

South Estonian in the Surnames of Põlva Parish

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There has been little in-depth linguistic analysis of Estonian surnames and the surnames themselves as a single region. Among the parishes, for example, the surnames of Jaani parish in Saaremaa have been studied (Henno 2000), among the parishes of South Estonia, the names of Räpina have been examined in more detail (Saar 2019), and analytical overviews can also be found on the surnames of the parishes of Kanepi and Urvaste (Kont 1986) and Kambja (Ernits 1998).

Family names were given to the peasantry in Estonia and Livonia after the emancipation from serfdom in the 1820s and 1830s. Previously, people of peasant status generally did not have official surnames. In Livonia, the first people to choose a surname were the farmers, and only afterwards the farm or mansion servants. The most important general requirements was that only close relatives could have the same surname within the same estate. Therefore, in many areas, the first to choose surnames were the farmers and then the servants.

In Põlva parish (South-Estonia) surnames were given in the summer of 1822. Unlike many other parishes in Estonia and Livonia, both farmers and servants were given surnames at the same time. The assignment of surnames was entrusted to the pastor of the Põlva parish, Johann Georg Schwartz (Tammoja 2021). The pastor was an estophile, knew the family connections and the (South Estonian) bynames in use among the people, which were often used as a base for a surname. The peculiarity of surnaming in Põlva parish provides an opportunity for a deeper study of the way in which surnames were chosen by both the landlords and the subjects.

In our presentation, we will show the results of analysing the names of appellative origin given during the general surname assignment in Põlva parish, where we aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How many South Estonian words were adopted as surnames, what was their share in the adoption of surnames?
- In which manors of Põlva parish were there more names taken/assigned in South Estonian and in which were there none at all?
- Which semantic fields inspired the adoption of surnames?

- Which surnames were chosen with positive and which with negative connotations, and what might have been the motives for choosing these names?

In the presentation we will also show the frequency of surnames, with a special focus on unique surnames (surnames given only in one estate), surnames given only in Põlva parish and surnames given only in Livonia.

As this is a topic not yet researched in Estonia, we will also look at the links between surnames and the social status of the recipients. Proponents of socionomastics (Terhi Ainiala, Emilia Aldrin et al.) have mainly studied the relationship between place names and personal names and their mutual effects, but the relationship between surnames and the social status of the name recipient (especially in the lower social class) has so far not been investigated much.

Who were the recipients of the appellative surnames: landlords or serfs? Was it an old byname and was the old farm name not used? Could the name have been chosen in the process without any previous connection? Who obtained surnames with positive or negative connotations?

The research material consists of nearly 900 surnames in Põlva parish, collected manually from the 1826 census (Rahvusarhiiv, EAA.1865.2.7/14; Rahvusarhiiv, EAA.1865.2.64/6-24) and then systematised as research material.

References

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Rahvusarhiiv, EAA.1865.2.64/6-24. Joosu, Kiuma, Kähri, Mooste, Partsi, Peri, Pragi, Põlva, Saarjärve, Tilsi, Timo, Uibujärve, Varbuse, Viira, Väimela, Võru, Vana-Koiola, Vastse-Koiola mõisa hingeloendid. 1826.