

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### REVIEW, COMMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES WITH REGARD TO RENATA SÕUKAND'S DOCTORAL DISSERTATION *HERBAL LANDSCAPE*

Renata Sõukand's dissertation is composed of six articles based on the concept of herbal landscape, on the role of folk medicine in Estonia during a long period of time, and on the use of plants as insect repellents.

During the period 2004–2010, Renata collected a great amount of information on plants used in popular medicine adopting ecosemiotic and ethnobotanic methods across descriptive, comparative, quantitative and theoretical approaches.

The thesis has been developed in four main directions:

- a. To present an overview of plant collection;
- b. To integrate the ethnobotanical framework adopting an ecosemiotic approach;
- c. To adapt the notion of perceived herbal landscape to the folklore data;
- d. To verify how there could be an improvement in the ethnobotanical research with the approaches proposed by Renata.

The herbal landscape is a very attractive concept that opens new perspectives in terms of folklore development not only in Estonia but across Europe as well. Renata Sõukand has demonstrated great competency in different sectors of the herbal landscape from bibliographic research to data set handling. The cultural heritage of Estonian herbal landscape has been underlined and discussed in details and reinforced by a rich bibliographic review.

How to conserve the human and social capital of herbal landscape and how to improve this cultural richness appears as a goal for the author. The presentation of different case studies, juxtaposed to a semiotic approach, is a fine example of integration between epistemological and empirical vision of the complexity. The herbal landscape seems an occasion to demonstrate the changes occurring in the last years in Estonian society, changes that can be found across all of Europe.

The relationship between medical plants and the concept of biodiversity could be a relevant topic to be questioned as often biodiversity is considered as a natural element far from human context, when in reality biodiversity means diversity of meaningful information of human surroundings.

Medical plants appear along the different papers that composed Renata Sõukand's thesis as an integrated resource involving beliefs, traditions, religious and medical properties.

The utilization of an ecosemiotic approach opens new perspectives also to other related fields like food products and local tradition, biodiversity perception and education. For these reasons I consider relevant the epistemological and cultural contribution that Renata Sõukand has offered in this PhD thesis and a clear example of application of ecosemiotic principles to the "real world".

Conserving biodiversity means not only preventing environmental degradation and species extinction but also means maintaining active knowledge and the related semi-

otic mechanisms. Biodiversity, as implicitly demonstrated by Sõukand's thesis is not an external natural element separated by human context but is a strictly interacting component of everyday living.

Extending the approach presented in Sõukand's thesis to other components of human context like the sound-scape or the heritage-scape seems a very promising innovative approach to guarantee human wellbeing on the local, regional and continental scale.

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## THESIS DEFENCE: ANNELI BARAN

### *POSSIBILITIES FOR STUDYING SEMANTICS IN PHRASEOLOGY*

On the 15th of March 2011, Anneli Baran defended her PhD thesis *Fraseologismide semantika uurimisvõimalused* [*Possibilities for Studying Semantics in Phraseology*] at the University of Tartu. The opponent could point out that Baran had taken on a challenging task when she, as a philologist and folklorist, had searched for new approaches to semantics in phraseology. One aim of Baran's dissertation is to prove how the psycholinguistic and cultural approach increases explanatory capacity in linguistics when semantics of phraseologisms are concerned. Beside the theoretical discussion about the possibilities for studying semantics in phraseology she bases her own conclusions on experience with Estonian phraseology during the construction of the database and also on results of queries among Estonian schoolchildren. She has also discussed experiments to use data from the Internet.

Baran seizes the problem of the lack of reciprocal discussion between phraseologists and psycholinguists interested in relevant questions of phraseology. She shows the history and mainstreams of different scholarly approaches in studying semantics in phraseology, the development of defining concepts by some predominant researchers, key persons' personal correcting movements (e.g. Raymond Gibbs). Baran analyzes the key concepts considered to be crucial for understanding semantics of phraseologisms. She debates approaches that are too narrow. For that she uses her own results reported in the articles and finds support from other research outcomes.

I recommend reading an important earlier article *The Compilation of the Database of Estonian Phrases* (2004) which has Baran as one of the authors (published in journal *Folklore* 25). The article and orientation to the database of Estonian phrases give a better comprehension in reading her theoretical discussion. In her dissertation Baran opens the central constructs of phraseology: permanence, iconographic/symbolic/metaphoric quality, motivation and idiomaticity in the light of psycholinguistic research. Linguistic "motivation" has been the most central term after Russian linguist V. V. Vinogradov's (1947) criteria for the classification of phraseological items, where phraseologisms without motivation are most idiomatic. It is quite natural that Baran also starts from the motivation-related problems concerning phraseologisms. She finds a new clue for motivation research from Dmitrij Dobrovolskij's studies with Elisabeth