

Taarna Valtonen

*University of Turku, Helsinki, and Oulu*

### **Anthropology of technology and loanwords: new tools for studying the connection between lexical and archaeological evidence in prehistoric contexts**

Loanwords have been used to reconstruct past lifeways and the intensity of cultural contacts. Such interpretations are typically based on the *Wörten und Sachen* -method that connects borrowed words with archaeological finds. Borrowed words are typically classified on the basis of semantic categories, and a large number of words (i.e. concepts) in certain categories have been used as evidence of, e.g., the intensity of relationships between communities. The most important problem with this method is that the semantic categories are based on a modern (European) understanding of hierarchical connections between concepts. We do not know if such categories were understandable in prehistoric times or if they represent past reality.

The anthropology of technology provides a more reliable basis for studying the connection between lexical and archaeological evidence. In this field of research, technology is understood broadly as covering “*all aspects of the process of action upon matter*” (Lemonnier 1992: 1). In archaeology, the most interesting technologies are such that cannot be learned easily, but instead require intensive long-term contacts between student and teacher for the student to be able to master the technology independently. In the case of distinct communities such social learning cannot be expected unless the members of two communities have close and long-lasting contacts. Specific types of pottery and stone tool making, but also, e.g., animal husbandry, cheese making, and wool processing can be considered such technologies that require an elongated period of social learning. As do all technologies, they include five related components: matter, energy, objects, gestures, and specific knowledge (ibid. 1992: 5–6).

From archaeological contexts it is possible to detect artefacts that can be used to reconstruct past technological processes. When a prehistoric technological process is described, the concepts referring to its components can be taken as reference material for loanwords. These concepts can be connected to different word categories, e.g. matter and objects are typically nouns, but gestures are verbs and adjectives. In such analysis the connection between loanwords is not based on modern understanding, but on independent analysis of prehistoric technological processes.

Reference:

Lemonnier, Pierre. 1992. *Elements for an Anthropology of Technology*. Michigan: Ann Arbor.