

For the Symposium A.1 Power imbalance and hierarchies in Finno-Ugric studies

Svetlana Edygarova

University of Helsinki

## **Abstract**

### **Beyond Boundaries: A Cross-Border Perspective on Finno-Ugric Studies**

Finno-Ugric studies originated with the historical-comparative method, which aimed to prove the kinship of Finno-Ugric languages. As Professor Jussi Ylikoski (2023) notes, the goals and objectives of Finno-Ugric studies have largely remained the same to this day. Thanks to researchers from prominent Finno-Ugric research centres in Finland, Hungary, Estonia, Germany, and Austria, Finno-Ugric languages are now well-documented and represented in typological and other linguistic studies worldwide. Specializing in Finno-Ugric languages can lead to a promising academic career, with opportunities for substantial research grants. However, the situation for native speakers and the use of these languages is worsening by the day, with the number of speakers rapidly declining (Prozes 2022, Lallukka forthcoming). Cooperation with native researchers and speakers has gradually decreased since the early 2000s and came to a complete halt in 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In this paper, I aim to answer the question: what can Finno-Ugric studies do to improve the situation of Finno-Ugric languages in Russia? One important approach is to amplify the voices of native speakers, for example, by actively involving them in the research process and through the study of personal experiences. Despite isolation, many native speakers of Finno-Ugric languages, including highly educated and qualified individuals, live in Europe and worldwide today.

Another important aspect is the adoption by scholars of Finno-Ugric languages of indigenous research methodologies and ethical principles when studying Finno-Ugric peoples and languages. These principles include conducting collaborative research projects where native speakers have equal status as research participants, clearly articulating the researcher's positionality, approaching studied communities with respect and responsibility, and providing feedback about the research to the language community (Smith 1999, Kovach 2009). These methodologies have already been successfully applied in Sámi studies (Porsanger & Seurujärvi

2021, Virtanen, Keskitalo & Olsen 2021) and could serve as a valuable model for studying other Finno-Ugric languages.

## References:

- Kovach, Margaret (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lallukka, Seppo (forthcoming). Declining population trajectories: Russia and her Uralic minorities. In Svetlana Edygarova, Outi Tónczos and Magdolna Kovács (eds.). *Readjustment: Reactions to Societal Change in Finno-Ugric Minority Language Communities*. Uralica Helsingiensia, 16.
- Porsanger, Jelena & Seurujärvi-Kari, Irja (2021). Sámi dutkama máttut: The forerunners of Sámi methodological thinking. in Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen, Pigga Keskitalo & Torjer Olsen (eds.). *Indigenous Research Methodologies in Sámi and Global Contexts*. New Research - New Voices, vol. 11. Leiden: Brill. 33-64.
- Prozes, Jaak (2022) Uurali rahvad ja Venemaa 2020. aasta rahvaloendusel. In *Soome-Ugri sõlmed*. Fenno-Ugria: Tallinn. 10–18.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Virtanen, Pirjo Kristiina, Pigga Keskitalo & Torjer Olsen, eds. (2021). *Indigenous Research Methodologies in Sámi and Global Contexts*. New Research–New Voices, vol. 11. Leiden: Brill.
- Ylikoski, Jussi. (2023). Suomalais-ugrilaisesta kielentutkimuksesta ja sen keskeisistä tehtävistä. Suomalais-ugrilaisen seuran aikakausikirja, 99. 349–352.