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SOUND SYMBOLISM OF EXPRESSIVE VERBS IN FINNIC LANGUAGES (ESTONIAN, FINNISH, INGRIAN, VOTIC)

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Abstract. This article will study language, using the contrastive-descriptive method, as a phonetic imitation of the world around us, and will concentrate on the verb vocabulary, based on sound imitation and natural sound imitation, characteristic of the Finnic languages spoken in the region of the Gulf of Finland, i.e. Estonian, Finnish, Ingrian and Votic, with a special focus on verbs expressing sounds produced by inanimate sound generators/sources. The investigation clarifies the differences between expressive verbs and general vocabulary in terms of phonetic composition, and describes derivation patterns of expressive verbs. In comparisons of the four related languages, the theory of sound symbolism has not been confirmed. It is almost impossible to find identical expressive lexemes (stems) carrying the same (collocative) meaning in all four closely related languages.

Keywords: Finnic languages, expressiveness, sound symbolism, verb derivation

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1. Introduction: onomatopoetic words, imitatives, expressive words

Finnic languages are extremely rich in onomatopoetic-descriptive vocabulary, and closely related languages resort to similar devices to form such words (phonetic composition differs from the standard vocabulary, verb stem model). Traditionally, onomatopoetic-descriptive words are divided into two categories: onomatopoetic words and descriptive words (ISK: 178).

Onomatopoetic words are affective words that describe natural sounds by way of imitating and conveying sounds through the phonemic composition of words. Onomatopoetic words are based on aural sensation. Onomatopoetic-descriptive words have also been referred to as *imitatives*; their abundance in the Finnic languages is reminiscent of the unlimited possibilities music can have in respect of sounds (Hakulinen

2000: 328). The latest discussions have considered imitatives, i.e. onomatopoetic interjections, i.e. mimetic interjections that are uninflected words imitating figuratively the sound or movement of nature, environment, humans and animals, for example, *naps* 'a snap'*, kops* 'a clunk' (Jääskeläinen 2013: 1).

Descriptive words are words expressing non-aural sensations, for example, manner of movement, manner of speaking, using phonemes or phoneme combinations.

Descriptive and onomatopoetic words are phonemically motivated words. These words are, in essence, expressive, conveying feelings, sensations and impressions of the speaker or writer (ISK: 178). Verbs make up the major part of both word groups.

Expressive vocabulary is a suitable term (Hakulinen 2000: 325; Jarva 2008: 13) because both descriptive and onomatopoetic words are, in essence, affective. Their phonemic composition may diverge from general principles. Language and music are expressed by sound, changing over time while onomatopoetic vocabulary expresses natural sounds by means of the phonemic composition of words; it is expressive and evocative.

Vesa Jarva (2008: 15, 2003: 76–79) has provided an in-depth overview of expressive words and their etymologies. In his opinion, onomatopoetic verbs are characterised by

1) semantic essence – polysemy, onomatopoeia, situation-specificity of meaning;
2) syntactic-pragmatic features: colourative constructions and predicativeness, i.e. ideophones are normally used in a special syntactic position, in a certain construction and with certain words;
3) morphophonological feature – phonemic variations, (favourite) preferred suffixes and morphological schemes and distribution of phonemes. The distribution of phonemes is often exceptional: ideophones contain sounds that are rare and not known in other vocabulary (Jarva 2008: 15). This phenomenon has usually been referred to as affectiveness. Several discussions have used the term *sound symbolism* to study the relationship between sound (phoneme) and meaning (Hinton, Nichols, & Ohala 1994, Wichmann, Holman & Brown 2010).

There is an iconic relationship between the form and referent of onomatopoetic words. In terms of sound symbolism, the relationship is the so-called imitative sound symbolism. At the phonemic level and with its selection of structure, each language tries to mirror voice/sound as

aptly as possible. This, however, is relative since each word is after all a symbol (Mikone 2002: 111). In different languages, words describing sounds by animate sound sources are quite alike. The description of the sounds produced by inanimate sound sources is, however, quite language-specific. Ante Aikio has drawn attention to this fact in his dissertation "The Saami loanwords in Finnish and Karelian" (Aikio 2009: 27).

The linguistic data to be analysed in the present article have been obtained from dictionaries (*Vadja keele sõnaraamat*, Nirvi 1971, Laanest 1997). The dataset of the Votic and Ingrian languages has been updated by the authors in the course of fieldwork in Ingria (in north-eastern Russia).

2. The age and origin of expressive vocabulary

It is not always possible to determine the age and origin of onomatopoeic words. The occurrence of similar stems in several related languages may be because of borrowing between the languages as well as the separate genesis of the words in the individual languages.

Huno Rätsep has studied the etymology of Estonian word stems and found that stems of Estonian and unknown origin make up almost 20% of the total number of stems, 60% of which are onomatopoeic-descriptive stems. In Rätsep's opinion, onomatopoetic words largely date back to the early days of Finnic languages. 95% of Estonian onomatopoeic-descriptive words have no counterparts in less related languages. In less related languages there are no types of onomatopoeia characteristic of the Estonian languages (*mühisema* 'to murmur', *mürtsuma* 'to boom', *raksuma* 'to crack', *kääksuma* 'to creak', etc.) (Rätsep 1983: 544). It appears from the study by Vesa Jarva (2003) that expressive words are not necessarily original, but may be derived from foreign (for example Russian) stems.

The bulk of the onomatopoetic-descriptive stem material has emerged during the autonomy of the Estonian language. Due to its phonetic variation, it is difficult to determine the age of vocabulary. Descriptive words are viewed as 'transparent' words, and this layer of vocabulary is thought to be quite young. Kaisa Häkkinen says that often it is not difficult to think of all the language-external factors contributing to this word (Häkkinen 1990: 12). Now, what are the factors given the fact that words differ a great deal in related languages?

The different nature of the derivations of expressive vocabulary may also indicate that the word has emerged (and also disappeared) more than once in the language (Koponen 1998: 60). Koponen says that apart from phonemic motivation, expressive words are characterised by the great variation of derivations and the relatively short life-span of words. Over time, the expressive nature of words recedes and they disappear or become neutral words (Koponen 1998: 61).

Descriptive and onomatopoetic vocabulary is an open set of words that each speaker of Finnic languages can easily complement whenever necessary. The models for forming such words are inherent in our linguistic instinct.

3. Phonological peculiarities of expressive verbs (phonotaxis)

3.1. Initial consonant cluster

In Finnic languages, words begin either with a vowel or a single consonant, there are no initial consonant clusters in the words of the standard (spoken) languages, except for loan words and onomatopoetic-descriptive vocabulary. In Kettunen's opinion (Kettunen 1930: 20), in this case the phonemic composition cannot be regarded as characteristic of the original Finnic language.

In Estonian, the consonant clusters *kl, pl, kr, pr,* and *tr* occur in the initial position in descriptive words (Klaas 1995: 122 ff.). The phonotaxis of Votic and Ingrian expressive words (phonemic composition) is even more idiosyncratic than in Estonian. Aside from consonant clusters with an initial stop, consonant clusters with an initial sibilant are used in the word-initial position. In Votic, voiced initial consonant clusters may also occur. There are no initial consonant clusters in the (expressive) vocabulary of the Finnish language.

Table 1. Initial consonant cluster (ICC) in Estonian, Votic and Ingrian

ICC	Estonian	Votic	Ingrian
kl_	*kliriseda* ‘to clatter’; *klõbiseda* ‘to click’	*klagisa* ‘to chatter’; *klopsahtaassa* ‘to clash’	*klabuttaa* ‘to clap, to pat’; *klonksahudella* ‘to swallow, to sip’
kr_	*krabiseda* ‘to rustle’; *krõmpsuda* ‘to crunch’	*kritauttaa* ‘to creak’; *krõpisa* ‘to crackle, to groan’	*kritustaa* ‘to grind one’s teeth’; *krobissa* ‘to make a crackling sound, to rustle’
pl_	*plagiseda* ‘to chatter’; *pläriseda* ‘to babble’	*plaiskaa* ‘to bang’; *ploksahtaa* ‘to break with a bang’	*plajahuttaa* ‘to crack a whip’; *pluksahtaa* ‘to plop’
pr_	*prigiseda* ‘to crack’; *prõksuda* ‘to snap’	*prakisa* ‘to crackle, to crack’; *präksüä* ‘to crackle, to crack’	*präɢissä* ‘to crackle, to sizzle’; *prögüttää* ‘to cough’
tr_	*trampida* ‘to tread’; *trummeldada* ‘to drum (the rain is drumming on the roof)’	*träläüttää* ‘to ring, to tinkle’; *trikisä* ‘to twitter’	*tralissa* ‘to rumble’; *triʁuttaa (lampaaɒ lehtiä söivät triʁuttiiɒ)* ‘to crunch’
dr_		*drilisä* ‘to tinkle’	
gr_		*grilisä* ‘to ring’	
sm_		*smoksuttaa* ‘to smack’	
(s)kr_		*(s)kripisä ~ (s)kripata, kripsahtaa* ‘to creak’	*skriippaa ~ skriippiä* ‘to creak’ < Rus. *skripet´*
šl_		*šlopisa* ‘to lap’; *šlopsi*a ‘to squelch’	*šliimaɒa* ‘to slap, to flap’
šn_		*šnääkkiä* ‘to speak in a hoarse voice’	

The Votic and Ingrian (expressive) words that start with consonant clusters with an initial sibilant are mostly loanwords from Russian (***sm_***: Vot. *smoksuttaa* ‘to smack’ < Rus. *smokat´*; ***šń_***: Vot. *šńäkisä* ‘to creak’ < Rus. *šmjakat´*; ***šl_***: Vot. *šlopisa* ‘to lap’, Vot. *šlopsi*a ‘to squelch’ < Rus. *šlëpat´*, Vot. *šl´opsahtaassa* ‘to flap once, to plop down’ < Rus. *šlëpnut´sja*, Vot. *šl´oputtaa* ‘to clap, to pat’ < Rus. *šlëpnut´*), but there

are also expressive verbs with no direct Russian equivalents: ***šń_***: Vot. *šńaksahtaassa* ~ *šnäksähtäässä* ‘to flap, to clap’, Vot. *šnibrisellä* (frequentative) ~ *šnibrissää* ‘to pucker, to frown’, Vot. *šnibrissüssää* ‘to crumple’, Vot. *šnibritellä* ‘to crumple, to shrivel’, Ing.LL *šnibristää nennää* ‘to turn up one’s nose at something’, Vot. *šnääkkiä* ‘to speak in a hoarse voice’; ***šl_***: Vot. *šlapsaa* ‘to toddle’, Vot. *šlaputtaa* ‘to waddle’; Vot. *šliimata* ‘to snap’, Ing. *šliimaɒa* ‘to slap, to give a slap; to give a blow’; Vot. *šlokkaa* ‘to squelch’.

3.2. Uncharacteristic word-initial single consonants

3.2.1. Voiced stops b, d, g

In the languages in question, initial voiced stops are as alien as initial consonants clusters. Initial voiced stops can be encountered in expressive words in the Votic and the Lower Luga dialect of Ingrian in the immediate vicinity of Votic (other dialects contain the equivalent verb with an initial voiceless stop).

Votic: ***b_***: *bulizõʙ* ‘(water) ripples’, *(rattaad) durizõvaɒ* ‘(wheels) are crackling’, *(tunnid) bumizõvaɒ* ‘(bell) buzzes’, *vattsa nõõb börizemä* ~ *burizõma* ‘(stomach starts) to rumble’, *(tihed) birraavaɒ* ~ *bimizevädɒ* ‘(insects) are chirring’, *(tšärpäzed) bõrizõvaɒ* ‘(flies) are buzzing’ (Kettunen 1930: 19); *borbattaa* ‘to sputter’, *birisä* ~ *birata* ~*birätä* ~ *bõrisa* ~ *börisä* ‘to whimper, to buzz’, *burisa* ‘to rumble, to whir’, *bumisa* ‘to din’; ***d_***: *dumisa* ~ *dümisä* ‘to thud, to thump one’s feet’, *durisa* ‘to rumble, to whir’; ***g_***: *grilisä* ‘to ring’.

Ingrian: ***b_***: *bamahtaa* ~ *pamahtaa* ~ *bomahtaa* ‘to bang, to thump’, *bomissa* ‘to boom, to rumble’, *bälättää* ‘to blab, to babble’.

There are no voiced initial stops in the Estonian and Finnish (expressive) vocabulary.

3.2.2. š_

In Votic and the Lower Luga dialect of Ingrian, some expressive words contain *š* instead of *s* in word-initial position, these are as alien as initial voiced stops or consonant clusters for the standard vocabulary of the languages.

Votic: *šipissä* < Rus. *šipet´* ‘to sizzle, to fizzle’, *šumisa* < Rus. *šumet´* ‘to rustle, to murmur’, *šorata* ~ *šorisa* ‘to ripple’, *šolisa* ‘to splash’, *šlopsia*~*šloppia* < Rus. *šlëpat´* ‘to squelch’, *širisä* ‘to splash’.

Ingrian: *(tuul) šahahuttaa* ‘(wind) rustles’, *šahissa* ‘to murmur’, *šarissa* ‘rustle, to crackle, to sizzle’, *šihahtaa* ‘to fizzle, to hiss’, *šolputella* ‘to plop’, *šolissa* ‘to bubble’, *šukutella* ‘to whisper’.

Though today it is common to pronounce *š* in the region of the Soikkola dialect, the sound change *s* > *ś* > *š* is a new development stemming from Russian influence (Laanest 1986: 41).

3.2.3. f_

In Votic and Ingrian, expressive words also contain the initial fricative *f*, uncharacteristic of the common language: Vot. *furisa* ‘to slurp’; Ing. *furskaᴅa* ‘to blow one’s nose, to slurp’, *furskaa* ‘to burble’.

In this word group it is clearly evident that all verbs starting with *f* mirror the sound produced by an animate referent.

3.2.4. tš_

In Votic *k* > *tš* is a regular sound change before the front vowels of initial syllables (cf. Vot. *tšäsi* and Est. *käsi* ‘hand’). Deviations from the standard language in Votic onomatopoetic words may contain *tš* before front as well as back vowels: *tširtšittää* ‘to twitter, to chirp’, *tšakattaa* ‘to chat, to twitter’, *tšaksahtaassa* ‘to plump down’, *tšulpsahtaassa* ‘to plunge’.

While voiced *b* ja *š* occur in the initial position probably only due to the influence of Votic in the Lower Luga dialect of Ingrian, *t′ś́* is known in other Ingrian dialects as well, where it occurs in Russian loanwords or in onomatopoetic-descriptive words only. Sovijärvi (1944: 65–66) has observed that some of these words also have an affricate-starting equivalent in the Aunus Karelian, Vepsian and South Estonian languages. It is worth noting that in the Ingrian language the affricate *t′ś́* is an exceptional sound that is accompanied by palatalisation, as if attempting to make it more special, for example: *t′ś́aɢaᴅella* (*naizet t′ś́aɢatteĬlooᴅ lääᴅä*) ‘women chat and chirp’, *t′ś́ahissa* (*kuivat heinät t′ś́ahizoo*) ‘to rustle’, *t′ś́arahtaa* ‘to blaze’, *t′ś́arahuttaa* ‘to sizzle’, *t′ś́auhaᴅa* ‘to snap’, *t′ś́iɢerᴅää* ~ *t′ś́iɢerrellä* ‘to sing, to chirp’, *t′ś́ihissä* ‘to hiss’, *t′ś́olputella* ‘to make a splash’, *t′ś́olissa* ‘to patter down (water from the eaves)’, *t′ś́orissa* ‘to ripple’.

Some of these verbs have a synonymous *s*-initial (also *š*-initial in the Lower Luga dialect) equivalent: *sirissä* ~ *t′ś́irissä* ‘to twitter’, *solikkoja* ~ *t′ś́olikkoja* ‘to splash; to spoil’, *sahissa* ~ *t′ś́ahissa* ‘to rustle, to

murmur', *suhissa* ~ *t´ś́uhissa* 'to murmur', Ing.LL *šolissa* ~ *t´ś́olissa* 'to splash, to bubble', Ing.LL *širahella* ~ *t´ś́irahella* 'to jump, to scribble'.

Some *s*-initial equivalents have a different meaning: *sarahuttaa* '(rain) spatters' ~ *t´ś́arahuttaa* 'to sizzle (in the frying-pan)', *sumissa* 'to buzz, to murmur' ~ *t´ś́umissa* 'to whisper', *sɪʙikkoja* '(a hen) to scratch the ground, to dash around' ~ *t´ś́ɪʙikkoja* 'to drizzle'.

Table 2. Uncharacteristic single initial consonants (IC) in Votic and Ingrian

IC	Votic	Ingrian
b_	*borbattaa* 'to sputter', *birisä* ~ *birata* ~*birätä* ~ *bõrisa* ~ *börisä* 'to whimper, to buzz', *burisa* 'to rumble, to whir', *bumisa* 'to make a din'	*bamahtaa* ~ *pamahtaa* ~ *bomahtaa* 'to bang, to thump', *bomissa* 'to boom (in an empty room)', *bälättää* 'to blab, to babble'
d_	*dumisa* ~ *dümisä* 'to thud, to stamp one's feet', *durisa* 'to rumble, to whir'	
š_	*šipissä* < Rus. *šipet´* 'to sizzle, to fizz', *šorata* ~ *šorisa* 'to ripple'	*(tuul) šahahuttaa* '(wind) rustles', *šolputella* 'to plop'
f_	*furisa* 'to emit a slurping sound'	*furskaʙa* 'to blow one's nose, to slurp', *furskaa* 'to snort'
tš_; t´ś́_	*tšaksahtaassa* 'to plump down', *tšulpsahtaassa* 'to plunge'	*t´ś́arahuttaa* 'to sizzle', *t´ś́olputella* 'to make a splash', *t´ś́orissa* 'to make a ripple'

3.3. *ö* in expressive verbs

In Finnic languages, the vowel *ö* is likely to be late formed; initially it occurred in onomatopoetic-descriptive words as a variant of phoneme *o* (Laanest 1975: 71). In several Votic words *ö* does not comply with the vowel harmony, but in onomatopoetic words *ö* occurs always in the vicinity of the front vowel: *börisä* 'to whir', *mömmöttää* 'to sound like a bear; to mumble', etc. *ö* can be viewed a feature, characteristic of descriptive words in Votic. All the words provided by Kettunen as examples of the occurrence of first-syllable *ö* in Votic are descriptive words (Kettunen 1930: 127). Since *ö*-harmony is not characteristic to Votic, in other words *ö* is rare, especially in non-initial syllables: *tääto*

'teadmine' (knowledge), *tüttärikko* 'girl', *mäŋko* 'game' (Laanest 1975: 71, Lauerma 1993: 158). In the Estonian, Ingrian and Finnish languages, *ö* is likewise frequent specifically in onomatopoetic words:

Estonian: *köhida* 'to cough', *löriseda* 'to slurp', *mögiseda* 'to bleat, to grunt', *möliseda* 'to bawl', *röhkida* 'to grunt';

Finnish: *röhkiä* 'to grunt', *höpistä* 'to sound like a bear, to mumble', *öhkiä* 'to sigh', *öristä* 'to growl in a low voice, to growl', *tömistää* 'to stamp one's feet';

Ingrian: *ögissä* 'to groan', *mögissä* 'to bleat, to grunt', *örissä* 'to growl, to growl in a low voice', *hörissä* 'to hum, to grumble', *törissä* 'to talk nonsense, to prattle'.

ö-containing verbs mainly reflect the sound produced by an animate referent.

3.4. *e* in expressive verbs

Mikone (2002: 71) has observed the omission of the vowel *e* from the composition of expressive verbs in Estonian and Finnish. The exception is Ingrian where descriptive vocabulary contains verbs with the vowel *e* in the initial syllable: *prettiä* 'to slide, to slip'; *rehissä* 'to blaze', *rehkua* 'to glow', *reissada* 'to brawl, to romp', *reekaa* 'to rattle (in one's throat); to grumble' (*tuвaɢam polttajil rinnaᴅ reekaa* 'the smokers' chests are grumbling' (Nirvi 1971: 475)).

4. Derivation models for expressive verbs

Lauri Hakulinen has said that descriptive or expressive vocabulary is very diverse and viable in Finnish. The number of such stem words or rather word stems is very large and they reflect the abundant possibilities provided by the derivation system of the language (Hakulinen 2000: 325). The same is characteristic of Estonian, Votic and Ingrian, i.e. the other languages closely related to Finnish.

Descriptive words are typically formed with specific patterns, the suffix matter (derivational suffix) present in the word is normally not added to the lexeme root, but to the descriptive word stem matter, which does not represent any lexeme (ISK 79). The derivative is preceded by a series of phonemes, the phonemic composition imitates an audible or visible phenomenon. The same stem occurs, mainly with different derivatives, in descriptive verb series (ISK 307) or represents a derivation type (ISK 178) (see Table 3).

In all of the four languages, the most common derivational suffix is *-ise-* expressing a continuous activity. In Finnic languages, (C)VC- is the most prevalent stem model for the expressive verbs. However, the root words of the expressive verbs within this group are usually unknown in the languages (Laanest 1975: 184). *-ise-*suffixed verbs do not have gradation; in Ingrian some forms are subjected to gemination of trisyllabic words: Inf *mölissä* : IndPrSg1 *mölliizen :* IndPrSg3 *mölizöö* 'to roar, to babble'.

Other productive derivational suffixes include *-ele-*, expressing frequentativeness and often occurring in the composition of compound suffixes, and *-AhtA-*, expressing momentariness, the corresponding Estonian suffix is *-ahta-*.

All the languages contain causative *u*-stem verbs that are more frequent in Finnish and Estonian whilst in Votic and Ingrian these words often do not have equivalents with a *u*-derivation.

When investigating loan words in Finnish, Aikio reconstructed plausible paths of development for expressive word families and chains concluding that with minor changes (alternation of stem-internal sound or derivational suffix) it is possible to construct divergent expressive word families (see Aikio 2009: 31–35). In Votic, the same word may have different derivative forms: *šorata*, *šorisa* 'to murmur' (cf. Fin. *kohista*, *humista*). Moreover, the same sound may be represented by a different verb, for example Vot. *bimata*, *birisä*, *birata*, *birätä*, *bõrisa* 'to buzz, to whir'.

Table 3. Derivation series of expressive verbs (infinitive)

	-A- / -U- reflexive	*-i-* frequentative	*-ele-* frequentative; continuative	*-U- + -tA-* frequentative; causative	*-A(h)tA-* momentary	Gloss (stem)
Vot.	*plakksaa*		*plaksutõlla*	*plaksuttaa*	*plaksahtaa*	clap; slap
Est.	*plaksuma*	*plaksida*		*plaksutada*	*plaksatada*	clap; slap
Ing.	*präksää*	*präksiä*	*präksüɒellä*	*präksüttää*	*präksähtää*	crack
Fin.	*räiskyä*	*räiskiä*	*räiskähdellä*	*räiskyttää*	*räiskähtää*	bang; shot; splash

In comparison to Votic and Ingrian, in Estonian and Finnish the functions of suffixes are more clearly established and the second derivation suffix adds a nuance to the word. Verbs containing the same descriptive stem matter form series: Fin. *surahtaa*, *surista*, *surrata*, etc. 'to buzz, to

hum, to whirr'; *risahtaa*, *risahdella* 'to crack'; *sirkutella*, *sirkuttaa* 'to twitter'; *räiskiä*, *räiskähdellä*, *räiskähtää*, *räiskyä* 'to splash'; *räsähdellä*, *räsähtää* 'to crack'.

Due to the diverse nature of verb derivation in Finnish, Finnish word stems allow the formation of more word forms.

5. Sound variation and sound symbolism

Sound variation is most typical for formation of onomatopoeic verbs (cf. Est. verb series of *sasisema* 'to rustle' – *sisisema* 'to hiss' – *sosisema* 'to whisper' – *susisema* 'to fizzle' – *säsisema* 'to sputter' – *sussitama* 'to try to keep something burning'; see Veldi 1988: 55). Several terms have been used to signify the variation in quality – for example *affective morpheme* (Bolinger 1950) or *phonaestheme* (Firth 1930, referred to via Firth 1964: 39). In Finnish linguistics this type of stem allomorphism has been thoroughly analysed; Raimo Anttila (1976: 131) calls this phenomenon *internal flexion*, whereas Alpo Räisänen (1978: 339) uses the term *stem-internal derivation*. In Estonian, the phenomenon has been discussed in detail by Enn Veldi (1988). According to him, in non-descriptive vocabulary, word formation takes place at the morpheme level, whilst in descriptive vocabulary at the morpheme variant level (Veldi 1988: 58). Sound symbolism is a motivated link between the phonemic composition and meaning of a word.

The four Finnic languages in question are characterised by the existence of large verb families, i.e. a similar phonemic composition can be used to express different sounds of nature, and the difference in the meaning derives from variations in the initial consonant (see Tables 4–6), in the vowel of the initial syllable (see Table 7), as well as the variation in an internal consonant (see Table 8):

Table 4. Variation of the initial consonant in Ingrian

3SgPrInd		English
Ø	*_urizoo ~ _urisoo*	*purrs*
k		*rumbles*
n		*dodders; begs*
p		*hisses; seethes*
v		*whirs; rumbles*

Table 5. Variation of the initial consonant in Votic

3SgPrInd		English
b	*_umizõb*	*dins; booms*
d		*thumps; thuds*
k		*booms*
š		*sighs/rustles; buzzes*
v		*whizzes, swishes*

Table 6. Variation of the initial consonant in Estonian

3SgPrInd		English
kl	*_iriseb*	*clatters*
n		*trickles*
p		*whimpers*
s		*twitters*
t		*rings*
v		*whines*

Table 7. Variation of the vowel of the initial syllable in Finnish

3SgPrInd			English
k	*a*	*hisee*	*rustles*
	i		*fizzes; hisses*
	o		*sighs/rustles; murmurs*
	u		*seethes, buzzes*
	ä		*speaks hoarsely, wheezes*
	ö		*rattles in one's throat; speaks hoarsely*

Table 8. Variation of an internal consonant in Finnish

3SgPrInd			English
ki	*h*	*isee*	*fizzes; hisses*
	l		*clinks, clanks*
	m		*twangs*
	r		*gnashes (teeth)*
	t		*creaks, grates*

Johannes Aavik believed in the qualitative difference of linguistic signs, including the varying motivation level of linguistic signs and sound symbolism beyond onomatopoeia. In his opinion (1924: 44): "...we do not make decisions about the sound nuances of a word on an absolute basis, but rather in association with a language, in the semi-conscious background formed by familiar words with their inherent meanings in the language in question." However, it is not impossible for a word to be inappropriate for the word in terms of sound: "Because though it is true that a natural language in its entirety, in its composition expresses the character, temperament and soul of the nation who have formed it and speaks it, it does not always hold true for all of its details." (Aavik 1924: 103)

5.1. Initial syllable vowel

The initial syllable vowel seems to have the highest distinctive capacity. The variation in the initial syllable vowel seems to lead to a specific change in the meaning; though comparing closely related languages shows that there is not always reason to speak of a clear change in meaning. In fact, this may be even regarded as a certain suffix used to form various word stems. Phonetic characteristics of vowels seem to be at least somewhat relevant in onomatopoetic words.

In Finnish, vowels have been regarded as most varied in the phonetic core of words (Mikone 2002: 50). Valve Värv has said the same about Estonian (1965: 49, 55). In the case of sound symbolism, several researchers (for example Mäger 1959, Põlma 1967, Sivula 1989) have linked sounds/phonemes to various shades in meaning. Thus, back vowels *a, o* and *u* would express lower and darker (lower) voices, for example Vot. *kahisa*, Est. *kahiseda* 'to rustle', Vot. *lotisa* 'to rumble, to rattle', Vot. *kohisa*, Est. *kohiseda* 'to murmur'; front vowels *i* and *ä* tend to express mainly a higher voice, for example Vot. *kihisä,* Est. *kihiseda* 'to fizz, to swarm'*,* Vot. *kripisä*, Est. *kriiksuda*, Ing. *kriɒissä* 'to screak, to chirk', Vot. *širisä*, Est. *siriseda* 'to chirp', etc.; high vowels express usually silent voice, and low vowels louder voice (see also Sivula 1989: 168). In Estonian and Finnish, *ä* and ö generally express sounds elicited by animate creatures and in case of people's voices, the verb is given an additional pejorative nuance, for example Vot. *mömmöttää* and Est. *möliseda* 'to blabber'.

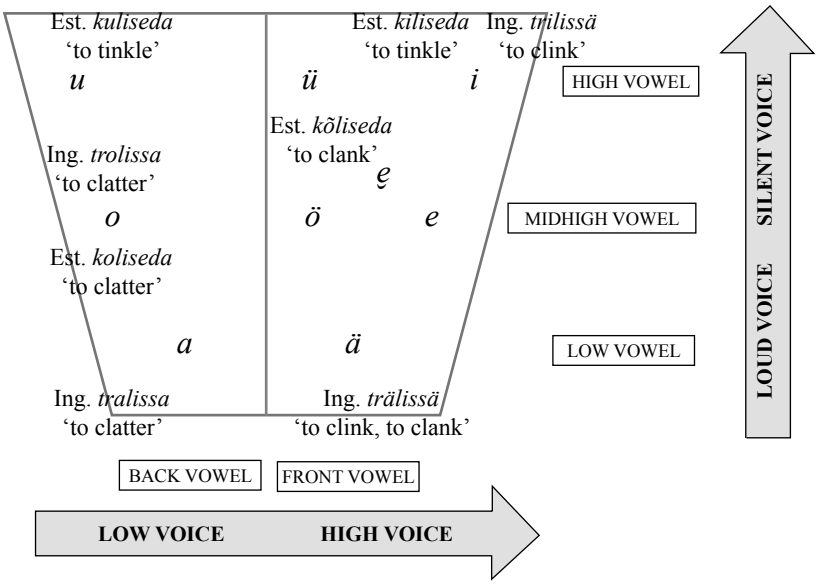

Figure 1. The distinctive capacity of the initial syllable vowel (cf. Est. and Ing.).

However, the principles outlined above may not be universally true since in Votic and Finnish an equivalent verb may occur both with a front vowel as well as back vowel: Vot.: *birata ~ birätä* 'to buzz', *dumisa ~ dümisä* 'to thud, to thump', *prakisa ~ präkisä* 'to crackle'; Fin.: *murista ~ myristä* 'to growl'. Other types of vowel alternations are also possible, whereas the word retains its meaning: Vot. *plaksahtab ~ ploksahtab* 'bangs', Fin. *lotista ~ lätistää* 'patters down'.

5.2. Internal consonant

An internal single consonant conveys the continuity, monotony and monotonous repetition of a sound (for example Vot. *kumisa* 'to boom', Est. *plagisema* 'to clap') whereas a consonant cluster conveys the abruptness (for example Ing. *klonksahuttaa* 'to gulp'), momentariness (for example Est. *plaksata* 'to flap', Ing. *kroksahtaa* 'to crunch') or fragmentation (for example Est. *naksuda* 'to crepitate') of a sound.

As for the phonetic features of consonants, it is not possible to draw such clear conclusions as in the case of vowels. The tremulant *r*, which conveys a trembling (for example Est. *säriseda* 'to sizzle', Fin. *täristä* 'to rumble') and fragmented sound, and the fricative *h*, which

symbolises friction (for example Est. *sahiseda* ‘to rustle’, Ing. *sohissa* ‘to whisper’), have turned out to be the most expressive ones.

6. Perception of expressive verbs

In the case of expressive verbs, the verb lexeme should in some way represent a phonetic imitation of a certain sound, and thus be clearly perceptible at least for the native speakers of the language – and one could assume that closely related languages are mutually understandable in this regard. In reality, the speakers of related languages do not perceive the meanings of expressive words of the other related language.

Ulla Vanhatalo (2001: 131) has drawn attention to the fact that it is almost impossible to find identical expressive lexemes (stems) that have exactly the same meaning in two languages.

Some similarities in phonemic composition of expressive verbs can be found, although there are also stems that are not perceptible at all for the speakers of closely related languages, for example ‘to whisper’: Est. *sosistada*; Vot. šopissa, šopottaa; Ing. *t’šumissa, sohissa, šukutella*; Fin. *kuiskata, kuiskia, supista*.

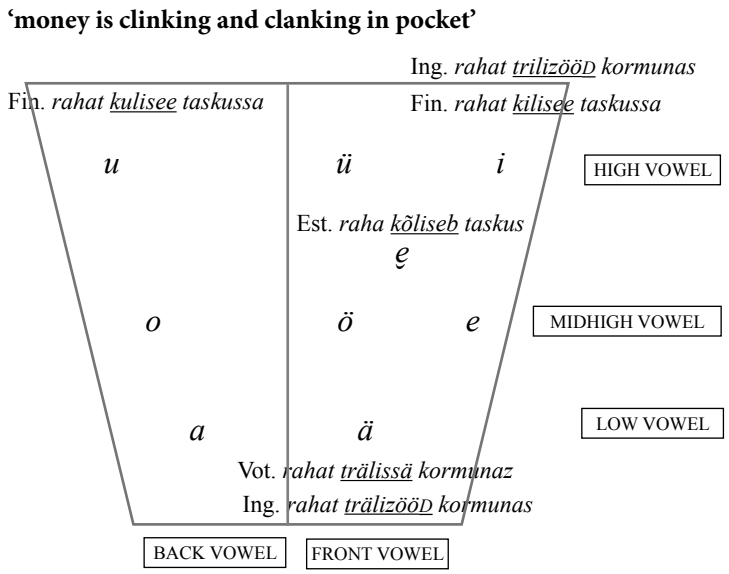

Figure 2. The location of the verbs of similar meaning in vowel space by initial syllable vowel.

According to Heikki Leskinen, native speakers of the language do not find it difficult to grasp the meaning of onomatopoetic words, although this word type is thought to be part of old dialects and its use has become less frequent due to the revolution in the contemporary Finnish language (Leskinen 1991: 356).

A study focusing on the perception of descriptive verbs in the native and related languages by Finnish and Estonian speakers demonstrated that the meaning of verbs is not clearly unambiguous, and that when it comes to people who speak Finnish or Estonian as a foreign language, it is difficult even for excellent speakers of the language to perceive the meaning of these verbs (Heinsoo 2004). The last Votic speakers are already forgetting their language. Thus, they also perceive descriptive verbs in association with the verbs they use in everyday speech. In the case of forgotten vocabulary, verbs are not perceived and the context of usage is unfamiliar (Heinsoo 2003). Hence, although it is a layer of vocabulary with several phonemic peculiarities and that is often distinct from other verb material, this vocabulary is quick to vanish when the vocabulary becomes less diverse.

Since descriptive verbs are characterised by abundance of verb nests where a verb develops a meaning when a vowel or consonant is changed, non-native speakers find it hard to grasp the vocabulary whilst it is often, even in the case of pure improvisation, understood by native speakers.

Heikki Leskinen likewise concluded that unlike their parents, young people no longer perceive the nuances of the onomatopoetic sound system (Leskinen 1991). It is not always apt and easy to describe the meaning of a descriptive word in the form of a verbal paraphrase.

7. Conclusions

1. The phonotaxis (phonemic composition) of Votic and Ingrian expressive verbs is considerably more specific than that of the Estonian and Finnish language (initial consonant cluster, sounds *b, d, g, š, f, tš,* uncharacteristic of the language); the expressive vocabulary of common Finnish is characterised by its simple structure, abundance of series, sound symbolism and variability. Aside from consonant clusters with an initial stop, Votic and Ingrian contain consonant clusters with an initial sibilant. In Votic initial consonant clusters may also be voiced. There are no initial consonant clusters in the (expressive) vocabulary of Finnish.

2. In expressive words, the suffix matter (derivation suffix) may be added to the word stem that does not represent any lexeme. Generally, the same stem occurs with various derivatives in a series of expressive verbs (ISK 307).
3. Regardless of the endless possibilities of forming new expressive stems there are a number of Russian loan stems in Votic and Ingrian whereby the verb structure befits the most prevalent stem model of expressive verbs ((C)VC + *-ise-*), for example *šipizõb*, *furizeb*.
4. In comparisons of the four related languages, the theory of sound symbolism has not been confirmed; the speakers of related languages do not perceive the meanings of expressive words of the other closely related language. It is almost impossible to find identical expressive lexemes (stems) carrying the same (collocative) meaning in all four closely related languages.

Due to the diverse nature of Finnish verb derivation, Finnish word stems allow the formation of more word forms, and the variation of Finnish verb series is also more diverse. In Estonian there are fewer descriptive verbs due to the special characteristics of the language, for example restriction on vowels in the following syllable. The number of descriptive verbs is considerably smaller in Votic and Ingrian. This obviously stems from the loss of vocabulary as early as in the phase where people started to collect material for dictionaries. Native speakers of Estonian and Finnish do not find it hard to perceive the descriptive vocabulary as long as the use of descriptive verbs is, on the one hand, collocative, and on the other hand, the same verb expresses a sound produced by the same referent. However, among young people of Estonian and Finnish origin, the knowledge and use of expressive vocabulary seems to be more limited than among previous generations. In Votic and Ingrian, the use of descriptive words is declining.

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Abbreviations

3 – 3rd person, IND – indicative, PR – present, SG – singular.

Languages and dialects: Est. – Estonian, Fin. – Finnish, Ing. – Ingrian, Ing.LL – Lower Luga dialect of Ingrian, Rus. – Russian, Vot. – Votic.

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Kokkuvõte. Heinike Heinsoo ja Eva Saar: Ekspressiivverbide häälikusümboolika läänemeresoome keeltes (eesti, soome, isuri, vadja). Käesolevas artiklis uuritakse kontrastiiv-deskriptiivsel meetodil keelt kui meid ümbritseva maailma häälikulist imitatsiooni ning kirjeldatakse Soome lahe piirkonnas kõneldavate läänemeresoome keelte, eesti, soome, isuri ja vadja keele helimatkingul ja loodushääle jäljendamisel põhinevat verbisõnavara, võttes eriliselt fookusesse elutu allika poolt toodetud helide väljendamise verbid. Artiklis selgitatakse ekspressiivverbide häälikulise koostise erinevused üldsõnavarast ning kirjeldatakse ekspressiivverbide tuletusviise. Nelja lähisugulaskeele võrdlus ei toeta häälikusümboolika teooriat. Peaaegu võimatu on leida häälikulise koostise poolest identseid ekspressiivverbide tüvesid, mis kannaks täpselt sama tähendust kõigis neljas lähisugulaskeeles.

Märksõnad: läänemeresoome keeled, ekspressiivsus, häälikusümboolika, verbituletus