

Are some Estonian adverbs pointlessly redundant? A comparative analysis of adverbs “kohe” and “koheselt” expressing immediacy

Lydia Risberg, Maarja-Liisa Pilvik & Liina Lindström

(Institute of the Estonian Language and University of Tartu; University of Tartu & University of Tartu)

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Some adverbs with the *-lt* suffix are not recommended by Estonian language planning for over half a century (e.g., see DSE 1960). In particular, the formation of *-lt* adverbs from *-ne* adjectives has been considered redundant. A common example given by language planners is the adverb *koheselt*, derived from the adjective *kohene*, which itself originates from the adverb *kohe*. Language planners have advised against using *koheselt*, claiming that the shorter adverb *kohe* conveys the exact same meaning, ‘immediately’, which is why *koheselt* is redundant and unnecessary (e.g., Mäearu 2000). While new words are typically not created if their meaning is already covered in the lexicon, this restriction does not always apply to productive derivational types, such as adverbs with the *-lt* suffix (Kasik 2015: 47).

Although language reference materials should indicate that certain expressions or grammatical forms are suitable for specific situations, many prescriptive sources have made such claims based only on small and limited text samples (Lüdeling et al. 2022: 4, 9). Similarly, handbooks and dictionaries provided by Estonian language planning that discuss *-lt* adverbs have been prescriptive (e.g., Erelt, Erelt & Ross 2020), which is why these adverbs are viewed as negatively redundant and characteristic of bureaucratic language. Although redundancy is a typical feature of language and serves various functions within it (Bazzanella 2011).

Do the temporal adverbs *koheselt* and *kohe* really express the same meaning, or is the longer word needed for something else – for instance, to add intensity or emphasize temporal succession? In this presentation, we provide an overview of a comparative study of *koheselt* and *kohe*, aimed at understanding their current usage patterns and drawing conclusions about the reasons behind choosing the derived form *koheselt* over the shorter *kohe*.

We formulated two hypotheses. First, that the usage contexts of *koheselt* emphasize urgency and temporal immediacy more than those of *kohe*. This hypothesis is motivated by the vagueness of *kohe* in expressing time (e.g., alongside ‘at that exact moment’ it can also mean ‘soon’) and by the observation that for stressing immediate temporal succession, more complex forms like *otsekohe*, *kohemaid*, and the repetition *kohe-kohe* are also used instead of just *kohe*. Second, we assume that the use of *koheselt* correlates with morphosyntactic and contextual features expressing directivity, and higher degree of textual complexity.

The variation between *kohe* and *koheselt* is analysed using random samples taken from the *Estonian National Corpus* (Koppel et al. 2023) via the corpus tool Sketch Engine (Kilgariff et al. 2014). These random samples were drawn from three genres: blogs, forums, and periodicals, ensuring that the sentences originate from both authentic, unedited texts and edited texts. We analyzed the correlation between word choice and factors such as genre, modality, sentence structure, and

contextual complexity using common methods of language variation analysis (chi-square tests and conditional decision trees). To understand the historical background of *koheselt* usage and prescriptive recommendations, we also examined how the usage of *koheselt* developed in the 20th century, based on Estonian articles in the DIGAR archive.

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