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WHERE DID THE LANGUAGE OF THE NORTHEASTERN ESTONIAN POLUVERNIKI COME FROM?

Abstract. This study examines the linguistic origins of the historical community of *Poluverniki* in northeastern Estonia. Members of this group were typically bilingual and spoke a distinctive blend of dialectal Russian and Estonian. The prevailing scholarly view — based largely on non-linguistic evidence — holds that the Poluverniki descended from a Votic-like Southern Finnic population that was later linguistically assimilated by neighboring Russian dialects. Drawing mainly on phonological data, we challenge this view by demonstrating that the Finnic elements in their vernacular(s) point to Northern rather than Southern Finnic roots. Furthermore, we show that their Russian variety does not fully align with the neighboring Central Russian dialects, suggesting that the Poluverniki's Russian is, at least in part, of a different origin from the contemporary vernaculars spoken along the coast of Lake Peipus and in the Gdov area.

Keywords: Finnic dialects, Russian dialects, linguistic roots, language contact, northeastern Estonia, Poluverniki.

1. Introduction

The term *poluverniki* (Russian *полуверцы* 'half-believers') refers to various subethnic groups in the Baltic countries and adjacent Russian regions that represent a linguistic and cultural blend of local East Slavic and non-Slavic populations, but differ from each other in their ethnic, linguistic, or religious affiliations. In northeastern Estonia, in the parish of Iisaku, not far from the northern coast of Lake Peipus, mainly Russian-speaking Lutherans have also been called Poluverniki. Until the last decade of the 20th century, this community was bilingual; it spoke a peculiar Russian vernacular, characterized by structural borrowing from Finnic (typically Estonian), as well as a form of the northeastern Estonian dialect mixed with Russian (Must 1965; Хейтер 1970; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the area inhabited by the Poluverniki covered most of the territory of Iisaku parish (see Map 1).

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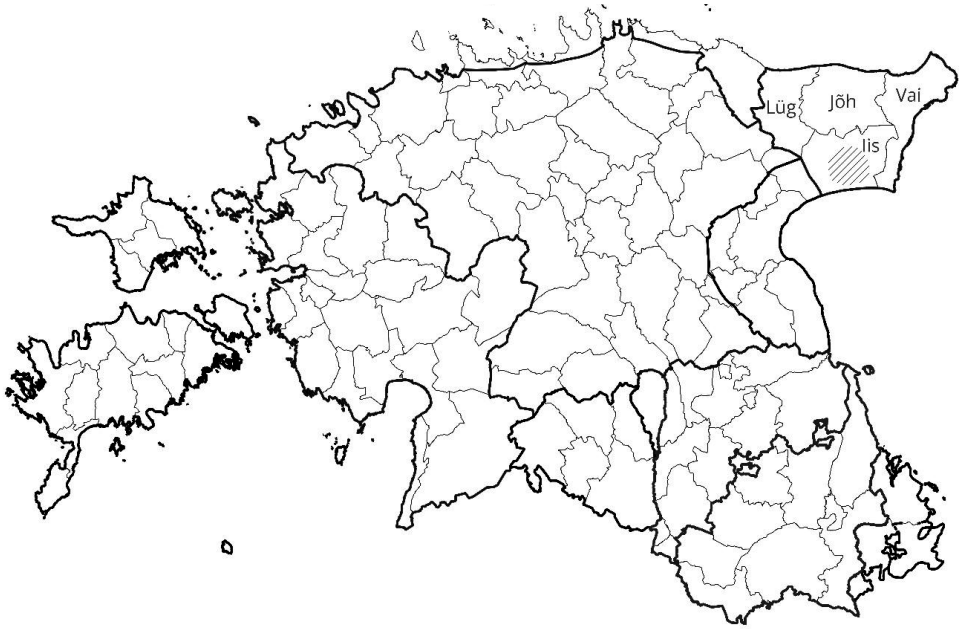


Map 1. **Poluverniki area overlaid on a map of Estonian dialects.**

Geographically, this region extends from the village of Kõnnu in the north to the villages of Kauksi, Kuru, and Katase in the south, and from Kamarna in the east to Roostoja and Lemmaku in the west (see Map 2). The region included the villages of Vaikla (former Porskova), Liivaküla (or Liiva, former Podgriiva), as well as Alliku, Imatu, Jõuga, Kaidma, Kamarna, Kasevälja (former Poludenka), Katase, Kauksi, Koldamäe, Kuru, Kõnnu, Lemmaku, Lipniku, Luuga, Lõpe, Pootsiku (Nurme), Roostoja, Sootaga (Sootaguse), Sõrumäe, Sälliku, Taga-Roostoja, Tammetaguse, Tubliku, Tärivere (Tärevere), and Varesmetsa (see, e.g., Ariste 1930 : 365—366; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 70).

Located about 5 km southeast of Iisaku, the villages of Vaikla and Liivaküla were regarded as central to the region — Vaikla has even been dubbed "the capital of the Poluverniki" because, in the eyes of their neighbors, the inhabitants of these villages were the most authentic representatives of the group, both culturally and linguistically (Ariste 1930 : 366; Must 1965 : 112, 121; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 71).

The prevailing scholarly view regarding the Poluverniki's ancestry is that they were originally Votes, or "a Votic-like population." This view is not grounded in linguistic research but rather stems from archeological findings (Moora 1964 : 274; Moopa & Moopa 1965 : 65—66; Ligi 1993) and, to a lesser extent, folklore studies (see Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 75). At present, this view dominates the narrative about the origins of the Poluverniki in the local museum of Iisaku. Another component of this narrative is that they became Russian-speaking through Russification imposed by the Tsarist education system (pers. comm. with the museum staff in 2025).[1]

Linguists have been unable to offer independent insight into the origins of this population, and this can be attributed to at least two factors. Firstly,

[1] This conviction is quite old, as it was reported by Ariste in the first half of the 20th century: "The use of the Russian language is often explained by later Russification" [our translation] (Ariste 1930 : 367).



Map 2. **Villages with inhabitants reported as Poluverniki at the beginning of the 20th century.**

the Poluverniki as documented in the 20th century are the result of multiple linguistic assimilations, which are difficult to disentangle based solely on synchronic linguistic evidence; unfortunately, the earliest usable recordings of their language date from the 1960s. Secondly, any linguistic hypothesis about their origins would necessarily rely on expertise in both Finnic and Russian dialects. Given how insular and separated from each other Finnic and Russian dialectological research traditions have been throughout the 20th century, meaningful progress in this area has only become feasible with the advent of modern digital tools — such as dialect corpora and interactive dialect maps — which facilitate the convergence of evidence from different fields of expertise, independently of academic institutions or traditions.

This study examines structural features of the Poluverniki's linguistic output as documented in the available recordings, with the aim of lifting the veil of mystery surrounding their ancestry. While we do not seek to invalidate the dominant narrative about their ethnic and linguistic origins, we aim to broaden it, demonstrating that the issue is far more complex with regard to both their Finnic and Russian linguistic backgrounds. Before addressing the linguistic issues, however, a brief overview of the region's history is warranted.

According to the prevailing scholarly view, the region was inhabited during the Iron Age by a Southern Finnic population indigenous to northeastern Estonia and bearing a resemblance to the Votic people as we know them from more recent history. In the 12th—13th centuries, another group of linguistically and culturally "Slavicized" Votes is believed to have migrated across the Narva River into northeastern Estonia (Moopa & Moopa 1965 : 65—66; cf. Selart 1998 : 63—67; Valk 2020 : 415—416). Between the 1560s and the Great Northern War, Alutaguse (comprising the later parishes of Lüganuse, Jõhvi, Vaivara, and Iisaku) was under Swedish rule and frequently

served as a destination for migration from Russia, especially from Ingria and the Gdov area (Liiv 1929 : 4, 21, 29, 30).[2] Among the reasons peasants migrated from across the Narva River into Alutaguse, according to Otu (Otto) Liiv, was the enactment of a law in 1597 that heavily restricted peasant mobility in Russia and in reality encouraged escape from manorial control. The emergence of a Russian-speaking population in Alutaguse can also be explained by the fact that during this period, Gdov area repeatedly came under Swedish control (in 1582—1583, 1612—1613, and 1614—1620), and it is plausible that the Swedes used these periods to bring peasants from there (Liiv 1929 : 30; see also Tarkiainen 2013 : 274—276).

During the 17th century, Swedish authorities restricted Orthodox worship and actively encouraged the peasantry around Iisaku to convert to Lutheranism (Liiv 1929 : 74; for a broader perspective, see Isberg 1973). As a result, the local population — later referred to by the exonym *Poluverniki* — adopted Lutheranism. Although in the early 20th century most Poluverniki identified as Lutherans, their Protestantism retained elements of their former Orthodox traditions, which distinguished them from the surrounding Estonian population (Liiv 1929 : 68—69; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 68).

A milestone in the region's history was the migration of Russian Old Believers to Estonia in the 1690s. This influx, adding to the population of Russians who had lived there since the Middle Ages (or even the Late Iron Age), significantly increased the Russian-speaking population in eastern Estonia. Over the following centuries, the Old Believers who settled along the northern coast of Lake Peipus became, alongside other Orthodox populations in the area, the closest Russian-speaking neighbors of the Poluverniki. Alutaguse came under de facto Russian control in 1704, and by 1708, the parishes of present-day Ida-Virumaa were incorporated into the Governorate of Ingria (Liiv 1929 : 50; Zetterberg 2007 : 258—263). The early years of Russian rule witnessed a renewed influx of settlers from Russia into Ida-Virumaa, including Alutaguse; the migrants were predominantly peasants fleeing Russian landlords (Liiv 1929 : 50). This wave of migration, however, was short-lived, and after 1730, immigration from Russia was only sporadic (Liiv 1929 : 54).

Because of their religion and distinctive language(s), Poluverniki have traditionally been regarded as outsiders by both local Estonians and Russians.[3] However, during the 20th century, the Poluverniki gradually assimilated linguistically and culturally into the Estonian population.

2. Why are the Poluverniki challenging for a linguist?

To outsiders, the most striking feature of Poluverniki speech was the mixing of Russian and Estonian, both spoken "incorrectly" (see, e.g., Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 66—67). For example, their Estonian was characterized by devoicing of the consonants in auslaut (*àe**k*** 'time' (Est. *aeg*), *kùl**t*** 'gold' (Est. *kuld*), *vär**f*** 'color' (Est. *värv*)); /h/ was often replaced by the velar-palatal [χ] (*rà**χ**a* 'money' (Est. *raha*), *vi**χ**ma* 'rain' (Est. *vihma*)); the vowels /e/ and /o/ were often pronounced with a higher onset (*ⁱè**m**a* 'mother' (Est. *ema*), *ära*

[2] In 1642, Alutaguse was administratively annexed to Ingria (Liiv 1929 : 4).

[3] Ariste (1930 : 367) articulated it as follows: „*Ja tõepoolest, poluvertsik ei ole kumbagi. Ta on n.-ö. venelasest välja saanud, aga eestlaseks pole veel jõudnud*" 'And indeed, the Poluvertsik is neither. He is, so to speak, someone who has come out of being Russian, but has not yet become Estonian'.

lʷòra 'Don't babble!' (Est. *ära lora*)); the inessive form of the *ma*-infinitive was usually replaced by a form without an ending (*ole juba kartuliväljal kartuli* ***panema*** (Est. *panemas*) 'Get to the potato field and start planting already.'); and the dependent of the numeral was often in the genitive rather than the partitive case (*kaks* ***tütre*** (Est. *tütart*) 'two daughters'). All these features can be explained by contact with Russian (Must 1965 : 109—110).

Conversely, features characteristic of their Russian include the vowels /ä/, /ö/, /ü/ (e.g., *stänùľi* 'they tightened' (Rus. *стянули*), *pǿstri* 'motley' (Rus. *пёстрий*), *kŕüķ* 'hook' (Rus. *крюк*)), the frequent lack of palatalization (e.g., *мат* [mat] 'mother' (Rus. *мать*), *стэкло* [steklo] 'glass' (Rus. *стекло*), *толка* [tolka] 'only' (Rus. *только*), *пальто* [palto] 'overcoat' (Rus. *пальто*), *больница* 'hospital' [balnitsa] (Rus. *больница*)), and other features that have been explained as reflecting an Estonian or, more generally, Finnic substrate (Must 1965 : 114—116; Хейтер 1970 : 124—125, 130, 132, 138; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 89—90). The last feature — the absence of palatalization — points to a Northern Finnic dialectal base, such as that found in the coastal Estonian dialect, rather than to a Southern Finnic one, as the Votic hypothesis would imply. In Section 4.1, we discuss such features in greater detail.

Examples (1)—(3) illustrate the way the Poluverniki interwove elements of Russian and Estonian in their speech. As in other mixed linguistic varieties, the distribution of material from the two languages within utterances was not random but governed by certain constraints. Sentence- and clause-level grammar tended to be Russian, whereas at the phrase level, Estonian linguistic matter was common. The examples come from the candidate dissertation of Helle Heiter and, as elsewhere, are presented in the original transcription (see Must 1965 : 115 and Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 90 for further examples); the Estonian transfers are in capital letters.

(1) *увели́* *на* *ПА́РАНДУСТ'ОЭЛЕ*
send:PST.3PL to corrective_work:ALL
'They were sent to perform community service' (Хейтер 1970 : 185)

(2) *йани* *из* *МЕХИКООРМАСТ*
they from Mehikoorma:ELA
'They are from Mehikoorma' (Хейтер 1970 : 185)

(3) *падýмал,* *пачемý* *йа* *этих* *хрест'йáн* *зр'á*
think:PST.M why I these:ACC peasant:ACC for_nothing
ÓР'ЙАН
be_slave_of:PRS.1SG
'I thought to myself, why am I serving (lit. be a slave of) these peasants' (Хейтер 1970 : 201)

Heiter notes that in this "mixed language" Estonian words often occur with Russian inflectional endings, whereas Russian words do not occur with Estonian bound morphemes (Хейтер 1970 : 186—187). However, she later concedes (p. 298) that this is marginally possible and presents example (4) with the Estonian additive clitic *=gi* attached to the Russian past tense form of the verb 'die'.

(4) *йана* *в* *прошлъм* *году* *умерла=ги*
she in last:PREP year:LOC die:PST.F=ADD
'She then died last year' (Хейтер 1970 : 298)

While this is promising material for research on mixed languages and language death, it is not what provoked us to look deeper into the language of the Poluverniki. Our inquiry was prompted by features in their speech that appear incompatible with prevailing assumptions regarding their descent and the affinity of their vernaculars with the neighboring Russian and Estonian (or Finnic) dialects.

At present, the Votic descent of the Poluverniki is taken for granted across disciplines such as archaeology, folklore studies, and ethnology. Since early Votes (or a Votic-like population) are regarded as indigenous to the area, this assumption implies that the linguistic roots of the Poluverniki should not be sought farther afield. The Votic linguistic substrate would then have largely dissolved into their Estonian variety, which on dialect maps is situated between the northeastern Estonian dialect and the eastern dialect of North Estonian, as well as into their Russian variety, which has been assumed to align with the contemporary Central Russian dialect continuum. This latter assumption implies that the Russian variety spoken by the Poluverniki is structurally contiguous with the varieties spoken on the northern coast of Lake Peipus (e.g., in Alajõe and Remniku) and with the Gdov dialect of Central Russian (Must 1965 : 112, 115; Орлова (ed.) 1970 : 449).

We will examine features of Poluverniki speech that challenge both the Finnic and the Russian sides of the puzzle, i.e., (a) the alleged Votic–(North)eastern Estonian origins, i.e., the Southern Finnic linguistic ancestry of the Poluverniki, and (b) the structural contiguity of their Russian variety with the neighboring Russian dialects. These features will be studied in Sections 4.1 and 4.2, respectively, but we first consider two of them for illustration.

The Estonian variety spoken in the 1960s in Vaikla and Liivaküla, on which we focus as it is considered prototypical of the language(s) of the Poluverniki, often lacks (especially in the speech of elderly speakers) the unround central vowel /õ/ (Must 1965 : 121; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 84—85), despite the fact that /õ/ is characteristic of both the neighboring northeastern Alutaguse dialect and the eastern North Estonian dialect (Pajusalu & Hennoste & Niit & Päll & Viikberg 2020 : 157, 170), as well as of Votic. Likewise, the Russian spoken by the inhabitants of these villages is not entirely structurally contiguous with the Russian vernaculars spoken on the northern coast of Lake Peipus and in the Gdov area. Fieldworkers observed excessive okanye in Vaikla and Liivaküla, i.e., the differentiation of /o/ and /a/ in unstressed positions, while in these areas akanye, i.e., the merger of these vowels in unstressed positions, prevails. This structural discontinuity with the adjacent Finnic and Russian dialects prompts us to reassess the existing assumption regarding the linguistic affinity of the Poluverniki. The central research question of this study is: **What are the origins of the language(s) of the Poluverniki?**

This question can be refined into more specific questions, addressing the Finnic and Russian dimensions of the puzzle:

(i) Finnic: Can the Finnic elements in the Poluverniki's language be stratified? To what extent have different Finnic varieties contributed to the formation of their vernacular?

(ii) Russian: Where does their Russian come from? Considering the early arrival of a Slavic-speaking population in the area and recurrent immigration

from Russia in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, can specific linguistic features be identified that link the Russian variety spoken by the Poluverniki to Russian dialects beyond the immediate vicinity of Lake Peipus and Gdov area?

3. Data and method of study

The Archive of Estonian Dialects and Finno-Ugric Languages (EMSUKA) at the Institute of the Estonian Language contains approximately eight hours of audio recordings featuring 18 speakers from Iisaku and the surrounding villages (including Liivaküla, Vaikla, Kuru, Sälliku, and Sõrumäe, among others), collected between 1962 and 1965 (see EMH-Iis). Approximately two and a half hours of these recordings are in Estonian; the rest are in Russian.[4] A major limitation of this material lies in the fact that fieldworkers conducted interviews in either (standard) Russian or Estonian. The consultants, who were fluent in both languages, accommodated the interviewers by consistently responding in the language imposed on them.[5] As a result, the recordings offer limited insight into the structure of the language(s) the speakers used among themselves in the absence of field linguists. It may be assumed that Estonian played a more prominent role in the speakers' domestic interactions than is reflected in the existing recordings. While all Estonian members of the field expeditions spoke and understood Russian, some of the Russian members did not understand Estonian.[6] It can be heard in the recordings that the interviewers sometimes insist that the consultant speak Russian, even when it is evident that the latter feels more comfortable expressing herself in Estonian.[7]

The leading figures in these field expeditions were Mari Must and Helle Heiter from the University of Tartu. The recordings housed at the Institute of the Estonian Language represent only a portion of the material collected by Estonian and Russian dialectologists during the 1960s and 1970s. A list of consultants — beyond those featured in the EMH-Iis recordings — along with their places of residence, is available in Хейтер (1970 : 329—330) and Kulakov & Nurgamaa (2012 : 78).

The findings of these expeditions were published in a series of articles (Must 1965; Хейтер 1967; 1971; 1975) as well as in Helle Heiter's candidate dissertation (Хейтер 1970) — a 330-page manuscript describing the phonology and morphology of the Russian variety of the Poluverniki. Given the limitations of the available primary sources, the present study relies on these secondary sources, which are based on a substantially larger body of data and reflect the expertise of researchers with experience in the field. In addition, we analyzed Truusmann's Poluverniki Russian word list (Трусмань 1895 : 29—34) to identify possible Finnic loanwords and other archaic features of their language. Examples from these secondary sources are reproduced without alteration, using the original transcription employed by the authors.

[4] A portion of this audio material has been transcribed; approximately 90% of the transcriptions are from recordings in Russian.

[5] Three consultants, L. M., O. K. and J. H., were interviewed in both languages, first in Russian and then in Estonian.

[6] For instance, a scholar from Moscow who interviewed the consultant M. K. in 1962 evidently had no knowledge of Estonian.

[7] A good example is consultant K. K., who hesitates and searches for words in Russian during the interview. Similarly, consultants A. S. and I. R. occasionally lapse into Estonian, forgetting the instruction to speak Russian.

The method we use involves extracting features of Poluverniki Estonian and Russian from these sources and placing these features in a genealogical and geographical context, i.e., on the Finnic and Russian dialect maps. Ideally, such an approach enables the stratification of the language(s) of the Poluverniki, whereby particular features are linked to distinct historical dialect areas.

In seeking to broaden the discussion surrounding the ancestry of the Poluverniki, we focus on linguistic features that challenge the prevailing view of their origins. Specifically, we examine elements of their language(s) that counter the assumption of Votic descent and question the notion that the structural properties of their Russian variety are entirely predictable based on their geographic proximity to the neighboring Russian dialects.

4. The vernacular(s) of the Poluverniki in the context of Finnic and Russian dialects

4.1. Finnic

Several Finnic languages and dialects have historically been spoken in and around northeastern Estonia. In fact, this region is one of the most diverse core areas of Finnic languages. At least four Finnic languages were once spoken here — Estonian, Votic, Ingrian (Izhorian), and Finnish — in particular, the southeastern Häme and southeastern dialects of Finnish spoken by migrants from across the Gulf of Finland since the late Iron Age, and the Ingrian Finnish dialects spoken by more recent migrants. Furthermore, Petri Kallio has recently highlighted the linguistic peculiarities of Kukkusi, which has previously been described as a dialect of Votic. According to Kallio (2024 : 305—308, 317), Kukkusi could be considered a distinct Northern Finnic variety that later received influences from both Votic and Ingrian.

Historically, there have been at least four Estonian dialects spoken in northeastern Estonia: (1) the Alutaguse (or northeastern) dialect and (2) the coastal dialect, both belonging to the northeastern-coastal dialect group; (3) the eastern dialect of North Estonian, and (4) the subdialects of the northeastern group of the North Estonian central dialect. These four Estonian dialects have distinctive features in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (see Pajusalu & Hennoste & Niit & Päll & Viikberg 2020 : 85—90, 162—172). Although the northeastern and coastal dialects have traditionally been grouped together in Estonian dialectology (Must 1987), the northeastern dialect is closer to Votic, which is a Southern Finnic language, while the Estonian coastal dialect along the Gulf of Finland has developed from a Northern Finnic variety. In addition, the northeastern Vaivara subdialect (marked as Vai on Map 1) stands out from the other coastal dialects; together with Eastern Finnish, Ingrian, and Karelian, it originates from Proto-Karelian (see Kallio 2024).

Thus, northeastern Estonia forms a dialect area that has developed through multiple contacts between Finnic varieties of different origins. Whereas Alutaguse and the central and eastern dialects of North Estonian, as well as Votic, are Southern Finnic varieties, coastal Estonian, Vaivara, Ingrian, and Ingrian Finnish are genealogically Northern Finnic varieties. However, multiple episodes of language contact and language shift over the course of history have blurred this distinction. As a result, neighboring varieties as documented in the 20th century often lack sharp structural boundaries and, in many respects, resemble a dialect continuum.

The Southern Finnic languages are characterized by several phonological innovations, the most striking of which are the emergence of a ternary length opposition through the differentiation of long and overlong quantities and the lexical spread of the illabial /õ/ [ɤ] in place of /e/, and later also /o/ and other back vowels (Pajusalu 2012). However, in the northeastern Estonian language area under consideration, the three-way quantity opposition has not been fully developed in the Southern Finnic variety of Alutaguse or in Votic; the word prosody of these Southern Finnic varieties is somewhat closer to that of the neighboring Northern Finnic varieties. The central and eastern dialects of North Estonian, on the other hand, are characterized by a regular opposition of three quantity degrees. In this context, it is relevant to note that the Estonian spoken by the Poluverniki does not exhibit the phonological opposition between long and overlong quantities and thus lacks the three-way contrast.

In addition to word prosody, the Northern and Southern Finnic languages are distinguished by the presence of the illabial central (phonologically back) vowel /õ/ [ɤ] mentioned above. In the Votic language, in Võro and Seto South Estonian, and in the insular Kihnu dialect, there is also velar *õ*-harmony, in which *õ* appears as the equivalent of *e* in back-vowel words, cf. Votic *tähe* 'star.GEN' and *tahõ* 'head of grain'. In Alutaguse and, more broadly, in eastern Estonian (i.e., Kodavere), /õ/ is a frequent vowel in the first syllable, replacing the historical /o/ in many words, but *õ*-harmony is not evident there, e.g., *õle* 'be.IMP', cf. Est. *ole*, Võro *olõ*'; *õmmeti* 'yet', cf. Est. *ometi*, Võro *ummõhtõ*. On the other hand, the illabial /õ/ does not occur at all in the coastal dialects, including coastal Vaivara, or in Kukkusi Votic, Ingrian, or the Ingrian Finnish dialects. Notably, in the Russian dialect of the Poluverniki, as well as in the Estonian spoken by older Poluverniki,[8] the central illabial vowel (Est. *õ*, Rus. *ы*) is usually replaced by other vowels. Given that the coastal Estonian dialects display a pronounced Northern Finnic substrate, and that Kukkusi, Ingrian, and Ingrian Finnish are essentially Northern Finnic varieties, it is plausible to associate the Poluverniki community — at least in part — with a Northern Finnic-speaking population. In fact, Ingrian traits in the language and material culture of the Poluverniki have occasionally been noted in the literature (see Must 1965 : 121—122; Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 62, 78, 88—89), but these have consistently remained overshadowed by the prevailing Votic (Southern Finnic) hypothesis concerning their ancestry.

An important source for explaining the earlier Finnic background of the Poluverniki, in addition to their Estonian dialect, is the set of Finnic loanwords in their Russian variety. Truusmann presented an extensive list of peculiar words in the Russian dialect of the Poluverniki (Трусмань 1895 : 29—34), several dozen of which he identified as Estonian borrowings, although these are probably loans from different Finnic dialects and from different ages. The number of Finnic loanwords in his list is probably higher than the number he explicitly marks as loans, and identifying their origins would help to determine which Finnic varieties were assimilated into their Russian. Crucially, none of the Finnic loanwords presented by Truusmann contain the *ы*-vowel.

The dialects of northeastern Estonia are generally characterized by great internal heterogeneity. The western and southern parts of the region, i.e.,

[8] This vowel is found in the speech of younger speakers in the above-mentioned recordings from the 1960s.

the area around Iisaku where the Poluverniki lived, are also linguistically diverse; there are influences from different directions, including those from the central dialect of North Estonian, which formed the basis of modern Common Estonian (see Must 1965; 1987 : 335).

The northeastern Estonian dialect in the parts of Iisaku parish where the Poluverniki lived has been recorded most extensively by Mari Must (1995 et seq.). Since Must was well acquainted with the language usage of both the monolingual Estonians and the bilingual Poluverniki of the region, her observations on the distinctive features of the Estonian dialect spoken by the Poluverniki are important.

Must (1965) highlights many features shared by Poluverniki Estonian and the coastal dialects of northeastern Estonia in their phonetic system, grammar, and vocabulary. She mentions nine phonetic phenomena: (i) the absence of ternary quantity alternation, which is also related to (ii) the transformation of short geminate plosives into single plosives (this is characteristic of the so-called Finnish-like coastal dialects elsewhere in the region); (iii) restrictions on the palatalization of consonants (in Poluverniki Estonian, palatalization is primarily coarticulatory, i.e., occurs with a consonant followed by a front vowel); (iv) in the initial syllable, the mid-high *e* is retained before a nasal, as in *menema* 'to go', cf. Est. *minema*, Fin. *mennä*; *nena* 'nose', cf. Est. *nina*, Fin. *nenä*; *penk* 'bench', cf. Est. *pink*, Fin. *penkki*; (v) diphthongization of long low vowels does not occur, e.g., *maa* 'earth, land', cf. Est., Fin. *maa*, East Est. *mua*; *pääl* 'on', cf. Est. *peal*, Fin. *päällä*; *sääl* 'there', Est. *seal*, Fin. *siellä*, South Est. *sääl* (however, diphthongs also occur, e.g., *ia* 'good', cf. Est. *hea*, Fin. *hyvä*; *pial* 'on', *sial* 'there'); (vi) retention of long /üü/, e.g., *müüma* 'to sell', Est. *müüma*, North Est. *müima*; *nüüt* 'now', Est. *nüüd*, North Est. *nüid*; *rüüpad* 'you sip', Est. *rüüpad*, North Est. *rüipad*; (vii) rising diphthongs ending in *-i* and *-u*, such as *kaiv* 'well', cf. Est. *kaev*, Fin. *kaivo*; *laiv* 'ship', Est. *laev*, Fin. *laiva*; (viii) the diphthong after a secondarily stressed syllable in the *laine-* suffix, e.g., *mesilaine* 'bee', cf. Est. *mesilane*, Fin. *mehiläinen*; *sugulaised* 'relatives', Est. *sugulased*, Fin. *sukulaiset*; and (ix) limited syncope, e.g., *andand* 'gave', cf. Est. *andnud*, Fin. *antanut*; *laulama* 'to sing', Est. *laulma*, Fin. *laulamaan*; *vaskised* 'coppers', Est. *vasksed*, Fin. *vaskiset* (see Must 1965 : 116—117; cf. Must 1987 : 154—155). These phonological features are particularly typical of the Northern Finnic dialects of the region, such as the coastal dialects and Kukkusi. However, it is important to note that these features are mostly archaic, indicating historically primary Finnic phonological traits.

Must (1965 : 121) points out striking differences between Poluverniki Estonian and the language used by the monolingual Iisaku Estonians, the most notable of which is the absence of the vowel /õ/ in the speech of older bilingual Poluverniki. Although the language of younger speakers, similarly to the language of monolingual Estonians in the surrounding area, has even more /õ/ than Common Estonian, e.g., *õlen* 'I am', Est. *olen*; *kõhe* 'immediately', Est. *kohe*; *kõrd* 'once', Est. *kord*, the older speakers, especially in the centrally located villages of Vaikla and Liivaküla, do not have /õ/ at all.

In the Russian variety of the Poluverniki, there are also Finnic loanwords in which the stem vowel of the first syllable corresponds to the expected Northern Finnic initial vowel, which later changed to /õ/ in Estonian and Votic (in addition to Трусмань 1895, see also Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 63—64). For example, the original Finnic labial /o/ has been preserved in

some loanwords formed with the diminutive suffix *-ša* [ʃa], such as *ноткуша* [notkuʃa] 'hollow' (< **notko*, cf. Vaivara, Kukkusi *notku*) and *лоймуша* [loimuʃa] 'warp' (< **loimi*, cf. Viru-Nigula, Vaivara *loime*, Est. *lõim*, Vot. *lõimi*). Must (1965 : 121) mentions that the labial /o/ is also pronounced in some words where /e/ or /a/ could be expected, e.g., *polt* 'field' (cf. Kukkusi *peлto*, Fin. *pelto*, Vot. *põlto*, Est. *põld*), *soobrat* 'friends' (cf. Kukkusi *sebrot*, Kymenlaakso Fin. *seprat*, Vot., Est. *sõbrad*), *sona* 'word' (cf. Kukkusi, Fin. *sana*, Vot., Est. *sõna*). In rare cases, /u/ or /ö/ also appears instead of the expected /o/, e.g., *nuges* 'nettle' (cf. Fin. *nokkonen*, Est. *nõges*, Votic *nõkõn*), *löppep* 'ends' (cf. Kukkusi *лopub*, Fin. *loppuu*, Est. *lõpeb*, Votic *lõpub*).

Instead of the Finnic /e/, there is /i/ in loanwords such as *пиргуша* [pirguʃa] 'hell' (< **perk-*, cf. Kukkusi *perku* 'evil', Est. *põrgu*, Votic *põrku*) and *ниркебитъ* [nirkebitʲ] 'weaken' (< **nerk-*, cf. western Finnish *nerko* ~ *nerkko*, Est., Votic *nõrk* 'gloomy', coastal Estonian (Jõe Kuu Hlj) *nork*, (VNg Vai) *norka*); *кордуша* [korduʃa] 'order of works' is probably a newer loanword from an *õ-* or later *o*-based original word (cf. northeastern Est. (Lüg Jõh) *kõrd*, Vot. *kõrta*, Est. *kord*).

The occurrence of /o/ instead of Southern Finnic /õ/ in the first syllable of some words is a change that is characteristic of the broader northeastern Estonian dialect area. Tiit-Rein Viitso has described this sound change as especially typical of Central Vaivara (Viitso 2008 : 60, 102; on the concept of Central Vaivara, see Toomse 1938 : 6). In the Central Vaivara subdialect, the change /õ/ > /o/ has occurred systematically in all *õ*-words, but in the Finnic dialect of the Poluverniki it appears only in a certain word group, where it has also occurred in neighboring Estonian dialects. In several words of the Poluverniki variety, however, /õ/ corresponds to some other vowel, as shown above.

In addition to its specific phonetic features, Poluverniki Estonian has several morphological and syntactic features that distinguish it from the surrounding Alutaguse dialects. Mari Must presents morphological similarities between the Poluverniki Estonian dialect and the other Finnic dialects in the region: (i) endingless singular partitive forms, especially in two- and three-syllabic words with a long initial syllable, e.g., *taigna* 'dough' (cf. Est. *taignat*), *lusika* 'spoon' (cf. Est. *lusikat*), *rumala* 'stupid' (cf. Est. *rumalat*), (ii) plural partitive forms in *(a)id*, e.g., *kuivaid* 'dry' (cf. Est. *kuivi* or *kuivasid*), *pikkaid* 'tall' (cf. Est. *pikki*), *vanaid* 'old' (cf. Est. *vanu* or *vanasid*), (iii) *da*-infinitive forms with an analogical marker, e.g., *niitada* 'to mow' (cf. Est. *niita*), *võttada* 'to take' (cf. Est. *võtta*); and (iv) geminate *mm* in the *ma*-infinitive and in the first person plural forms after a secondarily stressed syllable, e.g., *kuivatamma* 'to dry' (Est. *kuivatama*), *laulasimme* 'we sang' (Est. *laulsime*), *tantsisimme* 'we danced' (Est. *tantsisime*). (Must 1965 : 117—118; 1987 : 102—105) These features are again characteristic of the coastal dialect of northeastern Estonian.

On the other hand, Must presents several morphological differences between the Poluverniki Estonian variety and eastern coastal Estonian. For example, the recorded Poluverniki variety does not have an *i*-plural, a *je*-marked illative, or the essive case; in the first person plural, the ending *-ma* ~ *-mma* is replaced by *-me* (e.g., *tuleme* 'we come' instead of *tulema*) and in the second person plural, the ending *-tta* is replaced by *-te* (e.g., *tulete* 'you come' instead of *tuletta*); the negative verb does not inflect (e.g., *me ei tule* 'we do not

come'); and the second person plural form of the imperative is formed with the *ke*/*ge*-suffix, as in *tulge* 'you must come' (cf. northeastern Estonian and Votic *tulga*), etc. (Must 1965 : 122). In such grammatical forms, the influence of central or common North Estonian is probable.

The vocabulary of the Poluverniki Estonian variety contains many words characteristic of the northeastern Estonian dialects, such as *aigetama* 'to hurt', *reigas* 'bar', and *virsud* 'bast shoes', several of which also have equivalents in coastal or even Finnish dialects; other words are also known in the eastern dialect of North Estonian, such as *ketutama* 'to shell', *lesemed* 'chains, hooks', and *säppel* 'pan tongs' (Must 1965 : 118). However, there are also some words that have equivalents only in Votic, such as *kobri* 'wooden grain shovel' (see Kulakov & Nurgamaa 2012 : 75).

Based on the available linguistic evidence, we assume that the Finnic ancestors of the Poluverniki spoke a variety closely related to the coastal dialects of northeastern Estonia. Over the course of their subsequent history, however, they came into contact with several other Finnic languages and dialects of the region. As a result, the Southern Finnic component of their language gradually gained prominence over the earlier Northern Finnic stratum.

4.2. Russian

The following analysis draws primarily on Heiter's unpublished dissertation (Хейтер 1970), which demonstrates that the Russian variety of the Poluverniki is in many respects a natural continuation of the dialects spoken along the northern coast of Lake Peipus and in the Gdov area. However, Poluverniki Russian also exhibits features that distinguish it from these westernmost Central Russian dialects. We will focus on such cases of structural discontinuity with the closest surrounding dialects.

We read Heiter's dissertation and compiled a list of candidate features. The list included: (i) features that she contrasts with those of the Russian dialects spoken along the northern or western coast of Lake Peipus (or at least does not associate with them); (ii) features she does not explicitly link to the Gdov dialect; and (iii) features she characterizes as Northern Russian (while the dialects spoken in the 20th century around Lake Peipus and the Gdov dialect are Central Russian dialects). In essence, we sought features in Heiter's work that are absent from the immediate vicinity and may indicate links to more distant regions. As an additional criterion (iv), we excluded features that could plausibly be attributed to Estonian (or Finnic) influence on the Russian spoken by the Poluverniki.

We arrived at a list of nine features meeting these criteria. We then searched for these features in the first volume of the Atlas of Russian Dialects (DARJa I[9]) and the Interactive Map of Russian Dialects (IMRD), and when these did not provide sufficient clues about their distribution in Russian dialects, we consulted specialized dialectological literature.

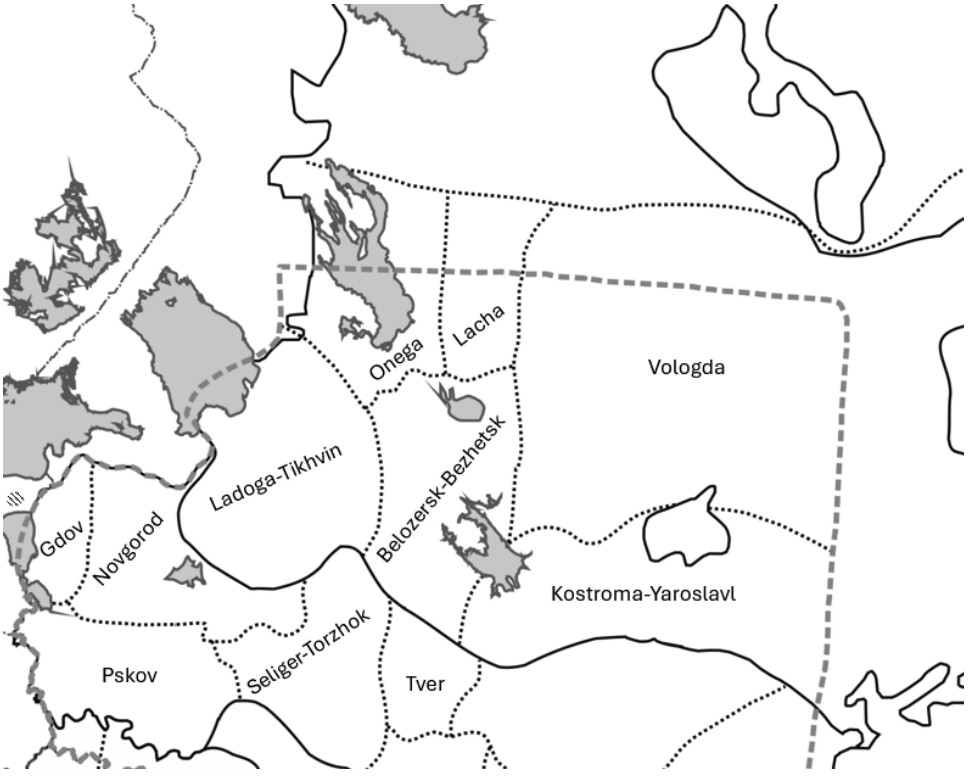
A conventional map of the Russian dialects is presented below. Map 3 only shows the so-called dialects of early (or primary) formation; the dialects of late (secondary) formation are not enclosed by the lines of the map. The dialects of primary formation occupy the northern and central regions of European Russia, where the Russian language evolved from the Slavic dispersal

[9] See also DARJa I/Vs for a description of the dialect features included in the maps.

until the 15th century. The dialects of secondary formation are spread across the rest of Russia and beyond, in territories that were colonized after the formation of the Russian language had been completed. There are some fundamental differences between dialects of primary and secondary formation. The territory inhabited by speakers of primary dialects is a continuous area, whereas the territory of secondary dialects often consists of discontinuous regions of Russian settlement, i.e., island-like areas surrounded by other, typically non-Slavic groups. The dialects of secondary formation are often mixed dialects, as they arose through migration from different regions of the area of primary formation (Захарова & Орлова 2004 : 29—31; Баранникова 2005 : 192—201). Since only the primary formation area exhibits a coherent geographic distribution of structural features, traditional Russian dialectology has focused on it. Consequently, dialect maps and atlases (including DARJa I) present variation solely within the primary area.

As can be seen in Map 3, Ingria is beyond the area of primary formation. Therefore, DARJa I does not contain information about the occurrence of the selected features in Ingria; IMRD, on the other hand, contains such information from several locations in Ingria.

Before we proceed, we need to clarify what we mean by saying that a feature does not occur in the immediate vicinity of the Poluverniki area but only farther away. There are 11 locations in IMRD within 50 km of Vaikla



Map 3. **Central and Northern Russian dialects. Thick black lines designate the borders of major dialect areas: Northern, Central, and Southern. The thick gray broken line encloses the dialects of primary formation (separating them from the dialects of secondary formation). Thin black broken lines enclose dialects within the major dialect areas.**

(the most important center of the Poluverniki), for which phonological and morphological information is presented. These are Remniku, Alajõe, Uusküla, Lohusuu, and Kallaste on the Estonian coast of Lake Peipus, and Vtroya (Втроя), Perevolok (Переволок), Zagriv'e (Загривье), Kanunovshchina (Кануновщина), Zaborov'e (Заборовье), and Zaborozhka (Заборожка) in the Gdov dialect area in Russia.

A feature is considered to exhibit a discontinuous distribution on the map if it meets the following criteria: (i) it is attested in the Poluverniki data; (ii) it is absent from all locations within a 50-km radius of Vaikla for which relevant information is included in IMRD; and (iii) it is attested elsewhere in Russian dialects. We consider 50 km a sufficient distance to warrant the classification of a feature in the Poluverniki dialect as geographically 'discontinuous' within the context of Russian dialect mapping.[10]

Only three features from our initial list satisfied the above criteria. The remaining features were either attested along the coast of Lake Peipus and/or in the adjacent Gdov dialects across the border, or we were unable to find information in the literature about their precise geographical distribution. The features that passed our filter are presented below in two categories: vowel- and consonant-related features. We begin, however, with a feature of the vowel system that, strictly speaking, does not pass the filter, but nevertheless displays a meaningful distribution pattern in our data — a distribution of a gradual rather than categorical character.

4.2.1. Vowels

Okanye (as opposed to **akanye**). The term 'okanye' refers to the distinction between the phonemes /o/ and /a/ in an unstressed position after a non-palatalized consonant, whereas 'akanye' refers to their merger into a central-back vowel somewhat close to /a/ (Аванесов 1974 : 143—149). Whether a variety features okanye or akanye in its vowel system is usually decided based on the vowel quality of the first syllable before the stressed syllable (i.e., the decision is based on the first pretonic syllable; cf. *вод*а́ vs. *въд*а́ 'water').[11]

In the material recorded by Heiter and her colleagues in the 1960s, the Russian of the Poluverniki is generally characterized by non-dissimilative (or strong) akanye, which means that the merger of /a/ and /o/ in the pretonic syllable does not depend on the exact vowel quality of the stressed syllable. However, in Vaikla and Liivaküla, especially in the speech of the older generation, Heiter also encounters frequent okanye (*дровá* 'firewood', *небол'шáйа* 'small:F', *продáжа* 'sale'), which leads her to the conclusion that okanye was likely more widespread earlier in these villages (Хейтер 1970 : 45, 66). In the other unstressed syllables, the non-differentiation (or neutralization) of /o/ and /a/ is common in the area but not as prevalent as in the villages on the northern coast of Lake Peipus (Хейтер 1970 : 57—58). The vowel distinction is least well preserved in the syllables following

[10] Note that the Russian border is only 24 km away from Vaikla in a straight line.
[11] As we are not interested in the exact phonetic qualities of the sounds but in the phenomena of okanye and akanye as such, we use Cyrillic in the following examples rather than IPA (in which case we would have [voˈda] vs. [vʌˈda]). Most of the attested examples below are from Heiter's dissertation, and we follow her Cyrillic transcription.

the stressed syllable, especially in a non-final syllable or in a final closed syllable; the neutralization is somewhat less advanced in syllables preceding the stressed syllable (in the second or third pretonic syllable) and in the final open syllable (Хейтер 1970 : 57). However, in the speech of older residents of Vaikla and Liivaküla, she often observes the preservation of vowel quality in the second or third syllable preceding the stressed syllable (e.g., *лошад'я* 'horses') and in the posttonic syllable, even when the latter is non-final (e.g., *з го́рода* 'from the town', *н'е́катори* 'some') or final and closed (e.g., *со́рок* 'forty') (Хейтер 1970 : 59, 66).

Based on the above evidence, as well as the frequent absence of jakanye in the speech of her consultants (see below), Heiter concludes that the dialect spoken in Vaikla and Liivaküla had earlier been an **okanye dialect**. This dialect must have had a Northern Russian vowel system, which over time acquired akanye (Хейтер 1970 : 66, 76—78). She assumes that the influx of speakers of akanye varieties from the Gdov and Pskov areas in the 16th—17th centuries gradually led to an increase in akanye (and associated phenomena, see below) and, eventually, to a vowel system dominated by akanye (Хейтер 1970 : 77—78).

How do these observations and assumptions compare with the information we obtain from Russian dialect maps, which were published after Heiter's dissertation?

Studying IMRD and DARJa I, we find not only akanye but also okanye in the first pretonic syllable in the Gdov dialect, e.g., just across the Narva River, in Zagriv'e, Perevolok, and Vtroya. On the northern coast of Lake Peipus (in Remniku, Alajõe, and Uusküla), IMRD attests only akanye, but in Lohusuu, on the northwestern coast of the lake, akanye also co-occurs with okanye (IMRD: Feature 1; see also DARJa I: map 1). Ingria, which is covered by IMRD but not by DARJa I, is mostly an akanye area, although co-occurrence with okanye is attested, e.g., in Zhabino (Жабино) and Koshkino (Кошкино) in Kingisepp District (western Ingria).

The situation in the second pretonic syllable (i.e., in the second syllable preceding the stressed one) is similar. IMRD (Feature 9; see also DARJa I: map 9) indicates that okanye occurs (although rarely) alongside akanye on the northern coast of Lake Peipus (in Remniku and Lohusuu) as well as in the Gdov area (including in places within 50 km of Vaikla, such as Perevolok, Zagriv'e, Vtroya, Zaborozhka, and Zaborov'e). In Ingria, on the other hand, within a large area stretching from Narva to the Hevaha (Kovashi) Peninsula, we find consistent akanye in this position (IMRD: Feature 9).

Regarding the posttonic syllables, map 16 of DARJa I shows that okanye is attested in posttonic non-final syllables in some villages of Gdov area, but not along the coast of Lake Peipus. However, Feature 16 of IMRD indicates that okanye also appears on the Lake Peipus coast (in Lohusuu and Remniku). In the Gdov area, it does not occur immediately across the Narva River, but somewhat farther inland, e.g., in Zaborov'e, Zaborozhka, Monastyrek (Монастырек), and Karino (Карино) (the former two within a radius of 50 km of Vaikla). In Ingria, okanye is found in this position close to the border with the Gdov and Novgorod dialects (e.g., in Koshkino, Zhabino, and Klenno (Кленно)), but not in northern Ingria (between the Kurkola and Hevaha peninsulas), where akanye occurs in this position instead. In the final closed syllable (IMRD: Feature 17), okanye occurs alongside akanye on the

coast of Lake Peipus (in Remniku[12]) and in the Gdov dialects, though not in the immediate vicinity of the Narva River (e.g., in Zaborov'e, Zaborozhka, Monastyrek, Karino, Pushkino (Пушкино), and Mar'insko (Марьинско)), and it also occurs sporadically in Ingria (e.g., in Ruch'i (Ручьи) on the Soikkola Peninsula and in Lipovo (Липово) on the Hevaha Peninsula). However, in Ingria, akanye is typical of this position.

In conclusion, despite the prevalence of akanye on the adjacent coast of Lake Peipus and in the Gdov area, okanye is attested in several locations within 50 km of Vaikla, even in phonotactic positions where akanye is structurally "most advanced" (in posttonic environments). Therefore, we cannot claim that the Poluverniki differ fundamentally from their surroundings with regard to this feature. The occurrence of okanye alone does not provide clear evidence of discontinuity from the neighboring dialects.

On the other hand, the proportion of okanye in the sound systems attested in this area is a matter of degree, and the mere fact that Heiter is somewhat surprised and emphasizes on several occasions that Vaikla and Liivaküla (which are the prototypical representatives of Poluverniki Russian) stand out in the area for their proclivity for okanye is meaningful in itself. If we accept her view that the variety originally spoken in these villages had a vowel system with consistent preservation of /o/ in all unstressed syllables, then its closest correlates with such regular okanye would be in the central part of the Novgorod dialect area, around 250 km away from the Poluverniki area (see maps 1, 9, 16, and 17 of DARJa I). Heiter's okanye hypothesis can be tested against the next feature, which is related to — if not an epiphenomenon of — the okanye/akanye distinction, and therefore contributes to our understanding of the issue.

Jakanye is the structural equivalent of akanye in a palatalized environment: in the first pretonic syllable, after a palatalized consonant, non-high vowels occur as [a]. Jakanye is characteristic of akanye dialects and, in fact, can be considered a particular manifestation of akanye.

Jakanye is attested in the Russian of the Poluverniki, both before a non-palatalized consonant (e.g., *в'ясна́* for *весна́* 'spring', *вс'агда́* for *всегда́* 'always', *с'астра́* for *сестра́* 'sister') and before a palatalized consonant (i.e., when the unstressed vowel is surrounded on both sides by palatalized consonants: *д'ат'эй* for *дете́й* 'children:GEN', *н'ав'е́ста* for *неве́ста* 'bride') (Хейтер 1970 : 47—48). Heiter reports both jakanye, i.e., the merger of the vowels /e/, /o/ and /a/ to [a], and the preservation of these vowels in the Poluverniki's speech. The former becomes more frequent the closer one moves to the northern coast of Lake Peipus, which is a consistent akanye area. The latter, i.e., the **lack of jakanye**, is more frequent in the core area (Vaikla and Liivaküla), and she considers it ancestral to the local Russian (Хейтер 1970 : 76—77).

Russian dialect maps display considerable variation in this phonotactic context; the western dialects of Central Russian exhibit several types of jakanye. When /e/, /o/, and /a/ merge into an invariable [a], regardless of the quality of the vowel in the stressed syllable, we have 'strong jakanye'; if the vowel quality in the pretonic syllable depends on the quality of the stressed vowel,

[12] Interestingly, based on IMRD (Features 9, 16, 17), Remniku differs significantly from the adjacent Alajõe and Uusküla. In Remniku, okanye is attested alongside akanye, whereas Alajõe and Uusküla consistently exhibit akanye.

then we have dissimilative, assimilative, or Gdov-type jakanye (see DARJa I/Vs 88—94; Князев 2008 : 22—26 for a description of these types).

Russian dialect maps indicate that the language of the Poluverniki differs from neighboring areas in the frequent absence of jakanye, i.e., with respect to this feature, it is not contiguous with the neighboring dialects. In the vicinity, Lohusuu and the settlements across the Narva River in the western part of the Gdov area exhibit Gdov-type jakanye. No data are available from Uusküla, Alajõe, and Remniku on the northern coast of Lake Peipus, but on the western and southwestern coasts of Lake Peipus, strong jakanye occurs. Strong jakanye is also found in the eastern part of the Gdov area. The retention of vowel quality in the pretonic syllable after a palatalized consonant, as found in the language of the Poluverniki, occurs alongside strong jakanye in some easternmost Gdov vernaculars bordering the Novgorod area (e.g., in Pushkino), at the northernmost edge of the Gdov area (in Monastyrek), and in the southern part of the Gdov area (e.g., in Mishina Gora (Мишина гора) and Nosovka (Носовка)). Vowel quality retention is much more frequent in Novgorod and dominant in the Northern Russian Ladoga—Tikhvin dialect. Vowel retention also occurs in several locations in Ingria, e.g., in Babino (Бабино), Ruch'i, Vassakara (Вассакара), and Modolitsy (Модолицы) (see DARJa I: map 3; IMRD: Feature 3).

In summary, Heiter provides evidence for the existence of a vowel system in some Poluverniki speaker varieties that lacks jakanye, i.e., a system that differentiates between non-high vowels in the first pretonic syllable after a palatalized consonant. The closest location in IMRD with such a vowel system is Monastyrek (Slantsevsky District, Leningrad Oblast), 56 km northeast of Vaikla. This type of vowel system is characteristic of Novgorod, but especially of the Ladoga—Tikhvin dialect (see DARJa I: map 3).

As already mentioned, based on this evidence concerning the vowels of unstressed syllables, Heiter concludes that the dialect originally spoken in Vaikla and Liivaküla had been an okanye dialect (Хейтер 1970 : 66). It would have had a Northern Russian vowel system, which over time acquired akanye.

What does this imply for the origins of the Poluverniki? We may consider two scenarios that could have led to the situation described above.

(A) Since the neighboring dialects along Lake Peipus and the Gdov dialect are akanye varieties, we may assume migration from more distant Northern Russian okanye dialect areas to the area around Iisaku. On their way, these migrants would have traversed areas inhabited by akanye speakers. The most probable direction of migration, based on vowel properties, is from the northeast.

(B) The area around Iisaku may always have been an okanye area, ever since the appearance of the first Slavic-speaking settlers in the region. The dominant view in Russian historical linguistics is that akanye only emerged in the 14th century (see, however, Князев 2000 for an opposing view). Crucially, this scenario does not assume immigration from far away; a gradual movement of people from nearby East Slavic-speaking areas is more likely. In this case, the inhabitants of Vaikla and Liivaküla would have been descendants of people who came from the area across the Narva River in the Early Middle Ages, before the emergence and spread of akanye in the Russian dialects, i.e., at a time, when the entire Russian dialect area was characterized

by okanye. These early settlers in northeastern Estonia may well have been descendants of a previously assimilated Finnic population. Furthermore, even in the Early Modern Period, migration waves from the Gdov area may still have included speakers of okanye varieties. As noted by one of the anonymous reviewers, in the Gdov-area — and even in the town of Pskov — pretonic okanye continued to prevail over akanye as late as the 17th century (see Чекмонас 1999 : 137—139).

Later, the Russian vernacular of Vaikla and Liivaküla (partly) survived the emergence of akanye in the area because of its seclusion from the Central Russian dialects. Natural barriers to influence from these akanye dialects were the Finnic population surrounding the Iisaku area, dense forests, the Narva River, and the political border. However, with the arrival of Old Believers along Lake Peipus and the intensification of contacts with Gdov area in subsequent centuries, the influence of akanye gradually seeped into the Poluverniki's language, eventually becoming dominant.

4.2.2. Consonants

***л/л'* > *w*(*ў*)**. Occasionally, though not systematically, and primarily in the speech of elderly Poluverniki who have always lived in the area, the consonant /л/ is replaced by [w(ў)]. This happens most frequently before another consonant (e.g., *испугауса* instead of *испугался* 'got_scared.м', *тоўка* instead of *только* 'only', *поўтара́* instead of *полтора* 'one and a half', *воўк* instead of *волк* 'wolf', *паўка* instead of *палка* 'stick', *игоўка* instead of *иголка* 'needle', *буўка* instead of *булка* 'roll of bread'), and word-finally (e.g., *ушоў* instead of *ушёл* 'left.м', *ф каравуў* instead of *в караул* 'on guard'). Occasionally, it also appears in word inlaut before a non-front vowel (e.g., *маўа* instead of *мало* 'a little', *пакриваua* instead of *покрывало* 'bedspread; veil', *гоўъву* instead of *голову* 'head:ACC') and word-initially (e.g., *ўошади* instead of *лошади* 'horses', *ўаўка* instead of *лавка* 'bench; store', even *ўаст* instead of *власть* 'power') (Хейтер 1970 : 102—103; Трусмань 1895 : 32; Ariste 1930 : 366—367). Heiter considers this a Northern Russian dialectal archaism, believing that it had formerly been a regular feature of the Russian variety of the Poluverniki (Хейтер 1970 : 102—104).

The Russian dialect maps confirm that this phenomenon is characteristic of Northern Russian dialects: it occurs in the Ladoga—Tikhvin, Onega, Belozersk—Bezhetsk, Lacha, and Vologda dialects (see DARJa I: map 61; IMRD: Feature 61); in the Vologda dialect, it has been explained as resulting from influence from Komi (Хейтер 1970 : 104; see also Аванесов 1949 : 171). At the same time, [ў] occurring in place of /л/ is also attested in the westernmost dialects of the Southern Russian dialect group (see, e.g., Бромлей 1987; Касаткин 1999 : 173), although its distribution there is more limited in terms of phonological context. In preconsonantal position, the phenomenon in southwestern Russian is restricted to historical combinations of a reduced vowel with a liquid consonant (cf. *доўго* for *долго* 'long'). Unlike in the north and in the Poluverniki data, it does not occur in nouns where a reduced vowel was lost before the suffix -*ък*- (cf. *паўка*, *игоўка*, *буўка* above) (DARJa I: map 61). In word-final position, the phenomenon in southwestern Russian dialects is confined to past-tense forms and does not occur in nouns and adjectives, as it does in Northern Russian

(DARJa I: map 61) and, occasionally, in Poluverniki Russian (cf. *ф каравуў* above).

Therefore, the closest structural correlates of this feature of the Poluverniki variety appear to be found in Northern Russian rather than in Southwestern Russian. However, in the absence of more extensive evidence about its structural and geographical distribution, any conclusions regarding its origins in Poluverniki Russian must remain tentative.[13]

л/л' > й. This is an enigmatic change that resembles a phenomenon known as *sladkoyazychie* (*сладкоязычие* lit. 'sweet-tongueness') in Russian dialectology. Heiter (Хейтер 1970 : 104—105) presents the following examples from recordings made in the 1960s: *зд'ейяэш* (cf. *сделаеш* 'you will do'), *гйаза* (cf. *глаза* 'eyes'), *хайодна* (cf. *холодная* 'cold.F'), *буйа* (cf. < *була* < *была* 'she was'), *пасейайи* (cf. *посеяли* 'they sowed'), *дейайу* (cf. *делают* 'they make'), *каш'йайа* (cf. *кашляла* 'she coughed'), *йука* (cf. *лука* 'scallion:GEN'), *сказайа* (cf. *сказала* 'she said'), *мас'йа* (cf. *масло* 'butter'), *к'ис'йава майака* (cf. *кислого молоко* 'sour:GEN milk:GEN'), *йов'йа* (cf. *ловля* 'hunting'), *умейа* (cf. *умела* 'she was capable (of)').

She assumes that the phenomenon is of Northern Russian origin, where, in turn, it is a product of a non-Slavic substrate (Хейтер 1970 : 105). Heiter's assumptions stem from a short note by Avanesov saying that *sladkoyazychie* occurs in the north of the European part of the Soviet Union ("на севере Европейской части СССР"), but without specifying where exactly (Аванесов 1949 : 171). At present, there is a consensus in Russian dialectology that Avanesov did not have evidence of the occurrence of this phenomenon in Europe. *Sladkoyazychie* is attested exclusively in Eastern Siberia, along the Kolyma River (especially in Pohodsk), and possibly, although the evidence is uncertain, on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk. Sokoloyanskiy, a renowned specialist in the phenomenon, assumes that Lower Kolyma *sladkoyazychie* is a product of the interplay of several factors, including developments internal to these Russian dialects, as well as external factors (such as Yukagir and Chukotkan influence) (Соколянский 2002 : 275—280).[14]

Crucially, however, in the Russian vernaculars along the Lower Kolyma, *sladkoyazychie* affects not only [л] (e.g., *гойова* instead of *голова* 'head') and [л'] (e.g., *йюбйю* instead of *люблю* 'I love'), as in the language of the Poluverniki, but also [р'] (e.g., *йезат*ъ instead of *резать*, *пйиманийа* instead of *приманила* 'she enticed (him)') and sometimes [р] (e.g., *дойого* instead of *дорого* 'expensive') (Соколянский 2002 : 271—272). Importantly, this neutralization of [л], [л'], [р'], [р], and [j] into [j] was characteristic of the speech of females, whereas in the male population on the Lower Kolyma, the opposite [j] > [л] shift has been attested; e.g., *воловать* instead of *воевать* 'be at war', *отчаланной* instead of *отчаянной* 'desperate' (Соколянский 2002 : 270, 278).[15] In the Lower Kolyma area, *sladkoyazychie* was last recorded in 1981; later expeditions have not been able to elicit it (Соколянский 2002 : 281—282).

[13] Sporadic occurrences of this phenomenon before a vowel (including word-initially), as observed in Poluverniki Russian, are attested in both the Northern and Southwestern Russian dialect areas (see DARJa I/Vs 162; Теплова 1967; Касаткин 1999 : 178).

[14] We thank Roman Ronko, Idaliia Fedotova, and Svetlana D'yachenko for bringing Sokolyanskiy's research to our attention.

[15] Sokolyanskiy provides an interesting sociolinguistic explanation for this divide (Соколянский 2002).

Sokolyanskiy suspects that the phenomenon never existed in the European part of Russia and suggests that Avanesov took the liberty of including it in his overview because, while focusing on the dialects of Central and Northern Russia, he also wanted to cover as many dialectal features as possible (Соколянский 2002 : 271). Sokolyanskiy's skepticism is understandable but, on the other hand, it is remarkable that Avanesov refers to "the north of the European part of the Soviet Union" and not "… of Russia". Is it possible that Avanesov had the dialect of the Estonian Poluverniki in mind? This is unlikely, because, to our knowledge, Heiter was the first to report this phenomenon in their language, and this happened 21 years after Avanesov's book was published. On the other hand, Avanesov probably knew Paul Ariste, who later became the supervisor of Helle Heiter's candidate dissertation, and it cannot be entirely excluded that Ariste was already aware of this dialectal feature in the 1940s. In 1930, he conducted a field trip to the area around Iisaku but did not mention the feature in his report on the trip (see Ariste 1930).

Another, less probable correlate of this feature of the Poluverniki's language is the dialectal variation between [l'] and [j], which goes back to Old (East) Slavic (Dmitrii Sichinava, pers. comm.). It mostly occurs in word-final position and after a labial consonant, and is attested across a vast territory, e.g., *журавль/журавель — журавей* 'grus' Vladimir (SRNG 9 : 228), *картофель — картофей* (*картофий*) 'potato' Nizhny Novgorod, Vladimir, Yaroslavl, Moscow (SRNG 13 : 103), and conversely, *муравей — муравель* 'ant' Bryansk, Kursk, Kaluga, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Simbirsk, Saratov, Kuban, Voronezh, etc. (SRNG 18 : 348). Occasionally, the alternation between [l'] and [j] can be found in other positions as well, e.g., *верей* 'gate' — *верельница* 'gate in the field, fence' Northern Dvina (SRNG 4 : 129—130), *пральник* Kaluga, Voronezh, Desna, Bryansk, Smolensk, Pskov, Tver, Latvia, Lithuania, Novosibirsk, etc. — *прайник* 'bat for beating laundry' Pskov, Bryansk, Kalinin, Novosibirsk (SRNG 31 : 65—66) (see Зализняк 2004 : 80—81).[16]

This alternation is too contextually restricted compared with the phenomenon in the Poluverniki's speech, which also affects the non-palatalized [л] and frequently occurs at the beginning of a syllable, and even at the beginning of a word. Therefore, Lower Kolyma *sladkoyazychie* remains the closest structural correlate of the phenomenon in the Poluverniki's language, although the two seem to have developed from different sources and are governed by slightly different phonotactic conditions.

4.2.3. Repercussions for the origins of Poluverniki Russian

We studied features of Poluverniki Russian that seem to have correlates only in more distant dialect areas and thus suggest discontinuity from the surrounding Russian dialects, at least as documented in the 20th century in DARJa I. The criterion for discontinuity was that a feature was not attested within 50 km of the village of Vaikla. These features were the absence of jakanye (closest attestation in Monastyrek, Slantsy District, 56 km to the northeast), regular okanye (closest attestation in the Novgorod dialects, 200—230 km to the east), *л/л'* > *ў* (closest attestation in Shemenichi, Podpo-

[16] The alternation is of clearly heterogeneous origin; some instances go back to Proto-Slavic, whereas others (e.g., *картофей*) are much more recent (Dmitrii Sichinava, pers. comm.).

rozh'e District, 440 km to the northeast), and *sladkoyazychie* (closest attestation in the Lower Kolyma basin, Eastern Siberia). Dismissing *sladkoyazychie*, which seems to be the result of independent developments in two remote areas, we are left with two points and one broader area (the Novgorod area) on the map, all pointing northeastward.

It remains unclear whether these similarities reflect actual migration of a Russian-speaking population from the northeast to the Alutaguse area or the preservation of archaic Northern Russian sound patterns in the Poluverniki's language that have become extinct in the neighboring dialects with the advance of Southern or Central Russian structural innovations.

5. Conclusions and prospects

Using linguistic data, we aimed to make an independent contribution to the unsolved issue of the origins of the northeastern Estonian Poluverniki. However, instead of integrating all the linguistic evidence into a single scenario, we have complicated the picture by raising additional questions and proposing different scenarios, all of which remain speculative despite the evidence presented.

What can be asserted with confidence is that the languages spoken by the Poluverniki — particularly by the inhabitants of Vaikla and Liivaküla — do not fully align with the structural profiles of their immediate Estonian and Russian neighbors. Both the Finnic and Russian material documented in these villages displays features whose structural correlates are attested in the 20th century only outside the surrounding regions of northeastern Estonia and the Gdov area.

The phonological features of Finnic loanwords in Poluverniki Russian and the attested peculiarities of their Estonian variety indicate that the ancestors of the Poluverniki once spoke a Finnic language that was more similar to Northern than to Southern Finnic. Traditionally, the Gulf of Finland has been regarded as a dividing line between Northern and Southern Finnic, with the concession that the two converge to some extent along its southern coast. New studies on the development of the Finnic language area (e.g., Kallio 2024) show that this is not really the case. The present study also demonstrates that a significant Northern Finnic component can be found much farther inland; Vaikla, a central village of the Poluverniki settlement, lies 42 km south of the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland.

However, it was not possible to associate the language of the Poluverniki's ancestors with any particular Northern Finnic variety spoken south of the Gulf of Finland. What we can say is that the Estonian dialect data recorded from the last Poluverniki speakers do not represent regular northeastern Alutaguse Estonian; in several respects, this variety is closer to the northeastern coastal Vaivara dialect and even to Kukkusi Votic. There are no clear innovations shared with Votic proper or Ingrian varieties.

The available linguistic data suggest that the region was once inhabited by people speaking a Northern-Finnic-like dialect. The Slavs who came to the region assimilated these indigenous inhabitants, but their Russian retained a Northern Finnic substrate, which was later transferred to the Russian dialect of the Poluverniki and developed further as a result of several waves of migration. In recent centuries, the Poluverniki acquired local northeastern Alutaguse

Estonian, and more recently, other northern Estonian features also entered their language. Mari Must, a distinguished researcher of the Poluverniki language, summarized this long history well in one sentence: "In the central and southern parts of Iisaku, which for centuries have been inhabited by a mixed Estonian—Russian—Votic—Ingrian population, various later layers of linguistic features originating from different directions have accumulated on top of the coastal Estonian dialect substrate" (Must 1995 : 51).[17]

While the Russian variety of the Poluverniki is in many respects a natural extension of the Central Russian dialect area to the west of the Narva River, it also exhibits Northern Russian features (occurring, e.g., in the northern part of the Novgorod dialect and in the Ladoga—Tikhvin dialect). We outlined two scenarios that could explain this Northern Russian layer in the language of the Poluverniki: (a) migration of speakers from Northern Russian dialect areas to Alutaguse (in the Middle Ages or in the Early Modern Period), and (b) preservation of a local Northern Russian phonological base that resisted the spread of Southern and Central Russian innovations (such as akanye) in the area. In fact, these two scenarios are not mutually exclusive — the influx of speakers of a Northern Russian variety (or varieties) may have contributed to the persistence of archaic northern dialect features in the vernaculars of Vaikla and Liivaküla.

We end with an appeal to archaeologists and geneticists. In a manuscript from 1975 available at the Iisaku Museum, the community historian Meeme Kask urges scientists to investigate ancient burial sites in the villages around Iisaku (Kask 1975 : 15, 23, 26). Such excavations, especially if they involve the extraction and analysis of DNA samples, would shed more light on the ancestry of the Poluverniki.

Data availability statement. This study did not generate primary linguistic data. All data discussed are drawn from published sources, except for audio recordings of the Iisaku dialect archived in the Archive of Estonian Dialects and Finno-Ugric Languages at the Institute of the Estonian Language (available at https://emsuka.eki.ee/collection/sound?series=1&series=2&parish=19&language=5&page=0).

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[17] In Estonian: „*Iisaku kesk- ja lõunaosas, mida aastasadu on asustanud eesti-vene-vadja-isuri segarahvastik, on rannikumurdelisele alusele ladestunud mitmesuguseid eri suundadest saadud hilisemaid kihistusi*."

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Abbreviations

Estonian dialects (parishes): Hlj — Haljala, **Iis** — Iisaku, **Jõe** — Jõelähtme, **Jõh** — Jõhvi, **Kuu** — Kuusalu, **Lüg** — Lüganuse, **Vai** — Vaivara, **VNg** — Viru-Nigula.

Glossings: ACC — accusative case, ADD — additive clitic, ALL — allative case, ELA — elative case, F — feminine, GEN — genitive case, IMP — imperative, LOC — locative case, M — masculine, PL — plural, PREP — prepositional case, PRS — present tense, PST — past tense, SG — singular.

DARJa I — Р. И. Аванесов, С. В. Бромлей (eds.), Диалектологический атлас русского языка (Центр Европейской части СССР). Выпуск I: Фонетика, Москва: Наука, 1986; **DARJa I/Vs** — Р. И. Аванесов, С. В. Бромлей (eds.), Диалектологический атлас русского языка (Центр Европейской части СССР). Выпуск I: Вступительные статьи, справочные материалы, фонетика. Москва: Наука, 1986; **EMH-Iis** — Eesti murrete helisalvestised, Iisaku. EKI eesti murrete ja soome-ugri keelte arhiiv (EMSUKA). https://emsuka.eki.ee/collection/sound?series=1&series=2&parish=19&language=5&page=0; **IMRD** — Interractive map of Russian Dialects. И. А. Марченко, О. Н. Долгов, А. С. Азанова, М. С. Замбржицкая, Е. А. Заливина, С. А. Землянская, Д. И. Мочульский, Е. И. Цейтина, Д. Г. Чистякова, Р. В. Ронько, База данных диалектологического атласа русского языка [Электронный ресурс]. https://da.ruslang.ru/; **SRNG** — Ф. П. Филин (ed.), Словарь русских народных говоров I—, Москва—Ленинград: Наука, 1965—.

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ОТКУДА ПРОИСХОДИТ ЯЗЫК ПОЛУВЕРНИКОВ СЕВЕРО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЭСТОНИИ?

В статье анализируется происхождение языка т.н. полуверников — двуязычной этнокультурной группы, проживавшей в окрестностях Ийзаку на северо-востоке Эстонии. Предположительно, изначально они говорили на одном из прибалтийско-финских языков, но позднее перешли на русский язык. При этом их язык и обычаи сохраняли особенности, отличавшие их от соседних групп. Результаты нашего исследования дают основания считать, что первоначальная прибалтийско-финская разновидность языка полуверников отличалась как от северо-восточного эстонского диалекта, на котором говорили в районе Алутагузе, так и от близкого ему водского языка. Эти различия, вероятно, были связаны с наличием в речи полуверников черт, характерных для северных прибалтийско-финских языков. В русском языке полуверников отмечаются явления, свойственные некоторым северо-русским диалектам, которые отличаются от средне-русских говоров, распространенных в районе Гдова и северном Причудье. Очевидно, что и прибалтийско-финские, и русские особенности языка полуверников формировались в течение длительного периода времени под влиянием различных языков и диалектов.

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KUST PÄRINEB KIRDE-EESTI POLUVERNIKUTE KEEL?

Artiklis analüüsime Kirde-Eestis Iisaku ümbruses elanud kakskeelsete nn poluvernikute keelelist algupära. Nad olid etnokultuuriline rühm, kes rääkis algul ilmselt mingit läänemeresoome murret ja läks hiljem üle vene keelele, kuid nende keel ja kombed erinesid naabrite omadest. Meie uurimistulemused annavad põhjust arvata, et poluvernikute kunagine läänemeresoome keelekuju erines oma põhjaläänemeresoomelike joonte tõttu naabruses räägitud Alutaguse kirde-eesti murdest ja ka sellele lähedasest vadja keelest. Nende vene keeles tulevad esile mõned põhjavene murretele omased nähtused, mis eristavad seda Peipsi põhjaranniku ja Oudova kandi keskvene murrakutest. On ilmne, et nii poluvernikute läänemeresoome kui ka vene keele erijooned on kujunenud pikema aja vältel ning saanud mõjutusi erinevatest keeltest ja murretest.