

Exploring the borders of analyticity and syntheticity

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Estonian is typologically an agglutinative-fusional language with some analytical traits. Recent developments in Estonian, however, show increasing evidence of drifting towards analyticity (Erelt & Metslang 1998). There are number of analytic features that exist parallel to their synthetic counterparts, often serving slightly different functions (cf. Klavan 2012). These kinds of phenomena have not been investigated systematically in Estonian, nor has the relationship between analyticity and syntheticity been addressed on a more general scale. However, recent studies indicate that especially dialects, based on some verbal phenomena, show remarkable variation in this respect. The aim of the present study is to provide a deeper insight of the variation in analyticity and syntheticity in Estonian by utilizing dialectal data (CED 2011). We examine nine analytic categories, both verbal (negation, passive, evidentiality) and nominal (six postpositions), which have synthetic counterparts. The main goals of the study are the following: 1) to explore the boundaries of dialectal areas when new phenomena are introduced to the research design; 2) to look into the degree of variation and complexity within the abovementioned categories, using data from non-standard varieties of Estonian as an indicator; 3) to provide explanations for the use of alternating forms. Along the lines of similar research on English dialects (e.g. Szmrecsanyi 2009), the data is approached in a quantitative aggregational manner. In addition to mapping the spread of individual features and their primary functions, we provide an overall picture of the aggregated variation of analyticity and syntheticity in Estonian dialects. We demonstrate how the individual linguistic features vary in frequency and function, while showing a diverse geographical distribution at the same time. Following, we hypothesized that western dialects make more use of analytical constructions as opposed to eastern and southern dialects which prefer synthetic means of expression. Although some individual features may exhibit opposite tendencies (e.g. Saareste 1955: 39), we demonstrate how aggregational syntactic analysis gives a more comprehensive overview of the linguistic phenomena in question.