

Viewpoints on learning Finno-Ugric languages

This is the 21st volume of *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* (“Close Comparisons”), a series originating from the tradition of Finnish-Estonian contrastive linguistics. The first edited volumes with the title *Lähivertailuja* appeared as a subseries within various publication series of Finnish and Estonian universities; since Vol. 19, *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* is an independent series published by the Estonian Association for Applied Linguistics (*Eesti Rakenduslingvistika Ühing*). Two articles in this volume are in English; the other papers, published in Estonian or Finnish, come with an English summary.

This volume is largely based on papers presented at the VIRSU symposium in August 2010. This symposium was part of the 11th International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies, hosted by the University of Pilsčsaba in Hungary. The project VIRSU, originally dealing with Estonian and Finnish as target languages, has since 2007 been extended to comprise second language acquisition research of other Finno-Ugric languages as well, and the goal of this symposium was to create contacts and involve researchers also outside the Estonian and Finnish circles.

The papers in this volume of *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* deal with various issues of language learning, especially with respect to language relatedness and the role of typological or perceived similarity between languages. Another central common denominator is corpus research. Many papers are based on material drawn from the Estonian and Finnish learner language corpora; the latter (ICLFI, International Corpus of Learner Finnish) is more extensively described in Jarmo Jantunen’s

review article “Kansainvälinen oppijansuomen korpus (ICLFI): typologia, taustamuuttujat ja annotointi” (“International Corpus of Learner Finnish (ICLFI): typology, variables and annotation”).

In their article “Mitä pitkittäistutkimus paljastaa edistyneiden suomenoppijoiden kielitaidosta?” (“What does a longitudinal study reveal of advanced Finnish learners' language proficiency?”) Kirsti Siitonen and Jenny Niemelä have used the learner language corpus to find out how advanced learners' command of Finnish (evaluated on the basis of selected syntactic features) develops in the course of seven months and whether general tendencies can be detected. In Ilmari Ivaska's article “Lausetyyppien sekoittuminen edistyneessä oppijansuomessa – näkökulmana eksistentiaalilause” (“Clause type confusion in advanced learner Finnish”), corpus data on existential clauses has been used to examine different types of unidiomaticity in learner Finnish. Also based on corpus material of learner Finnish is Tuija Määttä's article “Ruotsinkielisten alkeistason suomenoppijoiden paikallissijojen käytöstä” (“The Swedish speaking learners' usage of Finnish local cases”), which examines the incorrect uses of Finnish local cases and their background in how Swedish-speaking language learners conceptualise the linguistic representations of spatial relations.

Annekatriin Kaivapalu and Pille Eslon have drawn their data from both ICLFI and its Estonian sister corpus; their paper “Onko lähisuku-kielen vaikutus suomen ja viron omaksumiseen symmetristä?” (“Is the influence of a closely related first language on the acquisition of Finnish and Estonian symmetrical?”) explores the symmetry relations between the two sister languages Estonian and Finnish and their impact on language learning, particularly in the light of the relative case forms. The role of relatedness in language learning is also a central issue in Marianne Spoelman's paper “The use of partitive predicatives by Estonian learners of Finnish at different levels of L2 proficiency”. The syntax of the characteristically Finnic partitive case displays both similarities and major differences between Estonian and Finnish, and thus the Estonian L1 of Finnish learners can influence their Finnish in both positive and

negative ways; Spoelman's findings indicate that the negative impact of L1 decreases on higher levels of L2 proficiency.

The Estonian learner language corpus has been used in Pille Eslon's paper "Millest räägivad eesti õppijakeele käändeasendused?" ("Implications of the Estonian learner language case changes"). Eslon compares the choice of the object case – a characteristic issue of Finnic syntax – in Standard Estonian and in learner language. Assuming that development tendencies in Standard Estonian are also reflected in learner Estonian, corpus analysis may reveal structural phenomena which do not necessarily become visible in traditional contrastive analysis.

In their article "Eesti suulise keele korpus keeleõppedialoogide lähtematerjalina: telefonivestluse koostamine" ("The corpus of spoken Estonian as a source for language learning dialogues: construction of telephone conversations"), Raili Pool, Andriela Rääbis and Lea Jürgenstein compare authentic telephone conversations in the corpus of spoken Estonian of the University of Tartu with fictitious telephone conversations in textbooks of Estonian as a foreign language. They also present examples of how textbook texts and exercises can be composed on the basis of authentic corpus material.

A different viewpoint to the learning of Estonian as a foreign language is represented by Olga Pastuhhova's article "Kirjaliku produtseerimisprotsessi uurimise võimalused programmi *ScriptLog* abil: juhtumiuuring" ("Research on the writing process using *ScriptLog*: A case study"). The author has used the software *ScriptLog* to examine the processes of composing a text in non-native Estonian (corrections, hesitations etc.). The results show that for the test person, a Russian-speaking advanced learner of Estonian, the cognitive difficulties do not lie in the grammar of the target language but mainly in the vocabulary and the composition of textual macrostructures.

Beyond the closely related Finnish and Estonian, contrastive comparisons between Finnish and North Saami, a clearly more distantly related language, are undertaken by Marjatta Jomppanen ("Pohjoissaamen ja suomen kielen koloratiivikonstruktio vertailussa" – "Com-

parison of colorative constructions in Finnish and North Saami”). The colorative construction, a serial verb construction consisting of a stylistically neutral verb for a basic activity (such as ‘go’, ‘fall’, ‘draw’ etc.) and an expressive verb (denoting the manner, speed or aspect of the activity), is known in both Finnish and Sámi, but there are both morphosyntactic and lexical differences.

A feature unknown to Estonian, Finnish or Sámi but central in the grammar of Hungarian and some other Finno-Ugric languages is the so-called objective or definite conjugation: morphological marking of the (definite) object on the verb. Péter Durst and Boglárka Janurik (“The acquisition of the Hungarian definite conjugation by learners of different L1s”) have investigated how speakers of different languages learn to master this phenomenon in Hungarian, with special respect to speakers of Erzya Mordvin, a Finno-Ugric language which also has an objective conjugation (in an even more complex form than Hungarian). Their results indicate that typological similarity between (distantly) related languages is less important in this respect than exposure to the target language, i.e. time spent in target-language environment.

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