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# An Interactive Solution: a Grammar Handbook Linked to a Prescriptive Dictionary

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## Abstract

The paper introduces a new project at the Institute of the Estonian Language. 2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of Estonian dictionaries of correct usage. This prescriptive dictionary type was founded in 1918 as a concise spelling dictionary with basic morphological information. Since the 1999 edition it has many new layers and levels, including examples of words in sentences (word order, capitalization, case government etc.) and showing the difference between sublanguages. The last two editions (2006, 2013) have been published both on paper and online.

The concise form of a dictionary does not enable explanations about the reasons for certain preferences or the history of codification. The aim of the current project is to create an interactive combination of a dictionary and an online handbook of standard Estonian, using customized MediaWiki software. The handbook will provide 1) spelling and grammar rules, 2) comments and advice on frequent questions about correct usage, 3) written records that show the development of language planning ideas and theory in Estonia. Dictionary entries can be linked to handbook chapters and vice versa.

**Keywords:** electronic lexicography; prescriptive lexicography; dictionary appendices

## 1 Language Planning in Estonia

Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language with about 1.1 million native speakers; it is the state language of the Republic of Estonia. Standard Estonian is stable, modern, and rich; however, it requires constant development in order to meet the needs of changing society (DPEL: 21).

There is no one-to-one correspondence between the Estonian term *keelekorraldus* and its common English translation *language planning* due to their different historical evolution. Language planning (also called *language management* and *corpus planning* in some sources) is conscious development, enrichment, stabilization, and updating of the standard language (Erelt 2002: 15; 17). The main fields of language planning are general language planning, LSP and name planning.

The main general language planning institutions are the Language Committee of the Mother Tongue Society (provision of norms and recommendations in fundamental questions), the Language Planning Department at the Institute of the Estonian Language (compilation of the dictionary of standard Estonian and other publications, providing language consultations and courses for the public, etc.), institutions of higher education and some other centres.

The experience of Estonian language planning has produced the conception of three linguistic standards described by Henn Saari (1999: 688): 1) the objective standard or *status quo*; 2) the standard registered in sources of correct usage, and 3) a realistic language ideal. Language planning should proceed from the latter. The realistic ideal is based on the objective standard and is not

conceivable without it, but does not necessarily have to be restricted by it. Sources of correct usage should rather be consistent with the ideal.

## 2 The Dictionary of Standard Estonian (ÕS)

In 1918, a concise spelling dictionary of the Estonian language was published. This was the foundation of a specific type of prescriptive dictionaries in Estonian lexicography, named *õigekeelsussõnaraamat* (ÕS) 'dictionary of correct usage ~ dictionary of standard Estonian'. Since the foundation of the Institute of the Estonian Language in 1947, ÕS has been compiled in the institute. The 10th edition was published in 2013, the next is scheduled in 2018. The current edition is the standard for written language as fixed by a government regulation of 2014. The dictionary is addressed to anyone in need of linguistic support, such as teachers, students, officials, editors, journalists etc.

ÕS is a dictionary of standard modern Estonian. It belongs to a mixed type (Veldi 2000: 342), i.e. it is both descriptive and prescriptive but prescriptiveness is its distinctive feature. The first editions helped to establish and distribute a unified standard language, showing standardized spelling plus basic information about pronunciation and morphology. A concise appendix of orthographic rules was added to a number of editions from 1933 to 1976.

In the 1990s, the dictionary was thoroughly innovated. ÕS 1999 introduced new tactics of language planning – guidelines and recommendations instead of orders – and a new structure (from vocabulary level to syntactic level). ÕS now provides guidelines for using words in sentences: examples of word order, capitalization, case government, collocations, fixed expressions etc. It contains more semantic information and teaches the difference between sublanguages: dialect or colloquial language vs standard language, LSP vs general language, bureaucratic jargon vs neutral style. Orthographic rules were no longer added to the dictionary, they can be found in separate handbooks.

The 2006 edition was the first to appear both on paper and online. Since the 2013 edition, ÕS is compiled in the web-based dictionary writing system EELEX,<sup>1</sup> like other dictionaries of the Institute of the Estonian Language. No current updates are made in the online version, it is kept identical with the latest paper dictionary. Since 2008, the web page of the Institute of the Estonian Language shows a list of neologisms that will be included in the next edition. ÕS 2013 contains about 130 000 words altogether (about 50 000 headwords plus numerous compounds and derivatives inside entries). No Estonian dictionary can include all potential compounds, ÕS only shows typical compound examples and patterns for compound formation (Leemets, Raadik 2006: 125).

Different recommendation techniques (style labels, pointers, comments etc.) are used to show the linguistic standard. The dictionary contains a number of words that are widely used but not correct according to the standard:

- **{arvutiseerima}** → arvutistama, raalistama 'computerize' (*the word in curly braces should be avoided because it ignores Estonian derivation rules*)
- **rohke+arvuliselt**, *parem* 'better' arvukalt, rohkesti, hulganisti, palju 'abundantly' (*synonyms are recommended to replace bureaucratic jargon; see Figure 1*)
- **k`atse+s`arv**, *oskuskeeles täpsem* 'more accurate in LSP' tundel 'antenna' (*different words are used in general language and zoological terminology*)
- **know-how** [n`õuh`au] ingl oskusteave (*the English word is well-known but an Estonian equivalent is recommendable, in such cases ÕS can be used as a bilingual dictionary*).

<sup>1</sup> <http://eelex.eki.ee/> [25/04/2016]

### 3 The Online Handbook of Standard Estonian

A dictionary can be just one link between language planners and language speakers (Leemets 1992: 483). The user may want to know the reason for certain preferences or the history of codification. The concise form of a dictionary does not enable such explanations, they can be found in separate publications and other sources. Since 1996, language planners of the Institute of the Estonian Language have published a series of five books (four available online) containing articles on frequent questions asked through the language consultation service. The recommendations of the Language Committee of the Mother Tongue Society can be accessed on their web page.

In 2014, a new project was started in the Institute of the Estonian Language: a web-based handbook of standard Estonian usage. It will include 1) an introduction to the general principles of language planning, its ideas and theory in Estonia, 2) Estonian orthography (rules of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, compounding, abbreviation etc.), 3) detailed comments on frequent questions (advice about word formation, morphology, semantics, syntax, style, choosing between words etc.), 4) links to other written records that can be accessed online or will be scanned.

Customized MediaWiki software (free software originally for use on Wikipedia) is used to compile the handbook. This enables simultaneous work online, easy creation of chapters and hyperlinks. Chapters will be provided with cross-references and links to other, more meticulous articles on the subject. In a way the handbook may be defined as a web encyclopedia of a specific subject (spelling and grammar of the Estonian language).

### 4 Linking the Dictionary and the Handbook

The aim is to make the online dictionary and the handbook mutually linkable – a hyperlink in a dictionary entry may forward the user to a chapter in the handbook and vice versa.

An ÕS entry can have 11 elements at most: 1) the headword, 2) homonym number, 3) pronunciation, 4) case government, 5) inflectional pattern number and certain inflected forms, 6) subject or style label, 7) explanation(s) or synonym(s), 8) example sentences or phrases, 9) example compounds, 10) example derivatives and 11) cross-references. Additional information can potentially be linked to elements 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

In many cases two-level linking is possible: the dictionary will be linked to a condensed article in the handbook that may forward the user to more extensive reading material (opinions of different scholars on a rule throughout its historical development, resolutions of the Language Committee of the Mother Tongue Society, articles by language planners etc.).

We consider it particularly important to link short dictionary entries to longer explanations but the opposite may provide examples to illustrate articles in the handbook.

### 5 A Dictionary of Recommendations as a Pilot Project

In 2013, the Dictionary of Recommendations for a Civil Servant (AMSS) was completed in the Language Planning Department of the Institute of the Estonian Language and published online. The dictionary can be used as supplementary material to the Dictionary of Standard Estonian. It contains a number of recommendations from the latter (among other sources) and adds authentic usage examples with replacement possibilities and explanations.

[ÕS] Eesti õigekeelsussõnaraamat ÕS 2013

Vastab väljaandele „Eesti õigekeelsussõnaraamat ÕS 2013“ (Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, Tallinn, 2013).  
 Kirjakeele normi alus alates 1. jaanuarist 2014.  
 Kasutusjuhend jm lisad • Tagasiside: @sisulised ja @vormilised märkused

Päring: rohkearvuliselt Otsi ja näita! artikli osas Märksõna

Leitud 1 artikkel

rõhke+arvuliselt, parem arvukalt, rohkesti, hulganisti, palju. Tõi rohkearvuliselt näiteid, parem hulga näiteid

Figure 1: Entry in the Dictionary of Standard Estonian.

Figure 1 shows how the inadvisable officialese word *rohkearvuliselt* ‘abundantly’ is treated in the Dictionary of Standard Estonian: red colour background and the pointer *parem* ‘better’ lead to advisable synonyms. The entry has one example sentence.

[AMSS] Ametniku soovitusõnastik

Kaassõna • Tagasiside • Otsi ka ÕS 2013-st

Päring: rohkearvuliselt Otsi ja näita osas Märksõna

Leitud 1 artikkel

**rohkearvuliselt** <määrsõnana> ⇒ rohkesti, hulganisti, hulga, palju

- Peale kohustusliku riigikirjandi soovivad abiturientid **rohkearvuliselt** teha ka võõrkeeleksamit ⇒ Peale kohustusliku riigikirjandi soovivad **paljud** abiturientid teha ka võõrkeeleksamit
- **Sellega seoses** kogunesid erialarühmade liikmed ning mitmesuguseid ideid tekkis **rohkearvuliselt** ⇒ **Sel puhul** kogunesid erialarühmade liikmed ning tekkis **rohkesti / hulganisti** mitmesuguseid ideid (vt ka **seoses**)
- Toidumürgitusse nakatuti saastunud toiduga, mis sisaldas **rohkearvuliselt** mikroobe ⇒ Toidumürgitusse nakatuti saastunud toiduga, mis sisaldas **palju / rohkesti / hulga** mikroobe

☞ Ületuletus. *It*-määrsõna teeb sõnastuse sageli keerukaks ja kantseliitlikuks.

▷ Loe lisaks: [Sirje Mäearu artikkel „It-liitelised määrsõnad“](#)

keerukalt, ebamääraselt ja raskesti mõistetavalt sõnastatud

Figure 2: Treatment of the same headword in the Dictionary of Recommendations for a Civil Servant.

Figure 2 shows how the same word is treated in the Dictionary of Recommendations for a Civil Servant. The entry has three authentic usage examples with replacement recommendations, a comment on adverb derivation and a link to a longer article on adverb derivation. When the cursor is pointed at linguistic terms their definitions appear. The page also enables to search for the same word in ÕS 2013. The aim is to provide similar comments and links in the Dictionary of Standard Estonian.

## 6 Conclusion

The result of the project will be a combination of a dictionary and a handbook that provides spelling and grammar rules and enables to explain the standards set in the dictionary. It can be easily updated and made even more interactive when new needs and possibilities develop.

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