
I. ROZPRAWY I ANALIZY

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Toward a cognitive definition of the Estonian Thunder god *Pikne*

Estoński bóg grzmotu *Pikne* – próba definicji kognitywnej

Abstract: The aim of this article is to provide a cognitive definition of the supernatural entity associated with the phenomenon of thunderstorm (the Thunder god) in Estonian vernacular tradition and folk beliefs. The article will firstly investigate the lexicon connected with thunderstorm and its components, and secondly the etymological roots of the theonym. Subsequently, I will organize the linguistic data into facets such as homonyms and synonyms, co-hyponyms, hyperonyms, appearance, features unrelated to appearance, actions performed by the god, authority, addressee, address, and location. Finally, a cognitive definition will be proposed. The documentation will be shown in the original language alongside an English translation.

Key words: cognitive definition; ethnolinguistics; *Pikne*; *Uku*; Estonian Thunder god

Introduction

In this article, I will provide a cognitive definition of the supernatural entity associated with the phenomenon of thunderstorm (the Thunder god) in Estonian native religion and vernacular beliefs.¹ The cognitive definition

¹ The topic itself being quite large, it will not be possible here to present all the folkloric sources and evidence, but only the most relevant ones will be shown and translated from Estonian to English. The historical sources will also be both in the original language and in translation. When not indicated, the translation has been done by the author (G.G.). For limitations of space, I will not investigate the data concerning the Thunder god's fights against his enemy and against the Devil that were analyzed, among others, by Ülo Valk (1994).

is based on the linguistic worldview of a specific community of speakers and in the words of Jerzy Bartmiński, “aims to portray the way in which an entity is viewed by the speakers of a language, to represent socio-culturally established and linguistically entrenched knowledge, its categorisation and valuation” (Bartmiński 2013a: 166). The linguistic knowledge expressed in this way through a cognitive definition implies the connotations of the entity under examination, i.e. its criterial and characteristic features (Bartmiński 2012: 68). The cognitive definition is based on manifold linguistic data: firstly, data contained inside the system of a specific language (etymological data, phraseological data, synonyms, etc.) and secondly, data present in different texts of various genres in that language (with a strong emphasis on folkloric texts) and in the answers provided by questionnaires to native speakers of the language (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2020: 112).

Of primary importance in the context of reconstructing the linguistic worldview, of which the cognitive definition is a component, is the etymological analysis (Bartmiński 2013b: 4). Etymological analysis is strictly connected with diachronic and synchronic lexical semantics, where through the identification of the primary meaning of a term on the basis of its etymology, one can hierarchize and reconstruct the historical process of the development of meanings (Bartmiński 2013b: 4). Important data on the original meaning of the lexeme under study can be found by tracking the functions of a given word in folkloric texts. Often these sources either underpin the hypotheses of etymologists or suggest specific conclusions as to the semantic sphere of the words being studied (Popowska-Taborska 2012: 163).

In the following analysis, I will follow the model of the spread and diversification of Finnic languages proposed by Petri Kallio (2014, 2021). I will not be differentiating between Standard North Estonian and North or South Estonian dialects, in order to propose a panspatial and panchronic definition which can do justice to the perception of the local Thunder god from the first historical accounts to the latest folk beliefs. The article will firstly discuss the terms related to the names of the Estonian Thunder god and their etymologies. Subsequently, linguistic data will be grouped into definitional sentences divided into facets: homonyms and synonyms, co-hyponyms, hyperonyms,² appearance, features unrelated to appearance, actions performed by the god, authority, addressee, address, and location,

² A hyperonym indicates a word with a broader meaning in a semantic field than the terms with more specific meanings that belong to the same semantic field. The latter are called hyponyms. Hence hyperonyms and hyponyms are defined in relation to each other, since a word is hyperonymic only with respect to hyponyms, and vice versa. Two words that are hyponyms of the same hyperonym are called co-hyponyms.

following the model summarized by Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska (2020: 113) and employed in the dictionary *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych* (SSSL). Since the facets related to the Thunder god's appearance allow for a characterisation of the god as an old man, the entity will be referred to as "he/him". Next, I will concisely present the resulting cognitive definition and provide the documentation of the linguistic data in the original language and an English translation.

The Thunder god

The entity classified as "Thunder god" is an element of Indo-European studies³ and presented as a supernatural being who has power over storms and related atmospheric phenomena. He is also associated with other semantic fields including rocks, the oak tree, fertility and warfare, thereby extending beyond the domain of thunder. While Estonian belongs to the Uralic language family, and the Uralic mythologies do not seem to have had a distinct Thunder god (or a pantheon comparable to the Indo-European mythologies; cf. Ajkhenvald et al. 1989: 156–157), an analysis of the Estonian Thunder god, conceived in the framework mentioned above, is relevant. The reasons are connected to the fact that the ancestors of the Estonian people have had several strata of linguistic contact with different Indo-European populations or language networks over the last millennia (in chronological order with Indo-Iranian, Baltic, Germanic, and Slavic people), which deeply influenced the development of the languages and cultures involved, resulting in mutual influence of mythological images. These contacts resulted in the emergence of a more specific Thunder god from the more "comprehensive" supreme being.⁴ According to Kulmar (2006: 29), this process, in the territory of Estonia, is clearly related to the influence of Indo-European substratum.

As the cognitive definition concerns firstly the lexemes in use (the Thunder god's name, its collocations, and all its meanings in the worldview of the speakers of a given language), it is worth remembering that in Estonian there is a set of words connected with aspects of thunderstorm and with the Thunder god's name(s). This situation, far from being an isolated case of the Estonian language, was already noted by Jacob Grimm in *Teutonic mythology*, where he stated that ancient languages distinguish three acts in this natural phenomenon: the flash of the lightning, the sound, and the

³ As for instance in West (2007: 238).

⁴ According to Ajkhenvald et al. (1989: 158), the strongest influence came from the Balto-Slavic tradition.

stroke (Grimm 1882: 177–178). Subsequently, each of these components has a specific term which can also be used as a synonym of the Thunder god. It is possible to distinguish a sound component (Eng. ‘thunder’), a light component (Eng. ‘lightning’), and a term that indicates the action of an electrical charge striking the ground (Eng. ‘thunderbolt’).

In some Indo-European languages in general, the etymological root of these terms shows a connection with atmospheric events, as in English the light component of the thunderstorm is called *lightning*. According to Carl Buck, the words denoting the sound component ‘thunder’ “are mostly from various roots denoting noise, of which one is especially widespread in its application to thunder. But in one group the development is probably through *thunderbolt* from a root meaning ‘strike’, in another word through ‘thick cloud’; and there are some mythological terms” (Buck 1949: 57). More specifically in several ancient and modern languages around the Baltic Sea region, there has been a semantic correlation between the name of the Thunder god and the component ‘thunder’ (for instance Lithuanian *Perkūnas*, meaning both ‘thunder’ and ‘the name of the Thunder god’). The case of the Estonian language is somewhat different, as the synonyms of the Thunder god’s name(s) are etymologically not related to atmospheric phenomena or their terminology. Furthermore, the semantic picture of the terms is blurred by the fact that almost all of these words can be used interchangeably.

Terms⁵ and etymologies

The term *Pikne*

A direct pre-Christian source of the native Thunder god name is not attested. Nevertheless, two historical sources from the first half of the 17th century (shown in the documentation) mention an Estonian name of a personified supernatural entity which has power over dark clouds. This is

⁵ Here I will not take into consideration the theonym *Tharaphita*, whose relationship with the thunder or with other Thunder gods is problematic. Neither will I consider the theonym *Taara*, which on the one hand is considered to belong to pseudo-mythology and to have entered oral tradition only recently (Loorits 1951: 35–42). On the other hand, on the basis of folkloric and linguistic data a supernatural entity with a similar name (*Tooru*, *Toori*, *Toari*) seems to have been known in pre-Christian Estonia, apparently related to the Scandinavian *Thor* (Valk H. 1995: 508). Two other theonyms recognized as local supernatural entities related to thunder are *Pärkmann* and *Paarkun* – those will be analyzed in the section on facets.

a Thunder god called *Picker* or *Pikker*, an old form of the modern Estonian *Pikne*⁶ (but with a final consonant, cf. below). Therefore, this term can be assumed to be the foremost name for the Thunder god, as addressed in prayer.

The name *Pikne* was first recorded by the pastor Johann Gutsclaff in the historical text *Kurtzer Bericht und Unterricht von der Falsch-heilig genandten Bäche in Lieffland Wöhhandu* in 1644, which mentions a prayer made by the countryside people of the Võru County in Southeastern Estonia along the Võhandu river (Paulson 1971: 123, original text in Gutsclaff 1644: 362–363). The text of the prayer is contained in a chronicle mentioning the revolt made by peasants against the construction of a mill that would have hindered the flow of the sacred Võhandu river, also known in its upper course as *Püha jõgi* ‘Holy river’, around which existed a cult of thunder (Heiki Valk 2015: 16). The sacrality of the river was the key element that provoked the anger of the peasants, who associated the construction of the mill with a subsequent period of bad weather, seen as the revenge of the Thunder god himself. Their revolt culminated in the destruction of the mill the night before 8 July, 1642 (Heiki Valk 2015: 49).

The *Explanatory Dictionary of the Estonian Language* explains *pikne* firstly as “lightning together with thunder”, (i.e. thunderstorm) and secondly as “a deity who handles thunder and rain, thus giving fertility” (EKSS: *pikne*).

In the Estonian *Dictionary of Synonyms*, *pikne* is equivalent to the terms *äike* (SYS: *pikne*), while according to Matthias Johann Eisen in the book *Eesti mütoloogia*, *Pikne* and *Kõu* can be seen as almost the same entity (Eisen 1919: 112–114). Regarding the differences in their etymological roots and local uses and variations, these terms can be considered co-hyponyms of a general hyperonym containing the words *vana jumal* ‘old god’ (Loorits 1951: 6). In relation to the hyperonym, also the term *uku* can be seen an co-hyponym of *pikne* (Ülo Valk 2012: 43). This plurality in terminology appears to be shared by all the Finnic languages, albeit in different ways (Frog 2017: 114).

The term *Uku*

Another term related to the Thunder god’s name is *uku* or *Uku* ‘old man’. This term in Estonian does not mean directly ‘thunder’, but it is attested in the folkloric data collected in the same area where the historical chronicle

⁶ The differentiation of the term with a capital or lower case letter (*Pikne* or *pikne*) is different through the sources, and it is connected with the convention of modern or early modern authors and collectors of mythological data. It is possible to suppose that in the Estonian peasant oral culture, among which the cult of Thunder god existed, the difference was not very relevant.

mentioned the worshipping of *Pikne*, connected with a supernatural entity. The fact that this entity can be the Thunder god himself is inferred from the Finnish language, where *ukkonen* means ‘thunder’ and *Ukko* means ‘old man’ but also ‘the name of the Thunder god’.⁷ *Ukko* is unambiguously known as an important god of Finland with the power over the weather, thunder, and fertility, attested in the famous lists of Finnic gods presented in the preface to Mikael Agricola’s *David’s Psalter* from 1551 (reported in the original language in Voigt 1998: 14–16, an English translation of the verses mentioning *Ukko* can be found in Salo 2006: 5). Frog has pointed out that *Ukko* is ultimately a semantically transparent epithet meaning ‘old man’ and this appellative could also be applied to other pre-Christian gods or later to the Christian God⁸ (Frog 2017: 100).

According to the scholar of Estonian mythology Oskar Loo, the term *Uku* in Estonian was introduced as an adaptation of the Finnish word *Ukko* in the first half of the 19th century by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the author of the national Romantic epic *Kalevipoeg*, written on the basis of folkloric materials (Loo 1936: 256–257). Thanks to him, *Uku* would have become a character of the so-called literary pseudo-mythology. Apparently, *Uku* before Kreutzwald’s work, was considered a fairy of the Northeastern-Estonian coastal area, derived from a dead ancestor to which offerings were made on a specific rock altar (*ukukivi*) and bushel (*ukuvakk*), only elevated to a god as a consequence of Kreutzwald’s production (ENE 1976: 203).

Another opinion is expressed by Heiki Valk (2015). The author provides a large amount of toponymic data, more conservative in preserving old names and less prone to change under cultural influences connected with the term *Uku/uku*⁹ around the sacred Võhandu river. The scholar puts together the historical indications of the cult of thunder in the area and comes to the conclusion that *Uku* or *uku* may be an animistic representation of the thunder (Heiki Valk H. 2015: 50).

⁷ A deeper analysis of the connection between the Estonian and the Finno-Karelian Thunder gods lies out of the scope of the present article (among others, *Ukko* was studied in two long articles by Salo (1990, 2006).

⁸ A similar situation happened with the Estonian hyperonyms. On the one hand, it is clear that Christianisation added new layers of meaning to the ‘old man of the sky’ and which became associated with the Christian god *Jumal* which in the folkloric texts also performs the action of thunder. On the other hand, the historical sources and the linguistic and folkloric data stress the connection of the different co-hyponyms with the vernacular Thunder god.

⁹ Heiki Valk (2015: 49) underlines the fact that there are no capital letters in oral text, which is why *Uku* can be also spelt *uku*.

The term *Kukutätä*

The Võhandu river flows in Võrumaa, the southeastern region of Estonia. The inhabitants of the region have preserved two specific languages, deriving from South Estonian, namely Võro and Seto (Võro-Seto < Ugandi < Ugala < South Estonian) (Kallio 2021: 135). According to P. Kallio, South Estonian derives from the first dialectal split of Proto-Finnic (South Estonian < Inland Finnic < Proto-Finnic), while all the other Finnic languages, including (North) Estonian, derive from the other dialectal diversion dialect (Estonian << Coastal Finnic < Proto-Finnic) (Kallio 2014: 164). In this context, it is relevant to point out that in Võro, the Estonian term *pikne* has a synonym *kukutätä*,¹⁰ which in Võro means ‘sky father; god’ (VEVS: *kukutätä*), similar to *äike*, Estonian for ‘thunderstorm’ that is derived from *äi* ‘father-in-law; grandfather’ (ETY: *äike*). While the second part of the compound, *tätä*, corresponds to Estonian *taat* ‘father; old man’, the first component in the Hargla dialect of Võro is represented in the noun *kukk*, genitive *kuku* ‘bread’ (EMS: *kukk*) meaning ‘old man of the bread’. The folkloric material from this area helps to explain the theonym with the synonyms *leivaisa* ‘father of the bread’ and *leivaandja* ‘bread giver’, and also *jumal* ‘god’. So *Kukutätä* could be considered a local Võro co-hyponym of *Pikne*, both in hyperonymic relationship to *jumal* ‘god’.

Etymological roots of the Thunder god’s name(s)

The *Estonian Etymological Dictionary* explains these terms as follows:

Pikne: from the term *pikk*, a Uralic root meaning ‘spatially extensive; long lasting’. *Pikne* originally was an archaic term to indicate the flame thrown by spirits, while the variation *pikker* spread through the written language at the end of the 19th century and is probably due to a typographical error in the text of the lightning prayer (instead of the dialectal variant *pikken*) (ETY: *pikk*). Commenting on the Finnish cognate *pitkä*, which gave rise to one of the names of the Finnish Thunder god, *Pitkäinen* (apart from the above mentioned *Ukko*), Unto Salo says that it is not clear if this name refers to an elongated form of the Thunder god’s tall stature, the length of the lightning, the length of the distance one can hear the far-away thunder, or the altitude of the thunder clouds (Salo 2006: 12).

An indication of the antiquity of the theonym could be seen in the Livonian name of the snipe, a wading bird called *pitkiz-kabrikki*, from Livonian words literally meaning ‘thunder’ and ‘goat’, with *pitki* (nominative) being

¹⁰ With a local variation, *kukudäta*.

the Livonian cognate of Estonian *pikne*. This bird is associated with the Thunder god in the Finnic languages and this association can also be found in other languages around the Baltic Sea region (Harvilahti 2019: 191–192). As the ancestor of the Livonian language above, called by Petri Kallio “Gulf of Riga Finnic”, was the second language to diverge from Proto-Finnic around 200 CE (Kallio 2014: 165), it is possible to assume that the term *pitki*, thus fossilized in the bird’s name, kept the oldest form of the theonym. This is because the bird’s Lithuanian name is *Perkūno oželis* (‘Perkūnas’s goat’), and the Latvian name is *Pērkonkaza* (‘Pērkon’s goat’), both from the Proto-Baltic theonym **Perkūnas* ‘name of the Thunder god’, an equivalent of ‘thunder’.¹¹ The Estonian name for snipe is *taeva kits* ‘sky’s goat’ (Harvilahti 2019: 191). In the opinion of Oskar Loorits, *Pikne* as ‘the long one’ was originally interpreted as a long trail of fire from the sky and only later acquired a mythological reinterpretation. The term is attested all over Estonia (Loorits 1951: 8–9).

Kõu, from *kõuk* meaning in Estonian ‘distant ancestor’, was considered a probable ancient Baltic root, shown in the Old Prussian word *cawx* ‘demon’, with a cognate in Finnish dialects *kouko* with a range of meanings such as ‘sould of a dead person’, ‘big man’, ‘bear’, but also ‘personified bogeyman’ (Koski 2012: 160–161), ultimately from an Indo-European root (SKES: 226). Nevertheless, the Old Prussian *cawx* was recognized as a more recent Germanism (Kregždys 2021: 292), thus making this theory unsustainable. *Kõu* existed in older dialectal Estonian, meaning ‘thunder’. In the written mode, the word has been introduced with a new meaning. The original meaning of the stem ‘ghost’ has been preserved in Finnish. In Estonian, there has been a shift in meaning ‘spirit, ghost’ > ‘god of thunder’ > ‘thunder’ (ETY: *kõu*). This term and its cognates are mostly attested in Northwestern Estonia and Saaremaa (Loorits 1951: 9).

Äike, meaning in Estonian ‘an atmospheric phenomenon in the form of lightning and associated noise in heavy clouds’ (EKSS: *äike*), derives from Finno-Permic root *äi* ‘father-in-law’, dialectally ‘grandfather, old man’ (ETY: *äike*). The shift of meaning in the derivative ‘thunderstorm’ can be explained by the personification of the force of nature. This term is mostly attested in Northeastern Estonia (Loorits 1951: 9).

In this way, a model of the components or aspects of thunderstorm in Estonian incorporates several terms. The “pure” atmospheric terms as depicted in EKSS are:

¹¹ Other connections between Livonian *pit’ki* and Latvian *pērkons*, both as nouns and theonyms, are shown by Sayers (1990: 108–109).

- The flash component (Eng. *lightning*): *välk*, etymologically connected with the terms meaning ‘agile, fast’.
- The sound component (Eng. *thunder*): *müristamine*, *mürin*, *kõmin*, from the verbs *müristama* ‘to thunder, roar’ and *kõmistama* ‘to thunder, rumble’.
- The stroke component (Eng. *thunderbolt*): *välgunool*, a compound word made of *välk* ‘lightning’ and *nool* ‘arrow’.

The cognitive definition of *Pikne*

After the discussion of the terms connected with the names of the Estonian Thunder God in different parts of the country, I will provide a cognitive definition of *Pikne*, divided into facets. The corpus of folkloric and linguistics data used consists in selected items from the index cards of the manuscript collections at the Estonian Folklore Archives of Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, under the sections of *Pikne terminoloogiat* ‘Pikne terminologies’ and *Pikne seletamine* ‘Pikne explanation’ (177 cards). A broader investigation among the other sections of the index could widen the understanding of *Pikne* and, as a consequence, of its cognitive definition.

Hyperonyms

PIKNE – *JUMAL*, *VANA JUMAL*, *TAEVATAAT*, *TAEVAESÄ*

Pikne is part of a range of hyperonyms with the meaning ‘god’, ‘old god’, ‘old man of the sky’, ‘father sky’. They are contained in the phraseological units collected below. These terms entail a supernatural agency possibly with a wider semantic field than *Pikne*, as the latter can be seen as a specialized entity (the Thunder god). The hyperonyms could point towards the supreme being from which the Thunder god could have emerged. The picture is here blurred by the fact that the term *Jumal* is used also in Estonia for the Christian God. *Taevataat* and *Taevaesä*, meaning ‘old man of the sky’ or ‘father sky’, show the supernatural position of the agent.

Homonyms and synonyms

PIKNE: ‘THUNDER GOD’S NAME; THUNDERSTORM’

PIKNE = THUNDERSTORM COMPONENTS SUCH AS ‘VÄLK, MÜRISTAMINE’

Pikne is the eponymous name of the Estonian Thunder god, synonymous with the term for ‘thunderstorm’ and also a synonym of other components of the thunderstorm. In the sources it is not always clear if the term is used

to mean the supernatural agent behind the atmospheric phenomenon or the phenomenon per se.

Variations of *Pikne* are *pitkne*, *pitk*, *pitkes*, *piknik*, *piklene*, *pikene*, *piken*, *pikken*, *pikäne*, *pikjäne*, *pikse*.

Co-hyponyms

PIKNE – *KÕU*, *ÄIKE*, *UKU*, *KUKUTÄTÄ*

PIKNE — *VANA MEES*, *VANEMB*, *VANAISA*

PIKNE — *PAARKUN*, *PÄRKMANN*

Pikne is part of a range of co-hyponyms (*Kõu*, *Äike*, *Uku*, *Kukutätä*) which have different etymologies. Their historical development and characterization are indicated above. A confirmation of the co-hyponymity of *Kõu* and *Pikne* is provided also by the folkloric material (as in ERA 3, I. 167, (1)). A different range of co-hyponyms of *Pikne* includes terms for ‘old man’, such as *Vana mees*, *Vannamees*, *Vanataat*; for ‘ancestor’, such as *Vanõmb*, *Vanem(b)*, for ‘grandfather’, such as *Vannaissa*, *Vanaisa*. These terms may also be used with a sense of respect of intimacy for people of an earlier generation who are not related (and thus showing personification of the Thunder god). It is also worth remembering that the literal meaning of the terms *Uku* and *Äike* is ‘old male ancestor’. The term *Paarkun* is documented in Leivu dialect,¹² meaning ‘god’ and ‘Thunder god’ (as in AES J), while the noun *paarkun* is translated in Estonian as *pikne* ‘thunder’ (EMS: *paarkun*). Due to the proximity with the speakers of Baltic languages and to the fact that both in Lithuanian and Latvian the noun denoting thunder and the Thunder god’s theonym are semantically correlated, it is reasonable to view *Paarkun* as a Baltic loanword. The last co-hyponym of *Pikne* is *Pärkmann*, which was documented in Saaremaa and analyzed on the basis of folkloric data by Loorits (1930: 97). Loorits translated it as ‘thunderer angel’, and considers its etymology unclear.

Appearance

PIKNE IS AN OLD MAN

The hyperonyms allow to consider the materialisation of *Pikne* in human form as an old man. Furthermore, a folkloric belief mentioned by Matthias Johann Eisen (1995: 105) reports that a man was seen coming out from the water of the Võhandu river after the peasants had brought some offerings.

¹² Leivu was spoken by the Estonian population among the river Gauja in Northern Latvia; it is considered the earliest offshoot of South Estonian (Kallio 2021: 136).

One of his socks was yellow and the other one blue.¹³ According to Eisen, he could have been a human manifestation of *Pikne* or *Uku*.¹⁴

Features unrelated to appearance

PIKNE IS TEMPERAMENTAL

Pikne appears to be both kind and angry with people. According to the historical chronicle in 1632, Estonian peasants thought about constructing a mill on the Vöhandu river as an insult to the Thunder god, which in turn would have taken revenge by bringing bad weather. Furthermore, his anger is seen in his actions, where a multitude of verbs mean ‘to beat’ or ‘to burn’. In a folkloric text, the Thunder god under the name *Kõu* burns the farm of a man who shouted against the heavens (reported below, ERA II 245, 701 (4)).¹⁵ *Pikne*’s kindness is shown directly in one folkloric account where some of *Pikne*’s brothers have a kind heart (E 57337) and by the fact that in the historical chronicle his help is required to protect cultivated fields, presumably assuming an implicit disposition of *Pikne* to help the men. In another card it is mentioned that if there is a one-year-old child in the house, lightning will not strike it (ERA II 79, 330 (14)).

Actions performed by *Pikne*¹⁶

PIKNE PERFORMS VIOLENT AND NOISY ACTIONS

The violent and noisy actions performed by *Pikne* (also referred to with synonyms and co-hyponyms) are present in folkloric texts and exemplified in phraseological units.¹⁷

Müristab, taevataat tapleb ‘it thunders, the old man of the sky fights’, also in variations: *Taevaätt tapleb* ‘the old man of the sky fights’, *Vanataat tapleb taevas* ‘the old man fights in the sky’, *Jumal tapleb* ‘God fights’,

¹³ A folkloric legend reported by Loorits (1951: 23–24) describes Thunder as a boy wearing a blue shirt.

¹⁴ It is somehow unusual to identify the Thunder god as coming from the water, whereas water is customarily a location of the god’s enemy/-ies.

¹⁵ There are whole systems of beliefs linked to respect of the god in order to escape thunder and lightning; some of these are analyzed in Ülo Valk (2012: 51–56).

¹⁶ These examples of the agency of *Pikne* are taken from Eisen (1919: 110–114) and Loorits (1951: 6–10); they are based on the collection of Estonian folk beliefs in the form of single phrases, like *Pikne-Kõu* and the action being performed. The violent actions performed by the Thunder god can also be directed toward evil spirits and the devil – some examples are discussed by Ülo Valk (2012: 44–46).

¹⁷ These phraseological units are taken from the “Electronic basic dictionary of Estonian phraseologisms” (FES) as variations of the phraseologism *taevaisa tapleb* ‘father sky thunders’.

*Kõueke tapleb ja eesoke*¹⁸ *tapleb* ‘Kõueke fights and Jesus fights’, *Kuula, kui iisoke tapleb* ‘Listen how Jesus fights’.

Taevataat tõreleb ‘the old man of the sky scolds’, also in variations: *Taevaesä tõreleb* ‘the sky father scolds’, *Vanajumal hakkab meiega tõrelema* ‘the old god starts to scold us’, *Vanaisä tõreleb* ‘grandfather scolds’, *Vanamees tõrrel täämba jälle* ‘the old man scolds again today’, *Kukutätä tõrölõs* ‘Kukutätä scolds’, *Vanõmb tõrilas* ‘the old man scolds’ *Vannaissa torrisep* ‘grandfather scolds’, *Paarkun lummal’ rout’š* ‘Thunder god scolds’.

Taevaisa oo kuri lit. ‘the sky father is angry’, meaning ‘it thunders’.

Authority

PIKNE RULES ATMOSHPERIC PHENOMENA

PIKNE GIVES BREAD

The rule of Pikne over atmospheric phenomena, especially the clouds and components of thunderstorm, is recalled directly from historical prayers, for instance where he is addressed with phrases such as ‘send the clouds to the forest, to the swamp’ and by the fact that *pikne* ‘thundestorm’ in contemporary Estonian is a synonym of *võlk* ‘lightning’. In the folkloric material *Pikne*’s co-hyponym *Kukutätä* is said to be *leivaandja* ‘the bread giver’. This would correlate with the domain of atmospheric phenomena, which would allow the growth of the grain or other cereals necessary for the bread, pushing away the dark clouds.

Addressee

PIKNE RECEIVES OFFERINGS

Pikne receives different kinds of offerings, mostly consisting of horned animals (but also pig heads and grains). They are quoted directly in the historical chronicles (as with the phrase ‘we offer the ox, with two horns and four hooves’) and also in folkloric texts (as ‘we give you gifts; we send you an ox’).

Address

PIKNE IS ADDRESSED FOR PROTECTION AND GOOD WEATHER

Connected with the rule of Pikne over atmospheric phenomena are the offerings that were brought to him in order to ask for protection of the fields, for a good harvest and generally for good weather, as indicated in the folkloric prayer (‘keep arrows away from the ploughed land and sowing

¹⁸ The terms *eesoke* and *iisoke* are popular names for Jesus and show Christian influence on vernacular beliefs.

fields', where the arrows refer to *välgunool* 'thunderbolt') and in the first historical source ('Push the black clouds elsewhere, over the big marshes, the high wilderness, the wide forest, (let) the sweet weather, the honey air (stay) [...] protect our field-good straw below and ears above and good kernels inside'). A relationship with the agricultural cycle is shown in the folkloric material (as in AES, M J 186,94), where the "sound of the old man" (i.e. thunder) will bring joy to the farmer in the summer.

Location

PIKNE IS IN THE SKY, IN AND AROUND THE RIVER VÕHANDU

The relationship of Pikne with the Võhandu river was analyzed in the section on the terms and etymologies. Pikne is also materialized as a sacrificial rock, located close to the same river, under which a treasure is hidden. This rock could rinse itself in the water (ERA II 246, 35 (4)). Being the ruler of the atmospheric phenomena, Pikne is also located in the sky, as shown in phraseological units.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing analysis, a definition of *Pikne* can be proposed. *Pikne* is the name of the Thunder god of the Estonian people (attested all over the country); in Võrumaa he was also known as *Kukutätä* 'the bread giver'. His name is co-hyponymous with *Kõu* (attested in North-West Estonia and Saaremaa), *Uku* (attested around the Võhandu river), *Äike* (attested in North-East Estonia), but also *Vanemb* and *Vanaisa*. These terms reflect different etymological paths, though converging towards the hyperonym meaning 'god', 'old god', 'old man of the sky' as *Jumal*, *Vana jumal*, *Taevataat*. In the Leivu dialect he is known as *Paarkun*, thus reflecting a Baltic loanword. To Pikne, animal offerings were brought, around the Võhandu river, and into the water of the river too. It was also thought that Pikne could manifest himself in the form of a man. Pikne has power over atmospheric phenomena and for that he was addressed in the time of drought or to limit excessive precipitation (dark clouds); he also has plays a role in the agricultural cycle. Pikne's character is temperamental and can be positive or negative; for instance, he can take revenge if provoked. Pikne has four aspects. He has seven brothers, which are also both evil and good. Pikne performs violent and noisy actions.

Folkloric prayer

*Tuli-Pikker, ande anname, härja saadame*¹⁹ / Fire-Pikker, we give you gifts, we send you
an ox
Tuli-Pikker, saada pilve kõrbe, sohu! / Fire-Pikker, send the clouds to the forest, to the
swamp
Tuli-Pikker, hoia tulda, soola, vette! / Fire-Pikker, keep fire, salt, water
Kange Kõu, hoia nooli põllu külvist! / Strong Kõu, keep arrows away from the field's
sowings
Kange Kõu, hoia nooli põllu künnist ja külvist / Strong Kõu, keep arrows away from the
field's ploughings and sowings
Kodu härjast ja lambast, majast ja puudest / the house of ox and sheep, of building and
trees.

Data from the Folkore Archive

ERA 3, I. 167, (1) < Kuressaare gümnaasium, Saaremaa

Kõu ehk pikne, mida vanal ajal piksejumalaks nimetati / *Kõu* or *pikne* (was) what the
Thunder god was called in the old times.

AES < Hargla 1935 S. Tanning

'Kukutätä' Kõu, Kukudätä käiu kevastõ ja müristas / *'Kukutätä' Kõu*, Kukudätä went
loudly and thundered.

AES J < Koiva Valter Niilus 1936

Paarkun – jumal / *Paarkun* god
Paarkun – lummal' rout's
'Piksejumal tõreleb' / the Thunder god scolds

AES, M J 186,94 < Helme, Jõgeveste, Jaasikse t. S. Tanning 1937

*Vanembe eli om kuulda, me saami vanembe vihma. Vanemptege elli, põlumehe rõõmustave
suvel.*

The sound of the old man is heard, we will receive the rain of the old man. The elder
creates sound, the farmers rejoice in the summer.

ERA II 2, 677 < Hargla, Taheva v.

Kukutäta. 'Pikne'

ERA II 2, 677 < Hargla, Mõniste v.

Kukutätä 'Pikne'
Kukk, gen. *kuku* = *leib*; *tätä* = *isa*. / *Kukk*, gen. *kuku* = bread; *tätä* = father
Kukutätä = *leivaaisa*, *leivaandja* = *Jumal* / *Kukutätä* = Father of bread, bread giver =
God

¹⁹ The text comes from Eisen (1919: 113); it was used as a prayer in the village of Võnnu, Southern Estonia. No specific year is mentioned but it was most probably collected by Matthias Eisen between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

ERA II 245, 701 (4) < Toolamaa v, Leevaku k – Jaan Konsap < Oskar Konsap (1939) (reported by Valk H. 2015: 27)

Teine niisugune talu oli Võo jõe ääres Võu külas n. n. Sokamäel, kus ka muistsel ajal Ukle ohvertati. Ka sel maapidajal oli raudväravad ja väga rikas. Ta sõitis suvel jaanipäeva ajal saaniga Räpinas, mitu hobust saani ees. Tõusis pikse pilv, välgu sähvatused ja müristamine tema ümber. Siis sai mees selle üle pahaseks; ähvardades rusigaga taeva poole: Enne võid Sa kolm korda higistada, enne kui mina vaeseks jään. Koju jõudes oli tema talu välgust maani maha põlenud.

Another such farm was by the Võo River in Võu village, on so-called Sokamäe, where in ancient times offerings were brought to Uku. This landowner also had iron gates and was very rich. During the summer on Midsummer's Day, he rode a sleigh in Räpina, several horses in front of the sleigh. There was a cloud of lightning, flashes of lightning, and roaring around him. Then the man got angry because of this; so he threatened the heavens with his fists: "You shall sweat three times before I become poor". When he got home, his farm was burned to the ground by lightning.

ERA II 246, 35 (4) < Võõpsu alevik – Maria Vari < Vilma Helimets (1939) (reported by Valk H. 2015: 33–34)

Veel siis, kui polnud ristiusku, austati jumalaid hiiemägedel. Võhandu jõgi oli vanal ajal pühaks jõeks, sest arvati, et müristamisjumal Uku elab Võhandu kaldal. Võuküla ligidal Võhandu kaldal asus hiiemägi. Mäel kasvasid suured vanad tammed, pärnad, kesk küngast asus ohvrikivi. Rahvas austas hiiemäel jumalaid ja ohverdas ohvrikivil. Võhandu hiiemäel peeti pidustusi Uku auks, toodi palve ja tänuohvreid. Ohvriks toodi osa viljast ja ohvriks pidi alati toodama seapea. Kui seapea oli olnud väike, siis ei julgetud ligidale minna, vaid visati kaugelt ja üteldi: „Ole rahul jumalakene, tuleval aastal toon suurema.“ Vanal ajal olevat räägitud, et hiiemäel asuv ohvrikivi läheb iga kümne aasta järel 3 päeva enne suvist pöörpäeva keskööl Võhandu jõkke loputama, sest inimesed suitsutavad ta mustaks. Rahvas uskus, et ohvrikivi alla on peidetud varandust. Kuid räägiti, et selle kättesaamine on raske, sest kui kivi läheb jõkke loputama, siis võis küll varandust minna otsima, aga kivi tulnud hiiгла ruttu tagasi ja surmanud varanduseotsija.

Back then, when there was no Christianity, the gods were worshipped on sacred hills. The Võhandu river used to be a sacred river because it was thought that the thunder god Uku lived on the banks of the Võhandu. A sacred hill was located on the shore of Võhandu near Võuküla. Large old oaks and limes grew on the hill, and a sacrificial stone was located in the middle of the hill. The people honoured the gods on the sacred hill and sacrificed on the sacrificial stone. Celebrations in honor of Uku were held on Võhandu' sacred hills, prayers and sacrifices were brought. Some of the grain was sacrificed and a pig's head was always to be sacrificed. When the pig's head was small, they did not dare to go near, but threw it from afar and said: "Be calm god, I will bring a bigger one next year". It has been said in the old days that the sacrificial stone on the sacred hill goes to rinse the Võhandu river every ten years three days before the Summer Solstice at midnight because people smoke it black. The people believed that treasure was hidden under the sacrificial stone. However, it was said that it was difficult to get it because if the stone goes to rinse the river, it was possible to go in search of treasure, but the stone came back quickly and killed the treasurer.

H II 4, 404-5 (80) <S. Jaani. Vastemõise

Väik ehk pikne on nelja seltsi või neid on neli: põletaja, teine kustutaja, kolmas lõhkuja, neljas sulataja. Nii olla pikne kuskil hoone põlema löönud ja teise pauguga ära kustutanud, teises kohas olla ta hoone paljalt puruks löönud ja mitte põletanud, kolmandas kohas ühte rütsepat, kes uksest parajasti tuppa astunud, trehvanud kelle teine pool ära kadunud, öeldakse sulanud, ja pääle selle (peale selle) säääl (seal) ja sääle kellegil vasknööbid pisaratena maha jooksnud, ilma et mees tähele oleks pannud.

There are four types of (*väik*) lightning or *pikne*: the first is an igniter (which ignites), the second an extinguisher, the third a breaker, and the fourth is a melter. Thus, somewhere the *pikne* set fire to the building and extinguished it with another blow, in another place it pierced the building to the wooden base, but did not burn it, in a third place it attacked the tailor, who at that moment came through the door into the room, and the second part of which disappeared, they say that it melted, and after that, someone's copper buttons fell like tears so that the man did not notice it.

ERA II 79, 330 (14) Mihkli < Veltsa v. M. Piile

Kus majas aastane laps on, sinna ei löö väik sisse. / Where there is a one-year-old child in the house, lightning does not strike there.

E 57337 < Aliste

Igal swel ise pikne. Kui 7 pikset. On 7 pikset, kõik vennad. Neist 2 head, lahket, heasü-dameega, müristavad vähe. 2 venda aga väga kurja südamega, müristavad palju, ei aäüa armu inimesele, ega loomale, ei puule ega kivile. 3 venda on keskmised, ei kurja ega hea südamega, müristavad parajalt.

Every summer has its own *pikne*. There are seven *pikne*, they are all brothers. Of these, two are kind, open, with a kind heart, they do not thunder much. Two (other brothers) with a very wicked heart, thundering a lot, do not give love to either a person or an animal, or a tree, or a stone. The three middle brothers, neither with an evil nor a good heart, thunder moderately.

Historical sources

“Võta, Pikken, härja anname palvus(en) kate sarve kaan ning nelja sora kaan künni perast, külvi perast, õle vask, tera kuld. Tõuka muja(le) musta pilve suure soo, kõrgen kõnnu, laia laane pääle. Simase ilm, mesiõhk meile kündjale, külvajale. Püha Pikken, hoia meie põldu, hüva õle allan ning hüva pää otsan ning hüva terri sisen!” (original rendering from the Gutschlaff's chronicle in Laugaste 1963: 43)

“Take it, Pikne, we offer the ox, with two horns and four hooves as a prayer, for plowing, for sowing; (let) the straw be copper, the kernels gold! Push the black clouds elsewhere, over the big marshes, the high wilderness, the wide forest; (let) the sweet weather, the honey air (stay) with us, the plowman and sower! Holy Pikne, protect our field-good straw below and ears above and good kernels inside!” (translation in Paulson 1971: 123)

Another historical mention concerning a ritual formula related to the Thunder god is considered to be the so-called *piksekahja* words connected to bringing

a sacrificial drink to the thunder, of which a peasant named Haiki from Kanepi parish located along the Võhandu river was accused in a trial for witchcraft in 1632. (Paulson 1971: 124)

*Õnsa vetäi,*²⁰ *vii ne pimme pilve soo pääle, laanõ pääle, äia lasku künni pääle, külvi pääle.* Blessed waters, take these dark clouds on the marshes, on the forest; do not leave them on the plowing, on the sowing (translation and original texts in Paulson 1971: 124)

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²⁰ According to Heiki Valk, *vetäi* can also indicated a mythological being (personal communication). If this is the case, then the connection with Thunder god as a mythological being appears even stronger.

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Estoński bóg grzmotu *Pikne* – próba definicji kognitywnej

Streszczenie: W artykule podjęto próbę skonstruowania definicji kognitywnej nadprzyrodzonej istoty związanej z burzą i piorunami – bogiem grzmotu, czczonym w estońskiej tradycji i wierzeniach ludowych. Pierwszym krokiem było zbadanie leksyki związanej z grzmiotem i jej komponentów. Następnie refleksji poddano etymologię badanego teonimu. Kolejnym krokiem było ułożenie danych językowych w fasety: homonimy i synonimy, terminy o tym samym stopniu ogólności i nadrzędne, wygląd, cechy niezwiązane z wyglądem, działania wykonywane przez bóstwo, władza, bóstwo jako adresat działań, zwracanie się do bóstwa i lokalizacja. Na tej podstawie zbudowano definicję kognitywną, z podaniem dokumentacji w języku oryginalnym i angielskim tłumaczeniu.

Słowa kluczowe: definicja kognitywna; etnolingwistyka; *Pikne*; *Uku*; estoński bóg grzmotu