

# Historical, comparative, and corpus-linguistic views on learning and understanding Finno-Ugric languages

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the first *Lähivertailuja* ('Close Comparisons') proceedings and the publishing of the 25th issue of the journal *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* (now with a bilingual Estonian-Finnish title). The volumes which appeared under the title *Lähivertailuja* in the publication series of diverse universities have grown to an independent, peer-reviewed journal. The three decades of Close Comparisons will be celebrated with a conference in Tallinn on October 29th, 2015. We have worked hard to get this volume ready by this anniversary conference and by the AFinLA Autumn Symposium. Thanks to everybody who participated in our work and supported us!

This issue of *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* is structured somewhat differently from the previous ones. It begins with a section dedicated to reminiscences: how everything began, how our discipline has changed, how the teaching of the Finno-Ugric languages has increased, how bilateral relations have given way to multilateral diversity – even if in each concrete situation we are typically dealing with a person who has a certain mother tongue and studies one certain language at a time. Despite these differences, the seeds of things to come already existed 30 years ago and now, when looking back in time, the beginnings of many developments can be discerned. The reminiscences in this section are written by Hannu Remes, Mati Erelt and Valve-Liivi Kingisepp, and they come with illustrations.

The article section consists of five papers. Johanna Laakso reflects on the teaching of the Finno-Ugric languages especially from the viewpoint

of a language learner's identity and the idea of "being different" which keeps resurfacing in the teaching of our languages. Many researchers have examined the effects of objective or perceived similarity on language learning, but much less attention has been given to the question how the myth of the Finno-Ugric languages being unique and exceptional – a myth often cherished by the speakers of these languages themselves – affects language learners' motivation and identity. Furthermore, the position of advanced learners as "associate members" of the speech community and the essence and functioning of the virtual learner community are issues which beg further research.

Pirkko Muikku-Werner continues her studies – already presented in many issues of *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* – on the understanding of a closely related language, in other words, receptive multilingualism based on linguistic relatedness. This article deals with semantic priming: how semantic connections prepare the ground for how the meanings of unknown words are understood or guessed.

The following articles by Pille Eslon and Heleriin Paeoja (jointly) as well as Jarmo H. Jantunen and Mare Kitsnik are based on corpus-linguistic studies. Pille Eslon and Heleriin Paeoja examine the contexts and restrictions in the use of analytic and synthetic verb pairs, on the basis of the Estonian literary language corpus. The results of their analysis can be applied in language learning and teaching, translating and interpreting as well as in automatized language analysis. The study thus provides information and insights for both descriptive and theoretical linguistics.

Jarmo H. Jantunen has investigated the use of degree modifiers in the corpora of learner Finnish and discovered an interesting phenomenon: students who have learnt Finnish outside Finland use many different degree modifiers, while students living in a Finnish-language environment tend to use certain "fashionable" expressions and therefore display clearly less variation.

Mare Kitsnik examines the use of the conditional mood in texts written by Estonian learners at the levels B1 and B2. Her results show that at the B2 level, the use of the conditional mood is both more frequent

and more complex than at the B1 level. Furthermore, B2-level language learners show more accuracy in their use of the conditional. This means that the use of the conditional mood is clearly a criterion for distinguishing the levels B1 and B2.

*Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* is now getting prepared for the next 30 years and, inspired by the International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies in the summer of 2015, expecting to see a widening range of Finno-Ugric target languages in its future contributions.

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