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## Comparing Livonian and Vepsian Morphology

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### *Introduction*

There are many reasons to call attention on Livonian and Vepsian :

- Both languages are on the verge of **extinction** (Livonian :50-100 speakers, vepsian : 8000, no children are grown up in the language)

- Being located on **opposite sides** of the Balto-Finnic area along a NE-SW line, they represent typological entities of their own inside the **dialectal network** of BF.

- Speakers of the two languages have not been in **contact** for over 2000-3000 years, and their linguistic, ecological and cultural **surroundings** are fairly different. In the case of Livonians, who lived mainly on fishery along the shores of North-Western Curland, above Ventspil/Vindau, Latvian and languages of the Baltic fringe such as German and Estonian were strongly in contact. The Vepsians instead were settled in a fairly large area between lake Onega and the Ojat' river in Carelia, in a region of forests and marshes. They were in contact with Carelians and 'Ludians" in the West at the beginning, and were surrounded by Slavic populations in the East. During the last two or three centuries, the area has become isolated from the rest of the Carelian-Ludian dialect network due to increasing Russian settlements and the growth of Petroskoi as a regional, Russian-speaking urban center.

- Both languages are endowed with a micro dialectal network of its own. There are two dialects of Curland Livonian : Western (Piza or Mikeltuornis / Pissen and Luuz) and Eastern (from UUskila or Jaunciems to Kuolka/Domesnas). Vepsian is divided in three dialects : Northern (Onega), Central and Southern, with a rich array of structural options. E.g. vowel harmony, an important feature of BF languages lacking now in Livonian, Estonian and Northern Vepsian, is still preserved mostly in the Central and Southern varieties).

- Neither of the two languages have so far been standardized, though several attempts have been made by school-teachers and officials to work out a literary language, without success.

- The study of Livonian and Vepsian can be viewed as a paradoxical case in Uralic linguistics : though they have attracted much attention from Finnish scholars over the past 140 years, with great achievements such as historical grammars (Lauri POSTI, TUNKELO), volumes of texts, thorough grammatical sketches and a major Livonian dictionary by Lauri Kettunen, they are still ignored by most linguists outside Finland and Estonia, even among uralists. In no case this void can be explained by scarce interest of the structure as compared to the neighbouring languages : on the contrary, they can remarkably highlight parameters of the uralic type.

### **A contrastive typological glimpse**

Three assumption were made in the following study :

*Phenomenon / issue* : I will consider that each of the two languages at stake have followed opposite tracks : Vepsian has evolved smoothly from proto Balto-Finnic into a strongly agglutinative type, whereas Livonian has started a typological switch resulting in an original type of analytic and syncretic type.

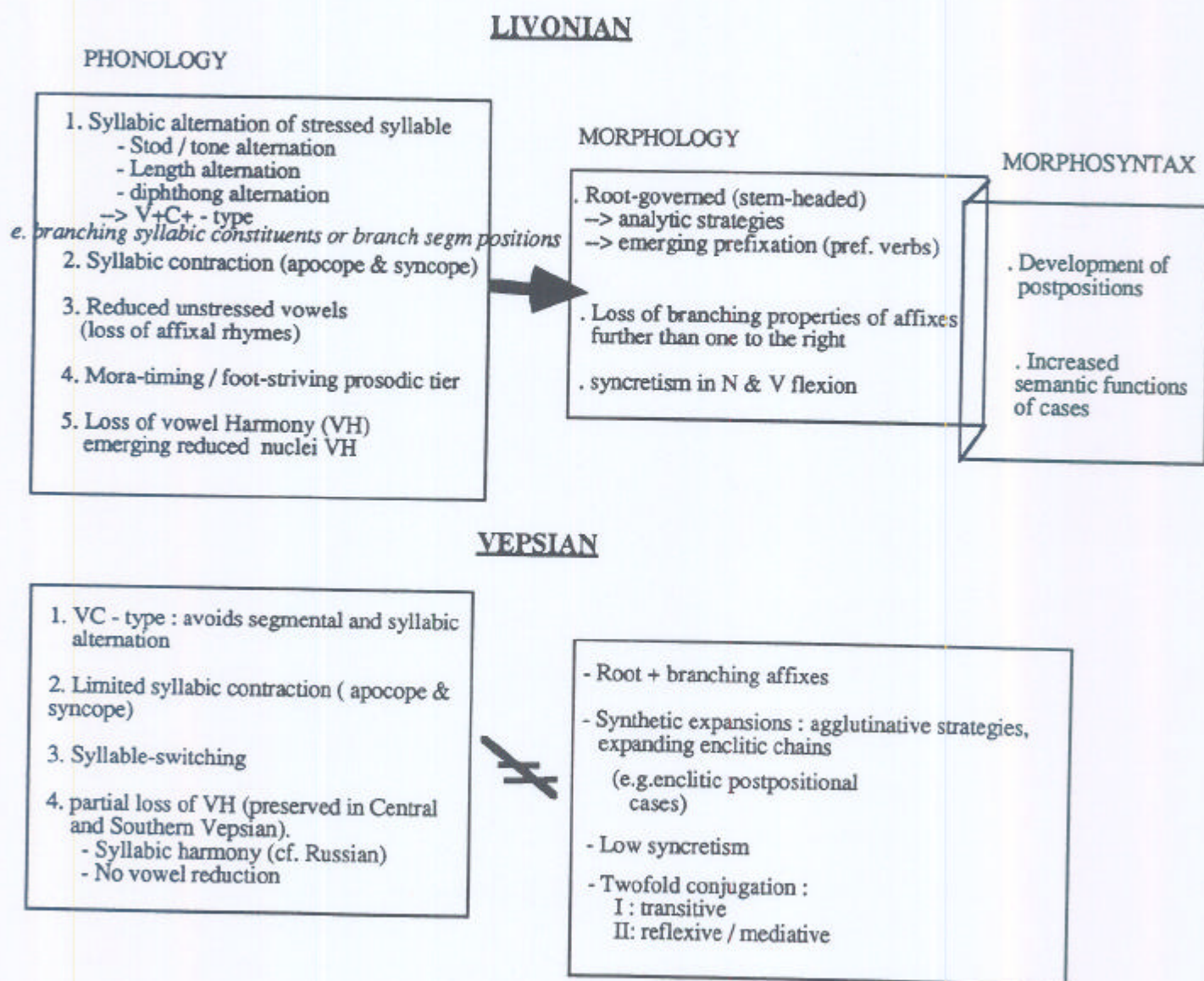
*Strategic layer/level* : I assume that drastic changes in all components of Livonian are determined by parametrizing syllabic and foot structure. In other words, typological switch here spreads from phonology to morphology and from there percolates into syntax. This is not the case in Vepsian, where layers of parametrizing seem to work on their own in each component.



*Causality* : I will assume that typological switch is triggered above all by variation of parameters inside the type. Though Livonian and Vepsian have been in close contact with two extremes of the Balto-Slavic type (Latvian and Russian respectively), the *contact* ( or *interference* ) parameter has only contributed to the regulation of inner changes ( like a *thermostat* )

The main typological features of L and V are shown in the following chart :

(1)



Before proceeding, I'll pick up two micro-corpora with a Finnish translation below to give a quick glimpse at some phonological processes and grammatical categories of Livonian & Vepsian :

(2) *Eastern Livonian*

kaks va?n-nð kala-mies-tð lek-s-tð etta-m(-Ø) mie?r-rð en'ts verg-i-di  
 Two old-PART fish-men-PART go-PAST-PL throw-INF.III-ILL. sea-ILL their f.net-Th-  
 PART.PL

**English** : Two old fishermen went to throw their nets into the sea

**Finnish** : kaksi vanhaa kalamiestä lähti heittämään verkkojaan mereen

(3) *Northern Vepsian (Soutjärvi, Onega)*

El'-i mama-nno i bat'a-nno koume-d sutka-d i læk-s'i-skan'z'  
 Live-PAST-3 mother-AT and father-AT three-PART day-PART and go-PAST-INCH.-PAST

kod'i-h'e. Kod'i-s-p'æi l'æk-s' mama-ze i sizar'e-d n'ev'eska-d sat-ma-ha  
 house-ILL. House-INES-ELAT go-PAST mother-3 and sister-NOM.PL. bride-PART. come with-INF.III-ILL.

**English** : She (the bride) stayed three days at her mother and father's place and then started to go back home. Her mother and (her) sisters went to see her off.

**Finnish** : Eli äidin ja isän luona kolme vuorokautta ja oli lähtemässä kotiin. Kotoa läksivät äitinsä ja sisaret miniätä saattamaan.

**Parameter percolation from phonology to morphology in Livonian**

We should now consider a few points of phonology outlined in (1) in order to be able to deal with morphology. Let's have a look at (4 & 5) : foot-patterns in Proto BF.

(4) **Heavy foot-patterns in Proto Balto-Finnic**

NB: Stress falls on the first syllable. V = vowel; C = Consonant ; V+, C+ = branching CV positions

a) KALA	fish	VCV
b) JALKA	foot	VCCV
KANTO	trunk	
c) TURSKA	codling, torsk	VCC+V
d) HALLA	frost	
e) VAKKA	bushel	
f) MUSTA	black	
g) KAKLA	neck	
h) AIKA	time	V+CV
SAUNA	steam-bath	
i) LAISKA	lazy	V+C+V
j) PAIKKA	place	
k) HAABAT	aspen	
l) REESKAT	sweet	
m) SAATTABI	it is raining	
n) SAAMMA	we get	

(Adapted from Lauri POSTI, 1942)



(5)  
Proto BF syllabic patterns :

$\overset{\prime}{\sigma}$	$\sigma$
V	C V
V C	C V
V C	C+V
V+	C V
V+C	C V

(6)

$\overset{\prime}{\sigma}$	$\sigma$
V	CV
VC	(C+V)
V+	
VC+	

The initial system provided 5 basic patterns for lexical bases as in (6), and two types of unstressed CV chains : light ( $\overset{\prime}{V}$ ) and heavy ( $\overset{\prime}{VC}$ ,  $\overset{\prime}{V+}$ ,  $\overset{\prime}{V+C}$ ). Unstressed chains were mostly of the type CV, except in a few words allowing C+V.

Flexional thematic positions were filled either by the nucleus of the unstressed syllable or by its onset according to the weight of the first syllable, as in modern Finnish (7).

(7)

kala (n.sg.) : kalan (gen. sg.) = *fish*

tuuli (n.sg.) : tuulen (gen. sg.), tuulta (part.sg.) = *wind*

Notice that in such a system, the unstressed CV chains are highly unmarked - they are expected to be there most of the time -, a redundancy factor that could contribute to their deletion when the stressed syllable is marked / heavy.

In fact, this system had soon begun deleting vowels following a heavy stressed syllable, a feature we find all over the BF area, except in some Finnish dialects (Hame, Savo) and Western Carelia. As we can see in (8),

(8)

#### Apocope/syncope feet in 4 BF languages

	Proto BF	Fin.	Veps.	Est.	Liv.
<b><u>APOCOPE</u></b>					
(NOM.SG.)					
8a)	*kala	kala	kala	kalà	kalà <i>fish</i>
8b)	*suku	suku	sugu	sugu	su?g <i>kinsman</i>
8c)	*jalka	jalka	jalg / jaug	jalg (Q3)	jalga <i>foot</i>
8d)	*lintu	lintu	lind	liind (Q3)	liind <i>bird</i>
8e)	*aika	aika	aig	aëg (Q3)	aiiga <i>time</i>
<b><u>SYNCOPE</u></b>					
8f) PR-P3	*empeleBi	ompelee	ombleb	õmbleb (Q3)	ũmblõp <i>sews</i>
8g) NOM.PL.	*lapset	lapset	lapsed	lapsed (Q2)	lapst <i>children</i>
8h) ILL.SG.	*jalkahan	jalkaan	jalgha, jaugha	jalka (Q3)	jalgð <i>to the foot</i>
8i) ILL.SG.	*kædehen	kateen	kædehe, kædhe	kätte (Q3)	ka?ddð <i>to the hand</i>

Livonian differs from the other dialects on several points : it has apocope in some CVCV feet with stod (8.2), lengthening of stressed nucleus and no apocope (8.3), syncope after a second syllable onset and lengthening of first syllable coda (8.7), an echoing/epenthetic reduced low vowel after a heavy stressed rhyme with lengthened coda (8.8, 8.9).

### Syllabic alternation

One of the major innovations brought by Livonian in this framework is syllabic alternation, with 3 patterns, as in (9)

(9)

#### Livonian syllabic alternation patterns

##### i) Glottalisation (first syllable strengthening strategy)

SG.	NOM.	ELAT.	ILAT.	PARTITIVE	
	* sugu	* sugusta	* suguhun	* suguda	<i>kinsman</i>
VOW.DEL.	sugg	sugst	sugh	sugd	
GLOTTAL.	su?g	su?gst	su?gg	su?gg	
∂ -EPENTH.			su?gg∂	su?gg∂	

-i #: \* meri > me?r (sea), \* kasi > kei?z (hand), \* jegi > jo?ig, jo?ug  
 -h- : \* lehma > ni?em (cow), \* lahtedak > la?d∂

##### ii) Length alternation in stressed rhymes

\* ranta (Nom. sg.) > randa / \* rantada (Part.sg.) > rand∂ (*shore*)  
 \* kirves > kiraz / \* kirvesta > kirr∂d (*axe*)

##### iii) Diphthong alternation

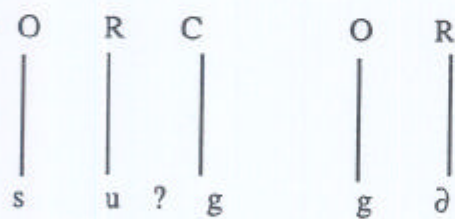
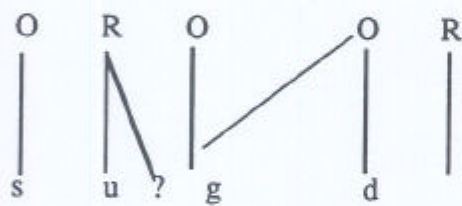
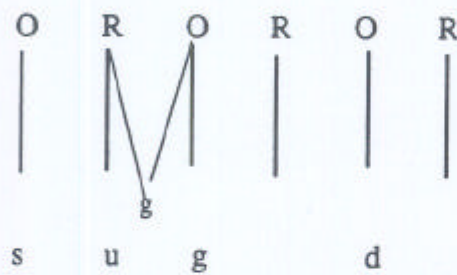
SG. NOMINATIVE	PARTITIVE - ILLATIVE
lōja	laj∂
lēba	leib∂
āiga	aig∂
pāika	paik∂

To get closer to the morphological consequences of these changes, these items should be analysed in terms of syllabic constituents, as in (10) : what happens is that the segmental shape of suffixes either disappears merging in the stem through metaphony, or becomes governed by movable heads in an extended framework of alternation. Affixes are no longer autonomous morphemes branching with a few adjustment conditions like in other BF languages (finnish *ranta*, n.sg. : *rannan*, gen.-acc.sg. = *shore*)

Even their segmental shape and their syllabic structure (full or empty : with or without rhyme) are governed by stem heads. As stress does not alter drastically, sticking to the first syllable, morphological oppositions are now triggered by a length cursor moving inside branching stressed rhymes over a range of as much as 3 morae (eg. in 'V+C structures such as *\*laiska*, *\*paikka*). Moreover, a foot-ending nuclear position is opened for reduced vowels, an innovation that will have important consequences in the new framing of morphological units, as we shall see next.



(10)



\*l e e b a --> leba (nsgs) bread

\*l e e b a d a --> leibð (part.sg.)

\*p a i k k a --> paika (n.sg.)

\*p a i k k a d a --> paikð

We should now have a look at the paradigm of nominal declension according to Kettunen (1938) in order to check the impact of these phonological processes into morphology : see (11)

(11)

Nominal declension in Livonian : # CY.C(V-) # and # CY(+).C(+).CY # stems.

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
NOMINATIVE	su?g	jalga	sugud	jalgad
GENTIVE	su?g	jalga	sugud	jalgad
DATIVE-LOCATIVE	su?ggðn	jalgan	sugudðn	jalgadðn
TRANSL.-COMIT.	suguks	jalgaks	sugudðks	jalgadðks
PARTITIVE	su?ggð	jalgð	su?gd'i	jal'gi
INESSIVE	su?gs	jalgas'	su?gsi	jalgis'
ELATIVE	su?gst	jalgast	su?gsti	jalgis'
ILLATIVE	su?ggð	jalgð	su?zi	
ADESSIVE		jalgal		
ABLATIVE		jalgald		
ALLATIVE		jalgðl		
INSTRUMENT.				jalgin'

(from KETTUNEN, 1938)

The system has 8 productive cases, most of the *sc. outer cases* having undergone strong lexicalisation. All predicative cases have merged, but a dative-locative case is added to the BF pattern, assuming functions of the genitive and the allative. Kettunen traces it back to a former essive in *\*na*, as in Finnish. We notice therefore a trend to syncretism, mostly as a result of syllabic contraction. Singular forms of partitive and illative are similar, whereas the onset of the suffix is preserved in plural forms, with an epenthetic reduced high vowel, corresponding to the reduced low vowel of the singular forms (the same process in all plural inner case forms). The translative and comitative cases have merged also as a result of syllable reduction : *\*naiseksi*, transl. > *naizðks* : *\*naisekaas*, comitative > *naizðks*.

Livonian has thus considerably simplified the BF category of case, but it still clings to its three basic modules : predicative, adverbial and locative, as shown in (12)

(12)

see next page

*Locative*

ELATIVE

ILLATIVE

INESSIVE

*Adverbial*

INSTRUMENTAL

TRANSLATIVE-COMITATIVE

*Predicative cases*

PARTITIVE

DATIVE-LOCATIVE

NOMINATIVE  
GENITIVE

**Vepsian**

We can now turn to Vepsian. Starting with the same point of departure as we have done with livonian, the syllabic level, we have seen in (1) that it is a simple CV-type, it allows syllable switching, and it avoids segmental alternation :

(13)

**Vepsian and Finnish word list**

	<b>Vepsian</b>	<b>Finnish</b>	
1.	kala	kala	<i>fish, n.sg.</i>
2.	kalad	kalaa	<i>fish, partit.sg.</i>
3.	ajada	ajaa	<i>drive, lead, Inf.I</i>
4.	kadag	kataja	<i>geniper-tree, n.sg.</i>
5.	leib	leipa	<i>bread, n.sg.</i>
6.	leiban	leivan	<i>bread, gen.sg.</i>
7.	andan	annan	<i>I give</i>
8.	andabad	antavat	<i>they give</i>
9.	vargastada	varastaa	<i>to steal, Inf.I</i>
10.	lehmiid'e	lehmien	<i>cows, gen.pl.</i>
11.	kogodamha	kokoamaan	<i>into gathering, Inf.III + Ill.sg.</i>
12.	tapda	tappaa	<i>to thresh wheat, kill, Inf.I</i>
13.	tapmha	tappamaan	<i>id., Inf.III + Ill.sg.</i>
14.	vær't'næd	varttinat	<i>spinning wheels, n.pl.</i>



At first sight, we see that Vepsian has been involved in vowel deletion processes more than Finnish (8.2, 4, 5 for apocope, 8.11-14 for syncope), but as a rule it tends to keep simple CV chains unchanged, and it does not get rid of onsets of affixes as Finnish does (8.2,3,9,10). It does not even assimilate them to stem codae when the thematic rhyme is closed by a suffixal consonant, as in 8.6&7.

This is an important point : keeping affixal onsets allows Vepsian to preserve its sub-categorisation / branching properties, provided that feet are allowed to keep complex consonant clusters inside words, as in 8.13 & 14. This allows Vepsian to expand agglutination further to the right than any other BF languages. It even allows additional enclitic strategies, as we can see in (14) : Declension pattern in Vepsian

(14)

**Declension pattern in Vepsian**

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary (enclitic postpositional)</i>
<b>SINGULAR :</b>		
NOMINATIVE	nado - Ø	
GENITIVE	nadon - n	APPROX nado - lost
ACCUSATIVE	nado - n	PROPINQ. nado - lon
PARTITIVE	nado-d	EGRESS. nado - lon - pAi
TRANSLATIVE	nado - ks	COMIT/PROLAT. nado - d - mu
ABESSIVE	nado - ta	
INESSIVE	-----	nado - s - Ø
ELATIVE	-----	nado - s - pAi
ILLATIVE	nado - ho -----	ADDITIVE. nado - ho - pAi
		TERMIN. nado - ho - ssaa
ADESSIVE	-----	nado - u - Ø
ABLATIVE	-----	nado - u - pAi
ALLATIVE	nado - le	
INSTRUCTIVE	rubl'in'	
<i>nado = sister-in-law</i>		
<b>PLURAL ( a sample )</b>		
NOMINATIVE	nado - d	
GENITIVE	nadon - i - d'e - n	
PARTITIVE	nado- i - d'	
ILLATIVE	nado - i - he	
INESSIVE	nado - i - s	
ELATIVE	nado - i - s - pAi	

The difference compared with Livonian declension patterns is striking. The inventory amounts to the 13 primary cases, including the enclitic ones, plus 5 primary cases. Even emerging syncretism resulting from apocope, such as in the inessive-allative and the adessive-ablative has been repaired by enclitic strategies. Postposition such as pAi = *head+Instructive*, ssaa = *until, up to*, mu = *along* have been added to primary forms, preserving **direction** categories in inner and outer cases with -pAi, as mentioned above, and opening a third **position** AT, CLOSE TO ( approximative, propinquative and egressive ).

We also find in vepsian a double conjugation we could identify as

- a) transitive / intransitive
- b) reflexive / mediative

The transitive / intransitive paradigm is similar to current conjugation patterns found eg. in Finnish and Northern Estonian, with personal suffixes added to the stem, without reflexive infixation. The reflexive / mediative is made up the stem + possessive-suffix-like forms, such as in (15)

(15)

(Northern, Onega Vepsian)

**Transitive / intransitive**

**Reflexive / mediative**

p'eze -n	peze - mei
-d	- tei
- b	- ze
- m	- mei
- t	- tei
- bad	- ze

pezeda = to wash

Another double conjugation of this kind opposing intransitive/transitive simple to mediative verbs is to be found in Southern Estonian, a dialect close to the Livonian typological line. So the question is not to know which language can afford additional categories according to its own type, but rather to analyse what it can do with them. It turns out that Vepsian and Ludian have developed intricate patterns of the double conjugation, with 1) a PRESENT - PAST opposition ( PR. 3 : ze, PAST 3 : he ) and 2) expanding chains of personal suffixes in the reflexive conjugation, as in

(16)

**Reflexive conjugation in Ludian (Kuujärvi)**

**Stem - Pers.            - Reflex. - Pl.**

peze - muo -	ze	
peze - tuo -	ze	
peze - ze -	ze	
peze - muo -	ze -	ba
peze - tuo -	ze -	ba
peze - ze -	zo -	bad

from RENAULT, R. (1986) and TURUNEN, A. (1973)