

# THE MOTHER TONGUE SOCIETY

The Mother Tongue Society (Emakeele Selts) is an organization operating in Estonia that brings together people working in or interested in the field of Estonian and related languages. The Society is associated with the Estonian Academy of Sciences. The Mother Tongue Society was founded on March 23, 1920 at the University of Tartu. From 1925 to 1952, it was known as the Academic Mother Tongue Society. The office of the Society has been located in Tallinn since 1956.

The activity of the Mother Tongue Society supports the Estonian state in performing its constitutional task of preserving the Estonian nation, culture and language. The Society has 387 active members, including 15 honorary members and 31 foreign members.

## STATUTORY GOALS OF THE SOCIETY

- to support the scientific study of Estonian, related languages, and ethnology
- to support the use of Estonian as the official language and the language of interaction throughout the country
- to generate public interest in Estonian and related languages
- to promote the academic interaction and joint endeavors of philologists as well as their cooperation with others interested in the Estonian language

## CURRENT MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY

- regular academic gatherings in Tallinn and Tartu
- Johannes Voldemar Veski day (typically on June 27, a conference held on the anniversary of J. V. Veski's birth)
- student conferences, including secondary school students
- language days in Estonia and abroad
- publishing (the Yearbook of the Mother Tongue Society, proceedings, the popular language journal Oma Keel, language books)
- establishing norms of standard language
- work with school students (including language camps, days, and competitions)

The Mother Tongue Society's primary mode of work is the organization of academic gatherings **and language days** as well as publishing of its own **publications**. The series of Mother Tongue Society Yearbooks and proceedings was initiated in 1921; this was supplemented by the linguistic journal Eesti Keel (1922–1940) and the publications of the Estonian Language Archive (1935–1940). After World War II, publications have included the yearbook, compiled as a compendium of articles (1955–2018, 63 volumes), proceedings (1958–2017, volumes) and selections of dialect texts (1956–2017, 9 volumes); the publication Kodumurre (1960–2001, 21 issues) aimed at a popular audience, Kirjakeel (1964–1985, 3 issues), and from 2000 till now the journal Oma Keel (published semiannually).

Beginning in 1961 in Viljandi, the Mother Tongue Society has organized over 300 language days, including many abroad (since 1989). The Society is involved in most language-related events, including the annual student conference (2005–), the dictation competition on Mother Tongue Day (2008–), the Language Act competition (2010–), the summary-writing contest Tuum (2012–), the Estonian company name competition Ehe Eesti (2016–) and the traditional F. J. Wiedemann language award day (2004–).

In 1972 and 2002, **neologism competitions** were held, which yielded a number of new words related to everyday life and European Union operations. More recent events include an internet-based word collection competition for schoolchildren (2008) and the neologism competition Sõnaus (2010) initiated by president Toomas Hendrik Ilves and aimed at finding new words for concepts related to the state and society.

As of December 31, 2017, the **Society's library** contains 6587 printed works on Estonian and Finno-Ugric languages from the 19th century to the present day.



## MOTHER TONGUE SOCIETY MANAGING BOARD (since 24.03.2017)

Chairperson	Helle Metslang
Deputy chairpersons	Jüri Valge, Jüri Viikberg
Board members	Reili Argus, Kersti Lepajõe, Miina Norvik, Karl Pajusalu, Kõllu Mei
Academic secretary	Maire Raadik
Senior member of the language committee	Annika Oherde
Library director	Maria-Maren Linkgreim
Webmaster	Mati Erelt
Editor-in-chief of the yearbook	

**HONORARY MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY:** Mati Erelt, Tiit Erelt, Enn Ernits, Mati Hint, Helju Kaal, Reet Kasik, Valve-Liivi Kingisepp, Uno Liivaku, Viivi Maanso, Helmi Neetar, Huno Rätsep, Ellen Uuspõld, Lembit Vaba, Tiit-Rein Viitso, Asta Õim

## CHAIRPERSONS OF THE MOTHER TONGUE SOCIETY

Lauri Kettunen	1920–1924	Huno Rätsep	1982–1989
Andrus Saareste	1925–1933, 1935, 1936–1941	Tiit-Rein Viitso	1989
Julius Mägist	1934, 1936	Eeva Ahven	1989–1990
Arnold Kask	1944, 1968–1982	Henn Saari	1990–1992
Johannes Voldemar Veski	1946–1968	Jüri Viikberg	1992–1993
		Tiit-Rein Viitso	1993–1997
		Mati Erelt	1997–2006
		Helle Metslang	2006–

## COMMITTEES OF THE MOTHER TONGUE SOCIETY

The **dialect committee** (1926–1940; 1963–1996) has contributed to the development of collection and study of dialect material; in 1939–1944 and 1963–1996, it organized competitions of language material and toponym collection. By the 1990s, the Society had completed its mission in collecting data related to older dialects of Estonian, and the new aim became to study variation in the modern-day language. As of the end of 2017, the dialect archive EMSUKA, of the Mother Tongue Society and the Institute of the Estonian Language, contained 5.580 million records of vocabulary items, 153,000 pages of text, and 3,000 hours of audio recordings.

The **language committee** (1969–1972; 1993–) is a central language planning committee, which makes decisions and gives recommendations related to important problems of the standard language. The 7–11 members of the committee represent institutions dealing with the study and regulation of the Estonian language; the senior member is chosen biannually by the general meeting of the Society. The state function of the language committee is participation in the determination of standard language norms. The committee's decisions and recommendations from 1993–2000 can be found in the compendium "Kirjakeele teataja II", later decisions and recommendations are available at <http://www.emakeeleselts.ee/keeletoimikond.htm>.

Text: Jüri Viikberg. Design: Sirje Ratso. 2018.

