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# Alice's Adventures in Karelian: Neologisms and the Revitalising Potential of Translating into an Endangered Language

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## Abstract

This paper looks at translation into Karelian, a severely endangered language, from the viewpoint of vocabulary work as an aspect of language revitalisation, through a comparative analysis of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its Karelian translation. The source material was searched for likely lexical gaps, or words previously missing from the Karelian language. These words and their translations were examined and contrasted with prior research to see what are the types of revitalising potential that translation into an endangered language has. The analysis reveals that lexical gaps have often been bridged by coining a neologism, as this is often seen to be beneficial for language revitalisation, and that, in addition to the source language, the translator has drawn inspiration from Finnish and Russian. The analysis exemplifies how (literary) translations into Karelian can both symbolically empower the language and introduce new words to it, highlighting translators' agency in shaping linguistic norms and sustaining endangered languages.

**Keywords:** language revitalisation; literary translation; endangered languages; neologisms

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## Introduction

This paper looks at translation into Karelian, an endangered Finnic language, from the perspectives of language revitalisation and lexical gaps (vocabulary previously missing from the language). Although Karelian is recognised as an autochthonous language in Finland and a minority language in Russia, it is severely endangered in both countries. Despite its weak status, speakers are very motivated to revitalise the language. In these efforts, translation has become an important strategy language that specialists often applaud for its tendency to introduce new words to the language (see e.g., Giloeva & Kok, 2021; Giloeva & Riionheimo, 2022; Koskinen & Kuusi, 2017; UEF, 2023). Vocabulary work is frequently emphasised in translating into and revitalising Karelian, as its development is restrained by its limited domains of use; in order to establish new domains, speakers need access to relevant vocabulary.

In linguistics, lexical gaps are sometimes called accidental gaps (e.g., Crystal, 2008, p. 205), implying their lack is not obviously motivated by cultural or geographical differences. In translation, the distinction between accidental and culturally motivated gaps is less relevant, as both require the translator to create or adapt vocabulary. Regardless, the divide into accidental and ‘non-accidental’ gaps interestingly represents the scope of lexical gaps Karelian translators encounter: many words examined in this paper relate to a specific historical era and, due to cultural differences, may initially not have been coined into Karelian, but the fact that these words still do not exist can no longer be explained by these differences. All Karelians are bilingual and use either Finnish or Russian to participate in society (Sarhimaa, 2010, p. 6), and all source text elements featured in the research material exist in both languages and have become established either through cultural exchange or (translated) popular media. As the cultural contexts of speakers of Karelian, Finnish, and Russian are similar, it would be justified to expect relative symmetry from their documented lexicon, making these differences noteworthy and likely related to the endangered status of the Karelian language and/or coincidence.

Lexical gaps can reveal which kinds of vocabulary have not been prioritised in the revitalisation of Karelian, demonstrating both models of Karelian-language neologisms coined during a translation process as well as the revitalising potential of translating into Karelian in general. This paper approaches the topic by searching an English source text, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and its Karelian translation (target text) by Aleksi Ruuskanen (2018) for potential lexical gaps and examining their translation solutions to see what kinds of patterns emerge and what they may tell about translating into Karelian at large. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is the only novel which has been translated directly from English into Karelian, which grants interesting opportunities for research.

Firstly, the paper will offer a brief overview of the Karelian language and its endangered status, and examine earlier research on lexical gaps and different ways of translating “over” them as well as translating into endangered languages. Then, the material and method will be presented in more detail, followed by analysis, discussion, and concluding remarks.

## The endangered Karelian language

Despite the long-term presence of Karelian in Finland, its vitality is grim. On UNESCO's 5-point scale of language endangerment (UNESCO, 2003: 7–16), Karelian has been said to be in stage 2 or 1, or 'severely' or 'critically endangered' (Sarhimaa, 2016). Karelian is spoken mainly (and not comprehensively) by the grandparental and great-grandparental generations, and its intergenerational transmission within families has halted with very few exceptions. Although Karelian has attained increased media coverage and new adult speakers in the recent years (see Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen, 2024; Tynnyrinen et al., 2025, p. 33), it continues to be at risk of losing vitality.

Before the Second World War, Karelian was spoken mainly in the easternmost territories of Finland (and the westernmost parts of Russia, but this article focuses on Karelian spoken in historical and current Finland). Speakers of Karelian have always been vulnerable to effects of recurring border changes as well as in contact with several more vital languages, such as Finnish, Swedish, and Russian. Historically, this made them unable to develop a stable linguistic (or national) identity, preventing the establishment of a unified written standard. At the end of World War 2, Karelian-speaking citizens of Finland were evacuated to other parts of the country, as some of the eastern municipalities were surrendered to the Soviet Union. In their new municipalities of residence, many speakers faced discrimination or silent judgement from the locals due to their language and some cultural customs being considered too influenced by Russian (Kananen, 2010, pp. 64–66). These attitudes, as well as the inconsistent group identity of a language divided into several major dialects, the complete lack of Karelian language teaching, and multilingual marriages between speakers of Finnish and Karelian becoming more common, caused the number of speakers to drastically decrease. There are no statistics on the current number of speakers, but, according to recent estimates, around 11,000 people are fluent in Karelian and 5,000 use it daily (Sarhimaa, 2013, p. 6).

The events following World War 2 did not only affect the number of speakers, but restricted the domains of use of Karelian as well. As implied above, studying Karelian has never been possible in Finnish schools, and its written standards are relatively young or still in development.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, all speakers of Karelian are at least bilingual, and even first-language speakers often prefer to discuss complex topics in Finnish (or Russian) because of uncertainty and/or lack of relevant vocabulary. Despite recent revitalisation efforts, Karelian has typically been seen as a language best fit to be used within the domestic sphere or small communities. Although this view of Karelian is simplistic and disregards the work of language activists, researchers, and teachers, Karelian is still mainly used in personal communications (Jalava & Tanczos, 2025), and some features of Karelian are notably asymmetrical, such as its lexicon. This asymmetry challenges all users of Karelian, including translators, but, additionally, grants communicative situations a uniquely revitalising potential.

While the close relationship between Finnish and Karelian has been helpful in the revitalisation and university teaching in Finland, it has also resulted in Karelian remaining

largely invisible in Finnish society as it has, at times, been mistakenly seen as a dialect of Finnish. Because of this, active revitalisation of Karelian in Finland began as late as in the 1990s (Sarhimaa, 2017, pp. 238–239),<sup>2</sup> which is why lexical asymmetry does not only affect new vocabulary but is also evident in historical contexts, perhaps surprisingly. The language mostly being used in the domestic sphere has shaped its documented vocabulary to fit a certain time and place. This is why historical texts from other cultures, such as Carroll's novel, can appear doubly foreign to Karelian translators: they represent both an unspoken (or unwritten, or untranslated) time and an unspoken cultural context. This is, of course, the case when translating between vital languages, as well, but translators of Karelian lack set conventions for bridging such cultural gaps while translating, as recent revitalisation activities have emphasised other, current, and local texts. Moreover, it is a common misconception that the older the topic, the easier it will be to discuss in Karelian. It is true that the vocabulary of Karelian is fit for discussing village life as it was on the cusp of World War 2, but for several decades, the language was not used in the public sphere and it steadily lost speakers, which resulted in notable gaps in vocabulary, particularly with regards to technological innovations and political or cultural advances of the time. Thus, when we examine the Karelian lexicon in relation to time, it appears irregular at best. This poses a challenge for translators, as does the fact that, in addition to lexical gaps caused by cultural differences and time, they encounter seemingly accidental gaps, or words that coincidentally have not previously been documented or coined in the revitalisation of Karelian. However, translations of older texts such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* can develop Karelian and its vocabulary in a multitude of ways, some of which are otherwise overlooked in language revitalisation.

### **Translating into Karelian as language activism**

Translating into an endangered language differs from translating into a vital language. Typically, translation is seen as the act of transferring the meaning of the source text into the target language to make the content available for a broader audience. All speakers of Karelian are fluent in Finnish or Russian; with them simultaneously being the most common source languages of translations into Karelian, this indicates that introducing new texts to the Karelian audience cannot be the primary aim of translation (Iso-Ahola, 2022, pp. 154–155). Instead, translating into an endangered language promotes a world in which speakers of endangered languages can actively choose which language to read a text in (González, 2005, p. 107) rather than being forced to do so in the dominant language of their society. In this envisioned world, several language versions of the same text co-exist more often, which can eventually (re)birth new (or momentarily diminished) domains of use. As well, it encourages more people to learn the endangered language by indicating that using it instead of (or in addition to) the dominant language does not sacrifice anything (on so-called controlled bilingualism see Tynnyrinen et al., 2025, pp. 49–50), and provides examples of modern registers as well as new vocabulary.

The sentiment that translating will lead to increased vitality appears to be recognised in the Karelian language community, including among translators (see e.g., Koskinen &

Kuusi, 2017), and many young Karelians mention wanting to develop their translation skills for the purposes of activism and language revitalisation (Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen, 2024, p. 286). Overall, translators of Karelian do not seem motivated by financial gain or professional identity as a translator, partially because translation into or publishing literature in endangered languages is largely dependent on voluntary or part-time work (Iso-Ahola, 2022, pp. 185–187) that translators and writers may take up with little translator or language training and/or in the early stages of forming their professional proficiency. Additionally, translated works can raise awareness on endangered languages, showing that an endangered language is as fit for literary use as any other (Iso-Ahola, 2022, pp. 54–56). This sentiment is often applied to translated works of (classic) literature (for a more detailed description of the different goals of translating into an endangered language, see Kuusi et al., 2017). Thus, to generalise, the revitalising potential of translation is twofold: translation both introduces new registers, textual types, and domains of use to the language and concretely generates new words and idioms.

It is important to consider that the circumstances presented above do not only affect translators but the readers of translations as well. Depending on the reader's level of linguistic assimilation, the Karelian translation can be more challenging to read than the source text. This is especially prevalent when reading translations of works originally written either in a strange time or place or regarding a niche topic, which is typical among the source texts of translations into Karelian as translators may consciously choose a text that has something new to offer to the language (Tynnyrinen, 2025, p. 96; Iso-Ahola, 2017, pp. 181–182). Although the difficulty of translations has at times been characterised as potentially detrimental to language revitalisation (Belmar, 2017, pp. 39–40), the Karelian-speaking community seems to embrace the challenging nature of literature translated into Karelian. Readers expect to encounter strange words and strain against the limits of their proficiency; reading a translation is seen as more challenging (and rewarding) than reading the source text or its translation into Finnish.<sup>3</sup> This mutual acknowledgement grants translators a certain freedom to experiment with words and employ creative translation strategies, but they may simultaneously experience responsibility for the revitalisation of Karelian. This can make it difficult to decline unappealing translation assignments (Iso-Ahola, 2022, p. 289), and translators may worry about whether their neologisms are beneficial or detrimental towards Karelian at large (Tynnyrinen, 2025, p. 99). With great effort, however, comes great revitalising potential, which has been harnessed in the revitalisation of Karelian and its vocabulary.

### **Bridging lexical gaps while translating**

To understand how lexical gaps are bridged while translating into Karelian, it is important to consider how translators of other, often vital languages approach similar situations. For instance, research on translating culture-specific terms and on specialised translation proves interesting points for comparison. Next, this paper offers an overview of translation strategies available to all translators and of earlier research on bridging lexical gaps while translating into Karelian and Finnish, which can, as the closest cognate of Karelian, offer insight on which

strategies and phenomena are likely due to the endangerment and underdeveloped vocabulary of Karelian rather than the cultural and geographical distance between the source and the target languages.

### **Translating culture-specific or non-existing terms: a general perspective**

Translation strategies can be defined in various ways but, in this paper, they refer to actions or positions translators take while translating. These strategies are often divided into global and local strategies, the first of which refers to overall principles, such as choosing to focus on either the message or the form of the text, whereas the latter refers to ways of translating individual words and phrases (Gambier, 2010, pp. 415–417). The latter are primarily discussed in the context of culture-specific elements, or *realia*, implying vocabulary is considered challenging to translate mostly when there are notable differences between the source and target audiences.

In general, a translator faced with cultural phenomena can adopt either a domesticating or a foreignising approach based on the target audience and translation norms (see Toury, 1995), and the decision will impact their translation strategies of individual textual elements (for categorisations of culture-specific elements see e.g., Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993; Pedersen, 2011). Domestication refers to modifying the source text to fit the cultural context of the target audience, whereas foreignising approaches preserve the original cultural context by – for example – intentionally leaving certain details at least partially untranslated.

Contemporary use of the two terms is often analytical and value-free, but they were initially concerned with ethical effects of translation, or the ethical position a translation establishes in relation to the source and the target audiences (Paloposki, 2011, p. 40). For instance, domesticating translation has been characterised as authoritative as it supposedly validates the linguistic standards of the target audience, perhaps by overwriting the unique cultural features of the source text. Foreignising translation, on the other hand, is said to be able to counteract assimilative processes by “drawing on marginal resources and ideologies” (Venuti, 2017, p. xiv). Both views can be practical, although the latter is mostly applicable when analysing translations into dominant languages as it assumes that the target language has assimilative power over the source language. This is not the case when translating into small or endangered languages, and their translators and researchers are, understandably, more concerned with whether excessive source language interference and foreignisation can lead to the *target language* losing its individuality (e.g., Cronin, 2010, pp. 141–142; p. 147).

Both domesticating and foreignising translation strategies can be categorised in several ways, the most recognised of which is perhaps that of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, pp. 31–40), who present seven strategies of translating over lexical gaps:

- 1) borrowing (a word);
- 2) calque, or loan translation (of a word)
- 3) literal translation (of an idiom etc.)
- 4) transposition, or changing the word class without changing the meaning

- 5) modulation, or change of a point of view
- 6) equivalence; and
- 7) adaptation.

In a sense, these strategies form a spectrum ranging from the most to least foreignising, and the types of strategies considered ideal largely depend on the target language and culture, textual type, and translation norms.

Last, it should be noted that domestication and foreignisation do not form a strict binary, and not all translation solutions can be neatly categorised as one (Abderraouf, 2019, p. 80). Translations often have features of both, and the terms are the most useful when broadly considering translated texts and the tendencies represented within them: are domesticating or foreignising strategies more common and what does this say about the translation process and the relationship between the source and the target languages?

### **Translating culture-specific or non-existing terms: Finnish and Karelian perspectives**

Finnish makes an interesting point for comparison when studying translating into Karelian, as written Finnish and its vocabulary were initially developed through translation (Tiittula, 2010, pp. 254–255; Kolehmainen, 2013, pp. 432–433). Finnish is a vital language, but its somewhat marginal geographical and cultural position, as well as its background as a language developed through translation, uphold circumstances in which translations are common and users of Finnish are generally accepting of them (see Paloposki, 2015). However, translations into Finnish are no longer expected to modify the language but to follow its linguistic norms (Tiittula, 2010, p. 256), and the translator's responsibility to avoid unnecessary foreign influence is often discussed (e.g., Latomaa, 2015). Accordingly, student translators of Finnish are offered course models tailored to their needs, whereas translators of Karelian do not have systematic translation training, at all.

There are certain overlaps in the terminology work of Finnish and Karelian translators, but the aims and realities of their tasks differ, as translators and terminologists of vital languages engage in vocabulary work in different ways. Terminologists create words for longstanding use, often prescriptively, whereas translators are more concerned with creating locally-accurate variants that do not hinder the accuracy and understandability of the translation (Pasanen, 2018, pp. 8–9). As Karelian is still undergoing standardisation, the role of translators (and other speakers) is heightened. Translators approach a variety of source texts as potential arenas of long-term language revitalisation and may avoid paraphrase, as their vocabulary work has been assigned prescriptive qualities by the language community, which, in absence of other linguistic resources, views translated texts as examples of ideal language.

The circumstances presented above are reflected in research on translating non-existing vocabulary into Karelian (e.g., Giloeva & Kok, 2019; 2021), which shows that translators coin neologisms and use similar translation strategies regardless of textual type. For instance, loans and calques from the source language appear common and are slightly

preferred by translators of technical texts (see e.g., Kuusi et al., 2022; Tynnyrinen, 2025), but similar tendencies have been noted in the fewer case studies examining literary translations into Karelian (e.g., Tynnyrinen, 2022). One master's thesis included an interview, in which the translator framed translating a literary text as language revitalisation and emphasised an aim to enrich the target language while honouring its unique means of expression (see Rapa, 2024). In this sense, the situation of Karelian resembles the past situation of Finnish.

Overall, literary translators of Karelian often view themselves as language activists or revitalisers (Iso-Ahola, 2017; 2022, pp. 198–203). When discussing the importance of literary translation, positive impacts on the literary canon and status of a language are often emphasised, but the prevalence, if not significance, of vocabulary work has been reported as well (Iso-Ahola, 2017, pp. 180–181; for a Basque example see Belmar, 2017, pp. 44–45). Research tends to portray translations that concretely develop the language through neologisms (often technical texts), and translations that symbolically empower the language (often literary texts) as somewhat separate, but such a divide is not useful in the case of Karelian, because literary translations often have significant 'concrete' revitalising potential as well. Accordingly, it is justifiable to examine literary translations into Karelian from both viewpoints, the concrete and the symbolic.

### **Translating over lexical gaps from English to Karelian: prior research**

The topic of this paper was previously addressed in the author's master's thesis (Tynnyrinen, 2022), in which the novel and its Karelian translation were compared to locate potential lexical gaps and examine their translations. The findings were categorised based on theme, such as invented words, or names of animals and mythological creatures, and assumed translation strategy. The thesis emphasised the latter by utilising a modified category of translation strategies based on prior categorisations by Chesterman (1997) and Pym (2016). Both consider a vast array of strategies, but the modified categorisation included the following local strategies: copying sound (loan), copying morphology (calque), hyponymy, synonymy, paraphrase, and explicitness change. The analysis focused on the likely neologisms, or the first two strategies, because neologisms are perhaps the most visible results of the translator's revitalisation work, as well as one that non-expert speakers are most likely to pay attention to.

In the thesis, 38 words or short phrases with no previously documented Karelian variant were examined, and it was noted that most of them had been translated by coining a neologism (12 cases of calque, 5 cases of loan), or, slightly less often, by re-wording the passage (12 cases of paraphrase). Additionally, it was noted that, despite the translator reportedly avoiding the influence of Finnish (Riionheimo, 2019), many translated items, especially neologisms, clearly resembled their Finnish equivalents.

## Material and method

The research material for this paper consists of 52 English-Karelian word pairs selected from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its Karelian translation *Ališan seikkailut kummanmuas*, by Aleksi Ruuskanen.

The novel was translated into Karelian directly from English, rather than by using Finnish or Russian as an intermediate language. Literature is often translated into endangered languages from the dominant languages of the societies of their speakers, which makes the present case somewhat atypical, and investigating potential foreign influence on the translation especially interesting. Although English is globally considered a destructive language, its interference deviates from the commonplace in the case of Karelian, and the translator has stated that translating novels from English when Finnish translations would have been available has been a conscious decision made to avoid Finnish influence (Riionheimo, 2019; see Tynnyrinen (2025) for Karelian translators' thoughts on the influence of Finnish). Accordingly, there is no pre-established or emergent 'model' of translating into Karelian from English as there is for translating from Finnish. Comparisons to prior studies are difficult to draw, as translation strategies of Karelian translators have been studied little, but the present results interestingly complement what is already known about translating into Karelian. Furthermore, certain aspects of the novel, such as vocabulary related to its Victorian context and recurrent wordplay, suggest that it can reveal both geographically or temporally-explained lexical gaps, as well as those motivated by the endangered status of Karelian.

Both the source and the target text were systematically examined to locate potential lexical gaps. In practice, this examination consisted of several side-by-side readings, or close readings, of the different language versions, followed by an intuitive selection of terms to be examined. Most of these potential gaps were initially located by searching the source text for words that appeared challenging to translate based on the author's language proficiency, personal experience, and/or earlier research of translating into Karelian; the target text was searched for words that appeared unusual or stood out as opposed to the surrounding words. Then, the target text equivalents were examined and searched for in several general and thematic Finnish-Karelian, Karelian-Finnish, and Russian-Karelian dictionaries and parallel texts (similar texts written in Karelian, or earlier translations into Karelian). Lastly, the 52 assumed lexical gaps and their translations were analysed through the following research questions:

- 1) What kinds of lexical gaps and neologisms are represented in the research material, and what could motivate these gaps?
- 2) What kinds of translation strategies have been used to bridge the lexical gaps?
- 3) Do the strategies adapt the text to Karelian norms (domestication), or retain features from the source language (foreignisation), thus modifying the target language?<sup>4</sup>

Question 1 seeks for patterns in, for example, thematic category of the lexical gaps, whereas question 2 considers whether tentative categories of translation strategies emerge.

Rather than forcibly assigning each translation a likely strategy, the analysis aims to locate patterns and tendencies. Are potential long-term solutions, such as neologisms, more common than only locally applicable solutions, such as paraphrase, in accordance with objectives and needs of language revitalisation? Lastly, question 3 brings these observations closer to above presented discussions of domestication, foreignisation and interference by considering whether the solutions, as a whole, “Karelianise” (domesticate) the source text or enhance (foreignise) the target language with lexical influence from other languages, even at the risk of making the translation challenging to read.

### **Subjectivity of the analysis**

The search for potential lexical gaps is always impacted by the fact that, in addition to being endangered, Karelian is an insufficiently documented language. While some elementary linguistic resources are available, speakers currently lack a modern, regularly-updated dictionary and existing resources are often outdated, especially as new words are introduced to the language weekly through translation of news items. The insufficient documentation of Karelian makes it difficult for a reader or a researcher to recognise lexical gaps or potential neologisms. Thus, it would be unreasonable to present such analysis as entirely objective, as the interpretation of the research material is fundamentally affected by the researcher’s ability to recognise potential neologisms based on topic or tone. Accordingly, the thesis and this paper do not claim that certain source language concepts would have never been referred to in Karelian, but instead consider the use of a specific, documented, and standardised variant of the language. This variant represents the tattered ideal available for learners of Karelian, and consists of dictionaries as well as proofread texts such as news articles and literature. Through community involvement and Karelian proficiency, the present author has aimed to locate the kinds of lexical gaps and potential neologisms non-expert readers and language learners pay attention to, and may later utilise in their own speech or writing.

While the subjective nature of such analysis undoubtedly results in some lexical gaps being overlooked, evaluating potential neologisms before examining them ensures a worthwhile analysis. In the case of the thesis and the present article, several bilingual dictionaries (Finnish, Karelian, Russian) and some thematic dictionaries were searched for a Karelian equivalent of the source text word. Second, parallel texts published in both Finland and Russia were examined via an internet search. Only when these two steps did not retrieve another case of use of the suspected neologism, or if the variant found was completely different, was the translation considered a neologism. In other words, in this context, “neologism” stands for a word a reader could only encounter in the translation.

## **Analysis**

### **Overview of potential lexical gaps**

As explained in above sections, lexical gaps and neologisms are, in the case of literary translation, often discussed in the context of culture-specific translation. Accordingly, a great

deal of the lexical gaps in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* can be explained by cultural or temporal differences but, as is typical for endangered languages, others are more challenging to categorise, appearing “random.”

The table below presents the source text words, or potential lexical gaps, according to thematic category.

**Table 1.** Potential lexical gaps according to thematic category.

| <b>Animal species and breeds</b> | <b>Invented or intentionally misspelled words</b> | <b>Historical words</b> | <b>Food and drink</b> | <b>Units of measurement</b> | <b>Miscellaneous</b> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| conger-eel                       | caucus-race                                       | bathing machine         | barley sugar          | gallon                      | daisy-chain          |
| dodo                             | Cheshire-Cat                                      | courtier                | cherry-tart           | pennyworth                  | Duchess              |
| dormouse                         | Hatter                                            | cucumber-frame          | comfit                | sixpence                    | fender               |
| eaglet                           | March Hare                                        | day-school              | roast turkey          |                             | hearthrug            |
| ferret                           | Mock Turtle                                       | footman                 |                       |                             | hookah               |
| flamingo                         | seaography                                        | frontispiece            |                       |                             | housemaid            |
| gryphon                          | the Antipathies                                   | inkstand                |                       |                             | jack-in-the-box      |
| lory                             | treacle well                                      | livery                  |                       |                             | jury-box             |
| porpoise                         | uglification                                      | tureen                  |                       |                             | latitude5            |
| starfish                         | Wonderland                                        |                         |                       |                             | longitude            |
| terrier                          |                                                   |                         |                       |                             | memorandum           |
| whiting                          |                                                   |                         |                       |                             | nonsense             |
|                                  |                                                   |                         |                       |                             | parchment            |
|                                  |                                                   |                         |                       |                             | steam engine         |

Firstly, the largest thematic group of lexical gaps consists of names of animal species or breeds, and mythological creatures (12 instances). As expected, some of these animals (namely the dodo, lory, flamingo, whiting, conger-eel, and porpoise), as well as the mythological gryphon, represent an unknown geographical context. In this sense, the lack of pre-existing Karelian-language variants is not surprising, although it should be noted that Finnish and Russian equivalents for these words exist and that both thematic and general dictionaries of Karelian contain names of some species that are not native to Finland or Russia (see e.g., FF, 2005). The findings represent the asymmetry of Karelian-language resources and documented vocabulary, especially regarding topics somewhat foreign to its speakers. Because of this asymmetry, translated texts hold immense revitalising potential, as they can be used to enhance Karelian with words that otherwise would not be prioritised in language revitalisation and vocabulary work. However, the potential is not limited to foreign concepts, as the array of 12 instances additionally contains names of animals native to or otherwise known in the linguistic area of Karelian: the eaglet, ferret, star-fish, and dormouse can be encountered in at least some Karelian-speaking areas, and the terrier breed of dog is widely recognised. It is possible that some of these words do have some locally-established Karelian-

language variant but, for one reason or another, they have not been included in dictionaries and thus remain unavailable for translators and learners of the language until used in a (translated) text. These two groups – translators and learners – often overlap because most modern speakers of Karelian in Finland learn the language as adults due to the virtually non-existent learning opportunities (see Tynnyrinen et al., 2025, pp. 23–30). This heightens the importance of dictionaries and similar information sources.

Secondly, other common categories were invented or intentionally misspelled words (10 instances) and historical words (9 instances). The first category contains nonsensical wordplay and proper nouns specific to the novel, such as ‘uglification’ or ‘Cheshire-cat’, and the second category contains words specific to the novel’s Victorian setting. These types of words are challenging for translators of all languages, although the challenge may be heightened when translating into Karelian as there are few similar historical parallel texts to use as examples. Bridging both types of gaps can be beneficial for Karelian, though, as the latter are unlikely to be otherwise coined and the former, although not directly applicable in other texts, function as necessary examples of Karelian-language wordplay and nonsense, potentially inspiring other speakers and writers.

Thirdly, there were two more distinct thematic categories: names of food and drink (4 instances) and units of measurement (3 instances). Like invented words, these are challenging for any translator, although vital languages most likely have pre-existing variants for the most common units of measurements.

Lastly, 14 perceived lexical gaps and their translations could not be categorised thematically and do not contain features that would undoubtedly make them foreign or historical. Although some of these words, such as ‘parchment’ and ‘Duchess,’ relate to the novel’s historical setting, they are not exclusive to it or difficult for a modern (source language) reader to understand. While these gaps, too, are due to the endangered nature of Karelian and the limited array of linguistic resources, they represent truly accidental gaps and show that a notable portion of lexical gaps cannot be explained by cultural or temporal differences alone. Moreover, the actual number of ‘random’ gaps is likely higher than reported, as some may have been overlooked during the analysis if they have not stood out due to, for instance, an archaic style. Such ‘invisible’ translations are often considered ideal when translating into vital languages (and are much harder to achieve when the target language is endangered.)

### Overview of TT elements and translation strategies

Out of the 52 source text elements, 38 have been translated into a similar, single-word target language element.<sup>6</sup>

In 9 out of 38 cases, the translation utilises a pre-existing Karelian word with a slightly different meaning. For instance, *whiting* has become *tretku* (trout), and *eaglet* has been translated into *kotkaine* (a diminutive form of eagle, or a small eagle as opposed to a young eagle.) The use of hypernyms, or broader concepts, is common as well: *lory* (a type of a parrot) has been translated into *popugailindu* (parrot) and *barley-sugar* (a type of hard caramel) into

*karamellu* (caramel.) It appears that pre-existing – but not entirely fitting – linguistic material from Karelian has been adapted in cases where an exact equivalent may not exist, but where 1) the concept is assumably not entirely strange to the reader of the translation; and 2) the lexical gap considers a somewhat arbitrary choice of words, rather than a recurring character or a piece of a riddle or a pun. Although a neologism has not been coined, revitalising potential has not been lost as such familiar, domesticating solutions simplify the reading process and introduce new ways of utilising the vocabulary already documented and in use.

In the remaining 29 cases, the single-word target language equivalent has not been previously recorded in dictionaries or used in easily-available parallel texts. Without consulting the translator, it is not possible to know for certain which translation solutions are neologisms and which are pre-existing – but previously undocumented – words; in this analysis, all such items have been treated as potential neologisms as they are new to the documented and standardised variant of Karelian discussed previously. At the very least, not being found in dictionaries or parallel texts indicates that the examined words were not established in Karelian at the time of translating the novel.

Potential neologisms seem to have been coined in several ways. First, so-called internationalisms, or words that are the same or similar in many languages, representing specific and perhaps foreign concepts have often been left untranslated or slightly modified: *dodo* and *flamingo* have remained the same, and *livery*, *terrier*, and *gryphon* have been slightly altered to better fit the norms of written Karelian (*livree*, *terjeru*, and *grifonu*.) The tendency to translate over such lexical gaps by loaning the source text word has been previously observed and assumed to be common because translators may see such internationalisms as “safe” to borrow (Kuusi et al., 2022, p. 150). Although “safe” mostly refers to words that can be borrowed without too strongly aligning oneself with any specific language, often either Finnish or Russian, an alternative reasoning arises naturally from the examples: sometimes direct loans are both convenient for the translator and easy for the reader to understand, especially when the “international” loans are already in use in Finnish and Russian. Such strategies may simultaneously appear domesticating and foreignising, as they utilise foreign linguistic influence (foreignisation) but do so in a way that is familiar to the Karelian readers (domestication).

Interestingly, the research material features a few cases of direct loans that do not originate from English but rather from Russian.<sup>7</sup> Namely, the words *duchess* and *courtier* have been translated into *gertsogin’u* and *pridvornoi*, which closely resemble their Russian counterparts *герцогиня* (*gertsoginya*) and *придворный* (*pridvornii*). The translation was published in Finland, and such words may be challenging for Karelian-Finnish bilingual readers to understand but, at the same time, they create linguistic variation within the text in a way that is very typical to speakers of Karelian. While loans from Finnish are common among Karelians living in Finland, speakers on the Russian side of border have tended to loan vocabulary from Russian, especially in the fields of science and technology. In this sense, translation can, in addition to enhancing the target language with the linguistic resources of the source language, unite partially estranged members of the language community

and make individual readers aware of alternative ways of developing the lexicon. The role of language specialists and translators in this is heightened when official communications and collaboration between Karelian speakers in Finland and Russia have been discontinued because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In addition to direct loans, many Karelian equivalents appear to have been coined by calquing, or separately translating each element of a source text item into the target language. For example, *cucumber-frame* has been translated into *ogurčulava* (cucumber + platform). As in the case of direct loans, not all linguistic inspiration seems to stem from English, and many Karelian equivalents at least closely resemble their Finnish counterparts. For instance, the words *fender* and *hookah* have been translated into *kyvensuoja* (spark + protection) and *vezipiippu* (water + pipe), which, when only looking at the source and the target texts, seem like completely unique Karelian neologisms. When one broadens their analysis to consider Finnish, however, it becomes evident that the most commonly used Finnish equivalents of these words (*kipinäsuoja* [spark + protection] and *vesipiippu* [water + pipe]) consist of the same parts.

It has been previously noted that (student) translators of Karelian look into a variety of different languages when translating (Kuusi et al., 2019, pp. 51–52; 2022, pp. 150–151; Tynnyrinen, 2025, pp. 97–98). Here, the prevalence of a single “third” language, Finnish, is so notable that it could be characterised as an unrecognised or undisclosed “implicit relay language” (Tynnyrinen, 2022, p. 30) through which some of the text has been translated. In fact, as opposed to the two cases of loans from Russian, this was assumed in 11 cases of calque; i.e., in more than half of them. Modelling Karelian translations after their Finnish counterparts is common, although its impact is often problematised (Kuusi et al. 2022, pp. 153–155; Tynnyrinen, 2025, pp. 99–100) as it can override what is unique about Karelian. Finnish has been observed to be similarly used as inspiration by translators translating from Russian to Karelian, although its prevalence has not surpassed that of Russian (Kuusi et al., 2022, p. 146). In the present case, the prevalence of Finnish influence is likely caused by the rather unorthodox source language as well as the translators’ tendency to primarily aim their translations at an intended Karelian reader in either Finland or Russia, although translation solutions understandable to Karelians on both sides of the border are often appreciated (see e.g., Kuusi et al., 2022, p. 149).

Lastly, the material contains 14 instances where the translation clearly differs from the source text. It appears that some changes relate to the Karelian language and its norms, whereas others concern features of the source text. The first category consists of two types of translation solutions: 1) instances where a compound word, such as *hearthrug*, has been translated into a phraseme, such as *kaminan mattoine* (little carpet of the fireplace), as is typical for Karelian; and 2) paraphrase, as in the cases of *frontispiece* and *bathing machine*, which have become *kirjan allus olii kuva* (the photo at the beginning of the book) and *heboloin vietty uindubutki* (a swimming tub pulled by horses). Such ‘pure’ paraphrase seems to mainly occur in the case of words that may be challenging to all modern readers, presumably in part

because it makes looking into other languages for inspiration and using related Karelian-language concepts difficult. Overall, it is not a common solution, as the material only features 5 cases of it.

Source text features have presumably required paraphrase or omission in 6 cases. In these cases, the source text reveals a potential lexical gap, but the passage has been translated without using the exact word. This type of translation is especially common in rhymes, riddles, and idioms, such as *gallons of tears*, which have been exchanged for idiomatic variants in Karelian, such as *kui korvos kuadajen* (as if pouring from a bucket). In such cases, a translator can prioritise either the rhythm and the rhymes of the poem or its meaning and the vocabulary used to convey it. Both options revitalise and develop Karelian in their own way, which, again, displays the twofold revitalising potential of (literary) translation.

## Discussion

This paper has viewed translating vocabulary into Karelian as language revitalisation from three perspectives: 1) types of lexical gaps, 2) the most common translation strategies, and 3) domesticating and foreignising, especially from the viewpoint of the needs and objectives of language revitalisation. The results are mostly in line with prior research, and they both strengthen and complement earlier findings.

As stated in this paper, translating into Karelian can be said to have two distinct but overlapping types of revitalising potential, both of which are detectable in the research material: 1) establishing new registers and making new types of texts available in the language and, thus, improving its status and, 2) concretely enhancing the language with new words and expressions. The former is often slightly emphasised in research on literary translation into endangered languages and as language activism (e.g., Iso-Ahola, 2017; Belmar, 2017), but the results show that, in terms of assumed translation strategies and solutions, the Karelian translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* does not greatly differ from non-literary translations. For example, both earlier case studies (e.g., Kuusi et al., 2022; Tynnyrinen, 2025) and the present analysis portray loaning, calquing and other strategies leading to single-word equivalents as the most common options, which is in line with what is known of the revitalisation goals of Karelian translators (Iso-Ahola, 2022, pp. 198–203). However, despite the great revitalising potential translation has for the Karelian lexicon, excessive use of loan words and neologisms may lead to a text that is too challenging for the target audience to read, as can the needless and extreme avoidance of foreign interference (Belmar, 2017, pp. 39–40). In the present analysis, roughly a third of the translation solutions was categorised as paraphrase, often likely because of puns, riddles, and nonsense in the source text. In these cases, which are challenging for all translators working with two non-related languages (see e.g., Kérchy (2020) on translating *Alice* into Hungarian, and Zhang (2017) on translating it into Chinese), neologisms have not been coined, but the translation contains other innovative translation solutions such as puns comprised of pre-existing Karelian linguistic material. This too revitalises and invigorates the Karelian language, but does so in a way that is more accommodating towards the reader.

Another notable finding is that the translation does not often seem to “Karelianise” the source text, as foreignising translation strategies such as loan and calque are more common than paraphrase, synonymy, and hyponymy. For instance, while imaginary proper nouns, such as Cheshire-cat, have been translated, the names of the human characters have mostly been kept as they are in the English original. Similarly, when paraphrase has been utilised, the translation seems to use Karelian words to describe foreign concepts (such as the bathing machine) rather than to attempt to make the target text appear more ‘naturally’ Karelian and less like a translation, which could be achieved by exchanging obscure cultural references for suitable Karelian equivalents. The observed strategy develops Karelian by establishing ways of discussing other cultures, as well as potentially introducing these cultures to the readers; this goal is discussed very seldom in the case of Karelian, but it is discussed nonetheless (Iso-Ahola, 2022, p. 281).

Although purely domesticating translation strategies are rare in the results, one could see the prevalence of Finnish influence as a domesticating factor, as Finnish and Karelian are closely related and as the novel was translated and published in Finland for a predominantly Finnish-Karelian bilingual target audience. Accordingly, the results contain a notable number of cases where a target text element seems to not have been modified after the English word but rather its Finnish (or, in two cases, Russian) equivalent. As stated earlier, Finnish influence is sometimes contested or avoided by translators of Karelian but, based on the present analysis, even a conscious decision to avoid it by choosing a non-Finnish source text does not entirely eliminate it. As Finnish and Karelian are closely related, minimising Finnish influence would likely result in an unnatural translation, but it is, regardless, interesting to consider the impact of the source text. Could a non-Finnish source text allow a translator to utilise the resources of Finnish in a concrete and self-willed way, but to do so without accidentally allowing excessive, detrimental influence on the target text because of restraints such as limited time or still-developing Karelian proficiency (see Tynnyrinen, 2025, pp. 94–95)?

While the close relationship between Karelian and Finnish is manifest in similarities between certain neologisms and their Finnish equivalents, the translation differs from those into vital languages such as Finnish in other ways. For instance, instead of adapting to the pre-existing, established norms of the target language (Tiittula, 2010, p. 256), the translation alters and enhances the Karelian language by utilising the source language and other languages in a controlled manner (on controlled interference, see e.g., Toury, 1985, p. 8), thus contributing to establishing the norms.

What remains unclear, however, is whether the translation features a substantial number of neologisms because the translator has willed so to revitalise the language, or whether the translator has simply had to coin neologisms due to limitations of the standardised variant of Karelian. In other words, do the neologisms originate from the translators and their ideals, or intrinsically and unavoidably from the source and target languages through the translator? The likely answer is a mixture of both, and both the background research and present analysis showcase the ways in which translation can develop and improve the usability of Karelian and

how these ways can relate to other languages. As stated above, initially Finnish was consciously developed through translation and is now a vital language; if developed diligently through translating and in other ways, Karelian can follow in its footsteps.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined and exemplified the process of translating into Karelian from the viewpoints of language revitalisation and vocabulary work by combining and referring to prior research and analysing an English-Karelian case example. As suggested by prior research, the examined translation potentially revitalises Karelian by introducing both new words and new textual types to the language. Furthermore, the analysis displays how literary translations can be especially fruitful arenas for coining new vocabulary, as they contain a wide variety of vocabulary often overlooked in language revitalisation and vocabulary work. This tendency, combined with the ability to improve the status of an endangered language, makes literary translation a powerful tool of language revitalisation.

This analysis is but one interpretation of the research material, and potential lexical gaps are complicated to locate. In addition to the subjective nature of the analysis, one should note that the present observations consider the decisions of one translator, whose personal preferences cannot be known or entirely overlooked. Furthermore, there is only so much to be discovered about translating over lexical gaps and neologisms through a purely comparative analysis constructed on a textual level. As referenced in this paper, though, these translation processes have previously been researched from the viewpoint of translators as well, but the analysis could be furthered and deepened by considering Karelian-speakers next. For instance, it would be interesting to strengthen the somewhat subjective analysis by examining whether speakers of Karelian generally recognise or pay attention to potential neologisms, and whether their selections would differ from the one compiled for the present analysis. After all, languages are revitalised to construct a sustainable and liveable future for their speakers, which is why non-expert speakers' ideas of translation as a tool of language revitalisation, as well as acceptably and unacceptably translated neologisms, prove an interesting implication for future research.

## Endnotes

- 1 Karelian is widely acknowledged as one language, but several written standards have been developed or are in development (Viena Karelian, South Karelian, and Livvi Karelian). This is mostly due to the inability (or unwillingness) to choose which dialect to use as a base for a common written standard, as several specialists coincidentally and simultaneously started developing written standards based on their own experience. For the development of the written standards of Karelian, see Anttikoski, 2003.
- 2 In the Republic of Karelia in Russia, revitalisation began slightly earlier.
- 3 There is not yet any academic research on the topic, but it is discussed in the language community. For instance, in 2025, the University of Eastern Finland organised a reading group for the first detective story translated into Karelian. The group was in high demand within the local Karelian-speaking community and its aims were to make reading in Karelian more approachable and to offer speakers an opportunity to discuss presumed neologisms together with other speakers. For more information (in Karelian), see UEF (2025). I am currently analysing this topic through a survey aimed at readers of translations into Karelian.
- 4 The present research material and questions partially overlap with those of the master's thesis (Tynnyrinen, 2022), as both utilise the same source material. However, the present analysis has been conducted independently of the thesis, and it broadens and re-frames the earlier analysis.
- 5 Karelian equivalents for latitude and longitude were found in a Finnish-Karelian dictionary. However, the equivalents were different from the ones used in the target text, indicating that they were coined as neologisms during the translation process. Thus, they were included in the research material.
- 6 All of the translations, as well as their likely translation strategies, are presented in Appendix 1.
- 7 Similarly, it is not possible to determine whether some neologisms are loans from Finnish, because the two languages are so closely related that a direct loan from Finnish and a calque from English or Finnish could lead to remarkably similar results. Moreover, the line between loans and calques when translating from Finnish into Karelian may not always be clear even to translators themselves (Tynnyrinen, 2025, pp. 96–97).
- 8 Published under the author's earlier first name as Milla Tynnyrinen. The author of the thesis and this paper are the same.

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**Appendix 1. All ST and TT items and their assumed translation strategy.**

| ST word               | TT word                        | Pre-existing word, neologism or other | Assumed translation strategy                  |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| barley sugar          | karamellu                      | pre-existing word                     | hyponymy                                      |
| bathing machine       | heboloin vietty uindubutki     | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| box of comfits        | n'amupakiettain                | neologism                             | calque                                        |
| caucus-race           | kruugois juoksendelendu        | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| cherry-tart           | višn'umuarjois luajittu piirai | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| Cheshire-cat          | Irvo-kaži                      | neologism                             | calque, potentially through Finnish           |
| conger-eel            | ängerjäs                       | pre-existing word                     | hyponymy                                      |
| courtier              | pridvornoi                     | neologism                             | loan, potentially through Russian             |
| cucumber-frame        | ogurčulava                     | neologism                             | calque                                        |
| daisy chain           | venku                          | pre-existing word                     | hyponymy                                      |
| day-school            | škola                          | pre-existing word                     | hyponymy                                      |
| dodo                  | dodo                           | neologism                             | loan                                          |
| dormouse              | unihiri                        | neologism                             | calque, potentially through Finnish           |
| Duchess               | Gertsogin'u                    | neologism                             | loan, potentially through Russian             |
| eaglet                | kotkaine                       | pre-existing word                     | near-synonym                                  |
| fender                | kyvensuoju                     | neologism                             | calque, potentially through Finnish           |
| ferret(s are ferrets) | tottu kui rottu                | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| flamingo              | flamingo                       | neologism                             | loan                                          |
| footman               | lakei                          | pre-existing word                     | synonymy                                      |
| frontispiece          | kirjan allus olii kuva         | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| gallon(s of tears)    | kui korvos kuadajen            | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| gryphon               | grifonu                        | neologism                             | loan                                          |
| Hatter                | Hatunluadii                    | neologism                             | calque, potentially through Finnish           |
| hearthrug             | kaminan mattoine               | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |
| hookah                | veziippiu                      | neologism                             | calque, potentially through Finnish           |
| housemaid             | palvelii                       | pre-existing word                     | synonymy                                      |
| inkstand              | černilpulloine                 | neologism                             | calque, potentially through Finnish           |
| jack-in-the-box       | vieteriukko                    | neologism                             | calque (or loan), potentially through Finnish |
| jury-box              | suvvonsellittäjien audivo      | other                                 | paraphrase                                    |

|                 |                    |                   |                                              |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| latitude        | leevysgruadussi    | neologism         | calque, potentially through Finnish          |
| livery          | livree             | neologism         | loan                                         |
| longitude       | piduhusgruadussi   | neologism         | calque, potentially through Finnish          |
| lory            | popugailindu       | pre-existing word | hyponymy                                     |
| March Hare      | Kevätjänöi         | neologism         | calque                                       |
| memorandum      | –                  | other             | paraphrase/omission                          |
| Mock Turtle     | Valehsuojusšlöpoi  | neologism         | calque                                       |
| nonsense        | tyhjiä pagizet     | other             | paraphrase                                   |
| parchment       | pergamentu(kiärö)  | neologism         | loan, potentially through Finnish or Russian |
| pennyworth      | –                  | other             | paraphrase/omission                          |
| porpoise        | –                  | other             | paraphrase/omission                          |
| roast turkey    | räkitetty indiekku | other             | paraphrase                                   |
| seaography      | merentiedo         | neologism         | calque                                       |
| sixpence        | kuvvndespenni      | neologism         | calque                                       |
| star-fish       | meritiähti         | neologism         | calque, potentially through Finnish          |
| steam-engine    | höyrymašin         | neologism         | calque, potentially through Finnish          |
| terrier         | terjeru            | neologism         | loan                                         |
| the Antipathies | Antipuatiet        | neologism         | loan                                         |
| treacle-well    | puatokkukaivo      | neologism         | calque                                       |
| tureen          | –                  | other             | paraphrase/omission                          |
| uglification    | pahendus           | neologism         | calque                                       |
| whiting         | tretku             | pre-existing word | near-synonym                                 |
| Wonderland      | Kummanmua          | neologism         | calque                                       |