

## **Lexical changes in dialect speech**

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It is common knowledge that future trends are rooted in the past. A century ago the collectors of Estonian dialect material used to complain that dialect speech was disappearing and good informants were hard to find. And yet dialects are still alive, even though spoken in a more or less different way. The basis of the dialects is still there, as well as several of their structural elements, morphological and phonetic features. However, cultural innovation keeps contributing new words, whereas many words fall into oblivion as archaisms. Our paper will discuss the nature of lexical changes, their direct and indirect reasons, areal differences etc. Although the analysis is based on Estonian dialects, some of its conclusions are likely to apply to the dialects of other languages as well.

Among other phenomena, our study revealed the following rules pertaining the etymology and geography of lexical innovations:

1. Lexical changes reflect regional contacts with neighbours, resulting in one and the same concept being expressed by different words in different regions.

2. Usually the terms of a certain field have been borrowed from the language that dominated at the time of the cultural innovation.

3. Domain specifics may condition restricted distribution of certain words, e.g. nautical vocabulary is found on seashores, while fishing terms also occur near rivers and lakes.

Dialect dictionaries often tend to avoid foreign entry words as new, not genuine dialect items. In the course of time, however, many foreign words are either domesticated or subjected to folk etymological adaptation. Often the borderline between new and old is hard to draw. If ever we accept changes taking place in a standard language, we certainly have to accept them in a living and evolving dialect.