

Questions of developing language skills and contrastive linguistics

Despite the uncertain times we are living in, the journal *Lähivõrdlusi. Lähivertailuja* ('Close Comparisons') and the "close comparers" continue their activities in the fields of contrastive linguistics and second language acquisition. The 32nd volume at hand continues the journal's tradition by focusing on the comparison of different languages and different language related phenomena. The comparison of languages is approached both contrastively and from the point of view of a language learner. As a new topic, this volume explores how language proficiency raters experience the oral language proficiency of the learners. In accordance with the current geopolitical situation in Europe, Ukrainian is among the languages studied in this volume.

Written language, writing and the development of writing skills are in the special focus of this volume. In their article *A case study of multilingual writers' writing processes: Using keystroke logging to identify formulaic sequences*, Maarit Mutta and Päivi Laine present a case study of three Finnish-speaking university students' writing processes in Finnish and in French. The study focuses on the fluency of writing, studied with the means of a new keystroke recording program *GenoGraphiX-Log*. Piret Soodla and Tiiu Tammemäe focus on younger learners, as they investigate the effect of children's mother tongue and gender on knowing the meaning of a word, and on understanding sentences and texts. Their article is titled *Emergent literacy of 5-year-old Estonian- and Russian-speaking Estonian children: What subskills are behind the differences?* Pille Eslon's article *At the border of lexis and grammar: Language usage patterns of journalistic opinion articles* deals with the

most frequent language usage patterns in Estonian opinion pieces. The author further examines the importance of such patterns in learning Estonian as a second language, among learners with varied language backgrounds.

Language learning is in the focus of the case study reported by Mare Kitsnik and Jelizaveta Kromberg as well. In their article *How to teach the grammar of Estonian as a second language to basic school students? Case study*, the authors discuss what kind of grammar teaching methods are used in schools, and how do these methods serve the goals of the communicative teaching method. Although the results are indicative, they raise important questions and provide a basis for further research. Pirkko Muikku-Werner continues to investigate the mutual intelligibility of Finnish and Estonian. The article titled *Understanding Finnish idioms – Estonian speakers' inference strategies* describes the strategies that Estonian speakers use when they try to understand idioms in Finnish, as reported by the participants.

Oral language assessment research is represented by Sari Ohranen and Sari Ahola. In their article *'There is so little foreign accent that I am guessing Estonian' – The National Certificates Finnish raters' perceptions of L1 Finland-Swedish speakers' oral Finnish*, they study Finnish language raters' assumptions of the test takers' first language and describe how often and why Finland-Swedish speakers are assumed to be Estonian speakers. In her article *On the transitivity of the verb 'watch'/'look' in Estonian, Russian and Ukrainian*, Natalia Vaiss continues the publication's tradition in contrastive linguistics. The aim of the corpus-based research is to determine how regular the transitive and intransitive pattern of the Estonian verb *vaatama* and its Russian and Ukrainian counterparts are.

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