

**Shifts in language phenomena status: phonology > morphonology > morphology
(the case of the Votic language)**

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The paper deals with morphonological phenomena in Votic (an almost extinct Balto-Finnic language), which stands out even among the rest Balto-Finnic languages for its complicated morphonological processes (including stem alternations, consonant gradation, secondary gemination, sandhi, etc).

Votic has never been a subject for a morphonological description. Though many historical aspects of consonant gradation and secondary gemination in Votic have been discussed in literature (see Kettunen 1930, Viitso 1964), the exact status of these phenomena has never been stated. The same holds for phoneme alternations, which were of course mentioned in the few existing descriptions of the Votic language (see Ahlqvist 1856, Ariste 1968), but were not viewed from the morphonological perspective.

Trying to create a morphonological description of the Votic language I had to face a number of facts, which need to be interpreted theoretically in order to draw the line between morphonology and other aspects of grammar. Special attention should be paid here to the cases when certain language phenomena change their grammatical status in the language development processes.

For example, the Votic hard and soft laterals (л and l) at first glance seem to be phonetically distributed depending on the next vowel (clusters with back / central vowels have л, with front vowels – l: *lahsi* 'child', *олuD* 'beer', *lehto* 'leaf', *elämä* 'to live', *eli* '(he) was'). That's how they are treated in [Ariste 1968], [Адлер 1966], [Лаанест 1993]. I claim that the distribution of л and l is not so evident.

Indeed, л and l are in complementary distribution if followed by a vowel. But what happens when л/l is at the end of the word or is followed by another consonant? The language material shows that in these cases the choice between л and l is determined by the row of the whole word (Votic has vowel harmony, so all the vowels within a word normally are either front or non-front): l occurs in front-vocalic words (*täll* 'he:Adessiv'), and л occurs in non-front-vocalic words (*kunneiti* 'they heard'). While this distribution can still be called phonetic, the most interesting point

concerns the cases, when we can not determine the row of the word without appealing to the morphological level. This happens when a word has no vowels except for i, which is "neutral" in Votic and can occur in both front and non-front-vocalic words (compare *sika* 'pig' and *pitämä* 'to hold').

We can not explain the л in *iim* 'weather' and l in *silm* 'eye' until we consider other morphological forms of these words and find out that, for example, in Partitive *iim* is back-vocalic (*iima*) and *silm* is front-vocalic (*silmä*). Thus, the distribution of л and l in Votic should be referred to the morphonological level.

Another interesting point concerns secondary gemination. Having originated from a purely phonetic process, secondary gemination in the modern language is a regular morphonological phenomenon, that serves, for example, to distinguish different kinds of stems (e.g. *karu* 'bear:Nominative', *karrua* 'bear-Partitive'). At the same time in some cases secondary gemination becomes one of the morphological means. In Liiv-Luutsatšüla sub-dialect of Votic secondary gemination is a regular way to derive negative pronouns or adverbs: *mikä* 'what' – *mitä* 'what:Partitive' – *eB mittä* 'nothing', *tšen* 'who' – *tšetä* 'who:Partitive' – *eB tšettä* 'nobody', *kuzä* 'where' – *eB kuzza* 'nowhere', *kuhe* 'where (to)' – *eB kuhhe* '(to) nowhere'.

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