

## **MEDIATED RECEPTIVE MULTILINGUALISM: COMPREHENSION OF FINNISH VIA ESTONIAN BY RUSSIAN-DOMINANT UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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**Abstract.** This study deals with mediated receptive multilingualism in comprehension of Finnish by Russian-dominant upper secondary school students in Estonia. The objective of the experiment is to analyse whether students with Russian as L1 and Estonian as L2, with no prior knowledge of Finnish, can understand Finnish utilizing their command of Estonian. The research in this field can enhance understanding of the processes in acquiring a foreign language without direct exposure to it. The linguistic experiment that was compiled to assist the objective of the research consisted of a test written in Finnish and a questionnaire. The respondents had to take the test and then fill in the questionnaire that aided to interpret the results. The outcome of the study indicated that the students excellently tackled the tasks of the experiment on understanding texts in Finnish. The students' L2 (Estonian) played a key role in understanding the Finnish texts. Likewise, the results of the experiment demonstrated that the understanding of a foreign text can be influenced not only by early-acquired languages, but also by other factors, such as frequent traveling to a country where the language is spoken, the internet, advertising and intuition.\*

**Keywords:** multilingualism, mediated receptive multilingualism, Finnish, Russian, Estonian

### **1. Introduction**

The ability to understand a text, be it written or oral, in another language is not necessarily a result of instructed language learning. Sometimes people can obtain some information from texts in languages they have never learnt consciously, especially if these languages have similarities to those they already know. In this case, multilingualism could perhaps be a reason for partial understanding of

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unfamiliar texts, in a language a person may be facing for the first time in their life. Voegelin and Harris (1951) were among the first to describe this phenomenon which became known as receptive multilingualism (RM). Since then, the interest in the topic has increased and there are several studies concerning the mutual intelligibility of languages (Lüdi 2013, Bles, ten Thije 2016, Bulatović et al. 2019, Sağın-Şimşek, Antonova-Ünlü 2019), including Finnish (Kaivapalu, Muikku-Werner 2010, Verschik 2012, Härmavaara 2014, Muikku-Werner 2014, Kaivapalu 2015, Härmavaara, Gooskens 2019).

The objective of this study is to discover whether and how L1 speakers of Russian with proficiency in Estonian understand written text in Finnish. To answer this question, an experiment was designed and conducted among students at Russian-medium upper secondary schools in Tallinn. The experiment focused on the students' understanding of various texts in Finnish, a language that they had not formally studied before.

Before the experiment, it was assumed that the students would be able to cope easily with the tasks because of the Estonian language's similarity to Finnish. The second hypothesis was that the students are more likely to look for pairings with foreign languages, especially Estonian.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do Russian students with Estonian as L2 understand Finnish texts?
- What similarities between Estonian and Finnish do they notice?
- What other factors play a role in their comprehension of Finnish?

Respondents in the study were students from Russian-speaking families with Estonian as their second language. Previously, a group of Russian-speaking Estonian students as participants was mentioned in Kaivapalu's report in AFinLa in Helsinki (2022); however, the methodology and results of the study have not yet been published. Based on this, it can be stated that a study that would coincide methodologically in this language group has not been carried out yet. Noteworthy, previously there has been no research on mediated receptive multilingualism carried out specially on this group. Another prominent factor among this group of students is their proficiency in at least three languages: Russian, Estonian, and English or German. Moreover, the students' linguistic environment is not only bilingual, but multilingual. According to Ehala (2017: 9), the population of Baltic states, to which Estonia also belongs, is multilingual, despite the fact that these states are officially monolingual. As a rule, both a state language and Russian are used actively for communication in these countries. The current study investigates the understanding of Finnish by secondary school students in the capital of Estonia, Tallinn, where the use of Russian is common.

Historical events, namely the fact that Estonia was part of the Soviet Union from 1944 to 1991, affected the language situation in Estonia. During the Soviet occupation the dominant language in major regions of the USSR was Russian; consequently, most of the newcomers who arrived to the Estonian SSR from other Soviet Union republics spoke Russian (Kiilo, Kutsar 2012). After the restoration of independence, Estonian became the official language and a compulsory subject in all Russian-medium schools. Over the next years, various education reforms were carried out in support of the Russian-speaking population of Estonia and opportunities for

integration into the new language environment were provided. The reforms were also applied to schools, for example, various options for bilingual education were introduced in Russian secondary schools. (Rannut 2008: 432–434) Nowadays, in accordance with the requirements of the language law § 21. *Language of instruction*, studies at schools can either be held in one language (i.e. Estonian), or use two languages (Estonian and Russian). To facilitate and ensure a sufficient level of Estonian in schools where the language of instruction is mainly not Estonian, it is mandatory to teach Estonian as a subject starting from the first grade. The level of teaching Estonian in such schools or classes must be up to par with the level that allows the graduates of basic school to continue their studies in an Estonian-medium educational institution. According to the data of Statistics Estonia, the population of Estonia in 2021 was 1,328,439, roughly a quarter of whom (322,700), identified themselves as ethnically Russians. In addition, there are representatives of other ethnic groups (e.g. Tatars, Ukrainians, Armenians, etc.) originating from Russia and other Soviet republics, whose main language of communication is Russian. Nowadays, Russian-speaking students in Estonia usually speak at least three languages by the time of graduation from upper secondary school. Moreover, since multilingualism in Estonia is not a recent phenomenon, most people in the country speak more than one language. However, not only multilingual speakers contribute to multilingualism: advertisements, commercials, street signs and other visuals also take part in that phenomenon (Aronin 2012).

The paper starts with an explanation and description of the theoretical framework of receptive bilingualism research. Following it there is a brief overview of the methodology and analysis procedure. Finally, the conclusions are presented along with suggestions for future research.

## 2. Mediated receptive multilingualism

RM can refer to situations in which the interlocutors use their mutual comprehension of each other's languages in actual interaction. RM differs from the concept of lingua franca, where a commonly known language is used for the communication between speakers of different native languages (see Rehbein et al. 2012).

Initially the studies in the field of RM were conducted among mutually intelligible languages (Braunmüller 2007). In the last decade the studies of RM among typologically unrelated languages have been investigated in the Swiss context (Lüdi 2007, 2013, Werlen 2007), among Finnish and Swedish speakers in Finland (Castrotrén 2012), and in Estonian-Russian communication (Bahtina-Jantsikene 2013).

According to Rehbein et al. (2012), within the scope of RM also lie interactions where speakers employ a second language that can be mutually understood by their interlocutor. Verschik (2012) studied RM in the Estonian-Finnish setting with some references to Russian speakers, where they tried to communicate in Finnish via their L2 Estonian. Later Branets et al. (2019) investigated the ability of Estonians to understand Ukrainian through the medium of L2 Russian.

My approach is similar to that in the studies on mediated receptive multilingualism. Hence, Estonian will serve as L2 since in previous research fluent bilinguals with Estonian as L2 were out of the scope of studies. Estonian in this case will

serve as the acquired L2 that is going to be used as the basis for comprehension of Finnish as Lx.

The research in the field of receptive multilingualism with the Estonian–Finnish combination can be found in the following studies: Kaivapalu and Muikku Werner (2010) investigated how Finns and Estonians understand each other’s language and perceive similarities between the languages; Härmävaara (2014) studied comprehension in communication, how Finns and Estonians can understand each other in a specific communication situation; and Härmävaara, Gooskens (2019) explored perception and understanding of isolated words in the related language. Verschik (2012) studied RM between Estonian sales assistants and their Finnish clients in Tallinn. By origin, Finnish and Estonian belong to the same branch of Finnic languages within the Finno-Ugric language family. Due to the fact of shared background, Finnish and Estonian have many similar elements in their lexicon and grammar. However, the languages are not regarded as mutually intelligible. To a dilettante’s ear, Finnish/Estonian may sound almost the same. Probably all previous studies involved the two languages Finnish and Estonian as L1 or L2.

According to Branets et al. (2019), due to general broader awareness and diversity of available language modes, proficiency in L2 for a person results in such benefits as development of reading and writing skills, multiple thinking, and creativity. Hence, every acquired language enhances the ability to learn a new one. When considering RM, not only the linguistic factors are essential, but also other aspects including individual factors and metalinguistic awareness, in addition to structural characteristics of the languages involved. (Bless, ten Thije 2016)

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants**

In total, 67 students of three Tallinn upper secondary schools (Tallinna Läänemere, Tallinna Humanitaargümnaasium, Tallinna Tõnismäe Reaalkool) participated in the study. The experiment was conducted during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years. All of the students spoke Russian as L1, Estonian as L2, and English as L3. Some students also indicated German as L3. Armenian, French, Norwegian, and Spanish were indicated as well among some students of this group as their L4; in most cases, the students had some relation such as relatives, frequent trips etc. to the country or participated in language courses.

I was interested in how the younger generation perceives a new language which differs significantly from their mother tongue but shares similarities with their second language.

#### **3.2. Procedure**

The experiment, the concept of which was based on the idea of Branets, Bahtina, Verschik’s (2019) experiment, consisted of two parts. Before the language experiment started, students had to answer a sociolinguistic questionnaire. In the questionnaire,

the students had to answer questions such as age, what languages they speak/study at school, how much exposure to Finnish they had, and how many times they had been to Finland. The tasks for Finnish texts were taken from the manual “Kielo” (Material for mapping the Finnish language skills of adult immigrants and monitoring their development, Hani 2008) and the Finnish words for the translation tasks were chosen from etymological dictionary of modern Finnish (Häkkinen 2011).

The first part of the experiment consisted of various tasks. For instance, the first three were to read a sentence in Finnish and try to guess its meaning by choosing one from three suggested Russian sentences (Example 1). Then there were two texts in Finnish that were followed by questions in Russian, the answers to which the students had to provide themselves (2). The two first parts of the experiment were followed by debriefing interviews, where the students were asked questions such as, were they able to understand the texts of the experiment fully, partially, or not at all and what helped them to understand Finnish texts and words. I was interested in the correct answers, and their rationale to exclude accidental guessing of the answers, and to understand how much Estonian as L2 assists in understanding a Finnish text, and what other factors took place in the comprehension of Finnish.

- (1) Tupakointi kielletty! ‘No smoking’
  - a) Курение запрещено ‘No smoking’
  - b) Телефон должен быть без звука ‘Mute phone’
  - c) Обгон машин запрещен ‘No passing zone’
- (2) Moi! Tiedätkö, missä luokassa meillä on tunnit tänään? Mulla on hammaslääkäri aamulla ja tulen vähän myöhässä, ehkä kymmenen aikaan. T. Minna  
 ‘Hi! Do you know in which classroom we have lessons today? I will be a bit late because I have an appointment with the dentist in the morning. I’ll be there around ten. BR. Minna’
  - a) Как вы думаете, что спрашивает Минна? ‘What do you think Minna is asking?’
  - b) Как вы думаете, почему Минна немного опоздает? ‘Why do you think Minna will be a little late?’

The tasks were graded as level A1 (Common European framework of Reference, CEFR). Furthermore, in the translation task, ten Finnish words were divided into three groups. The first group consisted of four cognates with the same meaning in Estonian (Table 1). The second group consisted of three cognates with different meanings in Estonian (Table 2). The third group consisted of three words which sound similar to Estonian words, but (coincidentally) have different meanings (Table 3).

**Table 1.** Translation task. Cognates with the same meaning in Estonian

<b>Finnish word with definition</b>	<b>Estonian equivalent</b>	<b>Translation in English</b>
<i>kieli</i>	<i>keel</i>	<i>language</i>
<i>pää</i>	<i>pea</i>	<i>head</i>
<i>kevät</i>	<i>kevad</i>	<i>spring</i>
<i>tytär</i>	<i>tütar</i>	<i>daughter</i>

**Table 2.** Translation task. Cognates with different meaning in Estonian

<b>Finnish word for definition</b>	<b>Translation in English</b>	<b>Estonian equivalent</b>	<b>Similar-sounding Estonian word</b>
<i>asua</i>	<i>to live</i>	<i>elada</i>	<i>asuma</i> 'to be located'
<i>halpa</i>	<i>cheap</i>	<i>odav</i>	<i>halb</i> 'bad'
<i>piimä</i>	<i>buttermilk</i>	<i>hapupiim</i>	<i>piim</i> 'milk'

**Table 3.** Translation task. Similar sounding words (not cognates)

<b>Finnish word with definition</b>	<b>Translation in Estonian</b>	<b>Translation in English</b>
<i>kassi</i>	<i>kott</i>	<i>bag</i>
<i>kauppa</i>	<i>pood</i>	<i>shop</i>
<i>piirakka</i>	<i>pirukas</i>	<i>pie</i>

In this experiment, I did not evaluate students by giving them marks for the whole test, but rather every completed task and the number of correct answers that the students gave in it was considered (both the task itself and the explanation of the chosen answer). The tasks were different in complexity, which meant that if one student from the study would successfully cope with the first three tasks, justifying their choices, another student may not have been that successful with those tasks, but better the other tasks, and vice versa. However, to calculate the correct answers in the three first tasks with multiple choice answers, I evaluated these tasks as follows:

- 1 point: a fully correct answer (if the students chose a correct option and could explain their choice)
- 0.5 points: a correctly chosen option with any explanation or with a wrong one
- 0 points: an incorrectly chosen option

The next two Finnish texts were with open answers tasks. I evaluated these tasks as follows:

- 1 point: a fully correct answer and explanation
- 0.5 points: a partly correct answer (if the student was able to understand something or find the related words which helped him/her answer)
- 0 point: an incorrect answer (when the answer was guessed), or no answer was provided at all.

For these tasks, the maximum number of points that students could receive was 6 points. For the translation task, I did not give any score to the students by dividing correct or incorrect answers. In this part of the study, I analyzed every single word and tried to find out how the participants perceived similarities between the words and how they connected words to their everyday life. Their answers were analyzed qualitatively.

## 4. Results

The students coped quite well with the first five tasks in the experiment. Only fifteen students out of sixty-seven understood less than 50% of the Finnish written texts. There were eight students who understood 50% of the texts, however forty-four

students out of sixty-seven completed the task with more than 50% correct answers (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Finnish texts comprehension by Russian-speaking students

0–2.5 points (< 50%)	3 points (50%)	3.5–6 points (> 50%)
15 students	8 students	44 students

56 of 67 students earned maximum points (both a correct answer and a proper explanation) on the first task. 29 students out of 67 earned maximum points on the second task, and 40 of 67 on the third task. In the next task, there was a message exchange text given asking where the lessons would take place that day, as well as an explanation that one of the interlocutors would be late because of his/her visit to the dentist. Only five students of sixty-seven gave completely correct answers to the first question on the text of the message, whereas 39 students understood that the text dealt with information about lessons, but what exactly one interlocutor asked the other in the message, they did not understand. In the answers, instead of the correct version of the question “where”, other questions were provided, such as: how many/at what time/what/which/ or asking for a leave from the lessons. Also, one student speculated that the message dealt with the topic of lessons but could specify nothing else. However, on the second question, where the students were asked why she will be late, 54 of 67 students answered correctly. In the final task (open question), the students had to assume what was written in a text in which former and current teachers, students and their parents were invited to the school’s birthday. Twenty-four students answered the question correctly, five participants did not understand the content of the text, answered incorrectly, or wrote *I do not know what it was about*. Thirty-six students also realized that the text was about inviting teachers and students, but they could not specify to what event and venue. Seven participants indicated that the text dealt with an event, act, or something about a school, without any specific addition (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Fully and partly correct answers in the tasks, number of students

Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4		Task 5		
			Part 1	Part 2	Fully correct answer	Partly understood	
Fully correct answer	Fully correct answer	Fully correct answer	Fully correct answer	Partly understood	Fully correct answer	Fully correct answer	Partly understood
56	29	40	5	39	54	24	43

## 5. Analysis

Previously, it has been proven that different factors such as similarities across languages, plurilingual resources, registers, multilingual contacts, and possible differences in attitudes towards languages may play a significant role in language comprehension (Bahtina-Jantskine 2013, Härmävaara 2013, Verschik 2012). Many of these factors are relevant and will also be discussed in this paper. In the

first section, the general overview of the comprehension of Finnish texts will be introduced. After this, translation tasks will follow with clarifications, based on the answers and explanations during the debriefing.

In the first three tasks, the students correctly recognized the Estonian word *keelatud* 'forbidden' in the Finnish word *kielletty* 'forbidden'. Four respondents answered that they came across this word when they were in Finland. Some of the students guessed the answer correctly and someone did not understand and chose a different incorrect answer. In the following task, most of the students paid their attention to the word *valot*, which reminded them of the Estonian word *valgus* 'light', which means that they guessed correctly; these words are of the same origin. Again, two students came across this word in Finland. The rest found it difficult to answer and they mainly relied on their intuition. The next Finnish text of the experiment misled the students: only two students were 100 per cent confident in their answers. The confidence in the knowledge of the word was there because they had seen it before, when travelling to Finland. 29 students also replied that the word *matka* 'travel' reminded them of the Estonian word *matk* 'hike'. In the open question task, 49 students out of 67 indicated that the word *hammaslääkäri* means the same as the Estonian *hambaarst* 'dentist'. Some of them also understood that the short note had something to do with lessons, since the word *tunnit* 'lessons' in Finnish sounds consonant with Estonian *tunnid*.

The rest of the students did not understand what the text was about. In the following task, the students understood that the message relates to teachers, students, and school: Finnish *opettajat* cf. Estonian *õpetajad*, Finnish *oppilaat* cf. Estonian *õpilased*, Finnish *koulu* cf. Estonian *kool*. Nonetheless, they did not understand what the text was specifically about, except for eight students. Seeing the date and time in the text, they assumed that it could be the date of some school event and seeing the heading *kutsu* similar with Estonian *kutse* 'invitation' some suggested that it might be an invitation, but they could not figure out to which event this invitation was for. There were three students who associated the Finnish word *tervetulleiksi* 'welcome' with the Estonian word *tervis* 'health', assuming a health-related event. Later, during the interview, I also asked what specifically helped the students to answer the questions. During the debriefing interviews, most students (55) answered that it was Estonian that helped them to understand the texts in Finnish. Less than ten indicated it was English or Russian. Few students mentioned their intuition. One student also indicated that he has often visited Finland and encountered these words there.

The translation task consisted of ten Finnish words that were divided into three groups (Table 6). The first group consisted of four cognate words with the same meaning in Estonian (Finnish *pää* 'head', cf. Estonian *pea* 'head'). The second group consisted of three cognates with different meanings in Estonian (Finnish *halpa* 'cheap', cf. Estonian *halb* 'bad') and the third group consisted of three words that sounded similar, but had different meanings (Finnish *kauppa* 'shop', cf. Estonian *kaup* 'goods').



**Table 6.** Translation task with the students' answers and frequencies to answers

<b>Finnish</b>	<b>Estonian</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>Correct Russian</b>
<i>kieli</i>	<i>keel</i>	язык 'language' (18) часы 'watch' (10) платье 'dress' (9) время 'time' (8) сумка 'bag' (5) запрещать 'forbid' (2) клей 'glue' (2) кейла 'keila' (1) лист 'sheet' (1) друг 'friend' (1) котлета 'cutlet' (1) рыба 'fish' (1) школа 'school' (1)	язык
<i>piirakka</i>	<i>pirukas</i>	пирог/пирожок 'pie' (25) граница 'border' (16) ограничения 'restrictions' (11) пират 'pirate' (2) торт 'cake' (2) грань 'edge' (1) груша 'pear' (1) зарплата 'salary' (1) пир 'feast' (1) паприка 'paprika' (1) пиранья 'piranha' (1)	пирог
<i>pää</i>	<i>pea</i>	голова 'head' (25) солнце 'sun' (12) день 'day' (10) вход 'entrance' (3) дерево 'tree' (3) папа 'dad' (2) глава 'chapter' (1) земля 'land' (1) мороженое 'ice cream' (1) небо 'sky' (1) путь 'way' (1)	голова
<i>kevät</i>	<i>kevad</i>	весна 'spring' (60) кефир 'kefir' (1) креветки 'shrimp' (1) осень 'autumn' (1) плохо 'badly' (1) цепочка 'chain' (1)	весна
<i>tytär</i>	<i>tütar</i>	дочь/дочка 'daughter' (61) тётя 'aunt' (3) время 'time' (1) гречка 'buckwheat' (1) девочка 'girl' (1)	дочь

<b>Finnish</b>	<b>Estonian</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>Correct Russian</b>
<i>asua</i>	<i>elada</i>	деревня 'village' (14) находиться 'located' (10) место 'place' (7) зал 'hall' (6) местонахождение 'location' (5) азия 'asia' (2) осень 'autumn' (2) вода 'water' (1) год 'year' (1) жизнь 'life' (1) жить 'to live' (1) здание 'building' (1) сауна 'sauna' (1) спа 'spa' (1) территория 'territory' (1)	<i>жить</i>
<i>kauppa</i>	<i>pood</i>	магазин 'shop' (34) товар 'commodity' (29) продукт 'product' (1) шкаф 'wardrobe' (1) универсам 'department store' (1)	<i>магазин</i>
<i>halpa</i>	<i>odav</i>	плохо 'badly' (18) плохой 'bad' (14) помощь 'help' (11) дешёвый 'cheap' (2) халва 'halva' (2) шарф 'scarf' (2) больница 'hospital' (1) голова 'head' (1) грусть 'sadness' (1) жить 'to live' (1) половина 'half' (1) хлеб 'bread' (1) часть 'part' (1)	<i>дешёвый</i>
<i>piimä</i>	<i>hapupiim</i>	молоко 'milk' (65) пахта 'buttermilk' (1) темно 'dark' (1)	<i>пахта</i>
<i>kassi</i>	<i>kott</i>	кот 'cat' / кошка 'female cat' (65) касса 'cash register' (1) мешок 'bag' (1)	<i>мешок</i>

In view of the above, the students at the upper secondary school translated the Finnish word *kieli* 'language' into Russian as *language* (18 answers), *hours* (10), *time* (8), *dress* (9) and once *Keila* (*the city near Tallinn*), *glue*, *sheet*, *bag*, *friend*, *school*, *fish*, *cutlet*, *forbid*; seven respondents did not provide any translation. Eighteen students gave the correct answer to the question, the remaining 38 students associated the translation to the phonetically similar Estonian word, only two students

linked their translations to the Russian words, one to *клеѝ* [klei] ‘glue’ and other to *котлета* [kotleta] ‘cutlet’.

The translation of the word *piirakka* ‘pie’ provided by the respondents were as follows: *pie* (25 answers), which is the correct translation, *border* (16), *restrictions* (11), other suggested answers were *bell pepper*, *cake*, *pastries*, *pear*, *salary*, *piranha*. Noteworthy, this time the students translated the words based on Estonian, however, turned out to be incorrect, but the reason for the proposed translation was its similarity to the Estonian word. Five students did not translate the word.

Furthermore, the translation of the word *pää* ‘head’, which is consonant with the Estonian word *päike* ‘sun’, was wrongly suggested as *sun* by twelve students. Two people translated it as *day*, which is also consonant with the Estonian word *päev*. Twenty-five respondents gave the correct translation of the word and indicated it to be *head*, *chief*, in Estonian *pea*. One person wrote that it could possibly be a *chapter*, such as a chapter in a book. Two associated this word with the Russian word *nana* [papa] ‘dad’.

The translation of the two words *kevät* ‘spring’ and *tytär* ‘daughter’ received the most correct answers: sixty and sixty-one, respectively. Essentially, the word *kevät* is almost identical to the word *kevad* ‘spring’ in Estonian, a word which students come across quite often at school and in their everyday life. One person indicated the translation of the word to be *autumn*, but during the debriefing it turned out that he accidentally confused the seasons in his second language. One student suggested that the translation is likely to be *shrimps* as it is very consonant with the Russian word *креветки* [krevetki]. There were also students who suggested that *kevät* could be *kefir* ‘kefir’, *kett* ‘chain’ and *kehvasti* ‘badly’, associating it with similar-sounding Estonian words. Two people did not give any answer.

In the word *tytär* many students saw a connection with Estonian, because this word is almost the same in spelling and pronunciation as the Estonian word *tütar* ‘daughter’, whereas several other respondents suggested that translation is likely to be *aunt* like Estonian *tädi*, some suggested the translations *buckwheat* (in Estonian *tatar*) and *girl* (in Estonian *tüdruk*). This was also a word that the students did not find a connection with their native language.

The next five words sounded similar to Estonian words but had a different meaning. For instance, the word *asua* ‘to live’ had different suggested translations, and only one person translated it correctly since he often traveled to Finland to visit his relatives there. Seven people wrote that it is a place, fourteen people wrote that it is a village, the rest of the answers were not repeated and were as follows: *spa*, *fall*, *sauna*, *Asia*, *territory*, *water*, *location*, *gym*, *year*. Thirteen students could not guess what the word might mean and did not provide any answers. Also, this was a word that the students tried to associate with an equally consonant word in Estonian or in their native language, Russian.

The word *kauppa* ‘shop’ was familiar to 34 people, because most of them had been to Finland at least once, and this word could also be seen in Tallinn, as it is a tourist destination for Finns. 29 students, nevertheless, associated this word with the similar-sounding Estonian word ‘kaup’ ‘commodity’. Also, one student translated the word as *wardrobe*, associating it with the Estonian word *kapp*.

As for *halpa* ‘cheap’, only two people gave the correct translation of the word into Russian. Presumably, they came across this word when they travelled to

Finland. Eleven people associated the word with the English word *help*: this was the only time in the experiment when the students did not connect the translation of a word with their native or second language but utilized their knowledge of a third language. Basically, here too, the students gave translations of the word consonant with Estonian such as *halb*, *haigla*, meaning *bad*, *hospital*, but there was also one suggestion associating it with a similar-sounding Russian word *хлеб* [hleb] 'bread'.

Sixty-five students wrote that *piimä* meant *milk*, associating it with Estonian *piim*, meaning milk. However, only one person provided the correct translation of the word, which is *buttermilk*, since he saw this word when visiting a store in Finland. One person translated it into Estonian as *pime* 'dark'.

Likewise, the word *kassi* 'bag' was also associated by the students with the Estonian word *kass* 'cat' and only one person translated it correctly as *sack*, again due to the fact mentioned above. One student translated it as *kassa* 'cash register', which is consonant with Russian and Estonian words.

The results of the experiment, as well as the conducted interviews, showed that Estonian, the second language of the respondents, is of colossal importance in the understanding of Finnish texts by Russian-speaking students in upper secondary schools in Estonia. Although in most cases the students translated words based on the Estonian language, the Russian language also had its impact, i.e., some students found consonance with their native language, even if it was an incorrect translation. The influence of another foreign language is minimal in this experiment, as only once did the students translate a word based on their knowledge of English. This 'perceived similarity' occurs when a respondent does not think logically, nor look at the context, but picks something 'from the air' that sounds close or is spelled similarly, sometimes from a completely different language. This casetype of perceived similarity was investigated in the study of Ukrainian comprehension by Estonians (Branets, Verschik 2021).

## 6. Conclusion

Various tasks were introduced in the experiment from tasks where the students had an option to choose what the sentences could mean in Finnish to tasks of understanding the texts where no options were given. The experiment was finalized with the task of word translation from Finnish to Russian: five cognates with the same meanings in Finnish and Estonian and five cognates with different meanings.

The experiment showed that the students' understanding of Finnish was sufficient to cope well with the experiment, even though they had not studied Finnish before. The reason for this remarkable outcome is the linguistic affinity of the Estonian and Finnish languages. As the students clarified later in the debriefing phase, Finnish words were like Estonian words. Hence, there was no difficulty for them to guess what the texts were about on some basic level. The native language, nonetheless, cannot be taken out of the equation either: its impact also played a role, because at least once there was an attempt to use it trying to translate a word that was similar to Russian. The influence of L3 was practically absent, however, since only once did students translate a word using association with an English word.

It was obvious that the translation would be done based on Estonian, but the fact that the words would be associated with similar words from everyday life was an interesting fact. For instance, the Finnish word *piirakas* 'pie' was associated with three different Estonian words: 1) *piir* 'border', which is a common word in the school life and media; 2) *pirn* 'pear', a fruit, a common word that students see and hear in their day-to-day life; and 3) *piirangud* 'restrictions', a word that was frequently seen and heard by the students during the pandemic while the tests were conducted. The debriefing showed that the students did not analyze the words deeply by trying to find the cross-linguistic similarities, but rather gave their answers depending on what was on their minds or if it was in tune with their everyday life and circumstances.

In the previous RM research with the Estonian-Russian-Ukrainian case, the authors found some interesting facts related to the language environment and the experience in the past with the country where the language was spoken. Those factors positively influenced language comprehension. (Branets et al. 2019) In the current study, the environment language – Tallinn being a favorite place for Finnish tourists – and interaction with the country (such as frequent travel to the country) are relevant as well.

The debriefing also showed that some of the students came across certain words in the external environment.

A further experiment could be carried out among the students at Estonian upper secondary schools. Linguistically, it would be of great interest to find out how the results of L1 Estonian-speaking students would differ from those with Russian as L1 and Estonian as L2.

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## **VAHENDATUD RETSEPTIIVNE MITMEKEELSUS: EESTI GÜMNAASIUMI VENE EMAKEELEGA ÕPILASTE SOOMEKEELSE TEKSTI MÕISTMINE**

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**Võtmesõnad:** mitmekeelsus vahendatud retseptiivne mitmekeelsus, vene keel, eesti keel, soome keel

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