

## **The diachrony of morphemes in the Finnic group: the role of stem allomorphy**

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Morphemes are autonomous morphological structures (‘morphology by itself’, Aronoff, 1994) that cannot be reduced to syntactic, semantic or phonetic conditioning. Recent findings tend to emphasize the persistence and the vitality of morphomic structures through time and space. The playground for these studies is predominantly the Romance language family, as it offers both diachronic depth and synchronic diversity, which allow to investigate the evolution of inflection classes and stem distributions (Maiden, 2018).

This paper discusses the situation of morphemes in Finnic noun inflection from a diachronic perspective, with a focus on a pattern shared in the northern and southern groups. As the languages under scrutiny underwent a strong standardization process, our approach considers the effects of both diachronic changes and grammar normalization.

We show how the asymmetry between the singular and plural local case forms in Proto-Finnic (PF) gave rise to a *metamorphome*, an arbitrary pattern of stem distribution shared across the lexicon (Round, 2015). As can be observed from Table 1, most PF words share the same stem for partitive and inessive plural. However, in the genitive plural, two competing patterns emerged: the first one (*\*kaloiðen*) mimics the distribution of singular forms, where all three cases build on the same stem, whereas the second one (*\*kalaðen*) leads to an unmotivated asymmetric distribution with two different stems in the plural (GEN.PL versus PART.PL). We review the changes which took place in the modern languages (Table 1) and demonstrate that although analogical leveling and phonetic change often led to the spread of new competitors in the plural, the core of the morphomic patterns incorporated this variation and remained broadly stable since Proto-Finnic. We further discuss the relation of this morphome with illative and partitive singular cells. We conclude that the diversity of the alternation patterns (inherited gradation, new gradation types) can often be subsumed under their shared morphological function in inflection.

	GEN.SG	PART.SG	INE.SG	GEN.PL	PART.PL	INE.PL
PF	* <i>kalan</i>	* <i>kalađa</i>	* <i>kalassa</i>	* <i>kalađen</i> ~ * <i>kaloideň</i>	* <i>kaloideđa</i>	* <i>kaloissa</i>
liv.	<i>kalā</i>	<i>ka'llõ</i>	<i>kalās</i>	<i>kalād</i>	<i>ka'ļdi</i>	<i>ka'ļši</i>
est.	<i>kala</i>	<i>kala</i>	<i>kalas</i>	<i>kalade</i>	<i>kalasid</i> ~ <i>kalu</i>	<i>kalades</i> ~ <i>kalus</i>
olo.	<i>kalan</i>	<i>kalua</i>	<i>kalas</i>	<i>kaloin</i>	<i>kaloï</i>	<i>kalois</i>
fin.	<i>kalan</i>	<i>kalaa</i>	<i>kalassa</i>	<i>kalojen</i>	<i>kaloja</i>	<i>kaloissa</i>

Table 1: Partial paradigm of *kala* ‘fish’ in some Finnic languages. Shading indicates stem distributions.

Whereas previous work on inflectional morphology in the Uralic languages often made sense of such changes with a combination of phonetic rules and analogy (e.g. Alvre, 1999), we argue that the autonomous morphological principles at play also deserve attention from linguists. In the same way, besides extensive discussion of the morphophonology of stem alternations (see for instance Viitso, 1981), less work has been devoted to the function of these alternations. The case study in this contribution takes such a direction.

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