

Language ideologies behind the Võro and Seto language use and planning

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Until the end of the 19th century, there were two literal languages in Estonia: North Estonian and South Estonian. Hand in hand with the national awakening in the second half of the 19th century, the stance of ‘one nation, one language’ evolved. For different reasons, South Estonian was forced out of use (Laanekask 2004, Raag 2008). At the beginning of the 20th century, the development of Standard Estonian began, and by that, standard language ideology became dominant in Estonian society. Standard language ideology was accompanied by purism. These three ideologies dominated Estonian society through the period of independence 1918-1940 as well as through the Soviet time (1940/44–1991). (Cf. e.g., Lindström. Risberg, Plado 2023)

In our presentation, we analyze the vitality and use of the Võro and Seto languages on the background of ‘one nation, one language’ ideology, standard language ideology, and purism. We concentrate on two main research questions:

1) how did the domination of these ideologies influence the use of the Võro and the Seto language through the 20th century? To answer the question, we use the data from an online questionnaire (conducted at the end of 2022, 660 answers) to research language shift. Based on the open answers, we can conclude that the language shift from Võro/Seto to North Estonian (that has been taking place since the 1960s) was influenced by rejecting Võro and Seto languages and excluding these from education and other public use. We demonstrate that the roots of the negative attitude towards Võro and Seto are in the dominating language ideology. We also ask if giving up ‘one nation, one language’ stance in the 2000s (cf. e.g., Ehala 2004) has influenced the use of Võro/Seto;

2) what kind of an impact have the dominating language ideologies had on Võro language activism and language planning in the 1990s and 2000s, and do Võro community members reflect these ideologies? To answer this question, we analyze three types of data: a) writings about the main principles of Võro language planning (e.g., Iva 2000), b) interviews with Võro language editors conducted in 2023, and c) posts on the FB group *Võro kiil* (‘Võro language’). We claim that Võro language planning has abandoned the standard language ideology, whereas it has overtaken purism (e.g., the principle ‘the older, the better’). The language editors also follow the puristic line; however, as the users do not follow purism, language planners have to find the balance between the principles of the Võro language planning and the stance of the language community.

References

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