The overlapping of inflectional morphology and contact-induced changes in non-standard eastern Finnic
Riho Grünthal (University of Helsinki)

Current theories about language contact suggest that inflectional morphology is least likely to be influenced by language contacts. This statement involves the assumption that the emergence of other than inherent features in a given language follows the same path and leaves transparent traces. Borrowed vocabulary, the most typical indication of foreign interference, has often a parallel both in the donor and recipient language. However, regardless of the fact that grammatical processes equally can show parallels between two or more languages, they are characteristically less transparent.

While syntactic patterns in non-standard Finnic languages such as Veps and Votic often display morphosyntactic patterns that, instead of other Finnic languages, have parallels in Russian, the preference of inherent vocabulary and morphology decreases the transparency of functional borrowing. This suggests that in a language contact situation between typologically divergent languages inherent features are more important than non-inherent.

However, we maintain that despite of the obvious contrast between inherent and non-inherent grammatical features, even inflectional morphology may indirectly or due to random analogy occur under the influence of language contacts. In non-standard Veps, for instance, the restructuration of tense system took place through the reanalysis of syntactic constructions, most notably the copulative constructions, which indirectly triggered secondary changes in tense categories and paradigms. Furthermore, there is evidence that the reorganization of inflectional patterns need not affect the whole category at issue but may be limited to a certain lexical type, such as past tense forms of one-syllable verbs.

The paper focuses on the overlapping of inherent features with secondary grammatical parallels in neighboring contact languages.