Sublanguages of Estonian

No living language is homogeneous. Language use inevitably differs in different situations, with different interlocutors, in different locations. Thus, we can speak about different varieties, which are also known as sublanguages. The number of sublanguages, their development, and mutual relations depend on the socio-cultural peculiarities, attitudes, general language situation, etc. The term 'sublanguage' does not designate hierarchical relations between different language varieties, but their multiplicity. The boundaries between the different sublanguages are not clear-cut; the transitions are smooth.

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN SUBLANGUAGES

(according to adapted works: Tiit Hennoste (2000) Allkeeled. T. Hennoste (ed), *Estonian sublanguages*. The publications of the Taru University Chair of Estonian 16. taru: TÜ Kirjastus, 9-56.)

Based on codification
Written language↔common language↔non-normative languages

User-based and usage-based sublanguages

User-based
"who am I"
- Local dialects
- Regional language forms
- Social dialects
- Group languages (including youth slang)

⟺

Usage-based (registers)
"what am I doing"
Oral/written
Spontaneous/edited
Informal/formal
- Colloquial language
- Written language
- Internet language

Professional language (including professional slang)





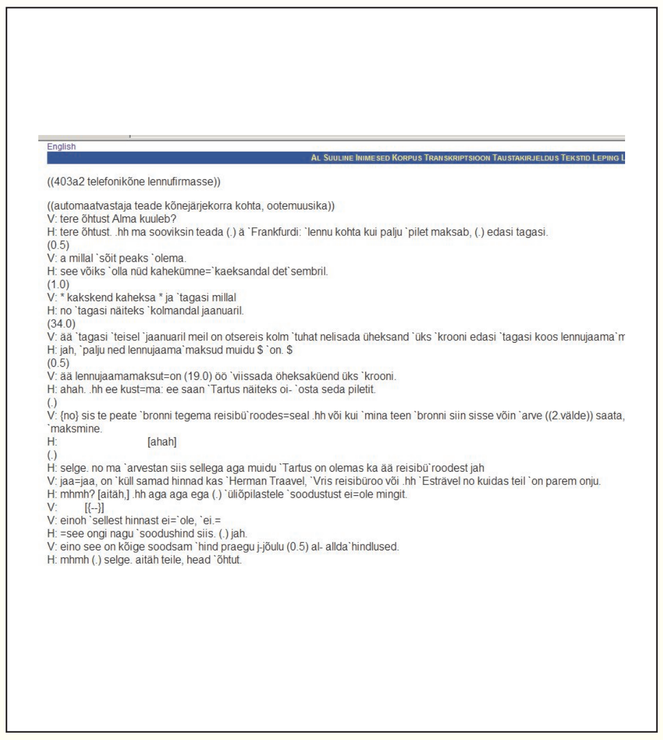
The **standard language** is a highly valued sublanguage in Estonian society because it functions as the consolidator of Estonian nationality. In the Estonian tradition the standard language has long been treated in contrast with the local dialects. The written language today is codified- with the norms established in grammar books, dictionaries, etc also the grammar and to lesser extent the vocabulary has been codified. Since a language changes in time and space and so does the norm, it is impossible to codify the language system once and for all.

The common language today is part of various sublanguages. This is the language form used by different people from various parts of Estonia or with different socio-cultural, professional etc backgrounds.

Some sublanguages differ from the rest only with respect to vocabulary and some specific constructions. **Slang** is characterized by the shared interests and activities of a group expressed in language use. Youth slang, but also professional (e.g. doctors', software programmers') slang is differentiated. **Language for special purposes** (LSP) is an example of a sublanguage with specific vocabulary. At first sight the vocabulary of a special language may seem to be similar to everyday language; for example, both an astronomer and an ordinary person use the words *täht* 'star' and *planet* 'planet'. However, for a scientist there is a clear difference; in everyday language we say *Tähed säravad* 'stars twinkle' although, technically speaking, there are certainly some planets among them.

During the initial period of the Republic of Estonia in the 1920s and 1930s it was important that all its inhabitants should acquire Standard Estonian. At that time the attitude to dialects was not different from the attitude that was prevalent elsewhere in Europe – one has to study dialects; they serve as sources of enriching the standard language, and they constitute our heritage that provides information about language history and language change yet the emphasis on laid on language usage based upon the written language. Although the local dialects have levelled due to the spread of the standard language and the impact of the press and television; they have not disappeared without any trace. The dialectal Estonian **territorial dialects** have become markers of the local identity. The common language may be used with strangers or outside one's neighbourhood, but when communicating at home or with one's close neighbours, one would use a dialect flavoured language variety.

The rapid development of the modern standard language and the uniform Estonian language as a symbol of the Estonian nationality at the end of the 19th century coincided with the gradual disintegration of the previous estate-based society. At the same time it implied the emergence of new linguistic relations – Standard Estonian was intended to be a language unifying the entire Estonian nation which should be equally available to town people, rural people, Estonians, and ethnic minorities in Estonia. For historical reasons Estonia did not have Estonian-speaking aristocracy; until the period of national awakening both the business and cultural elite consisted of Baltic Germans and later also Russians. Thus, unlike the traditional countries, Estonia did not have its own Estonian-speaking elite whose language use one could value and follow as an example. The Republic of Estonia, which came into existence in 1918, did not have any estate-based differences. The previously mentioned factors and the smallness of Estonian society account for reasons why **sociolects** have not developed in Estonia.





Usage-based language varieties point to the communicative situation that the speaker is in and to whom s/he speaks / writes. Usage-based language varieties are called **registers.** Use of certain speech forms indicates that one is dealing with a formal register. Use of specialized terminology shows that the speaker is talking about his/her speciality or some specialized field (e.g. finances). It is inevitable that spoken and written registers differ from each other because a written text is pre-planned, it can be edited. Spoken language is characterized by spontaneity, hesitations, repetitions, interruptions, etc. The second half of the 20th century saw a change in the attitude of researchers– the actual language use began to be studied. Spoken Estonian has been studied at the University of Tartu since the 1990s, where a large-scale spoken corpus of the Estonian language has been collected (http:/ /www.cl.ut.ee/suuline/Korpus.php).

During the past fifteen years one can speak about written spontaneous communication – **Internet communication** entails features of both written and spoken communication.

The different sublanguages of Estonian have been studied by Pille Eslon (Estonian of the non-Estonians, corpus of language learners); Tiit Hennoste (theory of sublanguage, oral language, corpus of oral language), Leelo Keevallik (colloquial language), Reet Kasik (advertising language, language of law), Krista Kerge (theory of sublanguage, language of law), Mai Loog (slang), Karl Pajusalu (variety in dialects), Tõnu Tender (slang), Jüri Viikberg (varieties of foreign Estonian) etc.

Lisalugemist
Hennoste, T. 1999 (toim). Estonian sociolinguistics. International Journal of the Sociology of Language 139.
Hennoste, T. 2003. Keelekasutuse uurimine. Emakeele Seltsi aastaraamat 2002, nr 48, 217-262.
Keevallik, L. 2003. Colloquial Estonian. In: M. Erelt (Ed.) Estonian Language. Linguistica Uralica Supplementary Series 1, 342–378.
Vainola, K., Kaplinski, L. 2003. Eesti slängi sõnaraamat. Toim A. Aule. Tallinn: Aule Kirjastus

The poster was prepared by the Mother Tongue Society, the Estonian Literary Museum, and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. Text by Anna Verschik. Dseigned by Margus Nõmm, Multimedia Centre of the University of Tartu 2008.