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# Etymological Studies Based on a Conceptual Framework

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## Abstract

The purpose of the poster is to demonstrate that vocabulary analyses by concept groups can contribute to etymological research. The paper focuses on some groups of the Indo-European influences on Estonian and cognate languages. Many nautical and fishing terms were borrowed from the Swedish in the Middle Ages, when the coastal areas of Estonia and Finland were populated by Swedes. The Estonian colour terms system is quite similar to the German one, and many words for the specific tones are German loanwords in Estonian (Oja 2001: 32–33). Studying the names of insects we found very few German loanwords, but there are many similarities in comparison with the corresponding Baltic/Slavic thematic groups (Vaba 2015: 370–383). The systematic analysis helps get more reliable results in etymological research. Single concepts will be approached as elements of the semantic system in order to explain the initial motivation for naming the concept.

**Keywords:** etymology; onomasiology; thematic groups; Indo-European loanwords; Estonian

## 1 Introduction

The first problem of an author of a dictionary, lexical database or linguistic atlas is the classification of material. Usually words of different origins are presented in different entries, but often the etymology of many words is not clear. Automatically we can find many similar words in different languages, but often the similarity may be accidental. The semantic aspect is not less important. Even the different meanings of a word may originate from different sources. The identification of a word's origin requires sufficient historical material from the target language and from cognate and contact languages for comparison. The area where Estonian and other Finnic languages are spoken is bordered by the territories of peoples speaking different Indo-European languages. Some results of the etymologisation of the Estonian vocabulary based on onomasiological analysis are introduced in this paper with examples in three thematic groups. The main donors of the Indo-European loanwords in these groups are different languages.

## 2 The Ways of Indo-European Stems into Estonian Language

Long-time linguistic contacts are believed to have occurred between people who lived in present-day Estonian territory and neighbourhood back in the prehistoric times. The earliest Indo-European lexical importations in Finnic are Baltic and Germanic loans (see e.g. Setälä 1913, Thomsen 1931, Kalima 1936, Laanest 1982, Koivulehto 2001, Kallio 2008, LÄGLOS 1: XXIII–XXV). The ancient Baltic loanwords were borrowed from Proto-Baltic into Proto-Finnic from the 2nd millennium until the 5th century BC. Germanic-Finnic contacts and the relevant loanwords are considered to be of later origin compared with the Baltic-Finnic ones. Traditionally it is supposed that the earliest contacts between Germanic and Finnic tribes took place in the 2nd millennium BC. Very early contacts have also been attested between Finnic and West-Slavic (mainly Polish and Belarus) tribes and East-Slavic tribes (Kalima 1956). The overview and statistical analysis of the etymology of the Estonian lexicon, based on the Estonian Etymological Dictionary (EES) indicates c.a. 162–235 Baltic loans, 222–377 Germanic (and Scandinavian) loans and 41–54 Old Russian loans in standard Estonian (Metsmägi et al. 2013, Soosaar 2013).

The separate languages emerged on the basis of the Finnic in the beginning of the 1st millennium AD. Since the Middle Ages, Estonians had close contacts with all their neighbouring peoples, i.e. besides Finnic people with Germans, Russians, Latvians and Swedes. The major layers of loan stems in Estonian are from Low German and German proper. Low German loans were borrowed mainly from the Middle Low German, spoken in Estonia between the 13th and the 16th centuries. High German speakers arrived in Estonia from the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Ariste 1972, Rätsep 1983: 547). Latvian loans began entering the Estonian language from the 8th century (Vaba 1997: 504). The Russian loans entered Estonian starting from the 15th century (Must 2000: 11). There are two main categories of Swedish loans in Estonian: words borrowed from Eastern Swedish (Estonian Swedish, Finland Swedish and Gotland Swedish) and from General Swedish (Raag 1997). The Eastern Swedish dialects have some archaic features, as compared with standard modern Swedish.

### 3 Work on Thematic Groups

The causes, centres and routes of lexical innovations mostly depend on extra-linguistic factors such as geographical location and road network, cultural contacts, historical and political events, etc. Some borrowings in Estonian and other Finnic languages are associated with the Western, some others with the Eastern sphere of influence. Many Baltic loans in Finnic denote natural environment, flora/fauna, body-parts etc. (in more detail see e.g. Kalima 1936; Kallio 2008). A great number of the Germanic loanwords refer to cultural concepts, objects of everyday life and agriculture (LÄGLOS). It is easier to explain the initial motivation for naming the concept and also the basis of the naming system by analysing vocabulary in a thematic group in comparison with corresponding group in contact languages. The examples of three concept groups demonstrate that Estonian has adopted a great number of lexical borrowings from one donor language or language group (different source for every thematic group).

#### 3.1 Borrowed colour terms

If we compare the systems of colour term formation functioning in Estonian, Finnish and German, we can notice a considerable number of common features. Most of the words denoting colours in these languages are compounds of a similar basic structure. The languages also have numerous colour names with several adjectival suffixes used in similar meaning. The meaning of a term often requires additional specification by indicating its position on the chromatic (colour) and/or the achromatic (black-and-white) scales. For example, if the attributive part is an adjective, it usually serves to specify one of the qualities of the colour, i.e. its tone, lightness/darkness (e.g. Gm *dunkelbraun*, Est *tumepruun*), intensity or other characteristics. The tone is mostly specified by another colour name in adjectival function (e.g. Gm *gelblichgrün*, Est *kollakasroheline*). Such a compound of two colour names describes mixed hues. Several colour terms apply only to a restricted class of objects (e.g. Gm *schimmel*, Est *kimmel* ‘grey mixed with white (usually of animal coat)’). Discussing the semantic background or original motives of colour-term formation we cannot bypass two major groups of words: (1) comparison-based colour terms and (2) adjectives derived from the names of colouring substances. German and Estonian colour names of both groups have many similar naming motives (e.g. Gm *golden* or *goldfarbig*, Est *kuldne* or *kullakarva*; Gm *Zinnober*, Est dial. *tsinoober* ‘vermilion’). In compound colour terms based on comparison the first component is a noun denoting the base of reference while the second component is a parameter word, meaning ‘colour’ (e.g. Gm *fliederfarben*, Est *sirelikarva*) or a colour word (e.g. Gm *moosgrün* Est *samblaroheline*). In all these three languages colour names belong to an open system (in more detail see e.g. Oksaar 1961, Koski 1983, Oja 2001, Oja 2007).

Etymological analysis has shown that there is a great number of Middle Low German and German loans in Estonian colour lexis, e.g. Est *värv* ‘colour’ < MLGm *verwe*, *varwe* (EES 621); Est *pruun* ‘brown’ < MLGm *brūn* (EES 387); Est *kimmel* < MLGm *schimmel* (EES 156); *tunkel* < Gm *dunkel* (EEW 3360). Many terms for specific tones having their origin in any other language are also

German loanwords in Estonian, for example Est *kreem* ‘cream-coloured’ < Gm *Kreme*, *Crème* < Fr *crème* (EEW 982, VL 595); Est *lilla* ‘purple’ < Gm *lila* id. < (EEW 1312, EES 241); Est *oranž* ‘orange(-coloured)’ < Gm *orange*, *Orange* < Fr *orange* (EEW 1840, VL 788); Est *roosa* ‘pink’ < Gm *rosa* (EEW 2537); Est *beež* ‘beige’ < ?Gm *beige* id < Fr *beige* (EEW 132, VL 139). Some German loanwords were adopted in Estonian first as names for dyestuffs or paints. For example Est *violett* ‘purple’ < Gm *Violet* ‘violet; purple’, cf. French *violet* id. (EEW 3870, VL 1195); Est *ooker*(*kollane* ‘yellow’) < Gm *Ocker*, *ockergelb* < *Ocker*, cf. Greek *ōchros* ‘yellowish’ (EEW 1837, VL 782); Est *orlean* ‘reddish yellow’ < Gm *Orlean(s)* < Fr *orléans* (EEW 1845). In Estonian the shapes of foreign words are often distorted due to folk etymology, for example *orden* ‘lit. orden’ instead of *orlean*; *viulipunane* or *viulisinine* – compounds consisting of the noun *viul* ‘violin’ and ‘yarn-winding tool’ and the word for red (*punane*) or blue colour (*sinine*) – instead of *violett*. Many German loanwords came into Estonian through trade contacts. Industrial goods (including manufactured dyes) were brought to Estonian and Livonian Hansa trading cities which were important centres of transit trade between Russia and Western Europe. By the way, these cities were important centres of innovation and language contacts as well.

### 3.2 Words for insects

After the study of Estonian words for insects there have been found very few German influences, but there are many similarities with the corresponding Baltic and Slavic thematic groups (Vaba 2015: 370–383). Most of the oldest Estonian insect names are Baltic loans, e.g. Est *vapsik* (variants in all Finnic languages) ‘hornet’ < Blt *\*vaps*; *herilane* ‘wasp’ < Blt *\*širšō-*; Est *kiil* ‘dragonfly’ < Blt *\*gīlias*; Est *vagel* ‘maggot’ < Blt *\*vagVlja-*; Est *väiv* ‘animal louse’ < Blt *\*vei-vesä*; Est dial. *ärk* ‘tick’ < Blt *\*erkē-*, etc. Russian loans are, for example, Est dial. *vošs* ‘louse’ < Rus *voš* id.; Est *murelane* ‘ant’ < Rus *muravej*; Est *prussak(as)* < Rus *prusak* ‘cockroach’; Est *tarakan* ‘(cock)roach’ < Rus *tarakan*; Est dial. *mõll* ‘moth’ < Rus *mol* etc. The Estonian dialect word *kurbline*, *kurblik* ‘beetle’ is a Latvian loanword (< Latv *ķurbulis* ‘European mole cricket’). The Estonian *ting* ‘nit’ is borrowed from Latvian or Russian, cf. Latv *gnīda*, Rus *gnīda*. The final elements of the borrowed insect names have either been replaced by Estonian suffixes (*-lane/-line*, *-k* and *-g* (+ *-as*), *-ik*, *-sk*, *-ts* etc.) or adapted to the Estonian system of derivation. The names of insects, borrowed from spoken language, do not belong to the category of classical culture loans, but nevertheless reveal long-term and intense neighbourhood contacts.

### 3.3 Nautical and fishing terms

Many nautical and fishing terms are borrowed from Swedish, especially from Eastern Swedish. Studying the loanwords borrowed into Estonian from the Estonian Swedish, Paul Ariste found that one third of the loans denote seafaring or fishing concepts (Ariste 1933: 120–121). Some words borrowed into West-Estonian dialects from the Estonian Swedish have reached the Northern Estonian coast either from Finland Swedish dialects or via Finnish (Ariste 1933: 125). Swedish loanwords are used for different maritime objects and actions in standard Estonian and/or in north-western Estonian dialects. The borrowed navigational terms are for example *haalama* ‘drag, lug’ < Est-Sw *hala* (EES 64), Est *hiivama* ‘heave’ < Sw *hīva* (EES 75); Est *tääv* ‘sternpost’ < Sw *stäv* < MLGm *steven* (EEW 3466); Est *hauskar*, dial. *ausker*, *hauster*, *ouster*, *haustel* ‘bailer’ < Est-Sw *auskar*, *häus(t)kar* (Ariste 1933: 46); Est *pootshaak* ‘gaff hook’ < Sw *båtshake* (EES 380). Loanwords denoting sailing boats or ships are e.g. Est *kaljas* ‘schooner’ < Sw *galeas*, cf. Dutch *galjas* (EES 121); Est *kuunar* ‘schooner’ < Sw *skonare* (EEW 1075); Est *jaala* ‘sailing boat’ < Sw *jala*, cf. Finnish *jaala* (EES 95). Several small-boat names of a Swedish origin occur in nearly all coastal sub-dialects of Estonia, e.g. Est dial. *eestok*, *eistuk* etc. ‘dugout’ < Sw *ekstock*; Est *luup* < Sw. *slup*, LGm *slūp*; Est dial. *uup*, *huup* < Sw dial. *håp* (Est-Sw *hōp*), earlier *håpa* < Finnish *haapa* ‘aspen’; Est *julla* < Sw *julle*, *jolle* cf. MLGm *jolle*, Dutch *jol* (Neetar, Oja 2007). A lot of Estonian fish names are Swedish loans, e.g. Est *silk* (dial. *sill*) ‘Baltic herring’ < Sw *sillaka*, *sillake*;

Est dial. *laks* ‘salmon’ < Sw *lax*, Est-Sw *laks* (Ariste 1933: 73); Est *norss* ‘smelt’ < Sw *nors* (EEW 1732). Some Swedish loans denote fishing supplies, e.g. Est *mõrd* ‘fishing trap’ < Sw *mjärde*, Est *sump* ‘corf’ < Sw *sump* (see also Kendla 1914: 236–237). In addition, some seaside landscape terms are borrowed from Swedish, e.g. *holm* < Sw *holm*, *holme* ‘islet’ (EES 78); *viik* < Sw and MLGm *vīk* ‘bay’ (EES 602); *pank* < Sw *bank* ‘slope, rampart’ (EES 352). Most of these loanwords were adopted in the Middle Ages, when Estonian and Finland coastal areas were populated mainly by Swedes. The inhabitants of the Northern Estonian coast and the Swedes of the Northern coast of the Gulf of Finland contacted also while fishing or trading (see Blumfeldt 1961, Raag 1997).

## 4 Conclusion

Our results indicate that systematic analysis (in combination with other methods) is a most adequate way of obtaining more reliable results in etymological research. Single concepts are approached as elements of the semantic system in order to explain the initial naming motive of the concept. It is particularly important to analyse dialect vocabulary where some archaic linguistic phenomena may have survived, or innovations have emerged, be it even in a quite limited area. The abundance of thematic loans imported from this or that language is not random, but depends on geographical location and historical reasons. Some groups of loanwords in Estonian correspond to economic needs (e.g. fishing) and trade (e.g. colour words); others were borrowed from the neighbours through close contacts (e.g. words for insects).

## 5 References

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