

CONCEPT, WORD, and PLACE

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As any verbal expression, be it oral or written, is usually addressed to someone, it has to be understandable to the listener or reader. Therefore it is not at all irrelevant what terms are chosen to express an idea. As we know, a word as such, i.e. a sequence of speech sounds is void of meaning unless created (and used) by a person to express a concept. Luckily, the seekers of the springs of word creation need not wander into the distant past to witness the origins of human language, however exciting the adventure could be. Living languages are in a constant process of change and development, during which new concepts constantly keep finding their forms of expression. One of the criteria of viability of a new word, proved by its coming into use is its informative aspect. This means that the new word should better have a familiar ring. There are various ways to achieve that: a new object may first be introduced by a foreign term, but as it becomes familiar the foreign word becomes domesticated as a loan word more or less adapted to the phonetic or orthographic system of the target language (e.g. *Internet*, *interjäär* 'interior' [< Fr. intérieur]); new words can be produced from familiar stems by means of derivation or compounding (e.g. *disainima* 'to design' [< loanword + Estonian suffixes]; *töötlus* 'processing' [< the stem word *töö* 'work']; *katla/maja* 'boilerhouse'); a notion may also be brought home by a figurative comparison (e.g. *võimete tipp* lit. 'summit of one's abilities' or *teadmiste lagi* lit. 'ceiling of one's knowledge' in the sense of 'upper limit,' *allmaailm* 'underworld' in the sense of 'illegal circles') etc.

A human being, leading his/her life in a spatially perceived environment often creates terms in which objects are associated with a place. The Estonian word *koht* 'place' stands for a very wide notion ranging from an arbitrary point to immeasurable distances. In most cases, however, the words *koht* and *paik* 'site' are used while speaking of a more restricted geographical area, or part of a closed space, while the location of an object (often in relation to something else) is ex-

pressed by an adverbial modifier of place.

In Estonian it quite often happens that instead of cardinal points directions are pointed out by means of place names. For example, the question 'where does the room face?' may be answered by 'The yard' or 'The street / Gonsior street / Tartu road / Department store' etc. In some cases places just seem better (clearer, better understandable, more relevant) than the points of the compass. At the same time their use is more limited. Near the seashore, for example, it may suffice to speak just of sea breeze and land breeze, but it is pointless on a larger territory (for what is land breeze in Tallinn may serve as sea breeze in Helsinki, and vice versa). In local usage, however, this way of expression is prevalent enough to produce terms even (e.g. on Saaremaa the western direction is called *vesikaar* [lit. *vesi* 'water' + (*ilma*)*kaar* 'cardinal point']).

The following discussion is not, however, directly dedicated to place names, being rather focused on the more philosophical problem of how a place can help language users extend their vocabulary and where, on the contrary, it should make the user more careful when choosing his/her words.

Toponym as part of a term

Literary language contains a great deal of terms for substances, animal breeds, food, objects of ethnography, etc., that are directly based on a place name, e.g. *tori hobune* 'a horse of Tori breed,' *kiievi kotlet* 'Kiev cutlet,' *mulgi kapsad* 'Mulgi sauerkraut,' *pandivere juust* 'Pandivere cheese,' *muhu sussid* '(embroidered) slippers of Muhu style,' *haapsalu rätik* 'a (fine crocheted) headkerchief of Haapsalu style,' *kibnu kiri* 'a pattern typical to the Isle of Kihnu,' *hiina portselan* 'Chinese porcelain,' *vasalemma marmor* 'limestone typical to Vasalemma pit,' *soome saun* 'Finnish sauna,' etc.

The comprehensibility of the terms depends, as usual, on the background knowledge of the listener, depending, on its turn, on his/her familiarity with the topic as well as on the distribution of the term. The two factors last mentioned need not always coincide. Such popular patterns as *kibnu kiri* and *muhu mänd* [lit. Muhu twirling stick of pine], for example, are relatively well known in Estonia, yet not all Estonians call them just that.

In foreign translations local terms usually call for an additional explanation.

Compounds combining a noun and a place word

Estonian is a language very fond of compound words. At that, the system is open, which means that the number of compounds is not fixed and every user is invited to make up his/her own compounds as necessity may require. The new compound is generally understood, if it has been made up following the traditional system of word-compounding. A speaker of Estonian, wishing to emphasize the association of any object, phenomenon, property etc. with a place, may create a compound the first component of which is a noun or adverbial denoting the place and the second component is a word denoting the object etc. in question. The following discussion will be limited to such compounds the second component of which is a declinable word.

If the first (place-denoting) component is an uninflected word, the compounding is, as a rule, simple and the result is transparent enough (e.g. *allüürnik* 'subtenant', *järelkäru* 'trailer' [*< järel* 'after' + *käru* 'cart'], *ettekandja* 'waiter' [*< ette* 'in front of (somebody) + *kandma* 'carry'], *eeskiri* 'prescript, instruction' [*< ees* 'in front' + *kiri* 'letter, writing'], *eestseisus* 'board of directors' [*< eest* 'from in front' + *seisma* 'stand'], *kõrvalhoone* 'outbuilding' [*< kõrval* 'at the side'], *tagakamber* 'inner chamber,' [lit. 'back chamber'], etc.

In the case of a nominal first component an appropriate way of compounding has to be chosen. For the desired precision of expression the formational meaning¹ of the compound has to be considered as well. Depending on the mutual relation of the compound components and their relative role in the whole meaning of the compound, compound nouns are classified into copulative and determinative ones (see EKG 1995: 457).

In the copulative compound nouns both components are equal partners so that the meaning of the compound is the result of the summation of the concepts designated by the components. Here the components are invariably compounded nominally (e.g. *linnriik* 'city-state,' *praamlaev* 'ferry' [lit. 'ferry + ship'], *muuseumkontserdisaal* 'museum-concert-hall,' *saunusvilla* 'summer-cottage with a sauna,' *diiivanvoodi* 'sofa bed').

Determinative compound words, however, consist of a basic component to

¹ Compound nouns with a nominal attributive component can be used to denominate objects and phenomena by referring to a property they share with another object or phenomenon. This abstract, often associative meaning is the formative meaning of the compound. This is the part of the meaning of the compound that is motivated by its own components (EKG I: 458).

carry the meaning, and an attributive component to specify it. Such compounds abound in Estonian and so does their number of different ways of compounding.

Earlier in this century literary Estonian was prescribed to apply nominal compounding wherever the attributive compound denoted a place (Aavik 1914: 9–10; Muuk, Tedre 1930: 41). In dialect material, however, most such cases have been shown to compound with the genitive (Riikoja 1959: 210). Yet rules can hardly stop a living language from evolving and so the second half of the 20th century shows that grammarians have turned a more attentive ear to popular usage. Newer grammars² point out that as a rule a nominal place-denoting attributive component is compounded to another noun with the genitive, e.g. *linnakool* 'municipal school,' *tänavapoiss* 'street urchin,' *merevaik* 'amber' [lit. 'resin of the sea'], *metsapähkel* 'hazel-nut' [lit. 'forest nut'], *kaldapääsuke* 'bank swallow,' *potilill* 'potted plant,' *puurilind* 'caged bird,' *karbibeerings* 'tinned her-ring,' *purgiõlu* 'canned ale.' A number of such compounds are close to compounds the attributive component of which expresses purpose or function, e.g. *katusekivid* 'roof tiles,' *köögimööbel* 'kitchen furniture,' *tänavakingad* 'walking shoes' [lit. 'street shoes'].

Nominal compounding occurs in some plant and animal names (e.g. *aedmaasikas* 'garden strawberry,' *põldhernes* 'field pea,' *metssiga* 'wild boar' [lit. forest + pig]). In addition, nominative compounding can be met among older compounds (e.g. *laudlina* 'table-cloth,' *kariloom* 'herd of cattle' [lit. 'cattle animal']), among loanwords (e.g. *tallmeister* 'groom' [lit. 'stablemaster']), among recent LSP-terms (e.g. *huulhäälik* 'labial sound') and in a few other cases. Among the exceptions just pointed out there is a group of words like *mägikütt* 'mountain hunter,' *mägijõgi* 'mountain stream,' *mägitee* 'mountain path,' *mägikarjamaa* 'mountain pasture,' etc. with the mountain-part referring to a mountainous area or mountain range. I believe that in *mägi-* here we have a case of the stem of a plural in *i* coinciding with the nominative singular.

The attributive word may take other cases, esp. locative ones. In the latter case the base word is mostly a verbal derivative, e.g. *õhkutõus* 'take-off, rising into the air,' *vettehüpe*, 'dive, plunge into the water,' *saalisviibijad* 'audience' [lit. 'those in the hall'], *töölevõtja* 'employer' [lit. 'taker on'], *marjuleminek* 'going to berry-picking,' *vetelpääste* 'lifeguard' [lit. 'rescue on waters'].

² see, e.g. Valgma, Rimmel 313-314, Erelt *et al.* 1997: 349-350.

Functions of the place-denoting attributive component in compound colour terms

In order to provide an overview of the role played by place words in non-locative vocabulary I would like to analyse words belonging to a definite concept. It is convenient to do it using my own database of Estonian colour terms, the 1,500 entries of which include vocabulary from both literary Estonian and the dialects. The above examples were all nouns, but a colour term may function either as a noun or as an adjective in a sentence. As is proved by the collected material the first human reaction to colour is to its visual aspect. The nouns denote either 1) colouring substances or 2) other objects of the same colour (e.g. *valge* 'white' in the meanings 'white horse,' 'milk,' 'vodka' etc.) The last mentioned group also includes combinations of a toponym and a colour term denoting fruit and vegetable varieties, such as the plum 'Hiuu blue,' the potatoes 'Jõgeva yellow' and 'Latvian yellow,' the red currant 'Holland red,' the cherry 'Viljandi yellow' etc.

Of colour adjectives (resp. adjectival phrases) originating in place names the first two coming to mind are *muhuroosa* 'Muhu pink' and *setu sinine* 'Setu blue,' both of which are motivated by the specific hue of a yarn typically used in the making of local folk costumes (of Muhu and Setu parishes, respectively).

Imported blue dyeing substance used to be called *berliinisinine* 'Berlin blue,' *preisi sinine* 'Prussian blue,' *pariisi sinine* 'Paris blue' etc. The attributive proper name in adjectival function was used to emphasize the foreign origins of the colouring substance.

In the Muhu subdialect the bright red manufactured dye has been called *linna punane* 'city red.' Here, too, the attributive part of the phrase seems indicative of the origin of the dye that was bought in town, not home-boiled from the roots of northern bedstraw. That does not exclude, however, that *linna punane* may be a folk-etymological development of the loanword *aniliinipunane* 'aniline red.' It is, after all, typical of foreign loans that they inspire people to invent something to replace an opaque background with a seemingly more transparent one. Most of the dialect variants for aniline dyes sound like a combination of familiar words or names, e.g. *liina* (Han)³, *līnapunane* (Kse), *liine* (Mih), *liinepunane* (Käi Mih Koe), *aniliinelilla* (Kuu), *anilillisiinine* (Urv), *anililla* (San Har), *liinisinine* (Jäm), *aneliin* (Kuu Koe Kad), *aneliinipunane* (Koe VMr Kad), *aani-line* (VMr), *aaniilin verev* (Kan), *aaniilin* (Iis), *aniliin* (Emm Rei Tor Kos).

³ A list of conventional abbreviations for Estonian subdialects is available at the end of the article.

Not every Estonian associates international colour terms originally derived from place names such as *bordoo(punane)* 'claret red' [< Bordeaux], *orleani(kollane)* 'Orleans (yellow)', *oxfordi sinine* 'Oxford blue' etc. with the names of unfamiliar distant cities. Some users know the loanwords just as colour terms. Foreign-sounding words have been phonetically adapted, in some cases to resemble similarly sounding Estonian words. Orleans, for example, has developed into the following dialect variants: *ordeni(kollane) ~ -kolne* (Käi Vig), *-punane* (Mih) 'order yellow/red,' *ordani värv* (Jõh), *ordjo(o)ni(kollane)* (Nis KuuK), *-kõllane* Kam, *ordjon* (Sim), *ordjom* (Jõh), *ordjanilpunane* (Aud), *ordjan* (Lüg Mar Tõs Tor Ris Lai Plt), *ordijaan* (Kei Trm Ksi), *uorde jaani värv* (Jõe), *ordijoon* (Kam San Kan Urv), *ort* (Kod Võn Ote Kan Har Plv Vas Rüp). Bordeaux motivating the Estonian term for claret red has produced such variants as *pordupunane* (Lai Krk), *pordupruum* (VNg), *pordupruum* (Har) 'brothel red/brown.' The development proves that the term has been perceived as a foreign loan denoting a particular hue, while location information was lost for the user.

Potisinine 'indigo blue' [< *pott* 'pot' + *sinine* 'blue'] is one of the best known terms in which the attributive component consists of a place-denoting common noun. Here the first component refers to the vessel in which the dye was prepared. Notably, it was necessary to dissolve blue vitriol in an acid. The acid was produced from urine left to sour in a warm place for a week or two. The really permanent colour thus produced was also called *potisine* (VNg VMr Krk Plv) või *potivärv* (KJn) [lit. 'pot colour']. Estonian dialect material contains nouns as well as adjectives of the same meaning, such as: *tündrisinine* (KuuK) [lit. 'tun blue'], *pottsinine* (Ris), *potirobeline* (Emm SJn), *potirobiline* (Pst), *potirobikolne* (Käi). [lit. 'pot green']. A greenish hue was obtained, if the wool had been dyed yellow before being treated with indigo blue.

While the names of bought dyes (the so-called city-dyes) were etymologically unclear for the countryfolk, this was certainly not the case with *potisinine*. A number of modern townspeople believe it is an ugly colour of a greyish or purplish hue, as they associate the *pott*-component either with the bottom of a kettle or with a blue enamel vessel. Actually, indigo blue was used to get the purest blue possible. Its lightness or darkness depended – as usual in the dyeing of textiles – on how strong the solution was.

The object of dyeing is referred to in such compounds as *kübaramust* [lit. 'hat black'], *särgimust* [lit. 'shirt black'], *seelikumust* [lit. 'skirt black'] and *kuue-*

nööripunane [lit. 'red of the cord sewn to the coat']. These are some old names for the bought red and black dyes. Extending the notion of place a little the compound terms could be considered as having been motivated by the place where the dye was used.

In Estonian it is quite normal to describe a colour by comparison, i.e. by means of a compound or phrase the attributive component of which is the name of an object the colour of which is generally well-known. If the object being compared is a place such as, e.g. the sea (*mereroheline* 'sea green'), the sky (*taevakarva* 'sky blue') etc. we may conventionally speak of the place as a base of comparison. Yet in most cases the object of comparison is probably perceived as a visual object rather than a place with spatial properties. There are various concepts qualifying better for a place-based comparison, e.g. *põrgupalavus* 'infernal heat,' *kuumaastik* 'lifeless [lit. 'lunar'] landscape.'

In a compound adjective the place-denoting attributive word usually occurs in the genitive case. Nominal compounding is preferred in comparison-based compound adjectives the attributive component of which emphasizes the high degree or intensity of the property (e.g. *haudivaikne* 'quiet as the grave,' *kottpime* 'pitch dark,' lit. 'dark as a sack'). The comparison is based on an object maximally characterized by the property in question. Place seldom occurs in this position. Dialect speakers have made a substantial difference between the words *taeva(karva) sinine* 'light blue, sky blue' (Nom. *taevas*, Gen. *taeva*) and *taevas-sinine* 'very blue'; *tule(karva) punane* 'yellowish red' (Nom. *tuli*, Gen. *tule*) and *tulipunane* 'fiery red, very red' etc. (Oja 1995: 813 jj). As in literary Estonian it has been recommended to use nominal compounding with most comparison-based colour terms, the above difference in meaning cannot be distinguished.

To sum up the above discussion we can say that if a place name occurs as an attributive component of a compound or a phrase, it may be indicative of

(1) the place of the origin of the object (e.g. *preisisinine* lit. 'Prussian blue,' *linnaapunane* 'city red,' *potisinine* lit. 'pot blue');

(2) the kernel area of the distribution of the object or phenomenon, or a well-known place of its massive evidence (e.g. *muhuroosa* lit. 'Muhu pink,' *põrgupalavus* 'infernal heat');

(3) a place of application, with an element of functionality (e.g. *kübaramust*, lit. 'hat black').

Across different conceptual groups the place-denoting attributive component

is not equally productive in compounding/phrase building. Some concepts allow additional functions. The above discussion was focused just on the most universal patterns.

Every place has its own ways

Speaking of words and places we can hardly overlook another important connection between them. Notably, wherever we go we find a local language variety including means of expression for all locally relevant concepts.

It may seem, perhaps, that on a small territory like Estonia regional differences cannot matter much. Considering the fact, however, that the language of our forefathers, calling themselves *maarahvas* 'landspeople' used to be spoken in eight different dialects with more than a hundred subdialects and that the territory was divided between two literary standards – the South-Estonian and the North-Estonian ones – right into the middle of the 19th century, I tend to believe that vernacular background has a rather essential, even though subconscious, role in the language perception of many an Estonian.

Local differences are also manifested in Estonian colour terms. Leaving aside purely dialectal terms I would now like to present a few examples of polysemy from the realm of colour terms.

An aboriginal South-Estonian perceives the words *punane* and *verev* as synonyms for 'red.' An aboriginal North-Estonian, however, regards the *verev* form as a derivative of the word *veri* 'blood' and consequently uses it in the sense of 'looking pink' or 'blood-red.'

In literary Estonian *haljas* means 'fresh, sappy, not wilted,' whereas in the Võru dialect (*h*)*allass* (~ *halas*, ~ *-ss*) is the common word for 'green.'

Yellow colour is called *vahanõ* or *vahass* in the subdialect of Hargla. Egg yolk, for example, is *vahane muna* [lit. 'yellow egg']. In the literary standard *vahane* means 'waxlike' or 'light yellow like wax.'

Egg yolk is called *rebu* in literary Estonian and the compound *rebukarva* denotes a yellow colour. On the Isle of Saaremaa and in some places on the western coast, however, *rebu* is an adjective denoting a spotty grey.

Dialectal differences are also observed in the local usage of *ruuge* 'light brown, dark yellow,' *ruske* 'russet, reddish brown' etc.

Beside background differences of dialectal origin word ambiguity may arise

from ethnographic, natural a.o. regional differences. In southern Estonia, for example, the word *savikarva* 'clay-coloured' denotes a yellowish-reddish-brownish colour, whereas on the northern coast it means 'grey.' The reason lies, of course, in the geological diversity of the Estonian territory, i.e. the colour differences between the local varieties of clay.

Although the above examples were all Estonian colour adjectives, the cases they illustrate are of a far wider distribution.⁴ The larger the area and the more numerous the languages/nations/cultures compared, the more difficult it is to adequately match the local terms.

In the questionnaire for the linguistic atlas *Atlas Linguarum Europae*, for example, there is such an item as house, explicated by the drawing of a simple private home and an explanation to the effect that it is a people's (family) home (Weijnen 1976: 72–73, 102). The Atlas is expected to provide distribution maps of the equivalents of this concept in all European dialects. But the regional differences between the types of dwellings used inevitably lead to the situation that the mapped words stand for different buildings. The same applies to the item honey-comb (Weijnen 1976: 66–67, 100). As for the item mole (Weijnen 1976: 38–39, 95) the mapped words refer to different species even within the area of the Finnic languages, as it includes the habitats of different kinds of the animal.

For the Finnic Atlas (*Atlas Linguarum Fennicarum*) it has been decided to map the equivalents of seed box used in the Finnic languages (Tuomi *et al.* 1989: 31). The number of words collected surpasses 150. Yet, due considerable variation in form and material it is often hard to call it the same thing (see Jussila 1995).

As for the equivalents for 'door' the mapping was complicated by the fact that unlike the rest of the Finnic languages the Karelian and Veps languages employ different words for the inside door and the outer door, while the latter coincides with the word denoting the (yard) gate.

Trying to express one's ideas in a foreign language one has to remember that foreign vocabulary is meant to express concepts of a place that is strange to us. This means that we are to search the foreign words for the most likely equivalents for our notions. At that consulting a dictionary need not always suffice as it is not the words we are translating but concepts. The expertise of a lexicographer in a particular field is seldom equal to that of a specialist.

⁴ On some foreign equivalents of Estonian colour terms see Oja 1998: 17–26.

Abbreviations of subdialect names:

Aud – Audru	Krk – Karksi	Rei – Reigi
Emm – Emmaste	Kse – Karuse	Ris – Risti
Han – Hanila	Ksi – Kursi	Räp – Rápina
Har – Hargla	KuuK – Kuusalu (Central dia- lect)	San – Sangaste
Iis – Iisaku (Eastern dialect)	Kuu – Kuusalu (Coastal dialect)	Sim – Simuna
Jõe – Jöelähtme	Käi – Käina	SJn – Suure-Jaani
Jõh – Jõhvi	Lai – Laiuse	Tor – Tori
Jäm – Jämaja	Lüg – Lügänuuse	Trm – Torma
Kad – Kadrina	Mar – Martna	Tös – Töstamaa
Kam – Kambja	Mih – Mihkli	Urv – Urvaste
Kan – Kanepi	Nis – Nissi	Vas – Vastseliina
Kei – Keila	Ote – Otepää	Vig – Vigala
KJn – Kolga-Jaani	Plt – Põltsamaa	VMr – Väike-Maarja
Kod – Kodavere	Plv – Põlva	VNg – Viru-Nigula
Koe – Koeru	Pst – Paistu	Vön – Võnnu
Kos – Kose		

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