

Variation in the Case Forms of the Indefinite Pronoun *keegi* ‘someone’ in Written and Spoken Estonian

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Variation in the case forms of the indefinite pronouns *keegi* ‘someone’, *miski* ‘something’, *kumbki* ‘either’, and *ükski* ‘none’ has been observed in both written language (Rull 1917) and dialects (Saareste 1955: 16) in Estonian for over a hundred years. In these pronouns, *-gi/-ki* can be placed after the case ending (e.g., *kelle-le-gi* ‘to someone’), before the case ending (e.g., *kelle-gi-le*), between two case endings (e.g., *kelle-le-gi-le*), or both before and after the case ending (e.g., *kelle-gi-le-gi*) (Saareste 1923, 1936). The variation has a strong dialectal background: forms where *-gi/-ki* appears after the case ending have historically been common only in Southern Estonia and Northeast Estonia (Saareste 1955: 16; Alvre 1980: 542). Nevertheless, in standard Estonian, placement that follows the language norm occurs only after the case ending.

Since this variation has been systematically studied very little in contemporary language (see Pant 2018; Pant 2020), the aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of the extent of variation in the case forms of the pronoun *keegi* and to describe the factors influencing this variation in both written and spoken Estonian. For the analysis of written language, I used data from the Estonian National Corpus 2021 (2.4 billion words; Koppel, Kallas 2022), and for the analysis of spoken language, I used data from Estonian Public Broadcasting’s Radio Corpus (109 million words; Lippus *et al.* 2023a) and Estonian Podcast Corpus (85 million words; Lippus *et al.* 2023b).

The results indicate that in written Estonian, *-gi/-ki* is most commonly placed after the case ending, accounting for 78.6% of all occurrences, while forms where *-gi/-ki* precedes the case ending occur in 20.6% of cases. Instances where *-gi/-ki* appears between two case endings or both before and after the case ending represent the remaining 0.8%. In contrast, in spoken Estonian, *-gi/-ki* occurs at almost equal frequency after and before the case ending, at 54.2% and 43.3%, respectively, and between two case endings at 2.5%. A univariate statistical analysis of the written language data showed that genre, the occurrence of the pronoun as an attribute and the function of the pronoun in a clause significantly influenced the variation in the case forms. In spoken language, the variation was significantly influenced by the corpus, the position of the pronoun in the clause, the gender of the speaker, case and speech rate. A multivariate analysis of the written language data indicated that genre, and consequently,

whether the language had been edited, was the strongest factor associated with variation. In spoken language, speech rate had the strongest association with case form variation: speakers tend to place *-gi/-ki* before or between two case endings when speaking at a faster rate. Men were also more likely to produce case forms where *-gi/-ki* is placed before the case ending or between two case endings.

In the presentation, I argue why this variation has persisted and explore the implications of my findings regarding this phenomenon.

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