

Case systems of minor Finnic languages: why do they change?

Finnic languages have a developed case system (Laakso 2022: 244–245) which is rather stable in major languages (i.e. Finnish and Estonian; see Table 1 as an example from Finnish) but in the minor languages this system usually undergoes various transformations. This paper is focused on Votic and Ingrian – two moribund languages of Ingria (a historical territory between Estonia and Karelia). Votic belongs to the southern branch of Finnic and is closely related to Estonian. Ingrian belongs to the northern branch and is closely related to Finnish and Karelian. Votic and Ingrian varieties demonstrate a number of recent deviations from the original case system. The goal of this paper is to give an overview of these deviations and a brief analysis of the causes that underlie these changes.

Table 1. Case system of Finnish

<i>Grammatical</i>	Nominative	Genitive	Accusative (pronominal)	Partitive
<i>Serial</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Whither</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Whence</i>
	<i>Series</i>			
	<i>Internal location</i>	Illative	Inessive	Elative
	<i>External location</i>	Allative	Adessive	Ablative
	<i>State</i>	Translative	Essive	(Excessive)
<i>Other</i>	Abessive	Comitative	(Instructive)	

The data come primarily from the field materials collected by the author since 2001 but also from the published sources.

The following set of phenomena is analysed in this paper.

1. Merging of the allative and adessive into one case (allative-adessive) in Lower Luga Ingrian and Luuditsa Votic, cf. Jõgõperä Votic *tütö-le* ‘girl-ALL’, *tütö-ll* ‘girl-ADE’ and Luuditsa Votic *tütö-llä* ‘girl-ALL/ADE’.

2. The semantic shift in the external locative cases in Votic. In the contemporary language, possessivity has become the main function of these cases while the original locative function has become secondary (the locative semantics is more often expressed with postpositions).

3. The development of the comitative case in Lower Luga Ingrian, cf. Soikkola Ingrian *kervehee-l* axe-ADE ‘by the axe’, *kerveheen kera* axe-GEN with ‘with the axe’ and Lower Luga Ingrian *kirve-(n)kää* axe-COM ‘by/with the axe’.

4. The loss of the abessive case on nouns in contemporary Votic and Ingrian, and its preservation only in the supine forms of verbs, e.g. Votic *tšünte-me-ttä* plough-SUP-ABE ‘not ploughed’.

5. The gradual loss of the excessive (e.g. Ingrian *šodameehee-nd* soldier-EXC ‘from being a soldier’, which is not used in spontaneous speech anymore), and the preservation of the essive (which however lost the semantic component of the temporary state) in Votic and Ingrian.

My analysis suggests that among the different factors that trigger transformations in the case system, the contact influence of the neighbouring varieties plays the most important role.

References

Laakso, Johanna. 2022. Finnic: General introduction. In Marianne Bakró-Nagy, Johanna Laakso & Elena Skribnik (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Uralic Languages*, 240–253. Oxford: Oxford University Press.