

Abstract

The Indo-European and Uralic (Fenno-Ugric) languages dominate present-day Europe, but both families are newcomers which replaced most of the indigenous languages step by step from the Bronze Age onwards. The encounter between indigenous and intrusive cultures, however, was most certainly not the only interaction that took place. By the time of arrival in Europe, the Indo-European and Uralic populations had already broken up and constituted a patchwork of languages and cultures that continued the process of convergence and interchange. Whether contacts were connected to trade, war, social interaction, or exchange of inventions is revealed by the character of the loanwords in each individual case – while the shape of the loanwords expose the time depth and the direction of borrowing.

Traditionally, scholars have thought that basically all loanwords between Indo-European and Uralic languages went in one direction – from the former to the latter. Such an asymmetry is supposed to reflect a past relationship between two peoples where one had the upper hand, technically and politically, at the time of borrowing.

In this dissertation it is shown that cultures of the Northeast played a surprisingly important role in the shaping of our continent from prehistoric to medieval times; and it is shown how these circumstances are reflected even in the vocabularies of modern European languages.

The Indo-European tribes, shortly after their migrations into Europe, came to form part of new cultural communities, influenced by Uralic populations from the North. This had a significant impact on specific parts of the vocabulary, notably terms for religion and warfare. Many trade terms (such as Danish *pung* ‘purse’), and words for tools (e.g. *hammer*) and religious concepts (e.g. *hell*) originate from Fenno-Ugric and other languages spoken in North-eastern Europe at the time. Even our word *half* can be shown to derive from an old Fennic trading term meaning ‘reduced, cheap (of prices)’.

Some terms denote animals hunted for their pelt (e.g. *mink*) and were exchanged in connection to centuries of fur trade along the Baltic coasts from the Roman Ages to the Hanseatic period. Other words for animals, among them quite a few used for pigs and boars, are, quite astonishingly, much older loans going back the pitted-ware culture around 3000 BC. Some loanwords show, for the first time, that (Proto-)Celts and Fennic peoples must have been in direct contact with each other.