

Recycling grammar – development of (complex) adpositions in Estonian

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In this talk I give an overview of complex adpositions (CAs) in Estonian with a special focus on complex *postpositions* (CPs). The development of CPs is here viewed as an instance of recycling grammar – a phenomenon where new complex grammatical items develop as lexical and grammatical components merge (see Jürine & Habicht 2013, 2017).

Most Estonian postpositions are simple postpositions. The development of CPs in Estonian is a process still in its early stages and has (thus) so far received very little attention. Until quite recently (Veismann & Erelt 2017) the (sub)category was not found in grammars.

CPs in Estonian include two components – a noun and a simple postposition. According to Jürine (2016), who investigated body part related complex postpositions, CPs in Estonian have the following characteristics: unit interpretation, desemanticization, decategorialization, and extension to new contexts. These features, which are listed also in many other accounts of CAs (e.g. Hoffmann 2005, Lehmann 2002, Moirón Bouma 2003, Adler 2008), may be used as criteria to distinguish Estonian CPs from their source form. Most CPs have both readings in contemporary Estonian:

Ex.	<i>Poiss</i>	<i>istus</i>	<i>tüdruk</i>	<i>selja</i>	<i>taga</i>	>	<i>otsus</i>
	<i>tehakse</i>			<i>seljataga</i>			
	Boy	sat	girl.GEN	back.GEN	behind		decision
	is made	people.GEN	back+behind				
	‘The boy sat behind the girl’s back’						‘The decision is made
	behind		people’s				back’
	SIMPLE POSTPOSITIONAL PHRASE						COMPLEX
	POSTPOSITION						

As such, the development of CPs is part of a developmental cycle of function words in Estonian where new grammatical items are formed by simple grams merging with lexical items:

NOUN + LOC. CASE SUFFIX	>	SIMPLE POSTPOSITION
SIMPLE POSTPOSITION	>	COMPLEX POSTPOSITION

As there are many parallels in the development of complex and simple postpositions, I observe the development of CPs against the backdrop of functional and formal properties of simple postpositions in Estonian. The investigation is carried out synchronically as well as diachronically. Synchronic analysis relies on data from the etTenTen corpus (270 million words), the diachronic development of the CPs is investigated based on data from COLE (Corpus of Old Literary Estonian; 2 million words) and CELL (Corpus of Estonian Literary Language; 4.5 million words).

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