

Introduction to the Estonian special issue of *FULL**

Anne Tamm

This is a special issue of *FULL*, dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Estonia. Estonia is one of the three sovereign countries where a Uralic language is a national language as well as the language spoken by the majority of the population. The Estonian language belongs to the Southern group of the Baltic-Finnic branch of the Finnic languages. Its closest relatives are Livonian, Votic, and South Estonian: Võro and Seto; both are considered as dialects in some approaches (see more details and further information in “Finno-Ugric peoples” n.d.).

Independence from the Russian Empire was declared on 24 February 1918, when the administrative areas referred to as Estonia and the Estonian speaking areas of Livonia were united in the Republic of Estonia. Estonia is thus the youngest sovereign state in the triplet with Hungary and Finland; the latter gaining independence on 6 December 1917. On 6 August 1940, the Republic was annexed by the Soviet Union. In 1990, the Congress of Estonia became the representative body of the citizens of the Republic of Estonia. Actual independence was regained through a gradual process, with the Soviet troops leaving the territory in 1994 (see more details and further information in “The story of our freedom” n.d., “Maarjamäe History Centre” n.d., “Eesti rahva museum” n.d.). Currently, the Republic of Estonia seeks to transcend its physical borders by offering E-Residency, which enables entrepreneurs to start a trusted location-independent EU company online (“What is E-residency?” n.d.). A network of cultural institutes provides information about Estonian culture and society across the world (“Estonian Institute” n.d.), with outposts in Tallinn, Helsinki and Budapest (“Estonian Institute in Hungary” n.d.).

The Estonian language is spoken by approximately 1.1 million people worldwide. According to the census in 2011–2012, Estonian is the first language of 68.5% of the total population of 1,294,236 in the Republic of Estonia. More specifically, the exact count of Estonian native speakers was 886,859 (“Rel 2011: Eestis räägitakse emakeelena 157 keelt” 2012). In addition, 147 persons report the knowledge of a sign language. The legacy of a long period as part of the Soviet Union is partly reflected in the large share of Russian (29.6%) or Ukrainian (0.6%) native speakers and partly by a considerable number of speakers of Finno-Ugric languages other than Estonian. The Estonian census records the following other Finno-Ugric speakers: 7423 Finns, 416 Mordvinians, 357 Ingrian Finns, 354 Karelians, 234 Maris, 189 Udmurts, 160 Hungarians, 93 Komis, 52 Vepsians, 51 Izhorians, 20 Komi Permyaks, and even 22 (self-reported) Livonian speakers (“RLE06: Loendatud püsielanikud emakeele ja soo järgi” 2012). Local Estonian dialects are spoken by 131,243 people according to the census data, which amounts to 10.1% of the permanent population. The knowledge of Võro is mentioned by 87,048, the Insular dialect by 24,520, and the Mulgi dialect by 9698 persons (ibid.). Originally, the South Estonian and North Estonian dialects had separate written variants, recorded in separate series of Bible translations. They were also spoken in different administrative regions for several centuries. To the present day, South and North Estonian dialects are mutually unintelligible. The

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Võru Institute (“Võru instituut” n.d.) is a center for learning more about the southern dialects.

Estonian has developed a written language that was standardized at the beginning of the 20th century on the basis of the Northern variants. The writing system uses Latin letters with the addition of *š, ž, õ, ä, ö, and ü*. There are numerous resources for learning Estonian, many of which are available online for free, e.g. a high-quality learner’s dictionary (“Eesti keele põhisõnavara sõnastik” n.d.) or an online grammar course (“Tere tulemast! Welcome!” n.d., or “Oneness City, Estonia” n.d.), or an attractive video and audio course (“Keeleklikk” n.d.).

The presence of these many Finno-Ugric languages and dialects makes Estonia a popular target of urban and field linguists of Finno-Ugric languages. In major universities, such as the [University of Tartu](#), [Tallinn University](#) and [TalTech](#), students whose native language belongs to endangered Finno-Ugric languages are common. Tartu has been a safe haven for speakers of Uralic languages, and recently a large-scale permanent exhibition has been opened to visitors in the [Estonian National Museum](#), located in Tartu. The [Department of Finno-Ugric languages](#) at the University of Tartu offers Hungarian and Finnish as well as endangered Uralic languages in its curriculum. Since 1927/1991, the foundation [Fenno-Ugria](#) has supported academic and other relationships between Estonia and the endangered Finno-Ugric language areas, in recent decades, via the government funded [Kindred People’s Programme](#). The University of Tartu, the Tallinn University of Technology, the Institute of the Estonian Language and the Estonian Literary Museum have united to form a [Center of Estonian Language Resources](#). The [Institute of the Estonian Language](#), which is a national research and development institution, houses an additional body of language resources and offers language services to public. It provides the rooms for the [Mother Tongue Society](#) as well. A number of scholars and native speakers of endangered Uralic languages are regularly employed at the Institute of the Estonian Language, partly because of lexicographic activities that target the kindred languages; bilingual dictionaries of Estonian and Mari, Udmurt and Erzya are already published and available [online](#).

The goal of the present issue of FULL is to celebrate the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia by celebrating the work of Estonian linguists for their efforts during a whole century to render Estonian one of the best described non-Indo-European languages in the world. This Special Issue is a *special* issue, since it is a humble tribute paid to Estonia, Estonian, and Estonian linguistics containing work on Estonian which is untypical in the sense that all contributors work outside of Estonia or are not native speakers of Estonian. Hopefully, this is a welcome surprise!

The issue contains four papers. The two research articles revolve around the Estonian case system. The first one, titled *Non-autonomous accusative case in Estonian*, is contributed by Mark Norris. Marcel den Dikken and Éva Dékány are the authors of the second article, titled *Adpositions and case: Alternative realisation and concord*. This is followed by a thorough review of the recent major volume on Estonian syntax edited by Erelt and Metslang, written by David Ogren. The thematic issue is completed by an overview of generative works on the structure of Finnish and Estonian syntax by Anne Tamm and Anne Vainikka.

The first research article, *Non-autonomous Accusative Case in Estonian* by Mark Norris, concerns the Estonian case system. It reconsiders the status of accusative case in the language, presenting two novel arguments suggesting that accusative exists as a non-autonomous syntactic case in the grammar of Estonian. This position, which has been

adopted in a number of previous works, departs from what may be considered as the standard view of Estonian grammar, which assumes a leaner set of cases: the standard position is that there is no accusative case in Estonian. Mark Norris's paper focuses on objects of verbs which show an alternation in case-marking that appears to be conditioned by morphological number: the object is genitive when singular and nominative when plural. The author contends, on the basis of two sets of phenomena, that these cases are morphological realisations of a syntactic accusative case. While the two sets of phenomena have been noted before, they have heretofore not been considered in the context of the debate on the Estonian case system.

The first argument comes from case-marking in pseudopartitives, where the genitive borne by objects behaves differently from genitive borne by elements in other positions in the language. The second argument is based on an apparently optional alternation in the form of the inanimate relative pronoun, which involves using the nominative form of the pronoun where the genitive form would be expected. As the author argues, in both of these instances the genitive borne by objects behaves differently from other genitives, resulting in a situation in which the hypothesized accusative, in fact, corresponds to a unique morphological form. After demonstrating that the accusative allows a simple explanation of the pseudopartitive and relative pronoun facts reviewed, Norris presents two possible formalizations of the morphological realisation of the assumed non-autonomous accusative case (both within the framework of Distributed Morphology), arguing that the one that includes a postsyntactic operation of Impoverishment is superior to the one that does not.

The second research article, by Marcel den Dikken and Éva Dékány, titled *Adpositions and case: Alternative realisation and concord*, presents a general outlook on 'inherent' ('semantic') case and case concord. Following the familiar insight that inherent case in case-rich languages such as Estonian correspond to adpositions in case-poor languages such as English, the authors adopt the hypothesis that inherent case is tied to the actual presence of adpositions in the syntax. Their paper develops this view on the basis of the Estonian case system (which, adopting the position also defended by Mark Norris, they take to include the accusative). In particular, they argue that an inherent case marker may be of two kinds: (i) it is either the (morphologically bound) exponent of an adposition, or (ii) it is an alternative morphological realisation of a phonologically zero adposition. The latter scenario, however, is possible only if the nominal that bears the case-marker that morphologically realises the null adposition is a direct syntactic complement selected by the adposition. Their study makes the case for the existence of these two types of semantic cases by demonstrating that both types are present in Estonian.

The seven spatial cases are of type (ii): each one involves a case-marker on a nominal phrase selected by a null adposition. The four non-spatial semantic cases (the terminative, the essive, the abessive and the comitative; the so-called 'last four cases'), on the other hand, can only belong to type (i): as the authors argue, the nominals that they are encliticised to as morphologically bound adpositions are not their selected argument. This central distinction between two types of inherent cases, which is shown to interact— among others — with case concord and partitive case assignment in Estonian, forms the backbone of den Dikken and Dékány's paper.

Syntacticians in Estonia have contributed a major achievement for the anniversary year, as the comprehensive volume *Eesti keele süntaks* (The Syntax of Estonian) was brought to completion in 2017. The book review section of this issue features an extensive review of this work, by David Ogren. This volume, edited by Mati Erelt and Helle Metslang, is the

largest and most detailed description of Estonian syntax ever compiled: its twenty-three chapters, written by scholars at the University of Tartu, collectively describe all the major areas of Estonian syntax. At the same time, the book is structured in such a way that each chapter may also be read as a standalone reference on its topic. The careful and lucid descriptions, which draw inspiration from older Estonian grammars as well as the comprehensive Finnish grammar *Iso suomen kielioppi*, are distinctively modern, relying heavily on recent studies and linguistic data taken from various Estonian language corpora. As it becomes clear from David Ogren's review, this reference book is a highly valuable addition to the library of anyone studying the grammar of Estonian and other Finno-Ugric languages.

The present issue of FULL concludes with a short paper titled *An overview of generative works on the structure of Finnish and Estonian syntax*, by Vainikka and Tamm, whose aim is to put the work of Estonian linguists in perspective by making a comparison with work on Finnish. The paper covers 50 plus 50 years of research on either side of the Gulf of Finland, mainly on the syntax of these languages, focusing on the generatively inspired work. Since most of the work that was impacted by generative ideas in syntax was carried out in the Soviet times in Estonia, the article could as well be called *Trees and movement behind the iron curtain*. This exactly conveys the isolation combined with curiosity for what happened on the other side.

It is encouraging to see that the work of Estonian linguists is gradually being discovered by new generations of linguists outside of Estonia, who are well versed in diverse methods and theoretical frameworks. And conversely, Estonia has opened up to the world of linguistics, experimenting with new methods and approaches and providing linguistic thinking with challenging facts.

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Anne Tamm
 Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary
 tamm.anne@gmail.com