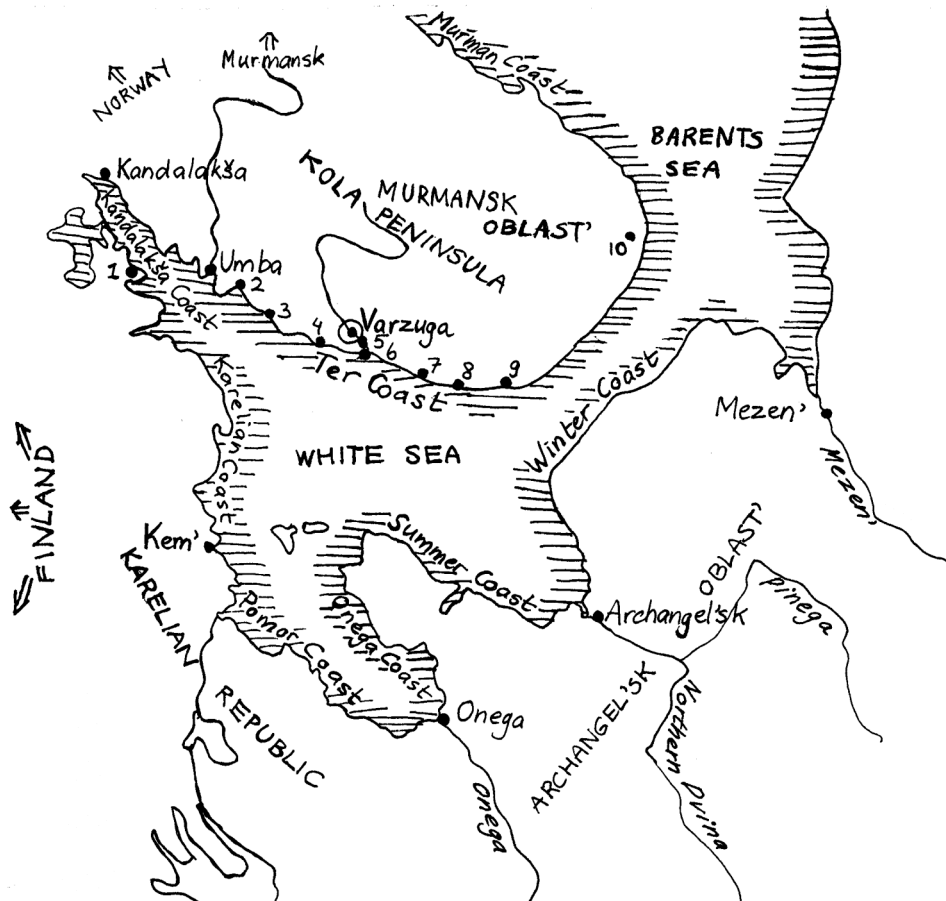


MARGJE POST

## **The Position of the Dialect of Varzuga in the Russian Dialect Landscape**

Until recently, few researchers had studied the archaic Russian dialects of the Kola Peninsula. In 2001 and 2004, slavists from the University of Tromsø carried out dialectological field work on the Ter Coast of Kola Peninsula. On our first expedition we were joined by colleagues from Moscow. In 2004, the universities of Tromsø and Bochum received funding from NFR (Norway) and DAAD (Germany) to set up a cooperation project for the study of the endangered Russian dialects around the White Sea. This autumn, dr. Christian Sappok from Bochum University combined his visit to Tromsø with a joint field work expedition to the villages of Varzuga and Kuzomen' on the Ter Coast. Our studies have so far resulted in a Master's thesis (Pétursdóttir 2003) and a range of short articles, part of which has been published in this journal (vols. 4, 5 and the present volume). In due course I hope to finish my PhD dissertation about the dialect of the village of Varzuga.

In the present article I will discuss the position of the Varzuga dialect in the Russian dialect landscape. Comparisons between dialects tell us how a dialect relates to other dialects: how isolated it is, and which dialects it is most closely related to. Areal linguistic studies also give information about the historical ties of the dialect and its speakers to other regions and about their cultural background. The people of Varzuga and the other villages around the White Coast lived relatively isolated from the rest of the Russian world, and their closeness to the sea, their contact with different cultures and the poor conditions for agriculture led to the development of a distinct coastal, Pomor culture. Although the Pomors consider themselves to be Russians, they are hardly part of Russia: in the conception of the *Varzužans*, *Rossija* is 'the land behind Karelia'. In this article I will try to answer the question whether these conditions led to the development of a distinct dialect.



The White Sea area.

1 = Kóvda; 2 = Kúzreka; 3 = Olénica; 4 = Kaškarány; 5 = Kúzomen'; 6 = Ust'-Várzugi; 7 = Čávan'ga; 8 = Tétrino; 9 = Čápoma; 10 = Ponój.

In the first classification of the Eastern Slavic dialects (Дурново et al. 1915), the dialects of the Kola Peninsula were classified under the Pomor group of the Northern Great-Russian macrodialect (*северно-великорусское наречие*). This dialect group was alternatively called the Northern or Archangel'sk group. Later dialect-geographical classifications, the *Russian Dialect Atlas* (ДАРЯ) and the *All-Slavic Linguistic Atlas* (ОЛА), do not cover the Kola Peninsula. The ДАРЯ only covers the core Russian area, which was settled by Russians before the 15th century, when the main Russian dialectal differences had emerged. Many regions

which were settled in later centuries got a mixed population with different dialectal backgrounds, which would result in chaotic dialect maps.

This article gives the results of a limited dialect-geographical study of dialectal characteristics which were attested on our recent recordings from the village of Varzuga. Most of these recordings consist of free conversation of speakers born between 1912 and 1937. Since we did not work with questionnaires, some dialectal characteristics might not have been recorded. I did not study the spread of the characteristics in Siberia. My main sources for the geographical spread of grammatical and phonological characteristics are ДАРЯ, Аванесов 1949, Касаткин et al. 1989, Пожарицкая 1997 and Гецова 1997. For the study of the distribution of some 50 dialectal words I mainly used Подвысотский 1885, *Словарь русских народных говоров (СРНГ)*, *Словарь русских говоров Карелии и сопредельных областей*, Меркурьев 1997 and ДАРЯ III. I had very limited access to *Архангельский областной словарь (АОС)*. In case I used other sources, this will be indicated. The term *dialectal word* is used in its narrow sense for words which are not common for all varieties of Russian, but are geographically restricted in form and/or meaning.

My studies show that the dialect smoothly fits into the Russian language landscape: there is a clear positive correlation between geographical proximity to Varzuga and the chance that the characteristic is shared with the Varzuga dialect. Most characteristics are found in the neighbouring regions as well, and only in exceptional cases a phenomenon or word is exclusively attested in an area which is far away from Varzuga.

Below I will give examples of dialectal characteristics, ranging from those with a large distribution to a dialectal word which is exclusively used in the village of Varzuga.

The dialect of Varzuga has typical Northern Russian characteristics, such as the distinction of the phonemes /o/ and /a/ after hard consonants in unstressed position (*polnoe okan'e*), plosive [g], personal pronouns in <a> in the first and second person singular and the reflexive form (*меня, тебя, себя*),<sup>1</sup> verb endings in the third person of the present tense in <t> and third person plural endings with an <a> (*любят* 'they love'), the loss of <j> and vowel assimilation in certain nominal and verbal endings, like

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<sup>1</sup> The dialectal forms are given in Standard Russian orthography.

*другу́* 'other' F.acc.sg. (cf. Standard Russian *другую*) and *знам* 'we know' (cf. Standard Russian *знаем*), and words like *кваши́ня* for 'kneading trough' and *ухва́т* for 'oven fork'. These are all phenomena which are found all over northern Russia.

The isoglosses of some characteristics are situated further to the north, crossing the Leningrad and Vologda *oblasti*, and sometimes the Novgorod *oblast'*. Examples are final use of the connectives *да* and *дак*<sup>2</sup> and words like *сэ́йгод* 'this year', *мох* in the meaning 'marshland' and the Balto-Finnic loanwords *ля́га* 'pool, puddle', *ня́ша* 'mud' and *ма́кса* 'fish liver'.

The word *ма́кса* is a good example of how the meaning of a word can develop in different directions in different languages and dialects. In the Balto-Finnic languages the word had the general meaning 'liver'; in most Russian dialects where this word is used, it has a more specific meaning: it means 'fish liver', or even the liver of a specific kind of fish. Because of the high fat percentage of fish liver, the word *ма́кса* was in some places used for the beestings, the first milk of a cow after giving birth (МЫЗНИКОВ 2003a:175 and 2003b:66-69). In Varzuga, we recorded the form *ма́косок*, gen.pl. of the variant form *ма́коски*, in the meaning 'fish liver'. We were told that *ма́кса* was also used (cf. Меркурьев 1997). Myznikov attested the word *ма́кса* in the Ter region in the additional meaning 'clot of blood' (МЫЗНИКОВ 2003b:67).

We have to get even further northwards to find the isoglosses of e.g. differentiation of dative and instrumental plural endings,<sup>3</sup> of second person plural endings of the present tense (and simple future) in stressed <é> like *пойди́те* 'you (pl.) will come' and of soft *сокан'е*. Soft *сокан'е* (*мягкое цоканье*) is the merger of the two affricates \*č' and \*c' into palatalised (soft) [c'], such as in the Varzugan examples *ко́льця* 'rings' and *вэ́чьно* 'eternal' (cf. Standard Russian *кольца* and *вечно*).

In an east-west perspective, Varzuga takes an intermediate position, having both western and eastern traits.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. map nr. 8 in Кузьмина 1993:185.

<sup>3</sup> Dative and Instrumental plural have merged into a single ending (<ам> for nouns; <им> for other nominals) in the Northern Russian dialects further south and south-east (ДАРЯ II, maps 41 and 51).

Eastern characteristics are the use of the word *лопотина* or *лопатина* for 'clothing' and *зѣбка* for 'cradle'. Both words are used in about half of European Russia. ДАРЯ III, map nr. 22 shows that the word *зѣбка* 'cradle' is used in the northeastern half of European Russia; the isogloss is drawn just east of Moscow. The other, western half mainly uses *люлька*.

Restricted to the north-east are the use of variants of the particle *-то*, stressed endings for infinitives with a stem in a velar (*неки́й*) and the absence of [a] in stressed position between soft consonants, like in *опѣть* (cf. Standard Russian *опять* 'again').

A characteristic which places Varzuga in an intermediate zone between east and west is the relatively widespread use of the preposition *с* 'from' where eastern dialects use *из* (*с Умбы* 'from Umba'). However, dialects further to the west do not use the preposition *из* at all.

Northwestern characteristics are, for instance, the word *платѣ* for 'bed linen; laundry'<sup>4</sup> and *мякина* (*мекина*) for the leaves of root vegetables.<sup>5</sup> The frequent predicative use of passive past participles and the use of *y*-phrases in these constructions to denote the agent of the action is also a characteristic of the northwestern area (Трубинский 1984). An example from Varzuga is *у Настѣ привезѣн был* 'Nastja had brought him (= the cat)'. Its use is most extended in the west, where it is also used with intransitive verbs (like *у меня ѱйдено* 'I have (had) left') and where there is usually no agreement between participle and grammatical subject. Consequent agreement of verb and subject and the absence of passive participles of intransitive verbs in our data from Varzuga show that the dialect is not situated far to the west.

Typical for the far north-west and north are words like *рѣститъ* in the meaning 'to bring up children', *нѣшатъ* for digging a hole through the ice on a river or lake, and *скать* in the meaning 'to roll out dough' or 'to bake pies'. The form *бруска* for 'red whortleberry' has – apart from on Kola Peninsula – only been found in the Novgorod *oblast'* and in the

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<sup>4</sup> The word *платѣ*, *платѣ* in the meaning 'bed linen' (cf. Standard Russian *бельѣ*) is used in North-Western and Western Russia and in many Siberian dialects.

<sup>5</sup> The word *мякина* has been attested as far south as the Pskov, Smolensk and Tver' *oblasti*, but not in the Vologda *oblast'* in the north-east.

intermediate area, in Karelia and the former Olonec *gubernija*. It is a rare example of a word which has been attested at some distance from Varzuga, but not in the Archangel'sk dialects: *бру́ска* is not mentioned in *AOC*, which is a very large dictionary.

Many traits and words are only shared with the areas around the White Sea, i.e. with the Northern Archangel'sk dialects and the Russian dialects of Northern Karelia. The Archangel'sk dialects have been studied extensively. Most of the characteristics found in our corpus are also common in the Archangel'sk dialects (Гецова 1997; Касаткина et al. 1989). Gecova mentions traits which differentiate the northern from the southern part of the Archangel'sk dialects (Гецова 1997:156-162). Interestingly, in all but one of the mentioned features which are found in our material, the Varzuga dialect joins the Northern Archangel'sk dialects:

Feature	Northern Archangel'sk	Southern Archangel'sk
1 Comparatives	<i>белее, белей, белé</i>	<i>беляе, беляй, беля́</i>
2 Dat.sg. of I decl.	<i>к женьí</i>	<i>к женé</i>
3 Loc.sg. of II decl.	<i>на столí, на дн́и</i>	<i>на столé, на днé</i>
4 Loc.sg. of III decl.	<i>в печí</i>	<i>в печé</i>
5 'Pie with fish'	<i>кулеба́ка + ры́бник</i>	<i>ры́бник</i>
6 Instr. pl.	<ми> in nouns; <ма> only in other nominals: <i>с мо́йма бéльма</i>	<ма> in nouns only

As to the last characteristic, the dialect of Varzuga is different from all Archangel'sk dialects. In the dialect of Varzuga, Instr. pl. endings in <ма> are recorded for all nominals, and the alternative ending for nouns in hard <ами> [amɨ] links the dialect not to the east, but to the south: apart from on Kola Peninsula, this form is typical for the Russian dialects of Karelia only.<sup>6</sup>

The pronunciation of former \*ě as [e] and not [i] in most positions, even in unstressed syllables, is shared with only part of the Archangel'sk dialects, including the nearby Winter Coast and the far north of the area. Remarkably, the merger of \*ě, \*e and \*a into [e] in the first pretonic

<sup>6</sup> This accounts for Northern Russia; the ending <ам'и> has also been attested at a few places in Southern Russia; cf. Пожарицкая 2001; see also Пинеда 2002.

syllable between soft consonants, which the dialect of Varzuga shares with northern Archangel'sk dialects (Пожарицкая 1997:41-42), is not found in any dialect covered by ДАРЯ (cf. ДАРЯ I, map nr. 3).

Gecova also mentions some isoglosses which divide the eastern from the western Archangel'sk dialects. The Varzuga dialect follows the Western Archangel'sk dialects in using the word *калитка* for open pies made without yeast and *шаньга* for pies with yeast; in the eastern part of the Archangel'sk dialects, the word *шаньга* is used for both types (Гецова 1997:165).

Words which have been attested only around the White Sea are for example *ка́рбас*, a type of boat which can be used on sea,<sup>7</sup> the word *но́р-вэ́г*,<sup>8</sup> the wind names *обэ́дник*, *побере́жник*, *полу́ночник* and *заси́верка*, *прола́* for 'ice-hole'<sup>10</sup> and *кулеба́ка* in the meaning 'open pie filled with fish'. This last word deserves some comments. It is in this meaning – pie filled with fish – also used in Pečora, further to the north-east, also along the coast. In this case, only the form and meaning are restricted to a small area: *кулеба́ка*, or its variant *кулеба́ка*, occurs in many other dialects as well, but with different meanings, e.g. a pie with other fillings than fish. Finally, *ка́лги* are skis with a fur coating in the western part of the White

<sup>7</sup> The word has also been attested certain places in Siberia, and in the Vologda region, but apparently in a certain expression only.

<sup>8</sup> We attested *но́рвэ́г* in the meaning 'a Norwegian'. Меркурьев 1997 only contains *Норвэ́га* for 'Norway'; СРНГ gives for *но́рвэ́г* the meanings 1. 'Norway' (Pomor. 1885; Murman.), and 2. 'Norwegian coast' (Pinega region, Arch. obl.). The meaning 'a Norwegian' is given only indirectly in the saying *Норвэ́г его́ знает* 'кто его́ знает' ('goodness knows'; Pomor. 1885).

<sup>9</sup> *Обэ́дник* is the word for 'south-east wind' (*обед* was eaten before noon); *побере́жник* means 'north-west wind'. The word *полу́ночник* 'north-east wind' has been attested in some more areas, but mainly with a different stress and/or meaning. The word for south-west wind is *шело́нник*, which shows that the dialect has ties with Novgorod; the Šelón' (Шело́нь) is a river south-west of the town of Novgorod. Since *шело́нник* starts with a letter late in the alphabet, I could not check the geographical distribution of this word among the Russian dialects. *Заси́верка* is a cold northern wind.

<sup>10</sup> The only other area where the form *прола́* it is attested besides on Kola Peninsula is the Pinega region, north in the Archangel'sk oblast' (СРНГ).

Sea region; in the Archangel'sk *oblast'* this word also denoted skis, but, surprisingly, they were specifically mentioned to have no coating.

The words *жѳмко* and *костыч* are rare example of words which have not been attested in a continuous area. *жѳмко* 'cold' has previously only been attested in the Pinega region and in the Olonec *gubernija*. А *костыч* is a simple kind of long gown, a sarafan. Apart from in villages around the White Sea and Karelia, the word has been attested in the Tula and Vladimir *oblasti*, in areas far away from the White Sea. However, over there the word denoted certain short clothes.

An even more restricted area of distribution is found for the different words for reindeer according to age and gender. Most of them are loans from Sámi (cf. David Pineda's article in this volume). In the data for the Karelian dictionary, most of them have only been attested in the Ter region of the Kola Peninsula; some, for instance *пыж* (a reindeer calf), are also attested in the neighbouring Kandalakša and Kem' regions. The word *валчак*, which according to Vasmer is also a Sámi loanword (Vasmer 1953-1958), appears to have the same restricted distribution. It denotes a salmon which after spawning in autumn loses weight and returns from the river to the sea.

Our Varzuga corpus contains some words which have not been attested elsewhere, and Merkur'evs dictionary contains a lot more of them. Myznikov has written an atlas of loanwords in the dialects of North-West Russia, which contains data from the Ter region (МЫЗНИКОВ 2003b). His maps show that the Ter region has links with areas in different directions, both to the south (Karelia) and to the east (Archangel'sk *oblast'*). They also show that some of the words of Balto-Finnic or Sámi origin which he recorded on the Ter Coast have a very restricted distribution, confined to villages on the White Sea Coasts or even the Ter Coast only. Myznikov remarks specifically about the White Sea dialects that their lexicon is archaic (МЫЗНИКОВ 2003b:72), which suggests a certain degree of isolation.

We accidentally learnt about a dialectal trait which is probably restricted to the village of Varzuga itself: the word *накѳль* for snowball. There might be more of such very local traits, but in order to identify



them, (negative) data from other villages are needed. Merkur'ev's dictionary of the Kola dialects is of little help in this respect.<sup>11</sup>

Merkur'ev considers the dialect varieties spoken in the old Russian settlements on the Kola Peninsula to form a single dialect.<sup>12</sup> Can the dialect varieties of the Kola Peninsula really be said to form a single dialect or not? Merkur'ev's publications give limited basis for evaluating his position, and our data are almost exclusively restricted to recordings from Varzuga. According to dialectologist E.V. Demidova, who has visited many villages along the White Sea in both the Murmansk *oblast'* and the Karelian republic, the people on both sides of the White Sea speak the same dialect (personal communication). However, there are indications that there are minor differences between the speech varieties of the different villages, at least in pronunciation and lexicon.<sup>13</sup> A good criterion for deciding if we are dealing with a single norm or with several dialects is the judgement of the dialect speakers themselves: do they consider the inhabitants of the Ter Coast to speak the same dialect, or not? When

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<sup>11</sup> Merkur'ev does not give geographical information in his dictionary (Меркурьев 1997), except for the source village of his example sentences. This information does not tell us anything about the distribution of the word elsewhere. In his works on phonology and morphology (Меркурьев 1960, 1962) he rarely identifies the villages where he attested the relevant characteristics (see below).

<sup>12</sup> “[Г]овор старинных русских поселений Мурманской области в основном однороден. При наличии некоторых своеобразий он относится к поморским говорам северновеликорусского наречия” (Меркурьев 1997:8; cf. Меркурьев 1960:15-16).

<sup>13</sup> Merkur'ev mentions a few examples of minor differences between the villages, e.g. the pronunciation of stressed /a/ between soft consonants, and that of /e/ after a soft consonant in first pretonic position. In his data, stressed /a/ between soft consonants was always pronounced as [e] in e.g. Varzuga, often as [e], but sometimes [a] in most other villages, and more often as [a] than as [e] in e.g. Kovda, a village in the west (Меркурьев 1960:15-16). First pretonic /e/ after a soft consonant can be pronounced as [a] in some villages, while only [e] and [o] are attested in others (ibid.). By coincidence, we learnt about the restricted distribution of the words *пакúль* (see above) and *не́блой*. This last word is given in Меркурьев 1997 with the meaning 'reindeer which is a few months old', with an example from Ponoj. In Varzuga we were told that they did not use the word; reindeer in their first year were all called *пыж*.

asked, the speakers seemed to disagree.<sup>14</sup> Lack of sufficient data on the other villages does not qualify me to decide on the matter,<sup>15</sup> but the dialectal differences between the villages seem to be minor.

### **Links with cultural background**

In the beginning of this article I asked whether the special conditions for the Russians living around the White Sea led to the development of a distinct dialect. My dialect-geographical study shows that this happened only to a limited extent. Indeed, the Pomor dialects developed distinct characteristics, as they both retained archaisms, such as *cokan'e*, old instrumental endings and archaic words, and developed new vocabulary in certain areas, such as fishery. However, the distribution of dialectal characteristics shows that the dialect of Varzuga smoothly fits into the Russian dialect landscape and that the influence of the neighbouring languages was limited.

As for the influence of the Balto-Finnic and Sámi languages, I do not deny that the Finno-Ugric languages spoken in the north of Russia might have had a large influence on the Russian language, affecting all areas of the language (Seliščev 1933; Veenker 1967; Kiparsky 1969). However, the Russian dialects around the White Sea do not appear to have been substantially more affected by Sámi and Balto-Finnic languages than other Northern Russian dialects. In the area of the lexicon, the Kola dialects do contain loanwords from neighbouring Finno-Ugric languages, such as Sámi, Karelian, Finnish and Vepsian, but their number

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<sup>14</sup> When I asked some inhabitants of Varzuga and Kuzomen' whether people spoke differently along the Ter Coast, they came with diverging answers. Some considered that they all spoke the same dialect, while others indicated that you could always hear differences, especially in pronunciation. One speaker told me that one could still hear that one of her neighbours was from a different village along the coast, even though she had lived in Varzuga for the last forty years. Our small number of recordings from Kúzomen' and the old village of Umba show some minor differences, but it is unclear whether they are purely due to geographical distance, or that our few informants from these two villages happened to show more standard language influence.

<sup>15</sup> It also depends, of course, on your definition of a dialect.

is comparatively low and mainly restricted to a few semantic fields, such as reindeer keeping, fishery and natural phenomena such as landmarks.

The dialect of Varzuga is hardly different from the neighbouring dialects in Karelia and the Archangel'sk *oblast'*. Some of the dialectal characteristics are indeed unique for the dialects around the White Sea, but most dialectal characteristics are shared with larger areas, sometimes with areas further south, sometimes in eastern direction. An archaism like soft *cokan'e* is not restricted to the coastal villages, but spread over a continuous area in Northern Russia. The increase in differences with dialects spoken at a larger distance is gradual. My limited amount of data suggests that if maps would be drawn of the discussed characteristics, they would show gradual transitions and large, continuous areas of dialectal phenomena, rather than small islands and randomly crossing isoglosses on chaotic maps, which would have been the case for many areas in Siberia.

These observations about the low degree of isolation of the dialect of Varzuga seem to be explainable from the information I found about the cultural background of the people of Varzuga and the surrounding White Sea area. Unlike most areas in Siberia, the settlement of the White Sea area started early. The Ter Coast of Kola Peninsula got its first permanent Russian population in the 15th century, and in most other areas around the White Sea, Russian settlement had started even earlier. The district seems to have attracted people mostly from neighbouring regions, which in their turn had been settled mainly by people from the Novgorod lands in North-West Russia (Бернштам 1978). The people still consider themselves as descendants from the Novgorodians. Therefore, no mixing of dialects took place on any substantial scale. One of the reasons that the area north of 62° N was not covered in *ДАРЯ* is that the population in the far north is scarce and not spread evenly over the area: the Russians there live only close to the sea and along the main rivers. Therefore, the principle which was used for the *ДАРЯ* project of choosing a village every 18 to 20 kms, could not be maintained in this area (Захарова & Орлова 1970:32). A final reason for not including these dialects in the atlas was that no important dialectal characteristics had been found which were not found in any other areas. This removed the urge to classify these dialects in a separate group (Захарова & Орлова 1970:121-2).

Although the Russian population in the area was scarce and not evenly spread over the area, it was not isolated from other Russian settlements either. The Russians on the Ter Coast seem to have been in closer contact with other Russians than with people with a different cultural and linguistic background. According to Bernštam, contact with the Sámi population was restricted, due to large cultural differences (Бернштам 1978:61-65). Contact with Karelians was intense in other areas, but not on Kola Peninsula, although the first reported settlement on the Ter Coast – Korel'skij pogost (1419) – was Karelian (Бернштам 1978:58-61; Ушаков 1998:17-18).

Furthermore, the Pomor culture and identity was not homogeneous: Bernštam showed that the *Terčane* were not considered to be real Pomors by the people on the other coasts of the White Sea (Бернштам 1978:76, map 3). One of the cultural differences was that they kept reindeer. The inhabitants of the different coasts along the White Sea mostly married with people from the same coast (Бернштам 1983:119). For the Varzužans, Pomor identity was only one out of several different identities. The Varzužans are called *русские, поморы, роканá* (nickname for Ter Russians)<sup>16</sup> and *фараоны*, which is the nickname for the villagers of Varzuga.<sup>17</sup> This means that they have both a Russian identity, a Pomor identity, a Ter Coast identity and a village identity. My finding that linguistic

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<sup>16</sup> А *рóкан* is a waterproof garment which was used by fishermen (Подвысотский 1885); *вагáн* originally means 'people from the river Vaga' (south in the Archangel'sk oblast'), but was extended to mean either 'people from the Archangel'sk oblast' or visitors from other regions in general (Меркурьев 1997; Лённгрен 2001).

<sup>17</sup> The people from each village had their own nicknames. Lönngren mentions some which had not been attested by Merkur'ev: people from Olénica were called *амери-кánцы* 'Americans'; Kúzreka was inhabited by *англичáна* 'Englishmen' and Čároma by *собáки* 'dogs' (Лённгрен 2001:11). During our last expedition we learned some more. People from Kaškaráncy were called *мякíнники* 'mjákina eaters' and the nickname *мешóчники* ('bag bearers') seems to have been used both for the *варзужáна* and *кузомлáна*: Меркурьев 1997 gives *мешóчник* as a nickname for a person from Várzuga, attested in Čávan'ga, but in Varzuga we were told this word was a nickname for people from Kúzomen'!

distance increases with geographical distance parallels these multiple identities.

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