

Signaling located referents through grammatical objects in Estonian

Rodolfo Basile (Kyoto University; University of Tartu)

This paper investigates how located referents (or *locatees*) may be signaled through grammatical objects in Estonian by looking into a random sample of sentences containing the verb *leidma* ‘to find’ and comparing it to a random sample of sentences containing the verb *leiduma* ‘to be found’. The intransitive *leiduma* ‘to be found’ can express locational function by acting as some sort of copula (1).

- (1) *Raamatus leidub ka pilte ja tabelleid*
book.INE find.MID.3SG also picture.PART.PL and table.PART.PL
‘In the book there are also pictures and tables (to be found).’ [EKSS]

In a similar way to its Finnish counterpart *löytyä* ‘to be found’ (as argued by Basile & Ivaska 2021; Basile 2024), it becomes (partially) bleached of its meaning ‘find’ and flags the located element for partitive case (for *partitive subjects* in Finnish and Estonian see Huumo & Lindström 2014). Such verb may hence appear in locative or existential constructions (Haspelmath 2022; Creissels 2019). On the other hand, the transitive verb *leidma* ‘to find’ is usually not associated with locative, existential or other types of presentational constructions, essentially because it takes an object instead of a subject or a subject-like partitive-marked NP. Hence, its main function goes hand in hand with its lexical meaning. In (2), the main overt argument of the verb *leidma* is marked for either partitive or genitive(/nominative for plural total objects) case, which are common ways of marking objects/patients in Estonian. However, (3) shows that when the construction-level aspect of the sentence does not necessarily align with the perfective nature of the verb, and when the verb is indexed for second persons, the meaning slightly changes.

- (2) *(Ma) leidsin õlut(/õlle/õllesid) külmkapist*
(1SG) find.PST.1SG beer.PART(/GEN/PL.PART) fridge.ELA
‘I found beer(/a beer/beers) in the fridge.’
- (3) *Leiate õlut(/õllesid/õlle) külmkapist*
find.PRES.2PL beer.PART(/PL.PART/GEN) fridge.ELA
‘You can find (lit. you find) beer(/beers/the beers) in the fridge.’

Namely, (3) seems to be a pragmatically marked clause in which the use of a second-person-indexed strategy has the communicative purpose of informing the (generic) interlocutor about the location of something at a certain position, similarly to what copulas signal in nonverbal locative or existential clause constructions. It is, however, clear that such construction has restrictions: for example, it is less likely to be used when the object is animate/human or in negative sentences.

In this paper, we collect a balanced random sample of a total of 2000 sentences, 1000 for the lemma *leidma* ‘to find’ and 1000 for the lemma *leiduma* ‘to be found’, from the Estonian National Corpus (Koppel & Kallas 2022). We provide a descriptive statistic of the different types of constructions (including *ennast leidma* ‘to find oneself’ and *aset leidma* ‘to take place’) found in the sample by analyzing their morphosyntactic and pragmatic characteristics, and by considering the polysemic nature of the two verbs. We propose possible grammaticalization paths and then compare the constructions found in the sample to their Finnish counterparts. We also aim at answering the question whether transitive constructions containing the verb *leidma* ‘to find’ can express location and, if yes, to what extent.

References

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