



Tuesday, June 24th, 11:15-11:45, room 4

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Early emotional contacts with the Indo-Europeans

There is no such an abstract thing as a “contact between languages” – linguistic contacts occur only between people. Human interactions involve emotions which can be addressed and negotiated in the discourse. This process can leave a trace in the language – the emotion vocabulary (emotion terms, adjectives and verbs).

The Estonian emotion vocabulary is a quite densely populated and well-structured semantic field today. What seems to be a conceptual system from the synchronic point of view might appear as an eclectic set of terms, originating in different sources while having a diachronic look.

The terms for emotions (an abstract domain) are expected to be figurative by their origin i.e. transferred from some more concrete source domains. Surprisingly, in Estonian there are some terms that seem to designate emotions from the very beginning.

In the presentation I will take the Estonian emotion lexicon as a starting point and look back at the etymology of the terms. I rely on the data provided by the Estonian Etymological Dictionary.

The specific emotion vocabulary might originate in genuine Uralic, Finno-Ugric or Baltic-Finnic stems, as well as be borrowed from some Indo-European donor languages. The nature of the borrowed emotion terms possibly reveals some aspects of the nature of the actual contacts between people at these (pre)historic times and in different socio-economic circumstances. One can speculate about the recurring contexts where there was a need to reflect these specific emotions. While interpreting the findings, literature mostly from archaeology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology is used as a background.

I am well aware that the original terms have undergone a process of semantic and phonetic changes as well as derivation. Some terms might have gone extinct. Therefore I will not attempt to utter the last word in this respect but offer some insights into the exiting matter of the human contacts at the (pre)historic times.

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