

## REVIEW

**Mikko Heikkilä**, *Bidrag till Fennoskandiens språkliga förhistoria i tid och rum*. Helsinki: Unigrafia, 2014. Pp. 349. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-0066-5>. doi:[10.1017/S0332586515000074](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0332586515000074)

### Reviewed by Janne Saarikivi

*Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, P.O. Box 4 (Fabianinkatu 24), FIN-00014, University of Helsinki, Finland. [Janne.Saarikivi@helsinki.fi](mailto:Janne.Saarikivi@helsinki.fi)*

Mikko Heikkilä's dissertation *Bidrag till Fennoskandiens språkliga förhistoria i tid och rum* [Contributions to linguistic prehistory of Fennoscandia in space and time] is a new contribution in a well-established tradition of research on Germanic borrowings in Finnic and Saami. This group of borrowings, first scientifically investigated already by Vilhelm Thomsen in his breakthrough monograph *Über den Einfluss der germanischen Sprachen in die Finnisch-Lappischen* (Thomsen 1870), is, without doubt, among the most thoroughly researched in the linguistic world. After Thomsen, it has been touched upon by T. E. Karsten (1914), A. D. Kylstra (1961), Tette Hofstra (1985) and Jorma Koivulehto (1999), to mention a few of the most important scholars from among dozens of other researchers. It can be noted in this connection that Mikko Heikkilä's defense of the dissertation at the University of Helsinki occurred on the same day as the late professor Koivulehto's passing away, adding symbolic value to the emergence of a new generation of scholars in loanword studies.

With the material from many early attested languages, Indo-European studies have achieved more in reconstructing the proto-languages than Finno-Ugrian studies. This is true especially in the establishing of regular sound correspondences and writing reliable etymological dictionaries and vocabularies of proto-languages (such as, for instance, those of Derksen 2008, 2014 and Kroonen 2013 to mention just a few of the most recent contributions). However, Finno-Ugrian studies have probably achieved a higher level in the study of borrowing processes. There is considerable amount of scientific literature dealing with old layers of borrowings from various Indo-European branches to Finno-Ugrian, many of which achieve high accuracy in establishing correspondences between Uralic sound systems and reconstructed phases of development of Indo-European languages (see e.g. Mikkola 1894, Kalima 1956, Koivulehto 1999). There is no doubt that the lexical material presented in such studies can fruitfully be reinterpreted from the point of view of new advancements in historical linguistics, while simultaneously presenting new etymologies.

The Finno-Ugrian research tradition has been taken into account only in a fairly modest manner in the Indo-European studies. It is not entirely unusual to see serious Indo-Europeanist scholars making references to decade old standard sources dealing with borrowings in Finnic and Saami, and discussing ideas considered as outdated in mainstream Finno-Ugrian studies. This is also reflected in the scientific discussion regarding the location and dating of the speaking area of Proto-Germanic in which the old contacts between Finnic and Germanic have been considered only in a very restricted manner. It is not uncommon that Indo-European scholars defend an idea of a Proto-Germanic speaking area in Denmark or Northern Germany, thus leaving the ample evidence of early contacts between Proto-Finnic and Proto-Germanic without explanation (as, for a variety of reasons, Proto-Finnic, may have not been spoken in Northern Germany or adjacent territories).

Certainly, such a discrepancy is also caused by the lack of an up-to-date handbook volume on Germanic borrowings in Finnic (the last attempt at writing such a volume was that of Hofstra 1985). While very few scholars master both the Finno-Ugrian and Germanic historical phonology and etymology and thus dare to evaluate the results of individual research papers on Finnic–Germanic contacts, the field lacks a reliable basic reference on sound shifts, layers and periodization of the contacts. In this respect, the dissertation by Mikko Heikkilä, which aims at reconstructing the relative and absolute (!) chronology of the Germanic, Finnic and Saami sound shifts on the basis of comparative lexical evidence, most notably, Germanic loanwords in Finnic and Saami as well as toponyms, has very ambitious and far-reaching goals rooted in a long research tradition, and it has potentially important repercussions in the philological and prehistoric studies both on the Finno-Ugrian and on the Germanic side.

The bold aim of the study bears witness of an ambitious young scholar who has earlier presented new etymologies as well as chronological and (pre)historical interpretations. Heikkilä states that his research material consists of all (!) of the established Germanic borrowings in Finnic, on the basis of *Lexikon der älteren germanischen Lehnwörter in den ostseefinnischen Sprachen* (LÄGLOS) as well as other relevant etymological dictionaries, but not only these (p. 27). In addition to his main goal, he also discusses many questions related to the prehistory of the Finnic and Saami people, and presents many toponymic etymologies for Finnish toponyms. These parts of his work, which from the point of view of the main aim are secondary, actually make up a half of the whole volume.

In the methodological part (pp. 27–32), the basic methodologies of sound history and etymology are presented and there is also a passage on their implementation in the study of toponyms. The methodologies of the interdisciplinary study of prehistory are not touched upon, although the author has many fairly original ideas even in this field, which, in the eyes of a critical reader, have several methodologically problematic issues. The methodological part also reveals a certain far-fetched confidence in the methodologies of historical linguistics.

Heikkilä's bibliography is impressive, and his writing proves that he has, in fact, read most of it. The author has in-depth knowledge regarding many details of language history of both the Finnic and the Germanic languages. The structure of the thesis is, however, fairly peculiar, and the reader gets an impression that the different parts, i.e. the reconstruction of the order of the sound shifts in three linguistic branches, the discussion regarding detailed questions of the prehistory of Finnic and Saami groups, and the toponymic discussions do not necessarily form a coherent whole. Some parts of the discussion are clearly based on substantial evidence, for example the discussion regarding the character and the relative dating of some Finnic sound shifts, whereas other parts represent little more than speculations on the basis of a few stray facts, for example the discussion on the character of *Terra feminarum* (pp. 192–193) mentioned by Adam of Bremen, or the *Pohjola* (pp. 238–242) of Finnish folk poetry, which are both identified with historical regions in Ostrobothnia by the author.

The reconstruction of the earlier phases of language development in the light of language contact research always involves both etymology and historical phonology. However, most scholars place a clear emphasis on one or the other. It seems to be the case that Heikkilä is better equipped to discuss the questions regarding historical phonology than those of etymology. The historical phonological changes are often discussed in depth in his thesis, and convincing general linguistic arguments have been put forward to verify or falsify hypotheses in this field, especially from the point of view of Germanic studies.

From the Finno-Ugrian point of view, critical questions arise every now and then, though. For instance, the author seems to consider *joukko* 'pile, stock' and *ruoko* 'cane, reed' with a second syllable *o*, examples of the oldest layer of borrowings in Finnic (dated 1500 BC by the author, p. 97), although from the Finno-Ugrian point of view both words represent a fairly new phonematic shape (long vowel in the first syllable, in *joukko* even before a consonant cluster). The dating of these words at a relatively young age would seem to be supported by the fact that they have no cognates in Saami. Kuokkala (2012) has recently investigated the Western Finno-Ugrian words with an *o*-stem and concluded that most of these words can be considered as relatively new and that the old hypothesis according to which the *o*-stem is a Finno-Saamic innovation only finds support in a small number of reliable etymologies.

When it comes to the etymological discussion, the author accepts most of the Germanic etymologies presented for Finnish words in the earlier research and considers them as research material for historical phonology almost without hesitation. He does not seem to acknowledge that an etymology that is phonematically possible is nevertheless not necessarily correct, and that for establishing a good etymology, one always has to try to exclude all other competing etymological possibilities as less likely. This is especially apparent when he presents new

etymologies. For instance, the author explains Finnish *pursua*, *pursottaa*, *purskahtaa* ‘gush’, as related to Swedish *fors* ‘rapids’, from which the Finnish *purha* and Saami *borsi*, both dialectal words meaning ‘rapids’, derive (pp. 90–91). The Swedish word, however, has a fairly stable meaning, whereas the Finnic words have varying semantics related to bursting water. The author does not discuss the relationship of the Finnic words with other words close in both phonology and meaning, for instance, Finnish *puro* ‘brook, source’, *pure* ‘foam, bubble’ and *purista* ‘burble’, all connected to water pouring out. Further, he does not mention the English *burst* that has the same meaning as the Finnic word and had a cognate in Old Norse (*brestan/brast/brosten*). The author does not take into account possible sound symbolism that may have affected the development of this kind of words both in Finnic and in Germanic. Similar cases are also found elsewhere in the book, for instance the etymology of Finnish *hento* ‘fragile, tender’ from \* $\chi$ em $\bar{t}$ a ‘hornlös’ > *hind* ‘doe (deer)’ (p. 74). While the presentation of new etymological suggestions is not central for the main argument of the thesis, a similar lack of caution is occasionally characteristic also of the author’s handling of etymologies presented by other scholars.

That said, I am inclined to believe that Hekkilä’s relative ordering of some major sound shifts is still reasonably well motivated. The methodological approach is, without doubt, a sound one and can be considered one of the important merits of the dissertation. It is certainly the case that the order of the sound shifts can be reconstructed on the basis of their attestation in loanwords both in the source as well as the target language of the borrowings. Such a methodology has been followed by scholars even earlier in a number of etymological studies, although seldom systematically. Thus, the approach employed by Heikkilä is a promising one, if not conclusive. He has put forward arguments for each of the proposed order of the shifts, and although some of them may be based on dubious etymologies or have alternative interpretations, it remains a notable achievement of the author that he has established the first full chronology of the sound shifts in Finnic, Saami and Germanic. A similar investigation could be conducted on other well-known layers of borrowings in any language.

Obviously, more investigations will be needed to shed light on numerous details. It can be considered a serious flaw of the dissertation that the author does not present a corpus of established etymologies that could be used for double-checking his claims regarding the order and age of the sound shifts. It takes a lot of expertise to follow the author’s thought, which is not always too clearly presented, and the reader is not able to check the presented analysis in the light of the actual material. The author does present etymological word material for each step, but the fact that some of the etymologies are dubious casts a shadow over the analysis in which every piece is dependent on every other piece. It would have been a better methodology to choose a corpus of indisputable loan etymologies and then at each step present the corpora of those cases that have taken part in a particular sound change.

Problems are particularly apparent in the absolute chronology of the sound shifts proposed by the author. The chronology is presented with an accuracy of 25 years (a generation) but is fairly speculative, to say the least.

As already mentioned, a relatively large part of the dissertation is devoted to toponymic etymologies of Finnish place names from Saami and Germanic languages; many of these etymologies do not stand critical scrutiny, mainly due to the methodology followed. The author has been looking for stray etymologies for toponyms that fit his reconstructions of sound history, without trying to establish parallel name types elsewhere or in the name-giving language. He has also sometimes failed to investigate all the names with similar stems, and treated only a handful of cases related to particular topics. Had the author have followed the methodological guidelines for the toponymic etymologies laid out by himself (on pages 31–32), it is likely that the results would have been more robust. For instance, Heikkilä explains the name for a Lappland major river *Ounasjoki* from Germanic *\*Auðniz* > Proto-Nordic *\*Ouðniz* ‘uninhabited’ and dates the borrowing at 400 BC. He does not discuss how likely it is that the Saami would have borrowed a name of a major river from the Scandinavians (we do not know a single such case anywhere else in Saamiland), nor how likely it is that the forefathers of the Scandinavians would have named a river that was situated probably thousands of kilometers from their living area. In a similar vein, the place name *Sarsa* (village and rapids near Tampere) is derived from a word denoting ‘horn’ in a hypothetical satemized language that would have been spoken in Finland in the Stone Age. While such a hypothesis may, in principle, be correct, it is utterly unlikely. If one looks for etymologies from reconstructed Stone Age languages for an isolated Finnish toponym there are, of course, countless phonematically plausible but still utterly improbable possibilities. However, it has to be noted, for the sake of fairness, that a minority of the proposed etymologies are acceptable, such as Heikkilä’s (2012) Saami and Germanic explanation for the name *Tampere* (~ cf. Saami *dappal* ‘stream pool’ < *\*timpele* < Germ. ~ cf. English *dimble* ‘ravine with a watercourse’).

Taking into account the vast amount of etymologies and sound shifts treated, and the speculative character of the author’s many results, it is especially problematic that the volume lacks a proper discussion part where the central results are put into a context and weighed critically. The concluding discussion (pp. 270–273) is only three pages long and rather superficial.

The overall impression of the monograph is that the very erudite author has been unable to restrict himself and self-critically assess his many ideas. Instead, he has just included them all in a collection of a learned stream of consciousness that consists of some genial parts, most notably in the methodology of the main part – the ordering of the sound shifts and some good but unproven hypotheses – and some sheer speculation that is somewhat out of place in a scientific monograph.

While this might sound like a harsh criticism, one has to admit that Heikkilä's dissertation is, in any case, much more creative and interesting than most of the mainstream dissertations in the present academia that only analyze a particular research material in a predictable way. It also contains new ideas of potential scientific importance, and certainly a lot of inspiration for future studies in the field of Finnic–Germanic contact. The author gives a proof of his many talents as a linguist while sometimes being over-optimistic in his interpretations. Had an investigation like this been conducted with the needed amount of self-criticism and modesty, it would, without doubt, have been a groundbreaking study in both Germanistics and Finno-Ugrian studies.

I would, however, recommend a reader not familiar with the research topic and tradition to read this dissertation with a certain amount of caution and always double-check the interpretations it contains with other sources, if possible.

## REFERENCES

- Derksen, Rick. 2008. *Etymological Dictionary of the Slavic Inherited Lexicon* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series, vol. 4). Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill.
- Derksen, Rick. 2014. *Etymological Dictionary of the Baltic Inherited Lexicon* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series). Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill.
- Heikkilä, Mikko. 2012. Tampere – saamelaisen Tammerkosken kaupunki [Tampere: A city of the Saami Tammerkoski rapids]. *Virittäjä* 116, 117–124.
- Hofstra, Tette. 1985. *Ostseefinnisch und Germanisch. Frühe Lehnbeziehungen im nördlichen Ostseeraum im Lichte der Forschung seit 1961*. Ph.D. dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen.
- Kalima, Jalo. 1956. *Die slavischen Lehnwörter im Ostseefinnischen*. Berlin: Harrassowitz.
- Karsten, T. E. 1914. *Germanische Lehnwörter im Finnischen und ihre Erforschung*. Heidelberg: Winters.
- Koivulehto, Jorma. 1999. *Verba mutuata. Quae vestigia antiquissimi cum Germanis aliisque Indo-Europeis contactus in linguis Fennicis reliquerint* [Borrowed words: What old contacts with the Germanic and other Indo-European languages have left behind?]. Edited by Klaas Ph. Ruppel. Helsinki: Finnisch-Ugrische Gesellschaft.
- Kroonen, Guus. 2013. *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series, vol. 11). Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill.
- Kuokkala, Juha. 2012. Jälkitavun labiaalivokaalit saamessa ja itämerensuomessa [Second syllable labial vowels in Saami and Finnic languages]. MA thesis, University of Helsinki. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/34015>.
- Kylstra, Andries Dirk. 1961. *Geschichte der germanisch–finnischen Lehnwortforschung*. Assen: van Gorcum.
- LÄGLOS = Andries Dirk Kylstra et al. (eds.). 1991–2012. *Lexikon der älteren germanischen Lehnwörter in den ostseefinnischen Sprachen*, 3 vols. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

- Mikkola, Joos J. 1894. *Berührungen zwischen den westfinnischen und slavischen Sprachen I. Slavische Lehnwörter in den westfinnischen Sprachen*. Helsinki: Finnisch-Ugrische Gesellschaft.
- Thomsen, Vilhelm. 1870. *Über den Einfluss der germanischen Sprachen auf Finnisch-Lappischen*. Halle: Waisenhauses.