THE DECLINE OF FINNISH ETHNIC ISLANDS IN RURAL THUNDER BAY

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As the Finns settled around the shores of Lake Superior, they established small, isolated communities ("ethnic islands") where Finnish was generally the only language spoken and where Finnish culture dominated. Today, however, in Northwestern Ontario, the Finnish character of these villages has nearly vanished. Based on field interviews with Finnish-Canadian community members and leaders, and with the interpretive aid of some prominent geolinguistic theories of language maintenance and language shift, the decline of Ontario’s Finnish culture and settlements is examined. Likewise, this paper establishes an approximate time frame and reveals many of the major external reasons, as observed by the local Finns, for the marked decline of their once-thriving ethnic communities.

INTRODUCTION

In Northwestern Ontario, near the shores of Lake Superior, the Finns formed what Noble (1985) has called “rural ethnic islands.” These had relatively small populations, were fairly isolated from other cultural groups, and were ethnically, nearly homogeneous. Finnish culture and language dominated everyday life in these settlements and social organizations, such as temperance societies, political clubs, and Finnish churches, were established which sponsored many community activities including dances, music recitals, plays, picnics, and sporting events (Metsäranta 1989). As Finns took up homesteads and began establishing farms, a unique vernacular landscape was formed which was clearly Finnish in origin. This included such distinctive features as log house styles, saunas, slash-and-burn agricultural practices, and Finnish place names (Rasmussen 1982, 1985, Noble 1983, Kaups 1992).

The isolation of Finns in small, rural forest communities in Northwestern Ontario helped them preserve their language and culture for a time. Today, however, these communities hardly exist, compared with their peak years. Few people in the settlements today claim Finnish ethnicity, few of those can even understand well the language of their grandparents, and most of the settlements’ Finnish dominance has been greatly diluted by non-Finnish immigration (Timothy 1995). This has resulted in a general absence of Finnish vitality and activities that were at one time so well-known in an area where the once-common traditional Finnish landscape and patterns of land use have largely disappeared.

Mention has been made in passing of a decline in the Finnish villages since their most active days in the early 1900s, and a few general reasons such as work, war, and the Depression, have been considered likely causes for this decline (Kouhi et al. 1976, Varjo 1985). However, no research has attempted to identify the main reasons for this decline in greater depth. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold:

1) to examine language shift in the context of rural, isolated Finnish settlements near Thunder Bay in relation to the deterioration of the villages’ Finnish character, and

2) to investigate, in a temporal framework, the main reasons for the decline of Thunder Bay’s rural Finnish settlements.
The first section of this paper provides the historic setting, followed by a discussion of language maintenance and language shift among the Finns. This is followed by an evaluation of community decline and the reasons for it, as disclosed by community members.

FINNISH IMMIGRATION TO NORTH AMERICA

The most significant influx of Finnish migrants to North America began in the 1860s. The majority of Finnish immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s came from the western provinces of Oulu, Vaasa, and Turku ja Pori (central and southern Bothnia and northern Tavastland). This migration from those regions was sparked by a rapidly increasing population and economic instability (Elo 1979, Kero 1969, 1982).

Between 1850 and 1900 Finland's urban population had increased over 200 percent, from 105,496 to 331,200, as a result of industrialization. During the same period, the rural population grew by more than 60 percent, from 1,531,419 to 2,324,700 (Kilpi 1979). This increase was especially apparent in the country's western, coastal provinces (Kolehmainen and Hill 1951, Kero 1974). This extraordinary growth in population decreased each family's arable land; already small farms were divided between tenants into even smaller units which were unable to provide a livelihood for all of their occupants. At the same time, famines and crop failures were plaguing Finland, adding yet another impetus for mass emigration.

Tar burning from coniferous trees was still a major economic activity as late as the 1860s in western and northern Finland. However, when the American Civil War ended, the price of tar dropped drastically, with the result that this major industry was forced to shut down. Many years of tar burning had rendered the forests of those areas virtually useless for lumbering, thus preventing another substantial industry from developing. Since lumbering was such an important business of that era in Finland, this condition aggravated further the severe economic crisis in the same provinces (Kero 1969). Furthermore, shipbuilding, once a source of livelihood for many people on the Gulf of Bothnia, was brought to an end by the late nineteenth century by the advent of steam-powered iron ships (Riippa 1981). With the end of tar burning, lumbering, and shipbuilding, the economy of the area along the Gulf of Bothnia was relegated to the economic periphery of Finland.

As a result of these economic failures, thousands of people departed the rural provinces in search of work in southern Finnish cities. Gradually the word of plentiful job opportunities in America spread through the cities and countryside, so that by the turn of the century, thousands of Finns had left for North America (Kero 1976a, 1976b). The pre-1899 immigrants came primarily from the rural, northern provinces, while most of those after 1900 were from the urban centers and farms of southern Finland (Riippa 1981).

An unstable political situation at the turn of the century also played a major role in the emigration of Finns. Oppressive measures taken by Russia created grim conditions in Finland, including mandatory military conscription, political persecution, and the nullification of Finland's special autonomous status (Kero 1969, 1974). Curiosity, adventure, and escape from rural seclusion were also reasons for young Finns continuing to leave Finland well into the twentieth century (Kilpi 1979). Once the first settlers arrived in North America, they began writing letters to their families and friends, often including enticing information about the great socio-economic conditions in America which included the nearly-unbelievable high wages, cheap land, and plentiful jobs.

In 1864, the Quincy Mining Company of Hancock, Michigan sent recruiters to northern Norway, where there were a number of Finns working in the mines, to solicit laborers for the copper mines of Michigan's upper peninsula. This resulted in the migration of approximately
1000 Finns to the United States during the next twenty years. Between that time and 1980, approximately 343,461 Finns migrated to the United States. From these beginnings, Michigan became the first major center for many Finns who later immigrated to America, and this soon spread to nearby Minnesota and Wisconsin (Alanen 1982).

Three waves of Finnish immigration to Canada have been identified by Laine (1989) and Raivio (1975). The first wave, comprised of approximately 21,220 people, arrived between 1900 and 1919. With the end of the first World War came a marked increase in the number of Finns leaving now-independent Finland for the United States and Canada. From 1920 to 1930, another large wave of Finnish immigration to Canada occurred (Table 1) as a result of the United States’ new immigrant quota policy, which limited the number of immigrants from any one country. After 1930, the number of Finnish immigrants arriving in Canada decreased, owing largely to the Depression. In 1948, however, numbers increased again, with a third wave of Finns comprising approximately 16,386 people between 1951 and 1960 (Table 1). The rapid increase of immigrants to Canada during the 1950s is attributed to the buoyant Canadian economy and the fear of war in Europe at that time (Saarinen 1967, 1981).

## SETTLEMENT IN RURAL THUNDER BAY

With the opening of the Sault Ste. Marie (US) canal in 1855 and the later construction of transcontinental transportation systems passing through the region, economic prospects for Thunder Bay began to rise. With the emergence of Port Arthur as a center for ore transport, the building of road and railway networks became necessary. In 1868, Simon Dawson began a road west from Lake Superior which eventually reached the Red River Settlement. The next year, the annexations to Canada of the prairies north of the 49th parallel promised a land rush like that of the American mid-west (Kouhi et al. 1976). With the development of the Dawson Road, the Thunder Bay area was gradually surveyed and townships were opened for settlement by 1885 (Wightman and Wightman 1992).

In 1882, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), built to connect Winnipeg with Port Arthur, was completed, providing a significant economic boost for the region. With the independence of the new Dominion of Canada, government officials and businessmen viewed the vast western hinterland as a possible source of raw materials and foodstuffs as well as a market for goods produced in the East. In order to develop the potential of the West, a transcontinental railway system and people to settle along it were clearly necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Finns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1897-1900</td>
<td>1,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-1910</td>
<td>12,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1920</td>
<td>9,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1930</td>
<td>36,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1940</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1950</td>
<td>1,228</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>16,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>6,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1980</td>
<td>2,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1990</td>
<td>1,040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Figures prior to 1926 do not include immigrants from the United States

*Figures prior to 1918 are not statistically accurate since many of the Finnish immigrants were classified as either Russian or Swedish

Table 1: Finnish Immigrants to Canada
Consequently, a campaign to solicit immigrants from Europe was introduced by the Canadian government (Kouhi et al. 1976). Fruitless efforts were made in the 1870s and 1880s by Canada to recruit railroad workers in Finland. By the late 1890s, advertisements had been placed in Finnish newspapers by the CPR in a widespread campaign to lure workers to Canada (Kero 1976a). ThunderBay's earliest Finns arrived not from Finland, but from the United States in 1876, after hearing about the proposed railway. Many more, however, arrived later, around 1882, when the CPR line itself finally reached Port Arthur from Winnipeg (Kouhi 1976, Van Cleef 1952). Prior to 1920, most Finns who came to Canada in search of work arrived from areas of heavy Finnish population in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin (Alanen 1982). However they were likely first-generation immigrants, given the recent arrival of most Finns directly from Finland to the Upper Great Lakes states. After 1920 most immigrants came directly from Finland.

Settling most often in the growing urban center, most of the earliest Finns were employed in the region's numerous mines and lumber camps as well as in the construction of the CPR and the Port Arthur, Duluth and Western Railroad, which followed a southwesterly route from Fort William into the United States (Minnesota). Logging and mining were jobs considered well-suited for Finns since many of them had arrived in Canada as highly-skilled woodsmen and physical laborers, based on their previous
experience in Finland (Radforth 1981, Seager 1981).

Only after most of the work on the railways and roads was completed, around the turn of the century, did Finns begin purchasing pieces of land for farming (Varjo 1985). In addition to clearing their own land, some settlers continued to work in road construction and in the mines. The location of their farms was usually determined by their proximity to lumbering, mining, and road construction (Lindstrom-Best 1981a). Most of the immigrants who arrived prior to 1900 were familiar with agricultural lifestyles, since many of them were farmers from the western provinces of Finland.

As a result of Port Arthur's Finns being struck with “land fever,” the early years of the twentieth century saw a dramatic increase in rural settlement. Consequently, Finns settled in nearly every township in the vicinity of Port Arthur and Fort William. The largest concentrations, however, were in the townships along the Port Arthur and Duluth Railroad, including Gillies, Marks, Lybster, Strange, Pearson, and Devon, as well as in the northern townships of Gorham and Ware, and in McIntyre, Oliver, Dawson Road Lots, Conmee, and Forbes townships along the Dawson Road. These settlements came to have names like Tarmola, Lappe, Kivikoski, North Branch, Intola, Ostola, Miller, Alppila, Kaministiquia, Pohjola, Sunshine, Leeper, Sellars, Nolalu, Suomi, Toimela, Pearson, and Devon (Canadian Uutiset 1921, Kouhi et al., 1976) (Figure 1). These communities, most of them established between 1900 and 1915, continued to grow until the mid-1930s. The time of most notable growth in Thunder Bay's Finnish community was the period from 1920 to 1930, during which, the Finnish population nearly doubled (Table 2). On the provincial level, the Finnish population nearly tripled during the same period (Table 2).

This growth is largely owing to political and economic instability in Finland soon after its independence in 1917. Shortly after independence, numerous supporters of the Red regime fled Finland to escape imprisonment and execution (Kero, 1974, Rippa, 1981). Many of these refugees settled in Northwestern Ontario. This influx of immigrants is especially apparent in many of the rural communities surrounding Thunder Bay, where Finnish political radicals attempted to mobilize fellow nationals, and were successful in establishing strong socialist community organizations (Kouhi et al., 1976). The rapid population growth is also attributed to the United States' 1920 immigration quota law, mentioned previously. The law limited the number of Finnish immigrants to the United States to about 560 per year. Consequently, Finnish immigration to the US decreased, so that the main flow after 1920 was directed to Thunder Bay and other parts of Canada (Aaltio1969, Virtanen 1976).

It was necessary, for practical reasons, to limit the research area to four hamlets on the rural fringe of Thunder Bay, all of which lie within townships whose populations were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>Thunder Bay District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>3,328</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>9,301</td>
<td>5,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>27,137</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>26,827</td>
<td>9,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>29,327</td>
<td>9,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>39,906</td>
<td>12,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>38,515</td>
<td>11,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>33,400</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>25,470</td>
<td>5,805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of Canada, 1921-1991

Table 2: Finns in Ontario and the Thunder Bay District
nearly 100 percent Finnish during the early part of the century (Table 3).
Lappe was chosen for its previous social and cultural significance in the area, especially as respects its Lutheran church, as well as for its relative proximity to Thunder Bay. Kivikoski, another village northwest of the city, was well-known for its active role in Finnish left-wing political movements. These two settlements are located near the Dawson Road, which was a major transportation and communications axis in the early part of the twentieth century. Nolalu and Suomi were selected as the other two study areas because of their more distant location from the Lakehead and their previous importance along the Port Arthur-Duluth Railroad to the southwest of the city. It is considered that these four communities are sufficiently representative of all the once-thriving Finnish villages in the area, and were selected for close study from available information about their social significance among the Finns in the early 1900s.

RESEARCH METHODS

Using a consistent set of open-ended questions, personal interviews with some 40 local key informants (e.g., church leaders, storekeepers, and life-long Finnish residents), who are familiar with the history and development of the settlements, were conducted in the four villages (Lappe, Kivikoski, Suomi, and Nolalu), as well as in Thunder Bay with former residents of the four communities. The interviewees, who were found with the assistance of local contacts, were asked about village and language decline, when such decline occurred, and factors to which they attribute the decline such as road improvements and communication innovations. Much of this information was checked against census data, since using more than one technique in the acquisition of evidence allows for cross-checking of findings, which assures greater reliability. Participants were also asked about contemporary community functions and ethnic activities. Non-referenced material in this paper is based on these field investigations.

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Fishman (1991) has suggested that where a minority ethnolinguistic group is sufficiently intact to protect its cultural boundaries, it will institute a defence of its mother tongue. He says that where such socio-cultural counterparts to political boundaries are in place, even small minorities can achieve intergenerational mother-tongue continuity. Similarly, Kloss (1966) discussed the following six factors which he suggested contribute to the successful maintenance of ethnolinguistic groups in North America:

1) religio-societal insulation;
2) time of immigration: earlier than, or simultaneously with, the first Anglo-Americans;
3) existence of language islands;
4) affiliation with denominations fostering parochial schools;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Finns</th>
<th>Percent Finns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ware</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lybster</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strange</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of Canada, 1921

Table 3: 1921 Populations of the Examined Rural Finnish Townships
5) pre-immigration experience with language maintenance efforts;

6) former use as the only official tongue during pre-Anglo-American period (Kloss 1966: 207).

According to Kloss, religio-societal insulation occurs when members of a group separate themselves from the rest of the world and build up a self-reliant community which rejects most modern innovations and tenets of their surrounding social groups. By secluding themselves, they succeed in keeping their ancestral tongue alive. Factor two (time of immigration) is important according to Kloss, because it refers to the continuity of residence and/or priority of colonization. It seems that Anglo-Americans have shown more respect to those groups whose history in America dates back at least as far as their own. He points out that legislation pertaining to non-English language groups has been much more liberal towards older minorities.

The third consideration, the existence of language islands, is also attributed to the successful retention of language. Kloss (1966: 207) defined language islands as “circumscribed territories where the minority tongue is the principal tongue used in daily conversation by at least four fifths of the inhabitants.” The larger the island, the greater its ability to withstand assimilation. Kloss further defines two functional categories of language islands:

1) islands that are large enough or isolated enough to preserve their language effortlessly;

2) smaller islands which face the possibility of absorption by the surrounding majority tongue unless efforts at maintenance are devised.

In the fourth place, Kloss suggests that language groups which belong to religious denominations that set up their own schools and encourage natal language use have a much better chance of preserving their linguistic identity. His fifth consideration entails having skills that can assist a group in preserving its language, while his sixth factor refers to the prestige remaining from certain former linguistic monopolies in North America in which non-English-speaking imperial powers preceded the Anglo-Americans, as in a number of US states.

The Finnish experience investigated here does not fit Kloss’ rather idealistic model. The Finns were indeed sufficiently isolated in the beginning to enable them to preserve their culture for a number of years; however, according to local residents, although modernization did arrive slightly later in the villages than it did in the city, they had no intention of becoming totally self-reliant and of resisting new innovations.

Compared to most other European groups, Finns were quite late in immigrating to North America. Since they were not one of the early groups to arrive prior to or simultaneously with the first Anglo-Americans, they received no exceptional consideration regarding their language and culture. Public schools, for example, were taught in English only. Although the Finnish ethnic islands around Thunder Bay fit Kloss’ definition of language islands, they were quite small, too small, seemingly, to withstand assimilation. Most of these communities had populations of less than 200 during their peak of activity in the 1920s and 1930s (Kouhi et al. 1976). Some maintenance efforts, such as Finnish-language newspapers, language courses for young people, debates, plays, and poetry and music recitals (Jalava 1981, Laine 1981, Lindstrom-Best 1981b, Kähärä 1989), were employed by temperance societies, cultural clubs, political clubs, and churches, but these did not ensure linguistic preservation. Furthermore, the communities themselves were not sufficiently isolated for a long enough time, owing to transportation and communication developments, to develop a resistance to acculturation.
Outside of urban Thunder Bay, churches were only built in the villages of Lappe and Nolalu. As Nolalu's church was abandoned shortly after its establishment in the early 1930s, only Lappe had a Finnish church to provide a continuing means for maintaining the Finnish language. The church was often a center of activity for both members and non-members. Through Finnish language worship services, Sunday schools, youth activities, picnics, choirs, sewing bees, and bazaars, the Lappe Lutheran Church functioned as a strong link for maintaining the Finnish language and culture (Danton 1992, Varjo 1985). Christmas and summer festivities have been carried out since the church was built, all of which have been Finnish in character (Repo and Maunula 1977). No other villages had such an organization, and even Lappe's church is now attempting to change its reputation as a Finnish church to a regular Lutheran church which anyone can attend. According to the Pastor of the Lappe church, Sunday services were held only in Finnish until 1970. Since then, services have been held two times: the first in Finnish and the second in English.

Although Finnish was not considered the "official" language of Finland until the twentieth century, the majority of the population there spoke Finnish and probably did not feel that their language was threatened. (It is unclear whether or not language maintenance efforts were practiced prior to the Finns' immigration to North America.) Since Finnish was never used as the official language in any part of North America before the arrival of English-speaking settlers, Kloss' sixth consideration cannot be applied to the Finnish situation either.

According to Kloss' model, therefore, it is clear why Northwestern Ontario's Finnish villages have today ceased to remain completely or even predominantly Finnish. However, at this point it is also important to look at some specific causes of the decline in the use of the Finnish language and the degeneration of the Finnish ethnic islands.

**LANGUAGE SHIFT**

Language shift, according to Williams (1980: 213), is "the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another." Durkacz (1983) suggested that this process comprises two stages:

1. the decline of first-language monolingualism into bilingualism and
2. the drift from bilingualism into intrusive-language monolingualism.

Tosi (1984), from extensive studies of language change and bilingualism among urban Italian immigrants, suggests that since Italian is the only language spoken at home by first-generation immigrants with their children, it necessarily becomes the language most depended on by the children in the home. However, when children begin attending school, they begin unself-consciously to switch to English and usually speak English with friends and with their siblings at home; it is common among second-generation Italian youngsters to begin speaking English with their parents at home by the time they reach their early teens. Child (1970) studied urban Italians in America and concluded that second-generation immigrants are neither typically Italian nor totally assimilated into mainstream American society. However, Tosi (1984) implies that these second-generation immigrants are more integrated into the host society than they are with the old one in that they are much more socially articulate and more aggressive than their parents. This is due to their formative experience in the fast-paced western world and their ignorance of the immobility of rural life from which their parents came; the young people draw from the modernism of urban life motivation for their social and economic enthusiasms.

Although little research has been conducted on isolated, rural ethnic islands, a great deal has been done concerning linguistic change within urban language islands and its causes.
Economic conditions are most often blamed for loss of original language as the new vernacular, usually viewed as the language of commerce, progress, and prosperity, leads young people to want to speak it instead of their mother tongue and often results in an out-migration of younger people in search of work (Williams 1980, Durkacz 1983). Scully (1977) focused his study on intermarriage between Welsh and English people as a reason for the decline of the Welsh language. He concluded that intermarriages often result in monoglot English children and a general decrease in the Welsh-speaking population, because when a Welsh person marries an English person, English tends to become the language spoken at home. State education has also been blamed as one of the major causes of language shift (Thomas and Williams 1978, Williams 1980, Durkacz 1983). As state schools become established in areas where ethnic islands exist, children are required to attend them, and by so doing, often learn the new language as well as, or better than, they know the old one.

Field investigations show that the Finns in Northwestern Ontario have experienced a similar pattern of language shift as discussed above by Durkacz (1983). Many first-generation Finns did not learn English at all, even after living in Canada most of their lives, though many did. The 1921 census reveals that 23.7 percent of first-generation Finns in Ontario were unable to speak English, but this decreased to 8.8 percent by 1941 and to 3.0 percent in 1991. Second-generation Finns in the Thunder Bay villages whose mother tongue is Finnish learned English quite well, usually in school, and became bilingual through their dealings with non-Finns. Again, according to the 1921 census, only 2.8 percent of Ontario's Finns who were born in Canada and over 10 years old were unable to speak English. However, unlike the urban Italians studied by Child (1970) and Tosi (1984), and even unlike the urban Finns in British Columbia and Canada's Atlantic Provinces (Roimila 1992a, 1992b, 1993), older second-generation Finns from rural Thunder Bay would probably consider themselves more Finnish than Canadian and they tend to feel more confident, or at least more comfortable, speaking Finnish rather than English. This difference is probably owing in part to the isolated nature of the settlements where outside contact was minimal far into the twentieth century. It is in the third generation that the drift generally occurs from bilingualism into intrusive-language monolingualism. In other words, those Canadians who were born in Finland and migrated as adults were usually only able to speak Finnish at first, and relatively few ever learned English well. Their children grew up speaking Finnish at home, but learned English at school and by associating with the English-speaking society around them. The grandchildren of the immigrants generally do not speak Finnish but can usually understand a few words they may have learned from their parents or grandparents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Finns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1901</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>9,077</td>
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<td>1931</td>
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<td>1951</td>
<td>23,417</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>31,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>26,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>23,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>18,805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of Canada, 1901-1991

Table 4: Number of Ontario Residents with Finnish as Their Mother Tongue
Since the period of highest Finnish immigration to Canada occurred from 1920 to 1930, these immigrants' children (the bilingual generation) would have likely been born during the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. The children of that cohort were the first monoglot English-speaking generation, and were probably born during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Table 4 lends limited support to this suggestion. The period from 1920 to 1930 experienced a rapid growth of people claiming Finnish as their mother tongue. However, there was a decrease in this after 1931 until 1951, when the third large wave of Finnish immigrants arrived, due to good economic conditions in Canada and the threat of war in Europe, as mentioned above. Since the end of the 1950s influx of immigrants, however, there has been a notable decline in people claiming Finnish as their mother tongue.

**REASONS FOR FINNISH LANGUAGE SHIFT**

Several reasons have been identified by Finnish-Canadians as causes of such rapid language shift. School, mentioned above, is the main reason cited for the shift from monolingualism into bilingualism. As children were required to speak only English at school, they learned the language relatively well even though they usually spoke Finnish with friends and schoolmates, siblings, and parents.

All participants agreed that the advent of radio, television, and telephone services to the rural settlements played an important part in the shift to bilingualism and was one of the most important factors in bringing about the change from bilingualism to English monolingualism since these new innovations provided a widespread exposure to English-language entertainment. Apparently, television service became available in Lappe, Kivikoski, Suomi, and Nolalu in the mid-1950s, approximately 1955. Telephone installment services, however, were available in Lappe and Kivikoski in the 1960s, in Nolalu in the late 1950s, and in Suomi as recently as the early 1980s.

If the general observations from Table 4 are true, as a number of the Finns themselves agree, some kind of relationship appears to exist between the arrival of new communications innovations and language shift. It can probably be said that radio, television, and telephones did play a large part in the development of the bilingual condition of second-generation Finns and the English monoglot status of their children.

Interruption between Finns and non-Finns is another reason identified for Finnish language decline. Most early immigrants were young men who had come to North America in search of work (Virtanen 1976), and there appears to have always been a higher number of male Finnish immigrants in Ontario than females, although many of the post-1900 immigrants were women. In 1921, for example, the census reported 5,391 male Finns in Ontario, in contrast to 3,910 females. However, in 1961 this gap had narrowed to 20,225 men and 19,681 women. The earlier imbalance is important to recognize, since it helps to explain the necessity of exogenous marriages, which contributed to language decline. However, exogenous marriages were not limited to men. It was not uncommon for young Finnish women to marry outside the Finnish community, usually as a result of working and attending school in Port Arthur and Fort William. As in the Welsh case cited above, when this type of marriage occurred, English was generally the language spoken at home. This was especially the case when intermarriage entailed moving away from the Finnish community.

The social decline of the Finnish ethnic islands in the Thunder Bay area may also be seen as a major reason for language shift. Through the years, as the rural communities and their activities became increasingly less and less Finnish in character, language use, which so many of the activities had served to preserve, began to decline.
EXTERNAL CAUSES OF FINNISH ETHNIC ISLAND DECLINE

Figure 2 illustrates the main reasons identified by Canadian Finns for the decline of their rural communities near Thunder Bay and provides a relative time frame for these occurrences. One of the main reasons cited for the decline in the village of Suomi specifically, was the occurrence of several forest fires in the area during the 1920s and 30s. One fire in 1924 destroyed the Whitefish River bridge on which the Finns heavily depended for transportation of people and goods (a gravel road was not completed to Suomi until 1931) (Kouhi et al., 1976). Furthermore, a forest fire in 1932 destroyed most of the timber in Strange Township, which was the main source of livelihood for many people in that area. It is thought by locals that this was the main reason Suomi experienced its decline much more severely than most of the other villages. After the fires, many people left the countryside to find work in the city. A few people stayed and continued to farm, but they were generally older settlers who did not feel they had a chance of finding work in town.

For many years the Port Arthur-Duluth Railroad provided biweekly services to Nolalu and Suomi, but by 1934 the trains had stopped running. Once again Finns found employment on the railways in 1934-35 in the area of Suomi and Nolalu; however, this time their task was to pull up the tracks, the very ones they had helped to construct just a few decades earlier. The removal of the railway, coupled with the forest fires, made Suomi’s decline much more acute than that of the other Finnish settlements. These two unfortunate events in Suomi and the railway closing in Nolalu are probably the largest contributors to those two villages’ rapid decline beginning as early as the 1930s. When the main sources of income and product transportation were terminated, most Finns were forced to resettle in Thunder Bay and other urban areas where jobs were becoming available in newly developing industries.

The decline in Lappe and Kivikoski began slightly later than in the southern settlements owing to the absence of a single major emigration-causing event. The government instituted new pasteurization regulations for dairy farmers in 1929; however, in most cases this was not considered a cause for emigration from the villages. Instead, it served to unite local dairy farmers in co-operative efforts to reduce production costs.

Several other reasons for village decline in all settlements were revealed by Finnish residents, the most common being the economy. Beginning with the Great

![Figure 2: The Temporal Framework and Major Reasons for the Decline of Finnish Settlements in Rural Thunder Bay](image-url)
Depression, many Finnish men and women moved to the city where work was sometimes available. As time went on, more and more young people moved to the urban center for work since this proved more profitable than farming the infertile soils of the Lakehead. Literally thousands of second- and third-generation Finns abandoned village life for more secure employment in Thunder Bay and other Canadian cities. Generally, however, first-generation Finns stayed with the land they had cleared and farmed for many years. These earliest immigrants have mostly passed away, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to locate first-generation Finns.

Education was also a reason for this general rural to urban migration. The rural villages, while often well-equipped with primary schools, were lacking in institutions for secondary education. As a result, all the young people who wanted an education beyond grade six were required to study in Thunder Bay. Many young Finns chose this route and left the villages to board in the city and commute to the countryside only on occasion. This, along with work in the city, often brought about intermarriage between Finns and non-Finns and usually resulted in the permanent resettlement of villagers to other areas.

With the onset of World War II, many young Finnish-Canadian soldiers were assigned to the battle fronts in the early 1940s. This is believed a major reason for Finnish ethnic island decline, because, although some men were killed, many who experienced life outside these secluded settlements had no desire to return to the countryside on a permanent basis; a significant number of them dissociated themselves from the villages. These factors are probably most important in causing young male Finns to leave the villages, thereby bringing about a significant drain in the local population.

Thus, the population decline in Nolalu and Suomi, which began in the 1930s, continued to progress as the same factors mentioned above also occurred there. Although several people had left Lappe and Kivikoski during the Depression, their most notable decline began in the mid-1940s. In the 1930s and early 40s, Kivikoski had still been considered a thriving socialist community with most of its activities focused on the Red Hall. However, village life slowed down during the 1950s and the hall was shut down by 1960, at which time the Finnish activities and societies ended. Even the school at Kivikoski was closed around 1957 because there were not enough young people left in the village to keep it open. The 1940s saw a similarly diminishing Finnish community in Lappe, and the hall there was also shut down in the late 1950s owing to a lack of patronage.

Again, the introduction of television corresponds temporally with the most rapid decline in the Finnish villages. Community members and leaders were asked whether television had any effects on the decline of Finnish activities and society in the villages. Although they had not systematically considered this at the time, everyone agreed that when television arrived, it tended to replace traditional entertainment; many people began staying home in the evenings to watch TV instead of going to community-sponsored activities.

The first automobile arrived in Suomi only around 1929. Nolalu's first car had come about 1922, while automobiles had arrived in Kivikoski and Lappe sometime before 1924. At that time, however, the roads from Thunder Bay to the villages were made of gravel and were often difficult to travel during rainy periods. The roads from the Lakehead to Nolalu and Suomi, and to Kivikoski and Lappe remained unimproved until the 1950s, when tar was spread over the gravel. According to Ministry of Transportation maps (1976/1982), the road to Nolalu and Suomi (Highway 588) was paved in 1975, and the road to Kivikoski and Lappe (Highway 589) was finally paved in 1981.

The Finns agree that road improvements in the 1950s were partially responsible for the loss of rural "Finnishness" since they made it easier to travel to the city for shopping and
entertainment. However, several people also acknowledged that road improvements and finally road pavement were as much a reason for non-Finns moving to the countryside during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s as it was for Finns moving out. This general non-Finnish "dilution" appears to have been the most influential reason for the decline of Finnish ethnicity in rural Thunder Bay in the past thirty years.

CONCLUSIONS

The rural Finns in Northwestern Ontario have experienced a process commonly known as "language shift".

1) the decline of first-language monolingualism into bilingualism and

2) the drift from bilingualism into intrusive-language monolingualism.

Owing in part to physical isolation, language use in these villages was well preserved for two generations (until about the 1950s). The Finnish experience has shown that first-generation Finns often remained a monoglot Finnish-speaking population since learning English was not requisite to survival in the rural settlements. Second-generation immigrants usually spoke only Finnish prior to attending school. The later introduction of radio, television, and telephones to the villages brought about a change to bilingualism within the second generation as these innovations boosted interaction (including intermarriage) with non-Finns. The third-generation is where the slide generally occurs from bilingualism to English monolingualism; however, most younger-generation Finnish Canadians usually understand a few words they have learned from their parents and grandparents.

As for village decline, a number of reasons have been identified for the demise of the once-active Finnish settlements around Thunder Bay. The decline in the villages of Suomi and Nolalu began as early as the 1930s owing to a number of devastating forest fires which, with the termination of the local railway, brought an end to the livelihood of many residents.

As a result of World War II, education in the city, and intermarriage, emigration of young people from the villages became common practice in most settlements during the 1930s and 40s. The introduction of radio and television to the villages during the 1940s and 50s replaced local entertainment with English-language programs.

Road improvements during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s not only allowed easier access for Finns to the city by decreasing the degree of rural isolation, they contributed to a "dilution" of non-Finnish ethnicity by allowing other ethnicities easier access to the countryside. Though several other minor incidents at a much more local level may have contributed to the decline of some Finnish communities, the events of the past 50 years outlined here have nearly spelled an end to the once-thriving Finnish villages in rural Thunder Bay.

REFERENCES


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