

Dialectal distribution of word meanings

My paper is focused on mapping semantic variation of a word used in several dialects or languages. The method is not often used in traditional geolinguistics. The distribution of some words in the Finnic languages is mapped in the Finnic linguistic atlas *Atlas Linguarum Fennicarum* (ALFE). These maps show the semantic differentiation and similarities of a word (so called formative) across cognate languages (e.g. Hänninen 2000, Oja 2003, Saarinen 2007: 130–131). A few ALFE semantic maps will be demonstrated as examples in the presentation. In addition, sometimes displaying the map in a smaller territory (e.g. in Estonian dialects) enables finer semantic differentiation.

The method is also suitable for comparing the areal distribution of the meanings of similar words which belong to different language families (cf. Est. *kaalikas*, *kaal*, Latv. *kālis* ‘Swedish turnip’, and Fin. *kaali* ‘cabbage’). Sometimes the word origin can be specified by following its semantic variation in the dialects of contact languages, e.g. Est. *titt* ‘baby, doll’ < MLGer. and *tita* ‘child’ < Rus. (Oja 2011: 187–188). The variation of word meaning may suggest different borrowing times or travelling routes. For example Finnic *villa* < Balt., cf. Latv. *vilna*, but Est. (Võru dial.) *villañ* ‘women’s plaid’ < Latv. *vilnaine* ‘id.’ < *vilna* (Vaba 1997: 242). Comparing the meanings of loanwords in the source language and all its target languages could reveal new interesting perspectives. Semantic maps could be of invaluable help here. Showing the different meanings of the word by charting their respective usage areas provides an opportunity to follow early inter-ethnic contacts and the history of linguistic change.

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