who did not speak Finnish. Finnish is still used when Finnish preachers come to the village and at greater reunions for the entire movement when people from Finland participate.

The Laestadianism served as contrast to the official Lutheran state church which was used as a tool in the norwegianisation process. Kristiansen (1998) describes the role of Laestadianism as a ”reversal of values”. Norwegian values were important for the integration of the Kven, but Laestadianism emphasises the values of the minority group: Finnish vs. Norwegian language, moderation vs. wealth, local costumes vs. civil servants.

### **3.1.3. Recent immigration**

The fishing industry has also caused a small influx of immigrants from Finland, and today six Finns live in Bugøynes.

## **3.2. Lappe**

The factors influencing the maintenance of Finnish in Lappe are more institutionalised than in Bugøynes:

[...] with the exception of the school their (the Finnish immigrants) lives were most influenced by organizations which strengthened their Finnish identity while at the same time providing them with spiritual, political and social activities. These were the institutions which enabled these people to survive and thrive in a difficult environment and at the same time maintain a cultural identity. (Burkowski, 1979: 20)

Also Lappe is close to Thunder Bay which is an important Finnish cultural centre. Factors contributing to the maintenance of the Finnish language in Thunder Bay would have a similar impact on Lappe. Now we will take a look at some of these factors.

### **3.2.1. The Workingmen’s Associations**

In 1903 the local Finns formed a workingmen’s organisation called *Imatra*, and this organization affiliated with the Finnish Socialist organization of Canada. They

published *Työkansa* (Working People) newspaper, founded a co-operative, and organised meetings, dances, parties and rallies in the socialist hall.

### **3.2.2. The temperance movement**

The goals of the Finnish temperance movement were to urge society and individuals to reduce their alcohol consumption. The Temperance movement like the workingmen's associations brought many of their traditions along from Finland, described by Kähära (In Metsaranta, 1989: 47):

The New Attempt Temperance Society took on many of the characteristics of the Temperance Societies in Finland, including the professed aim of education, cultural activities and social reform. But these objectives were not exclusive to the Temperance Society; for example, the local workingmen's association followed the same general pattern of activities.

These organisations conducted their business mainly in Finnish and these important cultural settings strengthened and maintained the Finnish language.

### **3.2.3. Finnish newspapers**

Finnish newspapers and other literature in Finnish were widely read in the Thunder Bay district, and in 1915 Canadian Uutiset, the first Finnish newspaper was printed in Thunder Bay, and it is still published weekly.

### **3.2.4. Finnish churches**

There were several Finnish churches in the Thunder Bay area, and in Lappe the church played an important part. The first official meeting of the Lappe congregation was in 1917, and Lappe Lutheran Church was, and still is, a very active congregation. All church services and social events were conducted in Finnish until the 1950s when a monthly evening service in English was introduced. Today the main service is in English, but there is a Finnish service every morning attended by 20-30 people.

### **3.2.5. Recent immigration**

There was a new wave of Finnish immigration to the Thunder Bay area in the 50s and 60s, and some of these Finns settled in Lappe, and brought new life to the Finnish language.

## **4. Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale**

Fishman (1991, 2001) has introduced an eight-point scale characterising the different stages of potential language shift. This scale measures the degree of danger of

the loss of intergenerational transmission of the minority language. Fishman compares this to the Richter's scale measuring the intensity of earthquakes; high numbers indicate stronger tremors, and the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale measures the degree of sociolinguistic disruption; the higher the rating the more "endangered" the language is.

This scale is partially implicational; higher scores imply that lesser degrees of disruption have taken place.

I will present Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (based on Fishman 1991: 87-107 and Fishman 2001: 466-474), and I will concentrate on the stages that are most relevant for Bugøynes and Lappe. In Fishman's terminology Xish is the language in danger of being lost, Yish is the language which is not threatened.

**Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale**

**Stage 8 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Most vestigial users of Xish are socially isolated old folks and Xish needs to be re-assembled from their mouths and memories and taught to demographically unconcentrated adults.

**Stage 7 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Most users of Xish are a socially integrated and ethnolinguistically active population but they are beyond child-bearing age.

**Stage 6 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

The attainment of intergenerational informal oracy and its demographic concentration and institutional reinforcement.

**Stage 5 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Xish literacy in home, school and community, but without taking on extra-communal reinforcement of such literacy.

**Stage 4 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Xish in lower education that meets the requirement of compulsory educational laws.

**Stage 3 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Use of Xish in the lower work sphere (outside of the Xish neighbourhood/community) involving interaction between Xians and Yians.

**Stage 2 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Xish in lower governmental services and mass media but not in the higher spheres of either.

**Stage 1 on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale:**

Some use of Xish in higher level educational, occupational, governmental and media efforts (but without the additional safety provided by political independence).

Stage 6 is a crucial stage because it involves the informal daily life of a speech community, and the intergenerational transmission of the minority language.

Bugøynes is at Stage 7 on Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale; most of the youngest Finnish speakers are too old to have children, but they are socially integrated in the local community.

The population was Finnish speaking until the 1970s when they stopped speaking Finnish to their children when they reached school going age. My generation (which is the 5<sup>th</sup> generation) is the first with Norwegian as our first language, while almost everybody over the age of 50 still use Finnish as one of their everyday languages. Most younger than 50 are passive bilinguals, their level of comprehension is fairly high, but apart from a few frozen expressions they do not use Finnish actively. However, I have discovered that a lot of them actually manage to communicate in Finnish when they meet people from Finland, and some people in their early 40s have told me that they use Finnish when they do not want their children to know what they are talking about.

There are a couple of families where the mother is a recent immigrant from Finland, and the children in these families speak Finnish with their parents, but not with anyone of their own age.

When it comes to placing Lappe on this scale, the picture is more complex than in Bugøynes. In Lappe many families of Finnish decent no longer use Finnish, but there are families where the children are third or fourth generation and still speak Finnish, and even families where the transmission of the Finnish language has skipped a generation and children have learnt Finnish from their grandparents. The children of those who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s generally speak Finnish, and some of them also speak Finnish to their children, particularly if they are married to a Finnish speaking person. Therefore there are young Finnish speakers in Lappe.

The schools of both communities offer Finnish tuition. In Lappe there is a two hour weekly program for children who want to study Finnish under the heritage language programme (<http://www.lhbe.edu.on.ca/default.htm>) (heritage languages are languages other than French, English and the languages of the First Nations).

The Norwegian Parliament ratified "The European Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities" in 1998, and the Kven now has status as a national minority. Finnish has got status as second language in the schools, and pupils in the Northern area can choose to study Finnish instead of Bokmål or Nynorsk (the two



official written standards of Norwegian). Currently, 1238 pupils decided on this option. ([http://www.su.fm.no/Elevtallsutvikling%20Troms%20og%20Finnmark%201998-2003\\_.doc](http://www.su.fm.no/Elevtallsutvikling%20Troms%20og%20Finnmark%201998-2003_.doc)). In Bugøynes, there are eight children who have chosen to do so, and 19 in total who study Finnish as one of their subjects.

In Bugøynes the language shift has been abrupt, perhaps as a result of the norwegianisation process: if you are a male older than 40 or female older than 50 you speak Finnish, and if not, you do not. In Lappe this differs from family to family and even within families, but the crucial difference is that Lappe still has Finnish speaking individuals who are not beyond childbearing age.

The unwritten social rules for language choice also seem to differ in these two communities. In Bugøynes one will use only Finnish if speaking to somebody who speaks Finnish. People of the “middle” generation, that is the youngest ones who speak fluent Finnish will almost exclusively speak Finnish “up” to their parents’ generation, “sideways” to people their own age, but not “down” to their children’s generation. In Bugøynes, the general rule seems to be: If people who use Finnish as one of their everyday languages meet, they will speak Finnish only. In Lappe, one seems to follow a different pattern: the oldest Finnish speakers use Finnish to each other, to their children and sometimes grandchildren, and the middle generation speak Finnish to their parents’ generation, but English to each other, whereas in Bugøynes this generation would use Finnish when speaking to people of the same age. Below is an attempt at a generalisation, but this is no more than a rough sketch based on my observations and conversations with language users. Further investigation is required, but this still gives an impression of the language choice in these two communities, and it illustrates that in Bugøynes the language shift is abrupt, while it is more gradual in Lappe.

Language choice in Bugøynes and Lappe, preliminary analysis:

**Bugøynes**

	Older speakers	Middle generation	Younger speakers
Older speakers	Finnish	Finnish	Norwegian
Middle generation	Finnish	Finnish (Norwegian)	Norwegian
Younger speakers	Norwegian	Norwegian	Norwegian

**Lappe**

	Older speakers	Middle generation	Younger speakers
Older speakers	Finnish	Finnish	English/Finnish
Middle generation	Finnish	Finnish/English	English/Finnish
Younger speakers	English/Finnish	English/Finnish	English

## 5. The future of Finnish in Bugøynes and Lappe

### 5.1. Lappe

As we have seen Lappe is at a lower level at The Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, and the Finnish language there is therefore less vulnerable, or “healthier” than in Bugøynes. In Lappe there are still Finnish speakers of childbearing age, and there is Finnish teaching in school. Lappe is also close to Thunder Bay which is a strong Finnish cultural centre with a Finnish club, restaurant, newspaper and several Finnish shops, bakeries and churches. Thunder Bay tourist information office say that about 10 000 of Thunder Bay’s population of 117 000 are Finns, but do not offer any information on the number of Finnish speakers.

### 5.2. Bugøynes

In spite of Bugøynes’ proximity to Finland, there is no institutional support for the Finnish language, apart from Finnish being offered as a subject in the local school. There are no speakers of childbearing age, but some of the younger speakers have a fairly high passive competence.

So, what are the prospects of survival of the Finnish language in these two communities? Lappe seems to face a brighter future than Bugøynes in this respect as there are still speakers in Lappe who are young enough to pass the language on to their children, and there has been a “blood transfusion” in the form of recent immigration from Finland. Bugøynes has had some immigration as well, perhaps enough to give some first aid, but this will only have an impact on the local society if people start speaking Finnish to their children.

Fishman points out that “there is no language for which nothing at all can be done, and that the problem is not “*whether* to do anything, but *what* to do?; *when* to do it?; *where* to do it?; and how to do it?” (Fishman, 1991: 12). I will not deal with these issues in this paper, but only point to one crucial factor: *If intergenerational transmission of the minority language is to occur, the language users must want to pass it on to the next generation.* The language users’ attitude to the minority language is an important factor in explaining language shift. The people I met in Lappe and Thunder Bay seemed proud of their Finnish decent and language, whereas the people in Bugøynes had a negative self-image and were ashamed of their Finnish background. Fortunately, the younger generation (who do not speak Finnish) seem to have a far more

positive attitude to their Finnish background. The language users' attitude to the minority language is an important factor in explaining language shift.

Perhaps the new immigration to Bugøynes, combined with the local inhabitants' changing attitude to the Finnish language and their Finnish descent, will be enough to reverse the language shift that appears to be taking place.

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