

Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

Typology of prosodic systems in Low Luga Izhorian varieties

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Low Luga Izhorian is one of the two still present dialects (together with the Soikkola dialect) of the Izhorian (Ingrian) language situated on the Russian-Estonian border. Contrary to the Soikkola dialect, Low Luga Izhorian is a high contact variety participating in the sprachbund of Izhorian, Votic, Ingrian Finnish and partly Estonian in the Low Luga area. Closely related Low Luga Izhorian, Votic and Finnish have undergone strong mutual influence, and many isoglosses cross the area in different directions. Thus, all the languages present in this area manifest the high level of intradialectal variation. Both Izhorian and Finnish of Low Luga are very poorly described (Votic is described a bit better), and now is the last possibility for the field documentation of all these languages.

I have been doing field research on Soikkola and Low Luga Izhorian since 2006. One of the most challenging problems a field linguist is encountered with while working on both dialects is segmental and especially prosodic phonology. While Soikkola phonology is at least more or less homogeneous, Low Luga Izhorian varieties seems to manifest at least 3 typological systems of both non-initial vowel systems and prosodic systems (depicting 3 diachronic stages of reduction in non-initial syllables).

A foot concept is crucial for Izhorian phonology. One observes much stronger interdependence of quantity and partly melodic parameters in the framework of a 1-3 syllable foot than on the foot borders. Length opposition of vowels in the initial syllable of the foot can be naturally interpreted on the segmental level. But all vowel quantity contrasts in the non-initial syllables are strictly conditioned by 1) certain position in a foot; 2) certain segmental structure of a foot. That's why for the majority of Izhorian varieties it's more convenient to describe these contrasts on the suprasegmental level with the help of two accents (light and heavy) ascribed to the first syllable of the foot. The general rule is that in the (C)V.CV.(CV) foot (where the 1st syllable is short) the 2nd vowel always undergoes prosodic lengthening and is longer than the 1st vowel. In other structures, where the 1st syllable is long, there is a contrast of phonetically [short/reduced/voiceless] vowels vs. [long/lengthened/short] vowels in the second syllable that has to be described on the phonological level. This contrast is intrinsically connected to the certain types of length contrasts in the nuclear of the 1st syllable. The rule is that if the 2nd vowel is lengthened, the nuclear of the 1st syllable is also lengthened. Besides, the same length contrast for non-initial vowels also exists in monosyllable feet in the very last syllable of a wordform.

1. In the northern area of Low Luga Izhorian, one finds the opposition of phonetically [lengthened/long] vs. [short/reduced] vowels in the non-initial syllables (the principal type of allophones is underlined). It's phonetically the same opposition as in Soikkola dialect. In principle, it can be described as the segmental opposition of long and short vowels, though it's not very convenient for the morphophonological description of the language.

2. In the central area of the dialect, there is the opposition of [lengthened/short] vs. [short (stable)] and [reduced (unstable)] vowels. Short and reduced allophones occur in complementary distribution in different structures and positions. The difference between them is in 1) their length; 2) the tendency of the reduced allophones to disappear in the fluent speech while short allophones always stay there. Such an opposition can be hardly described on the segmental level and the suprasegmental interpretation seems to be the most effective one.

3. In the southern area of the dialect, one observes the opposition of [short (stable)] vs. [reduced voiceless (unstable)] vowels. In this area former lengthened vowels became completely short and phonetically identical with the former stable short allophones that were preserved intact. Former reduced unstable allophones became voiceless and also tend to disappear in the fluent speech. So the opposition became binary again but it has undergone a considerable reorganization. Now it is based rather on the vowel quality than on the length. This kind of contrast is rather to be interpreted on the segmental level by postulating a phonological opposition of short and reduced vowels in the non-initial syllables.