

Estonian Dialects

There differences between the two major dialect groups – North Estonian and South Estonian – are very old, dating back to the time before Christ when individual languages started to emerge from Proto-Finnic. From the end of the 14th century until the 19th century freedom of movement was limited to one's parish which contributed to the emergence of distinct regional varieties, that is, over a hundred parish dialects or sub-dialects.

The differences between the two large dialect groups concern a number of important phenomena of the language structure, such as plural forms of declinable words. In North-Estonian dialects (eP) the *de*-plural is used in all the cases starting with the illative (*kala/de/st, kala/de/l*) while the vowel plural is used in South-Estonian dialects (eL) (*kall/u/st, kall/u/l*). A peculiarity of the third, coastal dialect (R), is absence of syncope and apocope (e.g. *kandama pro kandma* 'carry', *metsä pro mets* 'forest') and absence of quantitative alternation. The most distinct variety from the standard language is the Võru dialect. Some examples:

R –	<i>naula</i>	eP – <i>nael</i>	eL – <i>naal, nagõl</i>	'nail'
	<i>kohtu</i>	<i>kõht</i>	<i>kõtt</i>	'stomach'
	<i>suuremb(i)</i>	<i>suurem</i>	<i>suure(m)p</i>	'larger'
[ma]	<i>odin</i>	<i>võtsin</i>	<i>võti</i>	'I took'
[nad]	<i>tulled</i>	<i>tul(n)d</i>	<i>tullu, tullu'</i>	'they came'
[ma]	<i>saisin</i>	<i>saaks</i>	<i>sass</i>	'I could get'



Andrus Saareste



Theodor Saar

Dialect collections and research centre

Systematic collection of dialect language began on the initiative of Andrus Saareste in 1921 by means of student grants. A collection of dialect texts emerged in addition to the lexical collection that followed the dictionary by Wiedemann which became a valuable resource for several branches of the humanities. In addition to trained linguists, volunteer correspondents of the Mother Tongue Society have been instrumental in the collection of dialects. As of 2006 there were 1,748, 500 citation slips and 139,450 pages of language materials. The collections include 700,000 citation slips of geographic names and 56,700 personal and animal names. (For further information see <http://www.teaduskogud.org/materjalid>).

The trained dialectologists at the **Institute of the Estonian Language** (Aili Univere, Salme Tanning, Helmi Viires, Mari Must, Helmi Neetar, Mart Mäger, and many others) were instrumental in the collection and study of dialect materials throughout the Soviet era. In addition to active collection and research, several volumes of academic dialect texts and dictionaries have been compiled, the most comprehensive one being the 12-volume *Dictionary of Estonian Dialects* (4 volumes have appeared in 1994–2008). Estonian dialects have been recorded on a systematic basis since 1957 and digitized since 1999. A digital corpus of the Estonian dialects has been set up in cooperation with the University of Tartu (<http://eesel.fil.ut.ee/art.html>).



Mari Must



Valdek Pall

At the **University of Tartu** Lauri Kettunen laid a solid foundation to the study of Estonian dialects and Finnic languages, his work was continued by Oskar Loorits, Paul Ariste, Tiit-Rein Viitso, Aino Valmet, Karl Pajusalu, and others. The archive of Estonian dialects and genetically related language comprises Estonian dialect texts, sound recordings in Estonian and Finno-Ugric languages, and a photo and film library. 2000 witnessed the foundation of the **Centre for the Study of South-Estonian Language and Culture** at the University of Tartu (<http://www.ut.ee/lekeskus/>).

Valuing the dialect language

The 1980s saw the emergence of a civil movement that values one's dialect and cultural environment. One of its outlets was the new Võru standard language in South Estonia. Enthusiasts have compiled a dialect-language Wikipedia, elaborated multimedia games, and promoted writing and singing culture. The study of dialects and language expansion is supported by several national programmes. 1995 saw the foundation of the Võru Institute, the national research and development institution (<http://www.wi.ee>). Local initiative has been instrumental in the foundation of several other centres, such as the Setu Development Centre (1997), the Institute of Mulgi Culture (1999), and the Institute of Kihnu Culture (2004).



Helmi Neetar



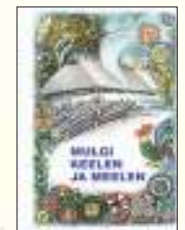
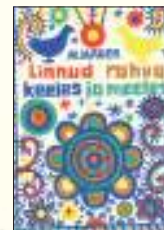
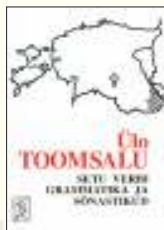
Karl Pajusalu

The state promotes the use and preservation of dialects as cultural heritage by making it possible to teach dialects as part of the local culture in the national curriculum of schools. The use of dialects is supported by programmes for the development of regional cultures.

The state grants legally that in the historical dialect area a dialect name can be used side by side with the official standard geographic name. A dialect can be used alongside the standard language on public signs, signposts, advertisements, and announcements.

Dialect researchers

Lauri Kettunen (1885 Joroinen – 1963 Helsinki) laid the foundation to the study and teaching of Finnic languages at the University of Tartu. **Andrus Saareste** (1892 Tallinn – 1964 Uppsala) laid the groundwork for the systematic collection and research of the dialect material and the dialect archive. He introduced the language-geographic method, and his main work is the monumental *Eesti mõisteline sõnaraamat* 'Conceptual Dictionary of Estonian' I–IV (1958–1968). **Paul Ariste** (1905 Rääbise – 1990 Tartu) is best known as the founder of the Estonian school of Finno-Ugric studies. He laid the foundation for phonetic studies at the University of Tartu and made important contributions to language contacts (including loanwords in Estonian) and Estonian dialects. **Arnold Kask** (1902 Pärnu – 1994 Tartu) was an outstanding researcher of Estonian dialects and a long-time faculty member at the University of Tartu. **Mari Must** (1920 Tartu – 2008 Tallinn) was one of the most important organizers of dialect collection and research at the Institute of Language of Literature of the Academy of Sciences and the Mother Tongue Society. She founded the sound library (1957), was one of the creators of the general card index of the dialect dictionary (1952–63), and directed the preparation of the manuscript of the Estonian Dialect Dictionary.



Literature

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 Kask, Arnold. *Eesti murded ja kirjakeel* 'Estonian dialects and the standard language'. Ed. by Huno Rätsep. Eesti NSV TA Emakeele Seltsi toimetused 16. Tallinn: Valgus, 1984.
 Eesti murrete sõnaraamat I–IV (a – laulus) 'Dictionary of Estonian Dialects'. Eesti Keele Instituut. Tallinn, 1994–2008.
 Academic text series *Eesti murded* 'Estonian Dialects' I–VIII (1961–2002).

Dialect records

Kendla, Mari. *Kirderannikumurde palu*. 'Stories in the northeastern dialect' Eesti Keele Instituut. Tallinn, 2001.
 Kendla, Mari. *Võru murde palu*. 'Stories in the Võru dialect' Eesti Keele Instituut. Tallinn, 2001.
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Web resources

Estonian dialects – <http://www.eki.ee/murded/>
 Wikipedia in the Võru language – <http://fiu-vro.wikipedia.org>