

An innovation in the contact of North Russian and Central Veps dialects

Chingduang Yurayong

University of Helsinki

This paper provides a perspective on methods in the comparative studies of genealogically unrelated dialects. Discussion grounds on empirical data from the contact of North Russian (Slavic) and Central Veps (Finnic) dialects in the area around Lake Beloye (Vologda region, Russia), which is today the easternmost Finnic speaking area. These dialects share a common feature of postposed demonstrative particle: North Russian *hleb-to* and Central Veps *leip-se* ‘bread-it’. Internal reconstruction shows that this unlikely goes back to Proto-East-Slavic (not attested in Old Russian source) neither to Proto-Finnic stage (Larjavaara 1986, Mäkelä 1993). Thus, we are dealing with a contact-induced innovation on both Slavic and Finnic sides.

This paper maps the spread of this dialectal feature by applying Güldemann’s (2008) classification of contact area with three concentric circles: 1) hotbed, 2) core and 3) periphery. Here, the innermost area around Lake Beloye represents the areal hotbed where occurrence and development of the innovation is at the highest degree. In detail, the demonstratives *-to* in North Russian and *-se* in Central Veps dialects can occur multiple times in a sentence and host-attachment is open to any part of speech from noun to adverb. In the core circle, the innovation still occurs but to a lesser degree of occurrence and development. For instance, Southern Veps dialect, Ludian and Karelian generally employ this construction only once in a sentence and the host-attachment is restricted to nouns, pronouns and verbs. Lastly, the periphery covers the outermost circle of the contact zone where the innovation is only sporadically observed. This includes, above all, East Finnish dialects (Hakulinen 1979: 509–512) and East Saami languages (Rießler et al. 2005+) where the use of the postposed demonstrative is not as productive as in the inner circles.