

Culture and Technology Meeting in Geographical Names : The Baltic Sea Area Example

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Abstract

Technologies play key roles in the development of geographical names and mediate cultural expressions in language. By influencing the interactions between members of a culture and just as importantly between members of different cultures, technology is key for many of the interactions that determine the terms people use to name geographical features. The Baltic Sea is a case in point of naming practices that were greatly impacted by technologies, especially communication technologies used for commerce and trade. Present day information technologies support these interactions in rich ways, possibly strengthening the influence of multiple cultures terms in new cultures of exchange.

History of the Baltic Area

Overview

This paper continues an examination of the significance of technology on the cultural genesis of geographical names in the Baltic Area. The focus of this paper is historical rather than contemporary. In this paper, I make the argument that technologies of communication have been key vehicles for the development of Baltic Sea area heteroglossia that goes hand-in-hand with the development of commerce and trade. Following the disruption of the Cold War, commerce and trade has recently been re-started through the expansion of the European Union in this area. Its roots are prehistoric, certainly reaching back to the historical records of the area from the 9th and 10th centuries AD, going back to Viking expansion into the Kievan Rus and trade with Greece, and reaching into pre-historical periods. In spite of the length of time, the size of the area, and importance of trade the Baltic Sea area has never been unified,

neither politically nor economically, nor religiously and certainly not linguistically. The persistent use of multiple terms over around 1000 years of recorded history to designate the Baltic Sea area is of interest not only for area studies in Central and Eastern Europe, but for geo-political studies of seas and oceans around the world.

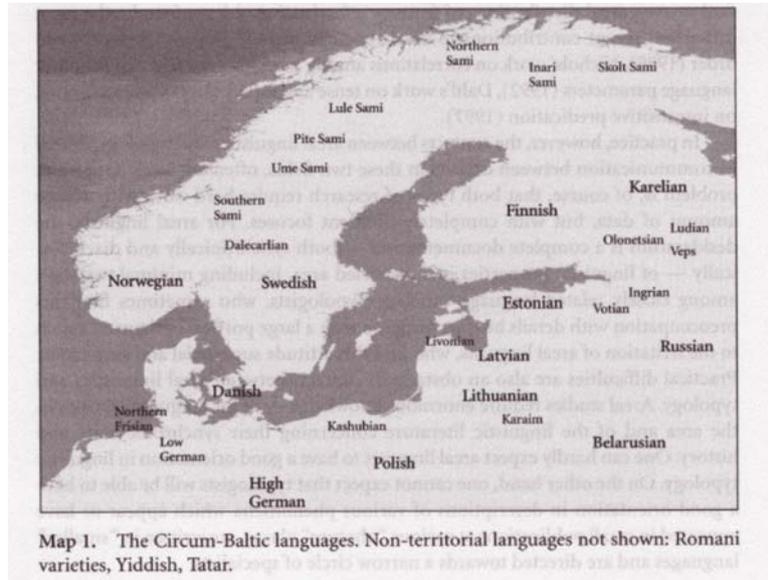


Figure 1 Languages of the extended Baltic Sea area
(Source: Dahl, Öand M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001))



Figure 2 The Baltic Sea area highlighting the watershed and participants in the Baltic Sea Regional Digital Map (BSR-Map)
(Source: Bundesamt für Kartographie and Geodäsie)

Languages and Technologies of Trade

Linguistically, the Baltic Sea Area (see Figure 1) is a complex set of overlapping languages and dialects from Indo-Germanic and Uralic stocks. The name *Baltic* is pre-historic in origin and reflects how the area's inhabitants referred to the belt of islands and shores that connected the area. In terms of trade, the great value of amber in the Roman Empire assured that the Baltic area was connected by trade routes to Greece, which the expanded under the Vikings. Several sources from the 11th century point to these connections and other sources articulate the belt metaphor. However, substantial differences occur. In German and Scandinavian languages, as well as Finnish and Sami, the Baltic Sea is known as the 'Eastern Sea'. In Estonian the same sea is known as the 'Western Sea'. Historically, the term Baltic was used to refer to Teutonic Order (crusaders of the Early Middle Ages) in present day Estonia and Latvia. Other languages have begun only more recently to use this term. In Russian the Baltic Sea was earlier called the *More Varjaskoe* (the Sea of the Varyags), where Varyag referred to Vikings. In Latvian, *Baltijas jūra* has been used only since the middle of the 19th century; earlier the Baltic Sea was called *Lielā jūra*, 'Big Sea' in contrast to the Gulf of Riga which was called *Mazā jūra*, 'Little Sea'.

The Baltic Sea area has been an area of intensive language contact. Never united, it has been a very dynamic area and has seen continuous redivision among spheres of dominance and influence. As recently as 16 years ago, many in the West considered the Baltic Sea to be a "Soviet lake". Economical, political, religious, and cultural differences have been the rule in this area. Linguistically, as a result of constant change, the area is very complex with many layers of contacts and influences superimposed on each other. Recent scholarship on the linguistic development of the area concludes that the many micro -contacts were never part of any broader linguistic developments (Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli 2001).

These different scales of linguistic interaction are understood in terms of macro and micro perspectives on linguistic interactions. The macroperspective refers to a "Panoramic view of certain phenomena against a general global typological background" (615) and the micro-perspective focuses on a more nuanced and detailed analysis of the same phenomena (Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli 2001).

Their study of linguistic pluralia tantum, suprasegmental phonology, morphological cases and subject and object relations, various clause-level syntactic phenomena, including nonverbal predication, predicative possession, comitative/instrumental, comparatives, passives, desubjectives and zero-subject constructions, various phenomena within noun phrases, such as adjective agreement, gender loss, and syntax

of numeral constructions, word order phenomena and evidentiality concludes that the languages of the area are influenced by many superimposed macro- and micro-contacts with numerous mutual influences. Koptjevskaja- Tamm and Wälchli refer to this as a **Contact Superposition Zone**.

Arguably, the Baltic Sea area languages interacted more intensively because of sea-going commerce and trade that were spurred by developments in ship-building techniques. The Viking long-boat, which had been the key to Viking expansion in the Baltic Sea and North Sea, was replaced by a larger ship, called the *cog*, that offered an enclosed space for storing goods and transporting passengers, a rear rudder, which was much more efficient for steering, and fore and aft structures above the deck, which were of great help in firing weapons at pirates or other merchants. Above all, the cog was larger: it could carry up to two tons of freight. Whereas the long-boat had been restricted to coastal waters, the cog could (and did) venture out in more open waters and travel longer

Extended Baltic Sea Area Languages	
Germanic	
West	High German (HGrm) Low German (LGrm) Yiddish (Yid)
North	Danish (Dan) Swedish (Swd) Dalecarlian (Dal) Nowegian (Nrw)
Baltic	
West	Old Prussian ‡ Curonian (Cur) † Jatvingian (Jat) †
Central	Lithuanian (Lith) Latvian (Ltv)
East	Galindian (Gal) ‡
Slavic	
West	Polish (Pol) Kashubian (Ksh) Polabian (Plb) ‡
East	Belarusian (Bylr) Russian (Rus) Ukrainian (Ukr)
Indo-Aryan	Romani (Rmn) with varieties/sub-languages Kelderash, Lovari, Kalo, Baltic, North Russian
Finno-Ugrian	
Finnic	Veps (Vps) Karelian (Kar) Olonetsian (Olo) Ludian (Lud) Finnish (Fin) Ingrian (Ing) Votian (Vot) Estonian (Est) Sami (Sam) with varieties/sub-languages
Turkic	Karaim (Krm) Tatar (Ttr)
‡ = extinct † = only onomastic sources and substratum	
Source :Dahl, Ö. and M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001). <i>The Circum-Baltic Languages: Intro to the Volume. The Circum-Baltic Languages. Typology and Contact</i> . Ö. Dahl and M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm. Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company. Vo Grammar and Typology : xv-xx.	

distances. The cog greatly enhanced commerce and was the key technology of the Hanseatic League. With it the Hanseatic League could establish itself and retain importance for trade in the Baltic Sea area from the 13th century through the 17th century.



Figure 3 Main trading routes of the Hanseatic League
(Source: www.wikipedia.org)

Naming, Cultures, and Technologies

The names given to geographic features are studied as toponyms. An important distinction is made between endonyms, the names given in a local language to a feature and exonyms, the names given by others. An example of this from this part of Europe is the Polish name Gdańsk, which is called Danzig in German. This distinction become complex and can even breakdown in areas of overlapping languages. In the Contact Superposition zone of the Baltic Sea area, the terms in one place may overlap to a degree to become synonyms, even though they originate from different languages.



Figure 4 Example of multiple exonyms for the Baltic Sea appearing simultaneously
(Source: http://www.balticconnections.net/_resources/images/pageImg_home.jpg)

The use of one or the other term may take on significance as a linguistic marker that helps communicators distinguish themselves and others. Use of the Dutch may signal the presence of Dutch interests without having to make them explicit. Use of multiple terms at once (as shown in Figure 3) may suggest an equivalency among national interests. This heteroglossia points to possible equivalences in the terms even though they originate in different languages.

Technologies play a key role in mediating the use of endonyms and exonyms. The limited production of the printing press and inherent limitations of physical distribution meant that the use of multiple language had a greater gravitas for interactions and supported more control over the resources which legitimated names. Information system, and especially internet, technologies greatly speed up this process, essentially making every person with a website a publisher. Control over naming is much harder to control. The names may more closely reflect different cultures' evolving naming practices.



Figure 5 16th Century map of the Baltic Sea area

(Source: <http://bell.lib.umn.edu/map/OLAUS/IMAGE/maplg.jpg>)

The Baltic Sea: Communication, Interaction, and Naming

Any sea is a zone of human interaction-rarely of habitation, but of crucial importance to the survival of human societies. Communication has been at the core of successful interactions. In the case of the Baltic Sea, the name has become a vehicle for commerce and trade-no matter which linguistic form is used. What was once the East Sea for English speakers in the Middle Ages has become the Baltic Sea; the then 'Sea of Vikings' for Russian speakers has become the Baltic Sea. Germans still refer to the 'East Sea', but use 'Baltic Area' to speak of the Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia or more frequently to refer to the ten nations of the Baltic Sea area. Names change with technology-at different speeds, and the meeting of technology is usually aided by a healthy dose of cultural understanding.

Conclusion

This historical study of naming practices in the Baltic Sea area leads to the conclusion that toponyms serve a crucial purpose in naming and evolve as technologies and cultures change. What is the Baltic Sea for one group and the East Sea for another group clearly signifies different economic, social, and cultural relationships. That the differences can be overcome and different names used concurrently as heteroglossia suggests that different names need not bar relationships between peoples and nations.

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