

Adjectives denoting surface texture in the Uralic languages: a typological study

Egor Kashkin, Moscow State University

This paper deals with adjectives denoting surface texture in the Uralic languages (those already considered are Finnish, Estonian, Komi, Udmurt, Erzya, Khanty and Nenets; the material is gathered mostly during fieldwork, and also from dictionaries and texts). The research is being conducted within the framework of lexical typology represented in [Rakhilina, Plungian 2007], [Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2008] and other relevant publications of those authors, and fits into the range of research projects dealing with qualitative adjectives mentioned in those papers (cf. studies of adjectives describing colour, size, temperature, etc.). The goal of my talk is to discuss the semantic parameters opposing the direct uses of adjectives denoting surface texture within the language sample concerned, to show basic patterns regulating the development of figurative meanings, and to outline the perspectives for future typological research.

The crucial distinctive parameter for the direct uses is the prototypical way of perceiving a surface: tactile vs. visual, cf. Udmurt *vol'yt* 'smooth' (tactile, e.g. about a small stone, the surface of a table) vs. *čoškylt* 'flat, even' (visual, e.g. about a field, a floor). This main distinction is complicated by a number of other oppositions. Thus, languages tend to describe slippery surfaces with separate lexemes, sometimes drawing a further distinction between a surface we walk on (e.g., a road covered with ice) and the surface of an object dropping out of one's hands (e.g., a wet ball), cf. the use of Komi-Izhma *vol'k* only in the former class of the situations. Adjectives describing surfaces without roughness may also be sensitive to the semantic class of an object (cf. Erzya *vad'aža* 'smooth' applied only to one's hair, clothes, etc., or Komi-Izhma *mol'yd*, which primarily describes surfaces smooth by touch, and extends its use to frames of visual perception only in case of land areas, but not artefacts) and to the impact on a surface, like South Udmurt *tegyz* 'smooth (about an intentionally levelled small piece of land)'. Adjectives denoting different kinds of roughness are opposed with size, frequency, sharpness, etc. of the irregularities on a surface (cf. adjectives specifying a surface with regular rigid roughness perceived by touch, for example, Udmurt *šakyr'es*, Komi-Izhma *sozores'*, Shuryshkary Khanty *karəŋ*).

The figurative uses of the lexemes in question belong to such domains as human qualities (Estonian *kare* 'coarse' → 'strict, severe (human)'), speech (Udmurt *vol'yt* 'smooth' → 'facile, fluent (speech)'), physical states (Nenets *nasorta* 'coarse' → used about an eye with a mote in it), weather (Erzya *kaz'amo* 'coarse' → 'severe (winter or another season)'), etc. Although their development is a point of cross-linguistic variation, it fits some general patterns which I will expose in my talk.

References

- Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Maria. 2008. Approaching lexical typology // Vanhove, Martine (ed.) From Polysemy to Semantic Change. – Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. P. 3 – 55.
- Rakhilina, Ekaterina V., Plungian, Vladimir A. 2007. O leksiko-semanticheskoj tipologii [On lexico-semantic typology] // Maisak, Timur A., Rakhilina, Ekaterina V. (eds.) Glagoly dvizhenija v vode: leksicheskaja tipologija [Verbs of aqua-motion: lexical typology]. Moscow: Indrik. P. 9 – 26.