

The stratification of Veps vocabulary

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Recent conclusions on the early spread of the Finnic languages quite unanimously suggest that the early spread of Pre-Finnic from east to west was followed by secondary spreads that mainly occurred from south to north. While this development is illustratively seen in the development of Finnish and Karelian dialects, the position of Veps is more ambiguous. In taxonomical models it is traditionally classified as a northern Finnic language relating to a historical core area that was adjacent to the Gulf of Finland as a descendant of the northeast branch of the Finnic languages (Kallio 2014, Koponen 1991, Laakso 2022: 241, Lang 2020: 317–331, Viitso 2000). In addition to the assumed early spread zones (Grünthal 2020), this is based on the evidence of the southern-most Finnic varieties, South Estonian and Livonian, which display innovations and inherited features that are lacking elsewhere. However, geographically Veps is the eastern-most Finnic language that has a historical connection with more eastern water routes, cultural areas and spread zones.

From a lexical and etymological viewpoint, only little attention has been paid to the language-specific characteristics of Veps. This is mainly caused by two facts. Firstly, Veps shares the basic vocabulary with other Finnic languages including inherited Uralic vocabulary, early Baltic and Germanic loanwords, and a high number of derivations based on shared Finnic word stems. Secondly, long-term and widespread Veps-Russian bilingualism has strongly influenced Veps communities, and it has been noticed by several generations. Due to the ubiquitous Russian influence the amount of Russian lexical, grammatical and phrasal borrowing casts its shadow on other, diachronically important features.

In our paper we will pay special emphasis on the etymological origin of less transparent Veps vocabulary. We assume that, in addition to shared Finnic vocabulary and more recent Russian borrowings, the geographically eastern location of Veps involves traces of early language-specific development and the secondary integration of the Finnic-speaking area that can be seen in lexical spreads.

References

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