

The discourse particle *agā* ‘but; or; perhaps; whether’ in Courland Livonian

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For minor Finnic languages like Courland Livonian that often have limited corpora and resources available, there has so far been little research done with the special focus on discourse particles. The topic would still need a wider coverage to investigate the particles more precisely, including their possible origin, their grammaticalization and development, and their syntactic and pragmatic use.

The particle *agā* ‘but; or; perhaps; whether’ is one of the most multifunctional among Livonian discourse particles, having derived from the conjunction *agā* ‘but; or’. It has acquired a modal particle use in the meaning ‘maybe, perhaps’ and additionally it has also developed into a question particle ‘whether, if’ for yes/no-questions. However, it is not an entirely neutral question particle, but rather involving a supposition or a doubt in it (Norvik et al. 2022: 140), see example (1):

(1)

AB: `ikš u'm ē `Vāldanum. (.) **agā** teg sie-dā tīeda-t
 one be.3SG HESIT Vāldanum PTCL 2PL DEM.PART know-2PL

 [`ka^h?]
 too

TV: [nā̃.] (AEDKL: SUHK0506-01)
 yes

AB: ‘one of these [who has a birthday] is um Vāldanum (.) **perhaps/whether** you know him as well?’

TV: ‘yes’

The presentation focuses firstly on explaining the possible development of the discourse particle *agā* based on the dictionaries and earlier text resources available. The second part of the presentation shows the empirical use of the particle based on spoken Courland Livonian data. The data is taken from the audio recordings in the University of Tartu Archives of Estonian Dialects and Kindred Languages (AEDKL), recordings with six different native speakers from the years 1986–2012 are used. The material is analysed qualitatively, considering intonation, stress and self-repairs that help to interpret the functions of the discourse particles in the

recordings. Based on the spoken language material, a brief overview of the syntactic and pragmatic use of *agā* is also given.

References:

AEDKL = Archives of Estonian Dialects and Kindred Languages. [Tartu Ülikooli eesti murrete ja sugulaskeelte arhiiv]. Available at <http://www.murdearhiiv.ut.ee>. (accessed 27.03.2025)

Norvik, M., Metslang, H., Pajusalu, K., & Saar, E. (2022). Livonian polar questions in their areal context. *Eesti ja Soome-Ugri Keeleteaduse Ajakiri. Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics*, 13(1), 121–155. <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2022.13.1.05>