

It is widely recognised that the explicit marking of feminine (or any) gender is atypical for Finnic languages. It is believed that the few feminine suffixes found in Finnic languages have developed under the influence of other languages (Mägiste 1928–29: 22). One such example is the diminutive suffix *-ik*, which historically (among its other meanings) denoted feminine gender but by now has lost this function. The feminine function of the predecessor to the Estonian suffix *-ik*, *-(i)kkoi*, is believed to date back to Proto-Finnic, as it has parallels in many Finnic languages. The suffix was primarily used in terms denoting female members of communities, such as *rootsik* ‘Swedish woman’, *vennik*, in Finnish dialects *venakk(o)*, South Vepsian *veñak* ‘Russian woman’, Votic *virakko* ‘Estonian woman’, Ingrian *sōmakko* ‘female Finn’, Lutsi *lätik* ‘female Latvian’ (Mägiste 1928–29: 24–25). The suffix has also been used in broader contexts, in words like *hõimik* ‘female relative’, *noorik* ‘newly married woman’, Ingrian *karjakkoi* ‘female shepherd’ (Mägiste 1928–1929); Votic *pantavikko* ‘girl of marriageable age’, *nuorikko*, and *vietävikko* ‘bride’ (Kettunen, Posti: 1932)¹. Although a range of feminine words derived with the suffix *-ik* are present in many sources of old written Estonian (Gutslaff 1648; Göseken 1660, Hornung 1693, Thor Helle 1732, Hupel 1780), its authenticity has once been questioned: the data on the feminine suffix *-ik* from Gutslaff’s grammar have been considered to be his own invention (Keem 1998: 325). Nevertheless, this claim has been refuted (Tóth 2018: 279).

In Estonian linguistics, the feminine suffix *-ik* has been primarily regarded as a distinctive feature of South Estonian (Mägiste 1928–29; more recently Tóth 2018). However, Mägiste (1928–29: 24) provides evidence of the word *noorik* from a broad range of Estonian dialects, which suggests a wider areal distribution of the suffix. By today, for various reasons the suffix has lost its feminine meaning: in modern standard Estonian the only rudiment of the feminine suffix *-ik* is the word *noorik* ‘newly married woman’. The historical feminine meaning of the suffix can also be seen in cow names (e.g. *Mustik* < *must* ‘black’, *Punik* < *punane* ‘red’, while bull names are derived from the same base words using other suffixes). Apart from that, the

¹ However, in Livonian, *nùgr̥kki* refers to a young person, without any reference to gender (Mägiste 1928–29: 26).

evidence of the suffix's former feminine meaning can be found in several Estonian dialects. We aim to demonstrate the distribution of the feminine suffix *-ik* across the entire Estonian language area, using examples found in the EKI (Institute of the Estonian Language) dictionaries of Estonian dialects. Our examples include terms derived with the suffix *-ik* that refer to little girls and young women (of which the latter are mostly pejorative, suggesting a link between diminution/femininity and pejoration).

The examples of forms meaning 'little girl' are: ***latsik*** 'little girl' < South Estonian *lats* 'child'; ***välgik*** 'little girl' < *välk, väle* 'swift'; ***väitsik*** 'little girl'. The forms meaning 'young woman' are: ***noorik*** 'newly married young woman' < *noor* 'young'; ***kaasik*** 'female wedding singer, companion of the bride', possibly < *kaas-* 'co-'. Pejorative derivatives include: ***edvik*** 'flirtatious girl' < *edeve* 'vain'; ***kepsik*** 'girl with loose morals' < *keps* 'leg', *kepslema* 'to prance'; ***pordik*** 'immoral woman' < *pordu-*, a root denoting sexual immorality; and ***lupsik*** 'disparaging term for a woman'. Some derivatives show semantic reduplication, where the suffix repeats the feminine meaning of the base form, e.g. ***lehmik*** 'promiscuous girl' < *lehm* 'cow'; ***naisik*** 'immoral woman, mother of an illegitimate child' < *naine* 'woman'; and ***hatik*** 'flirtatious girl' < *hatt* 'bitch, female dog'.

Our data shows that the suffix appears in all dialects across Estonia. To our knowledge, two of the above-mentioned words are only found in non-Southern dialects: *kepsik* and *naisik*; both Southern and non-Southern dialects feature five forms: *lehmik*, *väitsik*, *pordik*, *noorik*, and *kaasik*; while five forms are found in Southern dialects only: *latsik*, *välgik*, *edvik*, *lupsik*, and *hatik*. In conclusion, the feminine suffix *-ik* is not exclusive to South Estonian, let alone an arbitrary invention of Gutsclaff. It is a widespread element across all Estonian dialects as well as in the Finnic languages in general (see the Finnish, Votic and Ingrian examples above).

References

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