ESUKA – JEFUL 2016, 7–1: 249–255

REVITALISING A COMMUNITY LANGUAGE: LIVONIAN AND OTHER COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

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Abstract: The present paper compares efforts to revive the spoken use of two European languages which have fallen into disuse: Cornish, spoken in the southwest of England, and Livonian in Latvia. Different approaches have been taken in encouraging heritage learners to use the languages again, but there are points in common, and each has something to learn from the other. The work of the Cornish Language Partnership in organizing and encouraging Cornish learners is compared with the courses run by the branch of the Livonian Association in Kolka, Kurzeme.

Keywords: Livonian, revitalisation, Cornish, community, teaching, learning.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2016.7.1.11

Since I began my study of Livonian nearly thirty years ago, the world's other endangered languages have become the focus of my study and research. It was the process of decay of the language in Livonian that first caught my attention – which elements of a language disappear first under the influence of another – vocabulary? Morphology? Syntax?

Since that time I've had the privilege of being involved with a charitable organization based in the UK, the Foundation for Endangered Languages, which makes it possible to enable other language scholars to help in the revitalisation of languages that are dying out. Livonian, too, has been one of the languages that the Foundation has been able to help. The Foundation has an annual grant award scheme, and one of the main criteria for giving financial aid is that the project will help the community, rather than just advance the career of the scholar as a piece of objective research.

What is meant by 'community', though? Speakers of a common language might not all be living in the same place, and the researcher conducting the project might be either a native speaker or a foreign scholar, visiting the speech community for a fixed period.

The researcher might be studying a language which is still spoken as a first language by a shrinking community of speakers, or conducting a project to actively revitalise a language. I want to make a careful distinction here between 'revitalising' and 'reviving'. By 'revitalising' I mean putting to active use a language which is no longer anyone's first language, but which is remembered, either in the minds of the new generation of aspiring speakers, or in some printed or recorded form. 'Reviving' a language involves some reconstruction work, because there is no-one alive today who remembers using the language, and the last fluent speakers died more than one generation ago – they were at least the grandparents' generation for the current learners. Inevitably, there will be very little recorded material, and the vocabulary won't be complete or suitable for the terminology of modern everyday life. To give you an extreme example of a language that is currently being revived, there is the Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains in South Australia, which was last spoken in the eighteen-forties, and yet it is being carefully reconstructed, and taught in classes to the modern descendants of these Aboriginal Australians, who want to regain their heritage and give themselves an identity through language.

And to give you a good example of a revitalised language, we have the language that has brought us here today: Livonian. Only a few short years have passed since its last native speaker died, and while the last speakers were still alive, the language was already being taught here in Latvia to younger learners. We have good dictionaries, lots of sound recordings, and clear memories of the voices and personalities of earlier generations of speakers. Not many languages are so well equipped to be revitalised.

And best of all, there are groups of learners still on the territory of the language. Two years ago, the Livonian community of Kolka, through their teacher and organizer Maija Rēriha, applied to the Foundation for Endangered Languages for funds to pay for the teaching of classes in an ongoing programme of Livonian language learning. They got the money from the Foundation, and produced a report on their progress. I'd like to consider some aspects of the language courses and the contribution they make to revitalising Livonian as a living, working language. And for comparison I'd like to take a look at the similar language-learning projects for two other revitalised languages in Europe. They are both in Britain: Cornish in Cornwall and Manx on the Isle of Man. I could have taken examples of revitalisation for lots of other places in the world: there are plenty of revitalisation projects in

North America, for example, but I choose these examples from Britain, where I live, because they were the first examples of revitalisation that I encountered, and they exist in a situation that is a little bit similar to the Livonian one. For a start, they are all coastal fishing communities, at least as part of their economic life.

The Livonian group of the Livonian Association in Kolka consists of 13 members, or it did at the time of the 2013/2014 teaching programme. There were two fields of activity in the programme: learning the language and finding out about the cultural heritage. Language learning was done by a programme of lessons, which were reproduced for the Foundation. The medium of instruction was Latvian, and there was no published textbook; rather the texts were on photocopied sheets handed out to the learners, where they filled in the answers to prompted Livonian sentences following instructions in Latvian.

But in addition to language learning, the class members were exploring the Livonian cultural heritage, as well. Each lesson took up a new theme. They learned about Livonian place-names and their traces in modern Latvia and North Kurzeme especially. They learned about Livonian folk costumes in recorded history, from the 18th to the 20th centuries. They studied the textiles of North Kurzeme. Other traditional occupations of the North Kurzeme region were also studied. The course provided an insight into Livonian mythology. The Livonians' relatives among the Finno-Ugrian peoples were also studied.

Another way of familiarizing oneself with Livonian heritage is through recordings on film, and there have been a number of films made on this subject. In the process, they became familiar with Livonian songs and singing: Andris Slapiņš' film *Līvõd lõlõd* (Livonian songs) and the films by Aivars Freimanis: 'Meža stāsti' (Forest tales), 'Līvõ pivād' (The Livonian festival), 'Lībiešu mēles liegā ieskanēšanās nedēļu pirms pasaules gala' (The gentle sounding of the Livonian tongue a week before the end of the world), and 'Es dzīvoju lībiešu mājās' (I live in the home of the Livonians).

The course lasted from January to May 2014, and unlike previous courses in the language, it took place in a part of the Livonians' traditional territory, Kolka. The Livonian language space is of course part of the greater Slītere culture and nature reserve, which is a slightly unusual situation for a minority language in Europe, and not quite the same thing as a 'reservation' in North America or tribal land in Australia, where the reasons for the special status usually don't have anything to do with either language or nature.

And what does this coastal reserve have in common with the two areas of Britain that are home to revitalised languages, namely Cornwall, the ancestral home of Cornish, and the Isle of Man, the home of Manx? The Livonians and Manx were traditionally tied to the sea and to fishing. Fishing is also very important to the Cornish economy, but inland that economy was more varied, and even included mining. All three are far from the metropolitan centre of the nation, and not on a route to anywhere else by land, which is a significant reason why they have survived until so recently.

It's easy to visit Cornwall or the Isle of Man as a tourist and be completely unaware of the language – except if you are sensitive to place-names, of course. The languages are not audible or visible in private life on the public streets, but increasingly they are visible in the signage. In Cornwall, this is the result of work by pressure-groups such as the Cornish Language Partnership, and on the Isle of Man, which has an autonomous status within the United Kingdom, the government actually appoints a Language Officer who is responsible for the promotion of the Manx language in education and public life.

I will not attempt here to compare the situation of Livonian with both Cornish and Manx, but will concentrate on Cornish. Current Cornish activism has to deal with a situation where the last native speaker died in 1777, so over two centuries before the last native born speaker of Livonian. But the language was written and well recorded, and although there have been disputes about spelling and orthography, there is now almost complete agreement on a unified spelling system.

The web-site of the Cornish Language Partnership (www.magak-ernow.org.uk), which uses the Cornish name for Cornwall, Kernow, in its address, offers links and services to interested people. If you want to attend a Cornish language class, you will find the address of the nearest one to you. If you want a translation service, into Cornish of course, rather than out of it, you can fill in a request on-line. The Partnership seems to expect certain phrases to need translation, not whole long connected texts. The web-site encourages a Speak Cornish Week, which is held in July. A particular common phrase, such as 'happy birthday' is featured regularly for learners on the site. There is a newsletter which is bilingual: 'Kevren – Cornish Language News' – it appears every two months and is available on the web-site, too. This reports on local events, language campaigns, history of Cornwall and folklore.

A real effort at revitalisation is shown in the 'Using Cornish' section of the site, which is a clear attempt to raise the prestige of the language.

This section is divided into 'personal', 'business', and 'public' use. Personal use is such things as naming your baby, your pet, or your house. Business use is mostly emblematic: helping Cornish businesses to choose names for products, for instance. 'Public' refers largely to street signage: the visible presence of the language in everyday life. There is a Signage Panel in the Partnership which works to provide Cornish translations of the names of towns and streets in places where Cornish was once spoken.

The 'Teaching and Learning' section of the site offers opportunities to learn the language on-line, or to find classes you can join. But a great emphasis is also laid on the youngest learners – on introducing the language into primary schools and nurseries, on providing language learning materials for children, and so on. I should add that Cornish is not part of the curriculum in state-run schools in Cornwall, there is no obligation to learn it, and it is taught on a voluntary basis.

'Cornish Language Resources' is another section which strenuously aims at revitalising the language in as many spheres as possible. Here, for example, you can find a guide to conducting a wedding in Cornish. Phrasebooks, children's books, and other verbal resources are all available from the partnership.

A section 'About Cornish' tells the history of the language (in English) and its position in Cornwall today. Here is the area where the question of government support arises. The Cornish Language Partnership has published a Strategy document for the future of the language. This document acknowledges that the question of unifying, standardising, the written and spoken language has not been completely resolved. There are different factions which adhere to different 'classical' standards of the language. So the Strategy document is available in English, in 'Unified' Cornish, in 'Kemmyn', 'Modern' and 'UCR'. The Strategy itself is the result of a long process of consultation, argument, and reconciliation. I should stress that these varieties are not dialects of Cornish, they are just different concepts of what should be the standard of a language that had not been used in speech for two hundred years. Now here it's interesting to compare with Manx. The last native speaker of Manx died in 1974, and now that new learners of that language are appearing, the situation is more like that of Livonian. There has only been a short break in its transmission.

Running a web-site, and all the other activities that the Partnership operates, cost money, of course. Where does the funding come from? The funds come from the central government (the Department of

Communities and Local Government) and Cornwall Council. The organisation is called a Partnership because it is a collaboration between various smaller language organisations, and local authorities within Cornwall.

Now, I realise that there are important differences, as well as similarities, between the Cornish and the Livonian language situations. I am not entirely comparing like with like here. Livonian has been spoken only on a narrow coastal strip of Kurzeme in its most recent life, whereas Cornwall is an entire county within Britain. Likewise, the Isle of Man is a semi-autonomous island within Britain. The Slītere Reserve in Kurzeme is only a part of the province, and its aim is to preserve both the natural and the cultural heritage of the coastal area. The English language has beaten back Cornish over many centuries by different historical process than those that caused Livonian to shrink. I could compare Livonian with many other revitalised languages that could have been considered dead and forgotten: Chibcha in Colombia, Wampanoag in the USA, Gamilaroi in Australia. I believe that users and learners of revitalised languages can learn from each other. Cornish learners, too, can learn from the experience of Livonian. One of the sections of the Partnership's web-site is 'Links', and this mostly points to other Celtic organisations: in Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Brittany, in Galicia too.

There are Livonian activities which are a lesson to others as well: such as the children's summer camp in Mazirbe. In Latvia, funding from the government level comes from the Valsts Kultūrkapitāla Fonds. There is nothing quite like that foundation in Britain: there is the Arts Council, but that would not care for language preservation. Livonian resources may be smaller than Cornish ones, but within Latvia, Livonian can have a higher profile than Cornish can in Britain.

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On-line references

On-line Cornish resources: www.magakernow.org.uk (Cornish Language Partnership)
On-line Livonian resources: www.livones.net, www.vkkf.lv (Valsts Kultūrkapitāla Fonds)
On-line Manx resources: www.culturevannin.im
Foundation for Endangered Languages: www.ogmios.org

Kokkuvõte. Christopher Moseley: Kogukonna keele revitaliseerimine: liivi ja teised keelekogukonnad. Käesolev artikkel võrdleb jõupingutusi velmata keele suulist kasutust kahe Euroopa keele puhul, mida ei ole enam igapäevaselt kasutatud: need on korni keel Edela-Inglismaal ja liivi keel Lätis. Erinevaid lähenemisi on rakendatud, et julgustada pärimuskeele õppijaid kasutama jälle neid keeli, kuid on ka ühisjooni ning ikka on midagi õppida ka üksteiselt. Korni Keele Ühingu tööd keeleõppe korraldamisel ja õppijate motiveerimisel on võrreldud kursustega, mida on läbi viinud Liivi Liidu Kolka osakond Kuramaal.

Märksõnad: Liivi keel, taaselustamine, korni keel, kogukond, õpetamine, õppimine.

Kubbõvõttõks. Christopher Moseley: Kubgõn kīel ūdpā̰l jelstõmi: liivõ ja munt kīelkubgõnd. Kēra ītlõb kīel sūliz kȭlbatimiz jelātimiz vingõrtõkši kǭd Eirõp kīel pā̰l, mis jemīņ äb ūotõ jegā pā̰va kȭlbatõd: ne ātõ korn kē̦ lā̰nd Englišmǭl ja līvõ kē̦ Le̦tmǭl. Vaitiži ležgõldõkši um kȭlbatõd jūlgastõmõks pierāndkīeld oppijid ūdpā̰l kȭlbatõm nē̦ḑi kē̦i, agā um ka ītiži nā̰dõkši ja īdõkabāl um mis oppõ īdtuoiz kādst. Korn Kīel Ḭ̄t tīedõ kīeloppimiz sā̰dlõmiz ja oppijid motivīerimiz jūs um ītõltõd kursõdõks, mis um lebbõ vīnd Līvõd Ḭ̄t Kūolka jag Kurmǭl.