

# From a Dialect Dictionary to an Etymological One

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## Abstract

Typically, loanwords from different sources are presented in different entries of a dialect dictionary, but the etymologies of the dialect words are often obscure. An etymologist, on the other hand, has to consider the phonetic shape and developments of a stem, its areal distribution and meanings in dialects to find out the etymology. What are the cooperative prospects of etymologists and dialectologists? The paper compares the presentation of dialect words in two dictionaries currently compiled on the web, namely, in the Estonian dialect dictionary and in the Estonian etymological dictionary. Despite the different specifics of the two dictionaries a number of similar problems have cropped up. Also, comparisons of the material have yielded essential information enabling solutions for both sides. Across dialects, a loanword often displays numerous phonetic variants, while a variant may easily sound untypical of the concrete dialect. The possible donor can be traced considering the occurrence of the dialect word in the traditional area of loanwords of a certain origin and the semantic relationship of the word with the presumed donor language. Cooperation between etymologists and dialectologists has contributed a lot to making a distinction between homonymy and polysemy, to identification of folk etymologies (words as well as semantic nuances), to distinguishing between separate loanwords and derivatives of the same stem, etc. A shared electronic environment enables bilateral specification of the linguistic material, if necessary.

**Keywords:** dialect vocabulary; etymology; homonymy; polysemy; semantic change; Estonian

## 1 Introduction

The study is focused on the presentation of dialect words in an etymological dictionary. In 2003 the Institute of the Estonian Language (IEL) launched the project of an Estonian Etymological Dictionary. The first edition of the Estonian etymological dictionary (EES – *Eesti etümoloogiasõnaraamat*) compiled at the Institute of the Estonian Language was published in spring 2012. This is an approximately small dictionary for a wide readership, with about 6600 entries. The entry list of the EES was based on the word stems contained in the Estonian normative dictionary (ÕS 2006). Thus it includes the stems of standard Estonian and a small selection of dialect vocabulary (see Metsmägi 2010). The work has revealed that quite a significant part of Estonian word stems still lack a satisfactory scholarly explanation of their origin. Now, an extended and much more thorough edition is being prepared on the basis of the EES. The entry list of the new Estonian etymological dictionary (henceforth: EED) will be aug-

mented by about 1500 additional stems: dialect words and other older stems (e.g. words denoting obsolete tools, archaic occupations etc.) and the latest loanwords. The large Estonian etymological dictionary previously available, the *Estnisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* by Julius Mägiste (1982–1983, 2nd edition 2000; 12 volumes, 4106 pp.; EEW) contains dialect words as well. Unfortunately, the author was unable to finish it or edit due to his death. For that reason, there are numerous misprints and defective entries. Another reason for the dictionary being incomplete is that in exile the author ceased to have access to the materials kept in Estonia.

Standard Estonian was developed on the basis of local dialects. Estonian dialects, however, are based on the vernaculars of several Finnic tribes, not just one. The evolution of the dialects was affected by both the local conditions and various socio-historical factors. Conscious and deliberate development of Estonian as a standard language for the whole Estonian territory was only started in the 19th century (see, e.g. Kask 1984). Estonian vocabulary cannot be unambiguously divided into dialect and standard words. Often a word has different meanings in different dialects, which – like unusual phonetics – may help in tracing the origin of the word. In addition, dialects are a treasury of archaic terms and obsolete expressions that do not belong to the modern standard. Some hints on the origin of Estonian dialect words can be found in the Estonian-German dictionary compiled by F. J. Wiedemann in the 19th century (Wiedemann 1973). The etymology of Estonian dialect vocabulary has also been discussed in monographic studies of loanwords (e.g. Ariste 1933, Koponen 1998, Must 2000, Vaba 1997).

The Archive of the Estonian dialects and Finno-Ugric languages (EMSUKA) at the Institute of the Estonian Language includes a collection of Estonian dialect vocabulary, which contains about three million paper slips carrying phonetic, morphological and semantic data of dialect words as well as usage examples. This lexical collection serves as basis for the Estonian dialect dictionary (EMS – *Eesti murrete sõnaraamat*) currently compiled. So far, 25 fascicles (5085 pages) of the EMS (*a – matkama*) have been published. As preliminary work for the EMS a concise dialect dictionary (VMS – *Väike murdesõnastik*) was compiled in the 1980s. The VMS represents a list of possible entry words for the EMS, together with their areal distribution and the approximate meaning of the non-standard words. The dictionary has been published both in print and electronically. At present both the Estonian dialect dictionary and the Estonian etymological dictionary are being compiled online using the EELex program created at the Institute of the Estonian Language. The program enables representation of database material in a book layout form. Both dictionaries will be published electronically. The electronic version enables linking the dictionaries with the rest of the online dictionaries of the Institute of the Estonian Language.

## 2 Word Selection

The dialect words to be added to the new Estonian etymological dictionary (EED) are drawn from the material stored in the Estonian dialect dictionaries EMS and VMS. The data will be elaborated using the collections of the Archive of the Estonian dialects (EMSUKA), if necessary. One major dilemma that relates to the preparation of any dictionary is what words to choose, what ones to leave out. The EMS is exhaustive, including the entire vocabulary available from all Estonian dialects. Some words have been recorded from a few sub-dialects only while some others are known practically throughout the Estonian territory. Limits have been set on the presentation of words not specific to dialect usage, e.g. foreign words, new standard words, special terms, slang and nursery language (see Must 1968, Oja 1996).

In the first place the entry list of the new Estonian etymological dictionary is to be supplemented by dialect words representing lexical peculiarities of larger regions, such as South Estonian dialects<sup>1</sup>, e.g. *kurst* ‘twisted handful of flax, hair, straw etc.’ < Latvian *gūrste* (Vaba 1997: 107); *kuuas* ‘axe handle’ < Latvian dial. *kuôts* ‘handle of a tool etc.’ (Vaba 1997: 108-109), or the Insular dialect of Estonian, e.g. *kurt* ‘(fir or pine) cone’ < Estonian-Swedish<sup>2</sup> *kott*, *kotte*, Old Swedish *grankuttar* ‘(fir or pine) cone’, cf. Finnish-Swedish *kort* id. (Ariste 1933: 69).

Old genuine stems, missing in the standard vocabulary but found in the dialects will be added to the new etymological dictionary even if sparsely recorded. For example, a rather widespread dialect word *kosk* ‘thick bark’ is possibly an ancient (Uralic) genuine stem to which Ugric and Samoyed equivalents have been suggested (SKES 222; SSA 1: 409–410; UEW 179–180). The word *heri* ~ *here* ‘linden bark’ used in some Estonian dialects (EMS II: 1026) belongs to the Finno-Ugric layer of the genuine stems (SKES 183; SSA 1: 345; UEW 148–149). The dialect word *kärg* ‘woodpecker’ has etymological equivalents in Finnic and Volgaic languages (SKES: 261; EEW: 1138; UEW: 652; SSA 1: 476). The genuine stems with obvious etymological equivalents only in Finnic as the closest cognate languages will be added to the entry list as well.

On the other hand, the entry list will be augmented by words that clearly testify to being borrowed. Among the dialect words there are some old loanwords that were borrowed in the period before Estonian had become a separate language, i.e. the Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, Baltic, Germanic, Scandinavian and Slavic (Old Russian) loanwords. In general, they have etymological equivalents in other Uralic resp. Finnic languages. For example South Estonian *mehiläne*, *mihiläne* or *mehine* ‘bee’ (see VMS 2: 22) and the other Finno-Ugric words with the same stem (e.g. Finnish *mehiläinen*, Hungarian *méh*, *mihe* etc.) have been borrowed from Proto-Indo-European or Proto-Indo-Iranian (SKES: 339; SSA 2: 156; UEW: 271). Another word for bee, *mesilane* and variants (VMS 2: 25), used in other dialects as well as in standard Estonian is a derivative from the noun *mesi* ‘honey’, which is another Indo-European or In-

1 About grouping the Estonian dialects see, e.g. Pajusalu 2003: 231.

2 In Middle Ages the coasts and islets of Estonia were populated by Swedes. Their dialect is called Estonian-Swedish (see e.g. Blumfeldt 1961).

do-Iranian loanword (EES 280–281; UEW: 273; SSA 2: 161). The noun *rend* used for a long dining table in the Insular dialect has been borrowed from Baltic via the now extinct Curonian language *rend* ‘table’ (Vaba 2009: 779–780). The Insular dialect word *vada* ‘seine net’ (in close cognate languages: Karelian and Veps *vada*, Livonian *vadā*, Finnish *vata*) has been borrowed from Proto-Germanic, cf. Swedish, Norwegian *vad*, Old Norse *vaðr*, Middle Low German (MLGm) *wade*, German *Wate* (LÄGLOS III: 381; SKES: 1671–1672; SSA 3: 417–418).

In South-East Estonian and Eastern dialects the word *mugel* (*mugla*, *mukl*) stands for ‘spent lye’ (Wiedemann 1973: 609; VMS 2: 35). This is a Russian loanword borrowed from Old Pskov dialect (EEW: 1558; Koponen 1998: 127; Ojansuu 1922: 139). In North and Central Veps the same word *mugl* stands for ‘lye’. The term for ‘soap’ used in eastern Finnic languages is a more recent loanword derived from the same Russian stem: Finnish, Karelian, Veps, Ingrian, Votic *muila*, *muil* etc. < Russian *mylo* (ALFE 1: 205–206; Kalima 1952: 123–124).

As a rule, the transparent loanwords belong to some group of younger loanwords, borrowed only after Estonian had become a separate language, i.e. Low German, (High) German, Swedish, Russian, Latvian and Finnish loanwords. For example *kink* ‘haunch; ham’ (EMS III: 165) < MLGm *schink(e)* ‘ham’ (SKES I: 195); *tohv* ‘kind of cloth’ < German *Stoff* ‘material; textile’ (EEW: 3202); *turslag* ‘strainer’ < German *Durchschlag* ‘strainer; sieve’ (EEW: 3373); *tutspard* ‘moustache’ < German *Stutzbart* ‘tile beard’ (EEW: 3383); *hisla* ‘very sour, over sour’ < Russian *kislyj* ‘sour’ (Must 2000: 97–98); *robotama* ‘work quickly and intensively, toil, drudge; work quickly but carelessly’ < Russian *rabótat*, dial. *rabotát* ‘to work’ (EEW: 2510; Must 2000: 333–334).

It is not uncommon that a stem of Indo-European origin has been borrowed into different Finnic languages and even to the dialects of the same language in different times and via different routes. Sometimes the words of the same origin have been borrowed repeatedly. For example North-Estonian *tulk* ‘interpreter, translator’ was borrowed from Old Russian, but the Finnish *tulkki* is a Scandinavian loan and the standard Estonian word *tõlk* id., is a newer loan from Russian (SKES: 1391; EEW: 3350; SSA 3: 324).

### 3 Entry Structure

In both dictionaries, an entry contains the following components: headword, grammatical information of the stem, dialectal variants with information on the regional distribution and word meaning or meanings. In addition the EMS gives usage examples of the word from different dialects. The etymological dictionary presents information on the origin of the word stem and the equivalents of the stem in cognate languages, with comments and bibliography. Both dictionaries make ample use of cross references and reference entries or subentries. In the electronic version, the references function as links to the referred entries.

In both dictionaries the headword is either a standard word or a dialect word in a standardized shape. The main form of an Estonian noun is nominative singular (or nominative plural in the case of *plurale tantum*) and the lemmatic form of a verb is the infinitive ending in *-ma*. In both dictionaries the headwords are ordered alphabetically, but in the EMS the place of *h*-initial words depends on the vowel following *h*: *a-* (*ha-*), *e-* (*he-*), etc. as word-initial *h* is lacking in most Estonian dialects.

The entry lists of both dictionaries have been built up on stem basis, in the way that the stems having different etymologies go to separate entries. In the dialect dictionary (EMS) the predictable phonetic variants of a word are all in the same entry, but irregular variants are presented in different ones. By way of exception, some irregular variants of loanwords are found together in the same entry (in more detail see Neetar 1992). In the etymological dictionary (EED) an entry will cover all words or stems originating in a common etymological source, i.e. derivatives, lexicalized inflected forms and stem variants (synchronic as well as diachronic ones). Only the separately borrowed derivatives of a stem, i.e. derivatives containing affixes of the donor language get separate EED entries. In the EMS, separate entries are provided for each suffixed derivative as well as for the compounds included. In the EED, only the compounds borrowed as a single item are given in separate entries, e.g. *leierkast* 'barrel organ' < German *Leierkasten*.

According to the specifics of either dictionary their main emphasis lies on different aspects. The major part of an EMS entry deals with the details of the dialectal variants of the word and with its use in dialects: meanings, sub-senses and examples. If necessary, a semantic group is provided with sub-heads for figurative senses, idioms and phrases. The etymological dictionary is focused on the origin of word stems. The etymology is described in the EED by cognate language equivalents and/or the loan source. The entry of EED will also be supplied with a bibliographical component, containing a survey of the etymological treatments of the entry stem (i.e. the references).

## 4 Some Crucial Problems

One of the trickiest issues facing the authors of either dictionary is classification of the linguistic material, in particular, choice of the entry word. Many similar stems make one wonder which of the words should be presented in the same entry and which should be given separate entries. In dialect dictionary, a polysemantic word gets several entries, the entry word *nukk*, for example, starts seven articles (VMS 2: 105). Collocations are usually presented under several entries (see Oja 1996). In an etymological dictionary, it is essential to discriminate between words originating from the same loan source and those originating from different ones. Thus a detailed analysis of dialectal variants and meanings is required. The different meanings of a word as well as different phonetic variants may originate from different sources. The sources in their turn may be mutually connected, e.g. there are parallel loans from different Germanic languages – Middle Low German, (High) German, and Swedish. Actually the situation is even more complicated, because the words borrowed from the local German

dialect, the so-called Baltic German, and from the local Swedish dialect called Estonian Swedish, should be treated as separate loanword groups as well. In addition, sometimes different meanings have been borrowed into Estonian from the same source but in different times. In these cases the word variants or meanings will be discussed in separate EED entries.

#### 4.1 Polysemy and Homonymy

In a general case, the senses of a polysemantic word are presented in one and the same entry in the Estonian etymological dictionary, but in the dialect dictionary they are sometimes found under different entry words. The latter case applies, e.g. to words *koot*<sup>1</sup> ‘flail, agricultural tool for manual threshing; mobile part of various objects’ (EMS III: 635–636) and *koot*<sup>2</sup> ‘part of animal foot; part of human foot (lower part of the leg; thigh); usually pl., facet. human feet’(EMS III: 636–637). Notably, the two senses differ quite radically in their geographic distribution: *koot*<sup>1</sup> mainly occurs in South Estonian dialects, and also in the Central and Eastern dialects and in the Pärnumaa region, but it is practically absent in the Insular dialect, Läänemaa region and in the North-Eastern Coastal dialects, whereas *koot*<sup>2</sup> occurs in the North Estonian areas, apart from single reports from South Estonian dialects. Etymologically speaking, the root is the same: < MLGm *kote*, *kute* ‘ankle; hoof; pastern’ (Saareste 1924: 204; EEW III: 946). Thus, its primary sense is ‘part of leg’, semantically transferred to ‘manual threshing tool’ in Estonian (Saareste 1924: 204). The geography of the word in the sense of a tool (*koot*<sup>1</sup>) is eloquent of the spread of an innovative two-piece threshing tool: it was first introduced in southern Estonia (Mark 1932: 369–370, ERL: 96), while the older one-piece tool called *vart* ‘threshing stick’ was favoured the longest in the West-Estonian islands and in some places in western Estonia (Manninen 1929: 45–46; ERL: 342). The South-East Estonian *prunt*’s (and variants) ‘skirt’ is a Latvian loanword < East-Latvian regional *bruņči* id. that probably originates from the colour word *brūns* ‘brown’ < MLGm *brūn* id. (Saareste 1924: 166; Vaba 1997: 168–169). As long as the Latvian dialect word was unknown the South Estonian term for skirt used to be associated with the Estonian dialect word *pruūt*, *proūt* ‘pleat’ (EEW: 2183).

#### 4.2 Folk Etymology and Semantic Changes

There are several ways of loanword adaptation. Being uncertain of the real semantic background of foreign terms people often associate them with a similarly sounding familiar word. This way folk etymology may change the phonetic shape as well as the meaning of the loanword beyond recognition. Such loanwords tend to have exceptionally many dialect variants that are poorly motivated phonetically. Semantic change in loanwords, being caused by cultural differences, local specifics, taboo, etc., will complicate semantic analysis as well as detection of the origin of the word. Note that in dialects a word may be used in its original meaning lacking in the standard language or in a sense that is closer to the original meaning than standard usage (Oja & Metsmägi 2013).

For example, a wallet or purse may be humorously called *tengelpung* in Estonian. The components of the compound word have been associated with the well-known loanwords *teng* ‘money’ (< Russian *denga* id.) and *pung* arch. ‘wallet, pouch’ (< MLGm *punge* ‘pocket’ or < Swedish *pung* ‘wallet, pouch’). Actually, the Estonian *tengelpung* (in dialects also *tenkelpuuh*, *tenkelpus* etc.) has been borrowed from the Baltic German dialect (< German *Denkelbuch* ‘old style paper notebook, pocketbook’ < *denken* ‘think, believe, plan, imagine’ + *Buch* ‘book’) (Ariste 1942: 20; Viires 1960: 158.)

The name of juniper (the plant in the genus *Juniperus*) is *kadahas* in Estonian. In the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century a similar noun *kadahas* and the compound *kadaka/saks* (*saks* ‘squire, vulg. German’) or *kadaka/sakslane* (*sakslane* ‘German’) were used for Estonians who tried to look like Germans and spoke (usually incorrect) German (EMS II: 453). Although folk etymology would associate the Estonian words *hadakasaks*, *hadakasakslane*, *hadakas* ‘(half-) Germanized Estonian’ with ‘juniper’, the disdainful words have nothing to do with the tree. Instead, it is a loanword borrowed from the German compound word *Katensaße* ‘slum dweller, craftsman’ (< *Kate* ‘hut, shanty’ + *Saße* ‘place of residence’), which has been folk-etymologically modified to sound like certain familiar words (Saari 2004: 119–120). The word *katekismus* ‘catechism’ has dialect variants *katekeskmus*(s) and *katekeskmine* showing that the word has probably been folk-etymologically connected to the South-Estonian dialect word *kat*’s (vocalic stem *kate*) ‘two’ and *kesk*(*mine*) ‘middle; between’.

### 4.3 Derivatives or Separate Borrowings

Sometimes the question is if we have to do with a borrowed derivative, i.e., whether the derivative and the stem have been borrowed separately or not. The donor language may have been the source of the stem as well as of one or more of its derivatives. Some old Indo-European loanwords in the Finnic language group have undergone morphological and semantic adaptation to such an extent that they have come to be regarded as genuine native derivatives. For example, the structure of the Estonian *raudjas* ‘russet’ appears to be *raud* ‘iron’ + diminutive suffix *-jas*, but it is most likely a loan from a Baltic colour word, cf. Latvian *raūds*, *raūdis* ‘reddish brown’ from Proto-Indo-European *\*reud<sup>h</sup>-*), whereas the term *raud* ‘iron’ is a Germanic loan from Proto-Germanic *\*raudan-* (Oja 2004: 37–38).

Newer (esp. MLGm) loanwords display a lot of cases where a noun has been borrowed in parallel with a zero-affixed verb of the same stem, e.g. Estonian noun *hink* ‘gift, present’ < MLGm *schenke* ‘act of giving; (welcome) present, etc.’ (EEW: 834) and the verb *hinkima* ‘make a present, donate, give’ < MLGm *schenken* ‘make a present, to give’ (Ariste 1940a: 12; EEW: 834) or another example: *rööv* ‘robbery’ < MLGm *rōf* ‘robbery; booty’ (Ariste 1940b: 110) and *röövima* ‘to rob’ < MLGm *roven* ‘to rob’ (Ariste 1980: 34; SKES: 908; SSA 3: 122).

## 5 Conclusion

Word origin can be specified by following its dialectal variants as well as similar words in cognate languages and contact languages, considering both their areal distribution and meaning. The variation of the phonetic shape and the meaning of words in Estonian dialects may suggest different bor-



rowing times or travelling routes. The areal distribution of loanwords helps to pinpoint the centres of cultural innovations. An available dialect dictionary is of great help to word etymologization and etymological lexicography, offering concentrated and systematized information on the areal distribution, phonetic variation, and meanings of words. However, its entry list is most extensive, containing the whole dialect vocabulary, including compound words and derivatives, and thus an etymological lexicographer has to make a selection including the following: (1) dialect words representing lexical peculiarities of larger regions; (2) old genuine words; (3) loanwords with an obvious source; (4) derivatives borrowed separately from the stem.

A common issue in compiling both dictionaries is the arrangement of the highly variable linguistic data, in the face of polysemy and homonymy, folk etymology and semantic changes. Depending on the specifics of the dictionary, the final solutions may differ for the dialect dictionary and for the etymological dictionary. In a dialect dictionary the material cannot be presented systematically enough without considering word etymology. Hence an etymological dictionary makes an effective supplement to a dialect dictionary, helping to understand the background of the diversity of meanings and phonetic variation. Thus the best policy would probably be parallel compilation of the two dictionaries in a close cooperation of both teams, which is, however, extremely problematic to organize.

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