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# Naturalizing Economic Common Sense in Estonian Public-Service Opinion Discourse

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[AI-generated demo paper]

## Abstract

[Note: This is not a real research paper, but a demo artefact generated using AI agents by Andres Karjus for a presentation in the AI-teh seminar series at the University of Tartu. It showcases how paper- or thesis-like works can now be produced from scratch using tools such as Codex or Claude Code in about an hour, including a literature review, data mining, analytics, write-up, and pre-review. The topic was suggested by the audience. This note was added for clarification after Google Scholar attempted to index this file as if it was a real academic paper.]

This paper examines how Estonian-language ERR opinion articles make contestable economic assumptions available as shared common sense. It links pragmatic work on presupposition and common ground with critical discourse analysis of naturalization and economic media discourse. The object is presuppositional and presupposition-like backgrounding: sentence environments in which economic problems, causes, constraints, or necessities are treated as already available to the reader. A machine-assisted sentence-level pilot annotation of 92 articles and 5,126 sentences codes candidate common-sense backgrounding in roughly one fifth of the corpus. Positive cases are concentrated in environments that mark given or changed states, build recurring patterns, and close alternatives through rhetorical questions or necessity-oriented phrasing. The results are exploratory, but they provide pilot evidence for recurrent textual sites where public economic reasoning is naturalized rather than argued explicitly.

## Keywords

presupposition, economic discourse, common sense, ERR, critical discourse analysis, machine-assisted annotation

## Introduction

Economic opinion writing does not only argue for policy positions explicitly. It also establishes starting points for argument: that a budget problem already exists, that competitiveness has declined, that a tax burden has become excessive, that cuts are unavoidable, or that a particular group carries the cost of policy failure. Such claims may be asserted and defended, but they may also be placed in the background of a sentence as if they were already accepted. This paper examines that backgrounding work in Estonian-language opinion articles published by ERR, Estonia's national public broadcaster.

ERR opinion discourse is a meaningful pilot site because public-service media occupies a hybrid position in public argument: it publishes authored opinion, but it does so within an institution associated with public information, agenda-setting, and national political communication. Authored opinion on ERR is not the broadcaster's institutional

editorial voice, yet the venue matters because public-service publication gives these arguments a different public standing from private commentary alone. The corpus should not be read as representative of Estonian economic discourse as such. It is a short-window case study of how economic premises are backgrounded in one prominent public-media venue.

The Estonian case also gives economic common sense a specific institutional texture. Estonia's post-socialist liberal-market reputation, small-state vulnerability, eurozone fiscal discipline, competitiveness concerns, and digital-administrative efficiency agenda make questions of tax burden, regulatory burden, budgetary constraint, labour supply, and productivity especially available as public-policy commonplaces. The analysis therefore asks how those premises are linguistically backgrounded in a conjunctural sample of public-service opinion, not whether they define Estonian public debate as a whole.

The research question is: how are contestable economic assumptions presented as already accepted in ERR opinion

articles? The study approaches this question through presuppositional and presupposition-like backgrounding. Some coded environments are narrow conventional presupposition triggers, such as definites, factives, or change-of-state constructions. Others, such as rhetorical questions, are broader common-ground management devices that constrain what can count as a reasonable answer or policy alternative. The paper therefore does not claim that every coded positive case is a textbook presupposition in the formal pragmatic sense. Its object is the wider discourse function of placing an economic premise into the background of public argument.

The conceptual starting point is the common-ground account of presupposition. Presupposed content is treated as already available in the discourse situation, or as something the reader can accommodate for the utterance to proceed smoothly (Stalnaker 1973, 2002; Simons 2003). In public economic argument, this is not a merely technical matter. A sentence can shift a policy diagnosis from contestable assertion to shared background. The issue is not whether the backgrounded proposition is true or false, but how the text positions it with respect to disagreement.

The paper uses presupposition as a micro-linguistic entry point into a broader discourse-analytic question: how does economic common sense become naturalized? Critical discourse analysis has long emphasized that ideology is often reproduced through what appears ordinary, factual, or not worth debating (Fairclough 2015; Polyzou 2015). Economic discourse is especially prone to this movement because claims about markets, growth, fiscal discipline, productivity, and competitiveness can be presented as technical constraints rather than political choices (Hay and Rosamond 2002; Mautner 2010; Graham and O'Rourke 2024).

The contribution is a pilot discourse-analytic account of how economic assumptions are made to appear already shared in Estonian public-media opinion discourse. Quantification serves that argument by making the coding decisions auditable and by identifying recurrent sentence environments for closer interpretation. The design follows corpus-assisted CDA work that combines close qualitative interpretation with systematic corpus evidence (Baker et al. 2008; Kennedy 2022). The method follows mixed-methods work on quantizing qualitative material (Sandelowski et al. 2009; Fetters et al. 2013) and the machine-assisted implementation proposed by Karjus (2025). The purpose is not to replace close reading with automated labels, but to make the movement from textual interpretation to corpus-level patterning explicit and revisable.

## Background and Literature

### *Presupposition as Common-Ground Management*

Presupposition is usually analyzed as a relation between an utterance and a body of background assumptions. In Stalnaker's formulation, speakers act as if certain propositions are part of the common ground, and successful communication depends on how those propositions are shared, accepted, or accommodated (Stalnaker 1973, 1999, 2002). Later work on projection and accommodation shows why presuppositions are discourse-sensitive: they may be inherited from prior context, introduced by a trigger, or accepted into the discourse model even when they have not been explicitly established (Karttunen 1974; Heim 2002; van der Sandt 1992; Simons 2003; von Stechow 2008).

For the present paper, the key point is operational rather than purely formal. Conventional presupposition triggers provide observable places where a text treats something as background: factives can present an embedded proposition as true or known, change-of-state verbs presuppose a prior state, and definite or definite-like noun phrases can package an entity, problem, or process as already identifiable. Other resources in the coding scheme are presupposition-like rather than narrow triggers: iteratives and additives link a sentence to a recurring pattern, and rhetorical questions constrain the space of acceptable answers. These resources do not automatically carry ideological force. They become relevant here when they background an economic assumption within an article-level argument.

### *Naturalization and Economic Common Sense*

Critical discourse analysis explains why backgrounding can be politically and socially consequential. A central CDA claim is that power and ideology operate not only through explicit persuasion but also through assumptions that become normalized in language use (Fairclough 1995, 2015; Fowler 1991). Presupposition is useful here because it marks a textual mechanism by which propositions can be made less available for direct contestation. Polyzou's work on presupposition in discourse makes this link explicit by treating presupposition as one way texts organize what is taken for granted (Polyzou 2015).

Economic discourse is a strong site for this problem. Public debate about taxation, spending, productivity, inflation, welfare, competitiveness, and regulation routinely mixes technical description with political evaluation. Work on economic imperatives and crisis narration shows how contingent policy choices can be framed as external

constraints, necessities, or unavoidable responses to reality (Hay 1996; Hay and Rosamond 2002). Discourse & Society has treated similar questions in work on financial-crisis media discourse and austerity as a “no alternative” frame (Bickes et al. 2014; Borriello 2017). Research on market-oriented and neoliberal discourse similarly emphasizes that economic categories are not only descriptive objects but also ways of organizing institutional and moral priorities (Mautner 2010; Holborow 2015). In media discourse, such priorities are shaped by framing processes that define problems, assign causes, evaluate actors, and recommend responses (Entman 1993).

This paper narrows that broad literature to a specific textual question. Instead of asking whether an article is neoliberal, pro-market, redistributive, or austerity-oriented as a whole, it asks where and how local presuppositions and backgrounding cues make economic premises appear already available. This design connects small linguistic forms to larger discourse functions without treating either level as self-sufficient.

### *From Qualitative Interpretation to Quantitized Variables*

The method belongs to the mixed-methods tradition of transforming qualitative observations into variables that can be counted, compared, and modeled. Quantitizing refers to the numerical translation or transformation of qualitative data, a process that requires interpretive judgement rather than mechanical conversion (Sandelowski et al. 2009). Mixed-methods integration likewise occurs not only through design but also through data transformation, analysis, and interpretation (Fetters et al. 2013).

The present study applies this logic to discourse analysis with machine assistance. Large language model annotation is increasingly used in computational social science as a way to scale structured interpretation, provided that the task is constrained, auditable, and validated against human judgement where inferential claims depend on it (Ziems et al. 2024; Karjus 2025). Following Karjus (2025), the design begins with a theory-driven coding scheme, unitizes the textual material, produces structured labels through constrained annotation, and interprets quantified patterns in context. The method does not assume that machine annotation can settle interpretive questions. It makes the interpretive pipeline visible enough to be checked, revised, and statistically interrogated.

## **Data and Methods**

### *Design Overview*

The study is a mixed-methods discourse analysis implemented through machine-assisted quantitizing. The qualitative object is presuppositional and presupposition-like construction of economic common sense: the textual process by which economic assumptions are treated as already available to the reader. The quantitized object is a sentence-level dataset in which each row is one sentence from cleaned article text. Article metadata are retained with every row, and the annotation assigns compact labels for whether the sentence backgrounds an economic assumption, which cue environment is present, how the backgrounding works, whether the article voice endorses or distances the assumption, the surface cue, the backgrounded proposition, and annotation confidence.

The design follows the mixed-methods logic of transforming qualitative material into quantitative form and integrating the transformed data back into interpretation (Sandelowski et al. 2009; Fetters et al. 2013). Karjus’s machine-assisted quantitizing framework provides the implementation model for annotated textual data: define a compact scheme, unitize the material, annotate at scale, model the resulting variables, and return to contextual analysis (Karjus 2025). Automated annotation is therefore an intermediate procedure for making recurring sentence-level patterns measurable and comparable; it is not treated as an interpretive authority.

### *Research Question and Hypotheses*

The main research question is how contestable economic assumptions are presented as already accepted in ERR opinion articles. The empirical analysis operationalizes this question through four provisional expectations:

- H1: given/change cues will often frame the backgrounded assumption as a problem or cause.
- H2: pattern-linking cues will often frame the backgrounded assumption as recurrence or accumulation.
- H3: rhetorical-question cues will often frame the backgrounded assumption as necessity or closure.
- H4: headline, lead, and early body sentences will have a higher rate of common-sense backgrounding than later body sentences.

These hypotheses define the first version of the empirical test and are interpreted as pilot expectations rather than final confirmatory claims.

## Coding Scheme

The coding scheme converts discourse-analytic judgements into compact sentence-level variables with short labels and operational instructions. This is the central quantizing step. The primary row is one sentence, not a trigger instance. The annotation first identifies whether one of the hypothesis-aligned cue environments is present, and then separately judges whether the sentence backgrounds a contestable economic assumption. If a sentence contains several possible cues, the primary cue is the one most relevant to the sentence's discourse function. Free-text fields are retained for auditability, while the analytic fields use closed value sets that can support descriptive comparison and pilot modeling.

The coding frame distinguishes two conceptual levels. Given/change cues are closest to conventional presupposition, covering forms that present an entity, condition, change, or problem as already available. In Estonian, which lacks English-style articles, identifiability is operationalized through demonstratives, possessives, prior mention, contextual bare noun phrases, word order, and lexical packaging rather than through articles alone. Pattern-linking and rhetorical-question cues capture broader presupposition-like backgrounding: they do not always instantiate formal presupposition, but they can still position economic premises as recurrent, obvious, or difficult to contest.

The simplified cue inventory follows the hypotheses rather than a maximal list of presupposition triggers. Given/change cues cover identifiable noun phrases, factives, and change-of-state constructions that make an economic entity, problem, state, prior condition, or causal diagnosis appear already given. Pattern-linking cues cover iterative and additive cues that construct recurrence, accumulation, or a broader already-known pattern. Rhetorical-question cues cover question forms that present an obvious or preferred answer, narrow the answer space, or are immediately resolved by the article's own argument. Sentences coded as having no cue have no focal hypothesis-aligned cue in this simplified inventory; this does not mean that no other backgrounding mechanism is possible.

## Data Collection

The corpus consists of Estonian-language opinion articles published by ERR. The pilot collection contains 92 publicly accessible ERR opinion articles, of which 53 are economy-keyword flagged. It yields 5,126 sentence rows from articles published between 15 May 2026 and 8 June 2026. The collection window is short and likely conjunctural, so the corpus is treated as a pilot case study of ERR opinion

discourse rather than as a representative sample of Estonian economic discourse. The window may capture issue bursts around government, taxation, regulation, and competitiveness debates, while missing longer-term seasonal and electoral variation. Its size is nevertheless appropriate for the study's purpose: it is large enough to compare recurring sentence environments across dozens of articles, while still small enough for transparent codebook inspection and targeted close reading. The collection procedure preserves article metadata with every sentence row, including article identifier, source URL, title, author or byline where available, publication date, section location, paragraph identifier, sentence identifier, sentence text, sentence word count, and economy-keyword flags used for sampling and checks.

Economy-related vocabulary is marked with keyword flags. These flags are not annotations and are not treated as evidence of economic framing. They are used for sampling and filtering only. This distinction matters because an article may contain economic vocabulary without making an economic argument, and an economic argument may rely on broader political or institutional vocabulary. The corpus retains both economy-keyword-flagged and non-flagged articles: the former are the main target of the economic-discourse analysis, while the latter provide contextual and negative comparison material within the same opinion venue.

## Data Unitization, Cleaning, and Sampling

Before annotation, articles are converted into analysis units by basic Python sentence tokenization over cleaned article text. The unit of analysis is one sentence. Headline, lead, and body sentences remain in the same sentence-level dataset, with article and paragraph identifiers retained. Derived position variables distinguish front-position material, meaning headlines, leads, or sentences in the first two body paragraphs, from later body sentences.

Cleaning removes duplicated articles, navigation text, cookie and poll boilerplate, duplicated lead paragraphs, and malformed segments before sentence tokenization. The completed pilot annotation covers the sentence-level corpus used in the Results section.

## Validation Status

The present results are exploratory machine-annotated pilot patterns. A full expert-annotated benchmark has not yet been completed, and the results should therefore be read as provisional rather than as validated final estimates. A non-statistical selective check of positive, negative, low-confidence, and borderline cases found the fixed-label outputs

| Analytic field             | Purpose                                                               | Main values                                                     |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Common-sense backgrounding | whether a contestable economic assumption is backgrounded as accepted | no; yes; unclear                                                |
| Cue environment            | the most relevant hypothesis-aligned cue environment                  | none; given/change; pattern link; rhetorical question           |
| Backgrounding mode         | how the assumption is made common-sense                               | none; problem/cause; recurrence/accumulation; necessity/closure |
| Alignment                  | whether the article voice adopts the backgrounded assumption          | endorsed; distanced; unclear                                    |
| Cue text                   | surface cue or trigger phrase                                         | free text                                                       |
| Backgrounded content       | proposition treated as already available                              | free text                                                       |
| Confidence                 | annotator certainty                                                   | 1; 2; 3                                                         |

**Table 1.** Core sentence-level annotation fields. Derived metadata include sentence position, sentence word count, sentence identifiers, and article identifiers.

broadly consistent with the codebook. These checks support using the annotation for pilot pattern-finding, but they are not reported as accuracy estimates. Further validation requires an independently coded expert benchmark that covers likely positive cases, likely negative cases, unclear cases, and hard negatives across article positions and cue types.

### Data Quantitization Through Annotation

The qualitatively defined discourse categories were quantitized through constrained LLM-assisted sentence-level annotation on 8 June 2026. The annotation labels were produced with GPT-5.4 through the OpenAI Responses API, using structured outputs, temperature 0, and an instruction setup designed to keep the model in the role of a fixed-label annotator. The model was instructed to return codebook labels rather than interpretive essays or free-form analysis. Calls were grouped by article or text to preserve local context, with chunking for long articles where needed, but the output rows remain sentence-level. The completed batch contains 5,126 sentence rows, matching 5,126 unique source unit identifiers, with no missing, extra, or duplicate unit IDs. The five unclear outcomes and the small number of label-consistency edge cases are treated as analytic uncertainty flags. Each sentence-level output is stored as structured data linking the sentence to source metadata, labels, confidence, annotator model, and annotation timestamp.

For the present pilot results, only the completed annotation batch is used. The analysis excludes the five unclear outcome rows from the yes/no logistic model, while retaining them in the descriptive class-count summary.

### Quantification and Statistical Modeling

The quantified analysis was conducted in R. It reports descriptive sentence-level patterns: the rate of common-sense backgrounding per 100 sentences, rates by cue environment, rates by sentence position, the distribution of backgrounding

modes among positive sentences, and a compact cross-tabulation of cue environment by backgrounding mode to evaluate H1–H3.

The main model estimates the probability that a sentence presents a contestable economic assumption as common-sense background. Let  $Y_i = 1$  denote common-sense backgrounding for sentence  $i$  in article  $a$ :

$$\text{logit}\{\Pr(Y_i = 1)\} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 F_i + \beta_3 W_i + u_a, \\ u_a \sim N(0, \sigma_a^2).$$

Here  $T_i$  is the cue environment,  $F_i$  is sentence position,  $W_i$  is sentence word count, and  $u_a$  is an article random intercept. The model is a descriptive consistency check over labels produced by the same annotation procedure, not evidence that cue environments independently cause backgrounding. Article grouping is substantively important because rhetorical style, topic, and argumentative sequence vary by article. The author/byline field is not modeled as a random effect because only three of the 85 byline strings recur across articles; after article-level grouping, the metadata contain too little repeated-author information for a stable separate author-level variance estimate. The mixed model addresses within-article dependence in the pilot model, but it does not incorporate annotation error; the latter requires the expert benchmark described above.

### Interpretation and Contextualization

The final analytic step interprets quantitative sentence-level patterns in context. Quantified results identify recurrent patterns, contrasts, and outliers, but the paper’s discourse-analytic claims require close reading of representative and analytically important passages. This contextualization asks how positive sentences participate in article-level arguments, delimit what can be debated, and make particular economic positions appear already shared. The interpretation connects

measured annotation patterns back to the central question of economic common sense rather than treating the annotation variables as the final object of explanation.

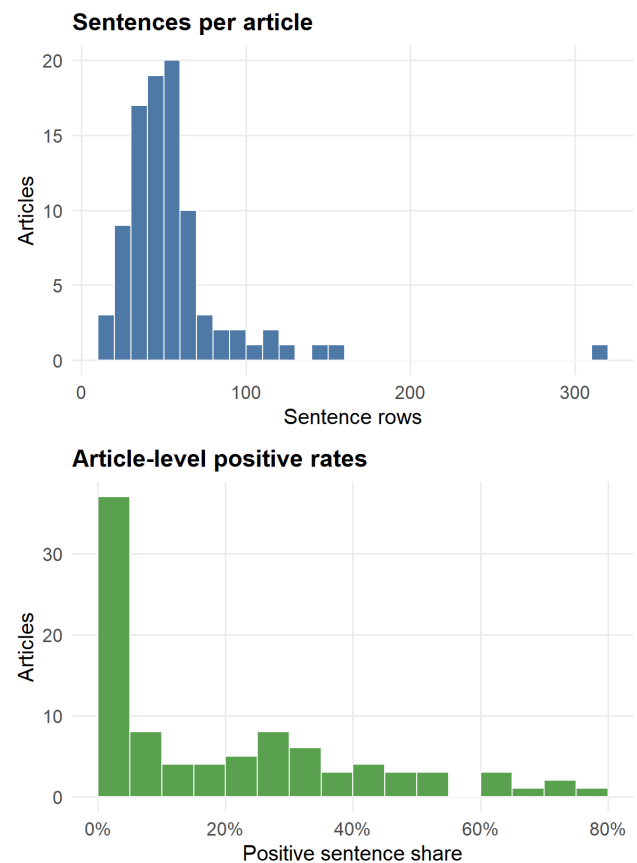
### Research Ethics and Limitations

The corpus consists of publicly available journalistic opinion texts. The analysis focuses on published discourse rather than private individuals. Raw article text is used as internal research material; publication relies on source metadata, derived annotations, aggregate results, and short attributed excerpts.

The main limitation is validation, not data availability. The analysis is exploratory: expert benchmarking is incomplete, and the estimates remain provisional until machine annotation error is assessed against independent human coding. The study does not establish reader uptake, authorial intention, or the truth or falsity of the backgrounded economic assumptions. Its claim is textual: how the articles make certain assumptions available as background.

### Results

The empirical unit is the sentence, with sentence rows grouped by article. The completed pilot annotation contains 5,126 sentences from 92 articles. Of these, 1,020 sentences were coded as candidate instances of common-sense backgrounding, corresponding to 19.9% of sentence rows. The negative class contains 4,101 sentences (80.0%), and five sentences were coded as unclear (0.1%). Figure 1 characterizes the corpus and article-level variation.



**Figure 1.** Corpus and annotation overview. The panels show article length and article-level positive sentence shares. The key point is that article-level variation is substantial, with many zero-positive articles and a long tail of highly positive articles.

The corpus is uneven in ways that matter for interpretation. Articles contain a mean of 55.7 sentences and a median of 49 sentences, with a maximum of 313. The median article-level positive rate is 11.3%, while the upper quartile is 32.7%; 29 of the 92 articles contain no positive sentences, and 10 articles have positive rates of at least 50%. This spread is not only a sampling feature. It reflects the fact that backgrounding is often tied to article-level argumentation: some texts build a cumulative case through repeated assumptions, while others contain economic vocabulary without making many economic premises tacit. Economy-keyword-flagged article rows have a higher positive rate than non-flagged article rows (26.3 versus 7.7 per 100 sentences), which is consistent with retaining non-flagged articles as contextual and negative comparison material rather than as the main economic-discourse target.

### Cue Environments and Backgrounding Modes

Common-sense backgrounding is strongly patterned by cue environment (Figure 2). Sentences with no hypothesis-aligned focal cue have a low positive rate, 4.1 per 100 sentences. Positive rates are much higher in the hypothesis-aligned environments: 39.8 per 100 sentences for given/change cues,

32.1 for pattern-linking cues, and 27.5 for rhetorical-question cues. This descriptive contrast suggests that the selected cues identify recurrent textual sites where economic assumptions are more likely to be placed in the background of the argument.

The cross-tabulation of positive cases refines H1–H3. Given/change positives often involve problem/cause backgrounding, as H1 expected, but they are split rather than uniform: 278 of 590 positive cases (47.1%) are coded as problem/cause, while a similar share is coded as necessity/closure. H1 is therefore only partially supported as a dominant-mode expectation; given/change cues are heterogeneous in the pilot annotation. H2 and H3 are clearer but conditional on smaller positive sets. Pattern-linking positives are concentrated in recurrence/accumulation (178 of 262, 67.9%), and rhetorical-question positives are concentrated in necessity/closure (51 of 61, 83.6%). The most common positive mode overall is necessity/closure, with 483 of 1,020 positive sentences (47.4%), followed by problem/cause (331, 32.5%) and recurrence/accumulation (205, 20.1%). The analytic rule for mode summaries is to count modes within positive sentences only; one positive sentence has no mode coded, five outcome rows are unclear, and eight negative rows with non-none mode labels are excluded from the positive-mode distribution.

The alignment field also matters for the discourse claim. Among the 1,020 positive sentences, 978 are coded as endorsed by the article voice, 40 as distanced, and two as unclear. The positive set is therefore overwhelmingly made up of assumptions adopted by the article's own argument rather than merely quoted or rejected assumptions.

### *Sentence Position and Pilot Model*

The original H4 expectation was that front-position sentences would have a higher positive rate than later body sentences. The pilot result goes in the opposite direction. Front-position sentences have 12.1 positive cases per 100 sentences, while later body sentences have 21.1 positive cases per 100 sentences. This descriptive pattern is consistent with the possibility that headlines, leads, and early paragraphs introduce topics more explicitly, while later body sentences do more cumulative explanatory and justificatory work through backgrounded assumptions.

The sentence-level logistic mixed model is used as a descriptive consistency check over the coded variables, not as final inferential proof. It uses 5,121 complete yes/no sentence rows from 92 articles, excluding the five unclear rows. The model includes an article random intercept and converged cleanly without a singular fit. Basic diagnostics

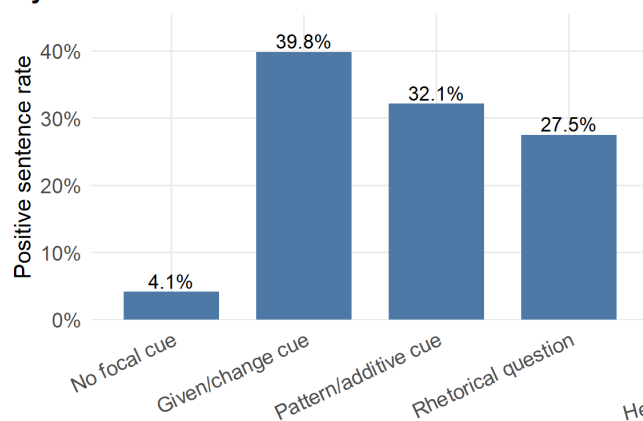
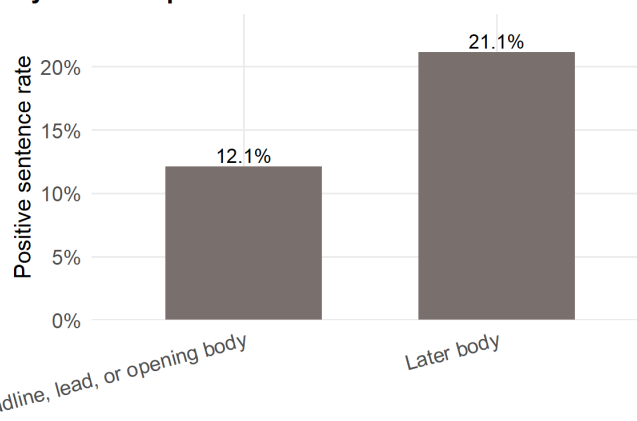
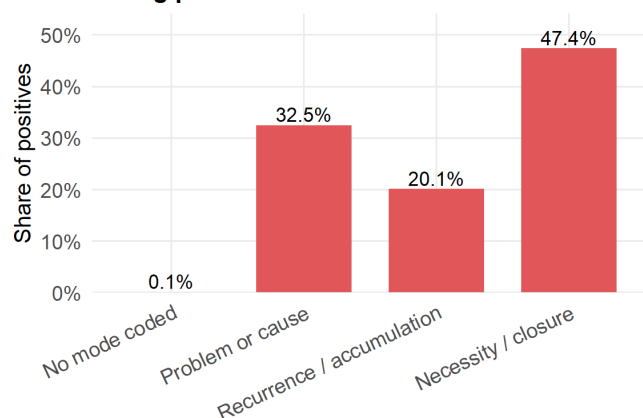
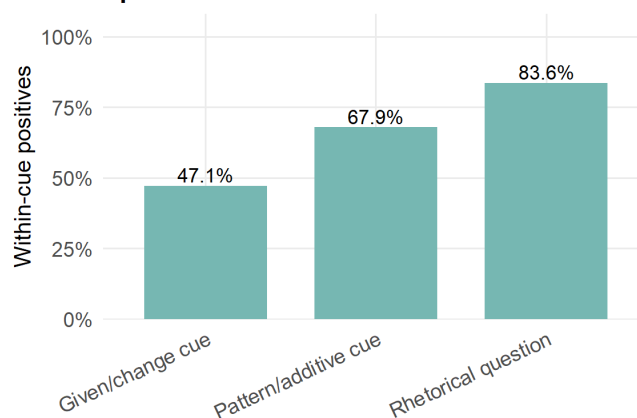
did not indicate a failed GLMM fit: all cue-by-outcome and position-by-outcome cells contained both positive and negative cases, the Pearson overdispersion ratio was 0.87, and the article random-intercept SD was 2.41 on the logit scale. Relative to sentences without a hypothesis-aligned focal cue, sentences coded with the three cue environments are more often coded positive: given/change cues have an odds ratio of 28.30 (95% Wald interval: 21.15–37.86), pattern-linking cues 21.93 (16.00–30.07), and rhetorical-question cues 19.07 (12.18–29.84). Later body sentences also have higher coded odds than headline, lead, or opening-body sentences (OR = 1.92, 1.39–2.67), contrary to the original H4 expectation. Sentence word count is retained as a modest control and is positively associated with the outcome (OR = 1.02 per word, 1.01–1.03).

The model is consistent with the main descriptive contrast between no hypothesis-aligned focal cue and the three coded cue environments. It does not turn the pilot annotation into a final inferential estimate, because annotation error is not yet modeled and the collection window is short. The H4 position contrast is therefore best read as a revision point: the observed direction is opposite to the hypothesis, and the article-random-intercept model preserves the higher body-position association.

### *Qualitative Patterns in the Positive Cases*

The annotation is most useful when the numerical patterns are read back into concrete discourse. The following source-labelled readings are not used to estimate rates; they provide the discourse-analytic interpretation of how the coded environments operate in context, why positive cases cluster in article bodies, and how a similar surface cue can fail to become economically relevant backgrounding.

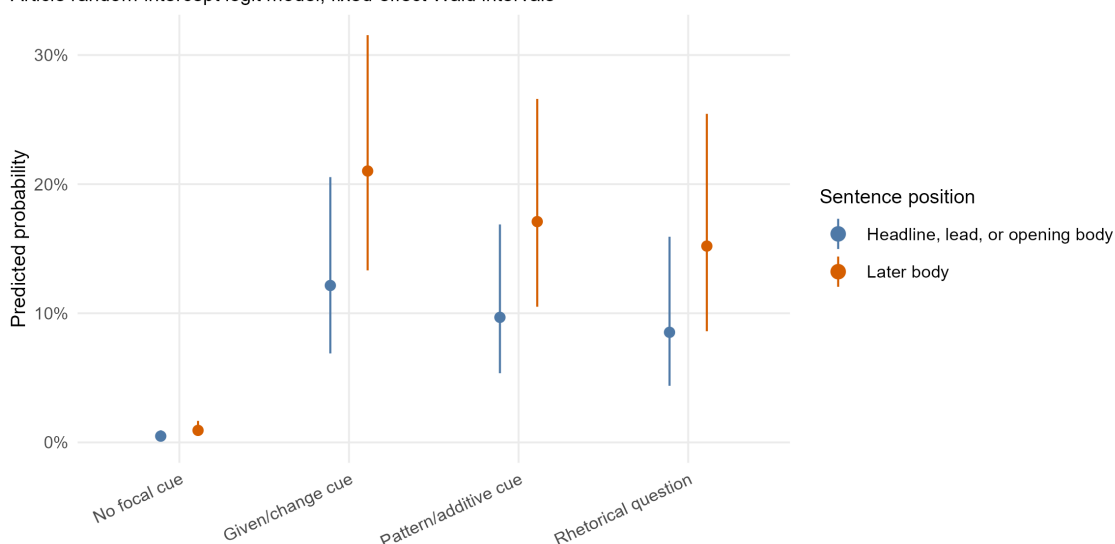
One recurrent pattern is the conversion of regulatory preference into administrative common sense. In Hando Sutter's 8 June 2026 article on government reform, the argument first names bureaucracy as "ühiskonnale kalli ja tarbetu bürokraatia", an expensive and unnecessary burden for society. Later, the sentence "Sama info mitu korda esitamine kulutab ettevõttele asjatult aega ja muid ressursse" treats repeated reporting as an already recognizable loss of firms' time and resources. The article then connects that premise to a procedural norm, "küsi andmeid ainult üks kord", and to necessity phrasing such as "vaid nii on võimalik". The discourse work is cumulative: the reader is not only asked to prefer deregulation, but is moved through a sequence in which reporting duplication, state-held data, reform speed, and competitiveness become mutually reinforcing background assumptions.

**By cue environment****By sentence position****Mode among positive cases****H1-H3 expected-mode share**

**Figure 2.** Main descriptive results. The panels show positive sentence rates by cue environment and sentence position, the distribution of backgrounding modes among positive sentences, and the share of positive cases in each hypothesis-aligned cue environment that match the expected backgrounding mode for H1–H3. The main pattern is the large cue-environment contrast and the reversed H4 position result: later body sentences show higher positive rates than front-position sentences.

**Model-predicted probability of common-sense backgrounding**

Article random-intercept logit model; fixed-effect Wald intervals



**Figure 3.** Conditional model-predicted probability of coded common-sense backgrounding by cue environment and sentence position, adjusted at mean sentence length for an average article. The sentence-level logistic mixed model includes cue environment, sentence position, sentence word count, and an article random intercept; five unclear rows are excluded. The model preserves the cue contrast and later-body association, but the fixed-effect Wald intervals do not incorporate annotation error.

A second pattern appears in Kaupo Paal's 7 June 2026 article on consumer credit and usury. The sentence "Mak-sevõimetutele inimestele laenude andmise ja liigkasuvõtmise probleem on viimasel kümnendil oluliselt suurenenud" does not merely assert a policy concern; it presupposes an already existing problem and presents the current moment as one of intensification. Later necessity formulations, including the claim that existing practice can no longer continue, shift the argument from diagnosis to institutional obligation. This helps explain why given/change cues are heterogeneous in the results: the same family of cues can background a problem, a causal condition, or the necessity of a response.

A third pattern concerns market comparison and consumer burden. In Margus Nõlvak's 29 May 2026 article on competition and fraud prevention, the question "Kellele meist aga meeldib oma aega ja energiat raisata, et teenusepakkuvalt paremat hinda kaubelda?" invites an obvious negative answer. Its force is not a narrow formal presupposition in the textbook sense. Rather, it narrows the answer space so that bargaining for a better price appears as a familiar waste of time and energy. The economic premise is that competition formally exists, but access to its benefits is made practically burdensome for consumers.

The contrast case comes from Paal's article: "Tihti ei tegele laenuvõtjaga inimene, vaid üksnes arvuti". The frequency cue alone is not enough; this sentence is not coded as backgrounding a contestable economic premise. Together, the readings show why the paper treats backgrounding as a discourse function rather than a one-to-one property of cue forms. A repeated-reporting sentence can turn administrative burden into an already-known cost; a change construction can transform a policy problem into a pre-existing condition that has grown worse; and a rhetorical question can make market comparison work appear obviously burdensome. This is the distinction the coding scheme is designed to preserve.

## Discussion

The pilot results suggest that economic common sense in ERR opinion discourse is often built through local backgrounding rather than only through explicit policy argument. The strongest descriptive contrast is between sentences without hypothesis-aligned focal cues and sentences in the three coded cue environments. This does not mean that a cue mechanically produces common-sense backgrounding. It indicates that given/change forms, pattern links, and rhetorical questions are recurrent textual sites where economic premises are more likely to be treated as already available to the reader. The alignment counts strengthen this interpretation: almost all

positive sentences are coded as endorsed by the article voice rather than distanced or merely quoted.

The mode distribution clarifies what kind of common sense is being naturalized. Necessity/closure is the most frequent positive mode, and it is especially prominent in rhetorical-question environments. This pattern connects the sentence-level findings to work on economic imperatives, crisis narration, and austerity discourse: policy-relevant premises become difficult to contest when they are placed inside formulations that make some response, constraint, or alternative seem already settled (Hay and Rosamond 2002; Borriello 2017). Pattern-linking cases add a second logic. They make economic assumptions plausible by presenting them as recurrence, accumulation, or the latest instance of an already-known trajectory. Given/change cases are more heterogeneous, supporting both problem diagnosis and necessity-oriented closure.

The position result complicates an initially plausible expectation. Front-position sentences did not show the highest positive rate; later body sentences did, and the same direction appears in the article-random-intercept model. This is consistent with the possibility that headlines and leads set up topics or viewpoints, while the cumulative work of making economic assumptions appear already shared often happens later, inside elaboration, justification, and policy explanation. The result does not support H4 as stated; it motivates revising the position expectation in future confirmatory work.

The analysis also sharpens the conceptual boundary between formal presupposition and broader backgrounding. Some positive cases are close to conventional presupposition. Others work through rhetorical constraint, recurrence, or framing-like common-ground management. This boundary is not a weakness of the design if it is kept explicit. It is precisely where discourse analysis can connect pragmatic form to public argument: the relevant question is not whether every positive sentence is a formal presupposition, but how sentence environments make economic assumptions less available for direct contestation.

The substantive pattern points to a particular kind of economic common sense in this sample. The most visible premises concern administrative burden, regulatory efficiency, loan and consumer-risk problems, and the reasonableness of market comparison. These are not presented only as policy preferences. They are often formulated as already recognizable burdens, worsening problems, repeated obstacles, or practical necessities. That is the discourse-analytic payoff of the sentence-level pattern: economic premises are made difficult to contest by being positioned as the background from which public reasoning begins.

The main limitation is validation. The annotation was constrained by a fixed codebook, structured outputs, and sentence-level checks, and selective human checks found the labels broadly plausible. A full expert benchmark is still needed before the estimates can be treated as validated estimates. The article random intercept addresses article-level dependence in the model, but not annotation error. Further validation can adjudicate the five unclear rows and the small set of cases where the backgrounding outcome and mode labels diverged, estimate human-machine agreement, and add a fuller set of article-level close readings.

The corpus is also a case study. ERR is analytically important because public-service opinion discourse can help stabilize the terms of public debate, but 92 articles from 15 May to 8 June 2026 do not represent Estonian economic discourse as a whole. The transferable contribution is therefore not a population estimate of Estonian media discourse. It is an auditable way to trace how economic assumptions are backgrounded at sentence level and then interpreted as part of public argument.

## Conclusion

This pilot analysis provides pilot evidence that contestable economic assumptions in ERR opinion discourse can be naturalized through sentence environments that present a state or change as given, link the sentence to a broader pattern, or close down alternatives through necessity-oriented phrasing. Across 5,126 sentence rows, roughly one fifth were coded as candidate common-sense backgrounding, with substantially higher rates in the three hypothesis-aligned cue environments than in sentences without a hypothesis-aligned focal cue. The central contribution is discourse-analytic: the paper identifies recurrent textual sites where public economic reasoning can be made to appear shared before it is explicitly defended. Quantification makes that argument auditable by showing where those sites recur in the corpus, while close reading remains necessary for interpreting how they function in article-level argument.

## Statements and Declarations

### *Ethical Considerations*

The corpus consists of publicly available journalistic opinion texts. The analysis focuses on published discourse rather than private individuals.

### *Consent to Participate*

Not applicable.

### *Consent for Publication*

Not applicable.

### *Declaration of Conflicting Interest*

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

### *Funding Statement*

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### *Author Contributions and AI Assistance*

A.K. designed the study, supervised corpus construction and annotation, directed the analysis, reviewed the outputs, revised the manuscript, and takes responsibility for the final text. Codex, running on GPT-5.5, was used under A.K.'s prompting to assist with corpus collection, analysis scripting, figure preparation, drafting, and revision. GPT-5.4 was used only for the constrained sentence-level annotation described in the Methods.

### *Data Availability*

The source articles are publicly available from ERR. Code and derived materials will be deposited in a public repository before submission. Because the articles are copyrighted, replication materials provide metadata, source URLs, sentence identifiers, derived annotations, codebook and prompt materials, structured-output schema, request metadata, validation logs, analysis code, and instructions for reconstructing the corpus from public sources; raw copyrighted article text is not redistributed.

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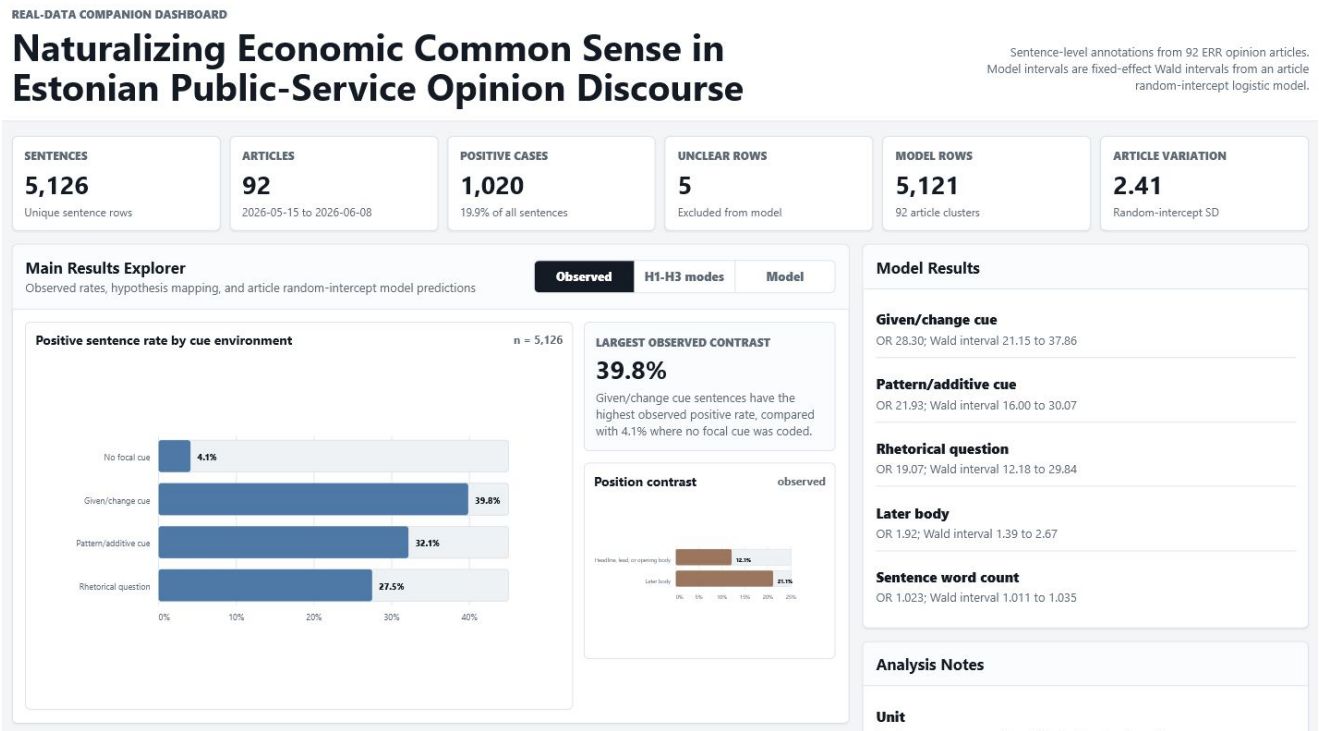
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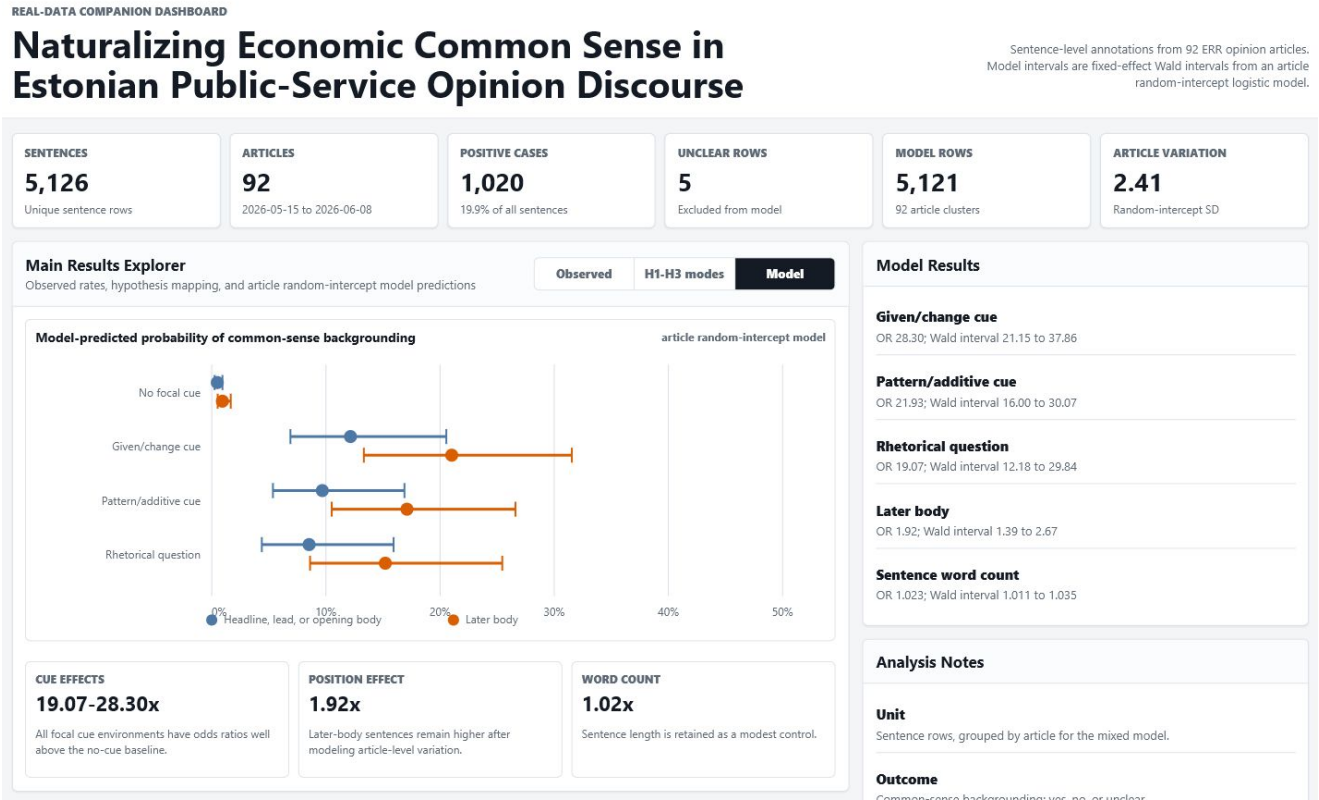
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Appendix A: Companion Dashboard

The companion dashboard is a local interactive view of the same derived annotation summaries used in the paper. It is not a separate evidentiary source; it provides an interface for inspecting sentence-level rates, cue-environment contrasts, model summaries, article-level variation, and quality notes without redistributing raw article text.



**Figure 4.** Dashboard overview showing sentence counts, positive cases, cue-environment rates, article-level model summaries, and analysis notes. The overview emphasizes the scale of the pilot corpus and the large descriptive contrast between sentences with no focal cue and the three coded cue environments.



**Figure 5.** Dashboard model view showing conditional model-predicted probabilities and fixed-effect Wald intervals from the article random-intercept model. The interface presents the same GLMM pattern as Figure 3: cue environments remain clearly separated from the no-cue baseline, and later body sentences have higher predicted probabilities than front-position sentences.

## Appendix B: Corpus Metadata

Table 2 lists compact article-level metadata for the 92 public ERR opinion articles used in the pilot corpus. The table reports only metadata, derived counts, and short title snippets; raw article text is not reproduced.

**Table 2.** Article-level corpus metadata and annotation summary. Title snippets use the first title words after the author prefix where present. The cue column reports the most frequent cue environment among positive sentences in that article; a dash marks articles with no positive sentence.

| Date       | Byline            | Title snippet                                  | Sent. | Pos. | Pos. % | Main positive cue   |
|------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------|------|--------|---------------------|
| 2026-05-15 | Aaviksoo          | tervishoid vajab Pipi Pikksukka                | 54    | 28   | 51.9   | No focal cue        |
| 2026-05-15 | Jakobson          | ideoloogilised positsioonid Eesti poliitikas   | 37    | 1    | 2.7    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-15 | Karis             | Putinile ei tohi anda                          | 61    | 6    | 9.8    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-16 | Gortfelder        | millal olid Eestis viimati                     | 68    | 19   | 27.9   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-16 | Vaino             | muuseumide õppetunnid metsatööstusele          | 42    | 14   | 33.3   | Rhetorical question |
| 2026-05-17 | Pöder             | Jeesuse eetika ja mitte-eetika                 | 35    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-18 | Oidsalu           | petlik optika Eesti droonikaitses              | 46    | 8    | 17.4   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-18 | peaökonomist      | keerulised ajad vajavad riigimehelikke         | 57    | 24   | 42.1   | Pattern/additive    |
| 2026-05-18 | Rohkla            | uus eelnõu jätab tagaukse                      | 27    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-19 | Kante             | eestikeelsele õppele üleminekuks loosungitest  | 32    | 7    | 21.9   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-19 | Perling           | poliitilise retoorika ja valitsuse             | 62    | 27   | 43.5   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-19 | Salla             | noorte vägivalda lõpetamiseks ei               | 41    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-19 | Sepper            | lõpuks on meil toimiv                          | 51    | 32   | 62.7   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-19 | Tiido             | uudised                                        | 56    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-20 | Kruusimägi        | uudised                                        | 26    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-20 | Ladõnskaja-Kubits | uudised                                        | 14    | 1    | 7.1    | Pattern/additive    |
| 2026-05-20 | Pedai             | kiire kohanemine kindlustab Eestile            | 59    | 22   | 37.3   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-20 | Sikk              | Appi, Eestis otsustatakse kõike                | 55    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-20 | Staub             | betonist, üheülbastumisest ja mälukaotusest    | 43    | 11   | 25.6   | Pattern/additive    |
| 2026-05-20 | Usk               | kliimakriisi loojangu algus                    | 27    | 7    | 25.9   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-21 | Arro              | uudised                                        | 29    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-21 | Erik              | kuidas IT-mehed metsas käisid                  | 81    | 21   | 25.9   | No focal cue        |
| 2026-05-21 | Jaanhold          | tehisaru ja pärisaru koostöös                  | 69    | 7    | 10.1   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-21 | Ratas             | uudised                                        | 58    | 19   | 32.8   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-21 | Tiido             | uudised                                        | 66    | 6    | 9.1    | No focal cue        |
| 2026-05-21 | Ukrainski         | Eesti majandusdebatt on liiga                  | 49    | 15   | 30.6   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-22 | Ernits            | lapse heaolust ja õigusest                     | 28    | 7    | 25.0   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-22 | Pöld              | sideandmete kasutamine vajab uusi              | 46    | 1    | 2.2    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-22 | Saarts            | konservatiivse "kurjuse telje" konstrueerimine | 30    | 4    | 13.3   | Pattern/additive    |
| 2026-05-23 | Kallas            | käes on radikaalseteks otsusteks               | 121   | 15   | 12.4   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-23 | Melioranski       | digiriik ei ulatu hooleni                      | 47    | 24   | 51.1   | No focal cue        |
| 2026-05-23 | Reinsalu          | Eestis süveneb poliitiline usalduskriis        | 36    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-23 | Tarand            | posti taga on pimedus                          | 55    | 26   | 47.3   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-24 | Beekmann          | alaealiste koht ei ole                         | 62    | 16   | 25.8   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-24 | Leyen             | miks on vaja tihendada                         | 50    | 9    | 18.0   | Pattern/additive    |
| 2026-05-24 | Puksand           | segadus põhikooli lõpueksamitega               | 35    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-25 | Kits              | uudised                                        | 111   | 11   | 9.9    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-25 | Kolts             | valimislubadused tulevad ja lähevad,           | 51    | 32   | 62.7   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-25 | Lippin            | riigikaitsekolonni tagumine ots vajab          | 60    | 23   | 38.3   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-25 | Taro              | suur osa kliimaseaduse eelnõu                  | 33    | 8    | 24.2   | No focal cue        |
| 2026-05-25 | Voog              | uudised                                        | 16    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-26 | Kersna            | peame erilise hoolega tagama                   | 34    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-26 | Kessler           | miks naiste kohustuslik ajateenistus           | 23    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-26 | Martin            | kaasamine algab mõistmisest                    | 41    | 9    | 22.0   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-26 | Pass              | uudised                                        | 66    | 22   | 33.3   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-26 | Tiido             | uudised                                        | 63    | 6    | 9.5    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-27 | Karis             | kaotused on õpetanud, et                       | 62    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-27 | Kaselo            | Päikesekuninga kombel tegutsemine on           | 38    | 27   | 71.1   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-27 | Möttus            | me ei peaks rääkima                            | 54    | 23   | 42.6   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-27 | Sutrop            | kui tehisaru annab vastused,                   | 96    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-28 | Kaas              | miks riigikogu Alar Karist                     | 80    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-28 | Kirikal           | seelikute lehvides ehk Alma                    | 37    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-28 | Kull              | kell ja loodus                                 | 23    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-28 | Saul              | tarbija kindlustunde indeks ei                 | 51    | 31   | 60.8   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-28 | Tiido             | uudised                                        | 53    | 4    | 7.5    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-29 | Ideon             | suurustamine lippudega pole Eestile            | 40    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-29 | Lempu             | ATS-i muudatus ei võta                         | 71    | 48   | 67.6   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-29 | Meiel             | üksik ratsamees/naine tuli me                  | 38    | 1    | 2.6    | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-29 | Nõlvak            | pettuste hirm ei tohiks                        | 44    | 21   | 47.7   | Given/change        |
| 2026-05-29 | Randpere          | kaheksajalast, kriitikast ja poliitikast       | 54    | 8    | 14.8   | Rhetorical question |
| 2026-05-30 | Gassova           | Narva on meie riigi                            | 33    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-30 | Lutsar            | laste vaksineerimisega hõlmatus tekitab        | 52    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-30 | Mattheus          | Ameerika MAGAb ehk Kes                         | 92    | 1    | 1.1    | Rhetorical question |
| 2026-05-31 | Jürgenstein       | kuidas siis ilma arutamata                     | 53    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-05-31 | Ventsel           | uudised                                        | 49    | 2    | 4.1    | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-01 | Kindsiko          | nähtamatuks muudetud noored esitavad           | 102   | 33   | 32.4   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-01 | Kross             | Alma Ostra-Oinas ja tema                       | 66    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |

| Date       | Byline           | Title snippet                               | Sent. | Pos. | Pos. % | Main positive cue   |
|------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------|------|--------|---------------------|
| 2026-06-01 | Vooglaid         | uudised                                     | 42    | 2    | 4.8    | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-02 | Aal              | poliitikut kibelevad muutma, aga            | 45    | 32   | 71.1   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-02 | Kõve             | õigusemõistmisest ja seaduste ühetaolisest  | 313   | 8    | 2.6    | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-02 | Lanno            | harjuge ära, väikelinnas näeb               | 52    | 17   | 32.7   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-02 | Tiido            | uudised                                     | 53    | 8    | 15.1   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-03 | Anton            | kliimaseaduse eelnõu ei ole                 | 44    | 18   | 40.9   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-03 | Gamzejev         | Narva kaksikvõimu on sünnitanud             | 45    | 1    | 2.2    | Rhetorical question |
| 2026-06-03 | Kannelmäe-Geerts | vaheaeg on taastumise aeg,                  | 32    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-06-03 | Veiser           | Eesti lippu ei tohi                         | 33    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-06-04 | Becker           | puit on biomajanduse vundament              | 30    | 16   | 53.3   | Pattern/additive    |
| 2026-06-04 | Kanter           | liikumisvaegus on tekitanud süsteemse       | 115   | 33   | 28.7   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-04 | Kütt             | andmed ja väärtus                           | 157   | 61   | 38.9   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-04 | Rannaveski       | depressioon on muutunud noorte              | 72    | 6    | 8.3    | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-04 | Rosenthal        | metsaseadus peab tagama metsa               | 81    | 21   | 25.9   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-04 | Tiido            | uudised                                     | 56    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-06-05 | Kaasik           | rahvusvahelise kaitse reeglid ei            | 48    | 4    | 8.3    | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-05 | Pormeister       | kas justiitsminister peab reegleid          | 40    | 8    | 20.0   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-05 | Šogenov          | põlevkivi puhul on nullheitiga              | 37    | 18   | 48.6   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-06 | Keldo            | üleriigilise planeeringu eesmärk on         | 48    | 13   | 27.1   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-06 | Tarand           | toimetus palkab tsensori                    | 53    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-06-07 | Kolk             | kõik mehed                                  | 35    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-06-07 | Paal             | kohtunikest ja võitlusest liigkasuvõtjatega | 144   | 30   | 20.8   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-08 | Sutter           | valitsus teebki ajalugu                     | 49    | 37   | 75.5   | Given/change        |
| 2026-06-08 | Toomse           | millist presidenti Eesti just               | 19    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |
| 2026-06-08 | Vaino            | üks väikerahvas peab oma                    | 42    | 0    | 0.0    | –                   |