



VÕRO

The Võro language in education in Estonia

| Regional dossiers series |



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Foreword

background The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (formerly Mercator-Education) aims at the acquisition, circulation, and application of knowledge in the field of regional and minority language education. Regional or minority languages are languages that differ from the official language of the state where they are spoken and that are traditionally used within a given territory by nationals of that state forming a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population. For several years an important means for the Mercator Research Centre to achieve the goal of knowledge acquisition and circulation has been the Regional dossiers series. The success of this series illustrates a need for documents stating briefly the most essential features of the education system of regions with an autochthonous lesser used language.

aim Regional dossiers aim at providing a concise description and basic statistics about minority language education in a specific region of Europe. Aspects that are addressed include features of the education system, recent educational policies, main actors, legal arrangements, and support structures, as well as quantitative aspects, such as the number of schools, teachers, pupils, and financial investments. This kind of information can serve several purposes and can be relevant for different target groups.

target group Policymakers, researchers, teachers, students, and journalists may use the information provided to assess developments in European minority language schooling. They can also use a Regional dossier as a first orientation towards further research or as a source of ideas for improving educational provisions in their own region.

link with Eurydice In order to link these regional descriptions with those of national education systems, the format of the regional dossiers follows the format used by Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe. Eurydice provides information on the

administration and structure of national education systems in the member states of the European Union.

contents

The remainder of this dossier consists of an introduction to the region under study, followed by six sections each dealing with a specific level of the education system. These brief descriptions contain factual information presented in a readily accessible way. Sections eight to ten cover research, prospects, and summary statistics. For detailed information and political discussions about language use at the various levels of education, the reader is referred to other sources with a list of publications.



1 Introduction

language

The South Estonian varieties of Balto-Finnic (Finno-Ugric family) – including the Võro language – are traditionally seen in public discourse as dialects of Estonian. Estonian dialectology distinguishes two (or three) groups of dialects – North Estonian (including Northwestern Coastal) and South Estonian. Standard Estonian and common Estonian are based mostly on North Estonian varieties. South Estonian in turn includes varieties of Mulgi, Tartu, Seto, and Võro. Even though the latter two, Seto and Võro, are similar, they are differentiated because of different religious backgrounds (Orthodox vs. Lutheran) and the identity of speakers.

A number of researchers have indicated a range of linguistic differences between North Estonian and South Estonian dialects. Today, many linguists and laypeople hold the view that if there were no uniting state borders, one would definitely speak of two different languages; South Estonian and North Estonian. Researchers also believe there is well-founded reason to speak of the Võro and Seto languages, as the linguistic continuum from North to South has disappeared and as most of the Tartu and Mulgi speakers have become monolingual (common Estonian) or migrated out of the region.

The Võro language (autoglossonym *võro* or *võru kiil*) differs significantly from standard and common Estonian on all linguistic aspects – phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. The most prominent features include vowel harmony, a glottal stop in nominative plural, a different third person singular in the indicative mood, and a negative particle following the verb (see Võro-Seto Language, 1999). Speech intelligibility may depend on circumstances: the conversation topic, a listener's extralinguistic skills, etc. For instance, some people with non-South Estonian language backgrounds may comprehend most of the utterances, whereas others may demonstrate complete ignorance. No special empirical analysis has been made of Võro intelligibility. The sub-varieties of Võro have different features,

but are comprehensible throughout the language area. Today, the Võro language has become mixed with common Estonian and has levelled mostly due to influences from common Estonian. However, research has also found some internal changes, which have occurred in simplifying tendencies (see Iva, 2001 for details).

South Estonian separated from the rest of the Balto-Finnic group as early as the period BC. In the period between the 16th and 19th centuries, two literary languages – the Tallinn and Tartu languages (*tallinna ja tartu keel*) – were in use in Northern and Southern Estonia, respectively. The old literary (Tartu) South Estonian language was used in Southern Estonia in churches, courts, schools, print media, and administration (excluding Mulgi and Seto-speaking areas) (e.g. *Agenda Parva* 1622; *Wastne Testament*/New Testament 1686; *Wastne Võro keele ABD raamat*/New ABC Book for Võro 1885; a newspaper “*Tarto maa rahwa Näddali-Leht*” in 1806), and of course in personal settings. From the beginning of the 20th century, the language gradually started to disappear from public, written use – mainly as a result of market forces and political decisions.¹ Still, the standardisation processes and domination of North Estonian in public use did not immediately drive all the speakers of South Estonian to switch languages. Probably, the main process of language shift occurred between 1960-1980.





The South Estonian (Võro, Seto, Mulgi, Tartu) language area with its enclaves (Lutsi, Leivu, and Kraasna). Source: Iva & Pajusalu, 2004.

The new rise of South Estonian started with the institutionalisation of Võro. The Võro movement initiated this development at the end of the 1980s. After the collapse of the Soviet regime, simultaneously with the so-called Estonian second awakening², the Võro movement (with the non-profit Võro Society VKKF on the forefront) became active in language planning and maintenance activities.

Since that time, the new standard, the modern South Estonian literary language (Võro), has been elaborated. The guiding principles of the new standard have been to find a compromise between sharp sociolinguistic markers, to maintain specific South Estonian features, and finally to follow the tradition of another standard, the old South Estonian literary language (Tartu). The process of standardisation has led to the compilation of a bilingual Võro-Estonian dictionary, published with 15,000 entries in 2002. In spite of the rise in the number of publications, considerable scepticism and criticism towards the standard exists – both among the speech community and among Võro activists themselves. The main opposing arguments have varied from the homogenising effects of the standard on the vernacular use to the fear of secessionism. Moreover, modern Võro spelling does not have the support of wider audiences because it uses letters peculiar in and alien to standard Estonian (y to differentiate a rising middle vowel from a vowel without rising, and q for a glottal stop). The spelling debate is not over yet – some publications use one specific spelling system while others have adopted a different one.

In 1995, a state Research & Development institution – the Võro Institute – was founded in order to preserve and revitalise the Võro language and culture. As the centre of Võro language policy development³, the Institute engages in activities including research on vocabulary, phonology, grammar, toponyms, language attitudes, various sociolinguistics features; the publication of academic series, teaching materials, other books, and audiotapes; and finally the organisation of various events such as teachers' in-service training, seminars, and conferences.

Another sign of institutionalisation is presented by the use of Võro in the media. Võro occasionally appeared in local newspapers as early as the end of the tsarist era, mainly as readers' contributions. There were few media texts in Võro during the pre-war period and in the 1940s-1950s. Starting in the 1960s, local county papers used Võro mostly in pejorative jokes. Towards the end of 1980s in the glasnost period a growing number of opinion articles and features were published in

Võro. Later, when Estonians participated in a yacht trip around the world in 1999, the local paper published stories of the travelogue in Võro. In the early 1990s Võro Radio presented brief broadcasts – mainly news, children’s programmes, and interviews with local people. Today, the national radio broadcasts 5-minute news programmes in Võro every other week. On national TV, a number of documentaries and talk shows were produced following the State Programme “South Estonian Language and Culture” (hereafter called Programme). Võro is also present on the Internet. Since 2000, the regular newspaper “Uma Leht” (UL) has submitted online and print (10,000 issues) editions every other week. UL can be characterised as a rather typical example of community and non-mainstream media. UL uses the simplified variant of new Võro spelling standard (without the letters q and y) and the online and printed editions are consulted regularly or occasionally by 75% of the residents of the Võro and Põlva counties aged 15-74: a total number of approximately 32,000 people (Saar Poll, 2005).

In general, the institutionalisation of Võro cannot be seen separately from the Võro Movement. The Võro Movement is a rather loosely organised movement and includes the non-profit Võro Society VKKF and some other associations of civic engagement, such as village organisations that have come into existence in the area and elsewhere. It also includes the Võro Institute and a number of individual activists and interested people. The Võro movement has also been called a regional movement. According to the statutes of the non-profit Võro Society VKKF, the main tasks of the Võro movement include supporting Võro and Seto culture, and therefore the accumulation of all material and intellectual resources; favouring and fostering both written and oral use of Võro and Seto in all life domains; and finally assisting and promoting the maintenance and positive appraisal of Võro and Seto cultural heritage in all social strata.

The somewhat paradoxical situation of being supported by the state and simultaneously not being recognised as a language has led Võro activists to search for international support. The

Võro Society VKKF was one of the initiators of EstBLUL, the non-governmental and non-profit cover organisation for Estonian linguistic minorities. EstBLUL is also a member state committee of EBLUL.

population

The Võro-speaking area has a population of about 60,000 people. This area of approximately 4200 km² constituted a single administrative unit – Võru County – between 1783-1920, but is currently divided between 4 counties: Põlva, Tartu, Valga, and Võru. It stems from parishes, units of church congregation and cultural communication⁴, which made up Võru County in the last quarter of the 18th century. Its earlier parishes date back to the Middle Ages, with the later parishes being formed between 1636 and 1694. During the period from the 13th until the 16th century, the Võro-speaking area belonged to the Episcopacy of Tartu, together with the Southern Tartu area. Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the area belonged to Tartu County.

According to the results of the 1998 survey, the share of those who claimed frequent and occasional use of Võro is 90% in the age groups 25-64 (ca 29-30,000 people). This figure reflects both understanding and speaking the language. However, it does not take into account the fact that considerable migration took place to areas outside the region. It also does not consider the more frequent use of Võro among people over 65 (ca 10,000) nor those who report passive use. As for inner migration, up to the early 1980s urbanisation processes prevailed in Estonia. Later, deconcentration⁵ processes took place (Ainsaar, 2004, p.11). Urbanisation also explains the migration patterns of the Võro-speaking community. Although there are no reliable data for Estonian regional migration, many peripheries – including the Võro-speaking area – lost their population to bigger centres (Tallinn and Tartu) as early as the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1990s, Võru County together with other Southern and Central Estonian counties experienced the greatest migration loss (ESA, 2003). Considering all circumstances, the most realistic estimation of the number of people speaking Võro would not exceed a total of 50,000 of active and passive users.

No data are available on reading and writing abilities, but as the new standard was elaborated recently – towards the end of the 1990s – the overall figure of readers in Võro cannot be high. The 1998 survey confirms that Võro is a less prestigious language – women, younger residents, people with higher education, and urban dwellers reported less frequent use. Võro is spoken mostly by men, middle-aged and senior citizens, the less educated, mostly in rural settlements, mostly with neighbourhood people and in the local village community. The case study held in Sute (Sutõ) in 1991 demonstrates that the users of Võro can be divided into three groups: informants born before 1935; those born between 1935 and 1960, and thirdly those born after 1960. The first group reported preferring Võro to the standard (L1 speakers). Those who were born before World War I showed many archaic features in their language use. The middle group demonstrated pretty levelled use, with signs of interference; it differed radically from the oldest group. People responded in Estonian when approached – but most of them only learned Estonian in school. There were large individual in-group differences in the youngest group. According to some estimates, the Võro language is moving from Stage 6 to Stage 7 of Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale for Threatened Languages (Fishman, 1991) – from “some intergenerational use” to “only adults beyond child-bearing age speak the language”. However, language shift occurs differently in urban and rural areas, in the traditional Võro speaking area and diaspora, in different domains and different sectors. For example, it is absolutely necessary to comprehend Võro if one works in the local office of the Estonian Agricultural Register and Information Board, which allocates the different types of EU agricultural and rural development support, or if one works as a doctor treating senior patients.

language status Today, the legal status of the Võro language is not specified. In 2004, a proposal was made to the Government of Estonia to recognise South Estonian (including Võro) as a distinct language in order to improve its prestige, to widen its domains, and to remove the legal vacuum. The proposal to change the Language Act was initiated by the Council of the Programme.

As the government commission that was consequently formed to elaborate on the draft of changes for the Language Act did not reach a consensus, the political decision was not made, and the issue is still under discussion. For example, in some policy documents – the Development Strategy of the Estonian Language (2004-2010) – Southern Estonian dialects are considered to be the regional special forms of Estonian. Still, in contrast, all South Estonian varieties are defined as languages in another programmatic text from the State Programme “South Estonian Language and Culture”.

**status of
language
education**

The status of the Võro language is not specified other than in the Development Strategy of the Estonian Language (2004-2010). The National Curriculum does not specify any other languages than Estonian (the state language according to the Constitution) and foreign languages.



**education
system**

According to the Education Act, the objectives of education are to create favourable conditions for the development of the individual, the family and the Estonian nation, including ethnic minorities. It should create favourable conditions for the development of economic, political, and cultural life in Estonian society, and also for nature conservation within the context of the global economy and global culture. Lastly, education should shape individuals who respect and abide by the law, and create opportunities for everyone to engage in continuous learning (Eurybase).

The organisation of the education system can be described as follows: children start in pre-primary education, followed by nine years of basic education: primary and lower secondary general or vocational education that together form a single structure. Then follows upper secondary general and vocational, post-secondary non-tertiary, and tertiary education (cf. “Education system in Estonia”, p. 32) (Eurybase).

Pre-primary education is provided in crèches and nursery schools, where groups are formed in a pre-school childcare institution. Education is compulsory for children to the extent

specified by law. Compulsory school attendance starts at the age of 7 (on October 1st of the current year) and lasts until completion of basic education (until the end of 9th year) or until the pupil is 17 years old.

Basic school includes years 1-9 and is treated as a single structure. This structure is divided into three stages: stage I – years 1-3, stage II – years 4-6, and stage III – years 7-9. An upper secondary school provides secondary education and includes years 10-12. Vocational schools are divided into schools that operate on the basis of basic education and schools that operate on the basis of secondary education. There are also schools that offer curricula on the basis of both basic and secondary education.

private and public

Private schools do not play an important role in the Estonian educational system. The share of pupils in the private sector offering primary and secondary education is less than 3% of the total number of pupils (EHIS⁶).

bilingual education forms

Bilingual education is offered in different Estonian schools that focus on foreign languages, e.g. French, English, German, and where the subject is taught by using a foreign language as the language of instruction (cf. Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL). The same method is used in Russian schools in Estonia, and from 2007 a more systematic transition to bilingual education is being created in Russian schools. There is a municipality school located in Võru – the Võru Russian Gymnasium – that had 134 students in 2005 (EHIS).

administration

The Law on Basic School and Gymnasium regulates the curriculum, governance, and administration of municipality and state schools (and also of private schools if the Act on private schools does not state differently). The National Curriculum is enforced by the Government Act of 2002. As the Võro language classes are not included in the National Curriculum, the interest in teaching and learning depends on each particular school and the municipality that owns the school. School administrations may initiate teaching Võro: a school can propose to a municipality to

introduce for example Võro language classes. The municipality council then makes a decision according to their priorities and budget constraints. However, as most of the teaching of Võro is funded by the Programme, the municipalities in principle face no obstacles other than the interests of pupils or parents and the availability of skilled and motivated teachers. In most cases, the Võro Institute is responsible for the entire project of teaching: for the grants, for the administration, and for monitoring the process. Still, some schools and municipalities have agreed to include the subject into the school curriculum as an elective subject. In this latter case, the costs of teachers' fees are partly covered by the municipality budget and partly by the Programme.

inspection

The state officials of the Ministry of Education and Research and the County Governors (the officials of county government) are responsible for school inspection. As the teachers of Võro are contracted by the Võro Institute, the institute also keeps an eye on the teaching process, on the progress achieved, and on meeting the requirements.



**support
structure**

The teaching of Võro, in-service teacher training, the organisation of extracurricular events, and the publication of teaching materials in Võro are all funded by the Programme. Since it was founded, the Võro Institute has worked on the development of teaching materials and has gradually introduced the Võro language classes – first by contacting schools and training interested teachers. Although there have been different modules for beginners and advanced learners, for generalists (teachers who teach most subjects, during grades 1-4) and specialists, the main target group has been formed by the practising generalists who are involved in teaching Võro. The teachers meet regularly – once a month or every other month between September and June – in the institute where their pedagogical and other teaching-related problems are addressed and discussed in an informal round-table setting. Usually, a special guest lecturer is invited to speak on a special topic. Furthermore, there are occasional seminars (held once or twice a year) on various topics (e.g. South Estonian folklore) for separate target groups (gen-

eralists, teachers of music or of local cultural history and local lore). In addition, a longer (one-week) introductory course is held for new teachers. The introductory course includes an overview of local language, history, folklore, methodological issues, and available sources and databases. The lecturers are both from within and outside the institute. Here, the institute co-operates with other educational institutions, e.g. the University of Tartu, the University of Tallinn, the Language Immersion Centre, the Estonian Literary Museum, and others. Study visits around the region are organised every year, when teachers are introduced to some of the local cultural aspects (local lore, cultural history, handicraft, literary tradition). As for methodology, the institute's coordinator for in-service training has been active in the acquisition of knowledge through the experiences of other (small) language communities and through cooperation with these communities. Over the years, around 50 teachers have enrolled in the in-service training programme. In 2005/2006, classes and seminars were given dealing with language immersion, folk traditions (such as cutting cross-trees), and local lore.

The Võro Institute – to some extent in collaboration with other organisations – and the experts it has contracted have developed and published a number of teaching materials. These include: a primer, a reader, a workbook for the primer, a workbook for the audio tape, several audio and video tapes, a song book, an illustrated vocabulary, and a reader for local (cultural) history. The institute has also developed the curriculum for the basic schools in the area. The curriculum for gymnasiums is on its way. Furthermore, “Täheke”, the oldest children's magazine in Estonian (first published in 1960), aimed at children between the ages of 5 and 10, has already seen two issues published in Võro: in February and November 2005. The Võro version was distributed without charge among first-graders and those who study the language in the Võro-speaking area.

2 Pre-school education

target group Pre-primary education is targeted at children under the age of 7. There are up to 35 institutions of pre-school childcare (crèches and nursery school groups) in the Võro language area, all operating in Estonian only. Only a few playgroup-like initiatives of Võro-speaking parents are known to exist.

structure Since 2005, there has been one small (5-6 children) playgroup for children between the ages of 3-6 and their parents, which meets (irregularly, mostly monthly) in a local county centre's creativity school. Their activities are limited to the singing of local folk songs and playing dance games. The instructors and parents try to keep Võro as the language used and stimulate the children's use of Võro. One of the problems encountered is bad timing and access: many interested parents would have liked to join the group but live far away from the centre or meetings were held during the afternoon when parents were still working and children were in nursery schools.

In addition, another spontaneous club-like activity was initiated in 2004 by a rural community: in Haanja (Haani), the local men have formed an irregular group of pre-school children (approximately 10) with an objective to learn about and to value their home language, nature, local identity, and customs.

legislation Pre-school education is regulated by the Law on Pre-School Child Institutions and government regulations on the framework curriculum for pre-primary education. Section 8 of the Law states that teaching and learning in those institutions takes place in Estonian, and that it may be replaced by some other language if the local government council decides this should be so. The Ministry of Education and Research and the County Governors are responsible for the supervision of pre-school education.

language use The Võro language is not used as a medium of instruction or taught as a subject except in the initiatives in Võro, the county centre and in Haanja (Haani).

- teaching material** As no special teaching materials are available, instructors use various materials issued by the institute or by others (e.g. the CD “Laulami latsilõ, laulami latsiga” / “Let’s sing to the children, let’s sing with the children”). Moreover, the instructors are trained in folk music and have folklore resources of their own.
- statistics** The overall (precise) figure of the number of pre-school children is not available for the area; partly because the statistics are organised along administrative borders, which splits up the language area. The closest estimate is 2,200 in 2005. Playgroups in Võro total some 20 children.

3 Primary education

- target group** Primary education includes years 1-9 in basic school and is given until the end of the compulsory school age, i.e. mostly 16 (17). The Võro language and related subjects (local (cultural) history, literature, and folk music) are taught in half the number of schools in the language area (20 out of 49). The Võro language is taught in all three basic school stages: in most cases as an extracurricular activity and as an optional subject in five schools.
- structure** The curriculum covering the subject the Võro language and culture is organised in three stages: ABC in Võro in Stage I (years 1-3), local (cultural) history in Võro in Stage II (years 4-6), and Võro language and literature in Stage III (years 7-9). As the curriculum does not belong to the national curriculum, the Võro Institute –as Programme contractor and grant holder – is responsible for it to some extent.
- legislation** As there is no institutional support other than that offered by the Programme or the Institute, one cannot really state that this curriculum has much institutional power. However, the National Curriculum Act (§ 266, (2)) states that the National Curriculum, in-school agreement on learning orientations and characteristics should form the starting point in the design of a school curriculum, taking into account the regional needs, the will of parents and pupils, and human and material resources. This option of introducing Võro as an optional subject has so far been embraced by only one fourth of the number of schools (5 out of 20) teaching Võro.
- language use** In stage I, the focus of teaching is on the language as a subject itself; it is also the language of instruction. During the following stages, the language keeps its importance as a subject. During Stage I, 70 academic hours (45 minutes per week, for 35 weeks in a period of 2 years) include an introductory part, development of comprehension, and the acquisition of basic reading skills. Those who have passed Stage I are expected to be able

to understand local speech, read, and value it. Additional activities include playing song and dance games, singing folk songs, and learning poems in Võro. Stage II and Stage III both offer 35 academic hours. In particular, after acquiring some communicative skills, children are encouraged to study local history and literature, but they also keep improving their language skills by meeting native speakers and people from local museums, by conducting regional studies and participating in poetry-reading contests, among other things.

Nevertheless, several problems remain – most of which partly originate from the lack of support that the national curriculum could provide. First, an opportunity to learn the Võro language and culture depends on the interest and possibilities of each school. Moreover, it also depends on whether a particular group adviser, form adviser or teacher (most often a generalist) is willing and able to teach Võro. If a pupil happens to be younger or older and happens not to be in that teacher's group his/her chances of taking part in classes decrease. In some cases, assembling interested pupils from the various groups for the extracurricular activity solves this problem. In addition to this more or less random situation, one hour of studies per week only allows pupils to become slightly acquainted with the issue – it does not help them learn to speak the language fluently, for example. Therefore, the situation favours pupils with some existing linguistic background of Võro and not those who start learning from scratch. Finally, teachers in Stage I have divergent linguistic and methodological (generalists) backgrounds, and existing in-service training for teachers offered by the Võro Institute cannot meet all the requirements set by (bilingual) teaching (close language, mixed forms, levelled use, handling code switching, etc.).

**teaching
material**

Most teaching materials are developed, published, and provided by the Võro Institute. They include a reader/textbook (*Võrokiilne lugõmik*, 1996), a primer (*ABC kiräoppus*, 1998), a song collection (*Tsirr-virr lõokõnõ*, 1999), a workbook for the primer (*Tüüvihk ABC kiräoppusõ manoq*), a workbook for the

audiotape (Tsiämäe luuq, 2001), a local (cultural) history book (Võromaa kodolugu, 2004), an illustrated vocabulary (Piitsynastu, 2004), and several audio and/or (audio-)visual materials. There are many more texts that may be used – and in fact are currently being used – for teaching as well: various fiction titles, poetry, a travelogue, print media, and a series presenting children's own creations.

statistics

Although the Võro language is taught in slightly fewer than half the number of schools in the language area (20 out of 49), the share of pupils studying it is low compared with the whole student body in the area's single structure – slightly over 5% in 2005/2006 (about 380 out of 7200) (EHIS; Võro Institute).

4 Secondary education

Secondary education is offered in eleven gymnasiums and secondary schools in the area. At the moment, the Võro language is not taught as a subject or used as a medium of instruction anywhere.

5 Vocational education

There are three Vocational Education Training (VET) schools in the area. The Võro language is not taught as a subject or used as a medium of instruction anywhere.

6 Higher education

structure

There are no universities in the area: tertiary education is provided in bigger VET schools. However, the Võro language can be studied at the University of Tartu. Tartu has offered the possibility of studying the Võro language as a discipline/subject since 1996, initially under the title “The Võro dialect” (awarded with 1 credit, equalling 0.7 ECTS in the European Credit Transfer System). From 2003 onwards, the discipline has been called “South Estonian I” for beginners and “South Estonian II” for advanced students and graduates – awarded with 2 credits (1.3 ECTS). In addition, a series of lectures called “Modern Southern-Estonian Literature” was given in 2004/2005.

legislation

In Estonia higher education is regulated by four different acts: the Universities Act, the Private Schools Act, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, and the Organisation of Research and Development Act. Those acts include references to the language of instruction to be used. The Universities Act states that the language of instruction at universities is Estonian and that the council of a university can decide upon the use of other languages (§22). The Private Schools Act states that the language of instruction of private schools is specified in the statutes of the private schools (§15). Finally, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act states that institutions of professional higher education should use Estonian as the language of instruction (§17).

language use

The language of instruction of all the above-mentioned courses is Võro. So far, two BA theses and one MA thesis have been defended in Võro. In collaboration with the Chair of History and Dialectology of Estonian Language in the Department of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (hereafter Department) of the University of Tartu, the Institute has published a series of academic publications (Publications of the Võro Institute / Võro Instituudi Toimõndusõq), including articles in Võro, Estonian, Finnish, Karelian and Kven – with summaries in English and in Võro. The yearbook of the Centre for South Estonian Language

and Cultural Studies at the University of Tartu (hereafter Centre) includes articles in Võro, mostly about linguistics, literature, and folklore. Võro is used during the annual interdisciplinary conference organised by the Institute and the Department.

teacher training The Centre offered a special course of 12 credits (8 ECTS) in 2002/2003. The course included grammar, language history, archaeology, ethnology, and literature. The graduates were 16 practising teachers. Current teachers are trained in the Võro Institute through different regular and irregular courses (see above). This, of course, does not meet all the needs connected with the teaching of Võro. There is a permanent shortage of motivated and skilled teachers. The problem is usually faced by the Võro Institute looking actively for new skilled teachers (language skills), by using and strengthening personal contacts, by negotiating with potential teachers and motivating them by providing a small fee in addition to their salaries from the Programme.

statistics Two hundred students have been awarded credits for passing this subject and in the 2005/2006 spring semester 20 students registered for the lectures (ÕIS database, University of Tartu). However, overall figures must be higher because the electronic credit database was introduced only in 2002 and previous records have not been transferred correctly.

7 Adult education

The Institute has some experience with teaching interested adults in-house, which took place in 2004. Although initial interest was considerable, the participation remained rather limited mostly due to busy schedules on the part of learners. The course was organised after working hours. However, when the target group shows an interest and resources are available, the Institute is ready to develop the course further and offer it again, but no special efforts are made to actively advertise the course. In 2001/2002, another small group of 3-4 people gathered for conversation lessons in the Centre in Tartu. In 2003-2005, a group of 6-10 interested Finnish speaking people learned Võro in the Institute and in Tuglas-Seura, Helsinki.

Since 1989, there have been annual (rotating) open summer universities – Kaika Summer Universities – throughout the Võro-speaking area, usually held in August. These are aimed at people interested in the Võro language and literature, theatre and music, local folklore, traditions, history, etc. The language used during classes is Võro (with some exceptions). Courses also include workshops and activities for children. Kaika Summer University brings together people who have their roots in the Võro-speaking area and are interested in Võro language, history, and culture. It has been a traditional event for 200-300 Võro-speakers every year.

8 Educational research

Educational research addressing the issues of schooling in Võro has so far been modest and random. The only serious attempt to study schooling in Võro is the work done by Kara D. Brown, as a doctoral candidate of Indiana University. As the subject is optional and does not belong to the national curriculum, she describes the Võro classes – like the other local aspects of culture – as peripheral in the school environment or *schoolscape*⁷ (Brown, 2005). Although the peripheral status may give teachers some independence in teaching, they have claimed a need for support and legitimacy that the national curriculum could provide. Her Ph.D. thesis provides more information on the subject⁸.

According to the results of a representative study held in 1998, most people between the ages of 25-64 claimed that the teaching Võro as an optional subject would be a desired measure to maintain the language. Most of them (67%) did not support compulsory learning of the language.

9 Prospects

Although local schoolscapes do not symbolically support the use of Võro, outreach and other activities show a growing interest in the topic. Võro is increasingly used in public signs and texts, mostly with marketing objectives (e.g. campaigning for local elections, commercials and advertisements for local products). Most of Võro toponymes have been included on the basic map of Estonia as parallel names. However, only some municipalities have made those endonyms official. Since 2000, the Programme has supported a number of projects and activities in Võro and in other South Estonian varieties on a competitive basis. Despite opposing claims against increasing public use of the functionally inferior variety, local people support it in more ambiguous domains such as literature, theatre and music, referred to as *culture* in the common sense of the term (cf. Pajusalu et al., 2000).

As for education, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research initiated a commission, whose task it was to evaluate the possibilities of teaching local themes and varieties in the national curriculum, to develop and elaborate a circular including suggestions for implementation of local themes in school curricula, and to make proposals for the introduction of local topics into the new version of the national curriculum. In 2005, the commission concluded that local themes and teaching local varieties should be included in the new national curriculum, at least as a general topic. At the same time, the Institute was planning to introduce Võro in secondary education as well: the curriculum of South Estonian language and cultural history has been drafted, and work on the chrestomathy is proceeding.

Despite a growing public interest and efforts exhibited by language activists, one has to admit that although the community is still bilingual, it is involved in a rapid process of language shift. Other market-driven changes are not supportive of education in Võro either. For example, there is a problem stemming from the closing down of small rural schools. Due to

economic backwardness, urbanisation, and a negative population increase, the rural areas have 'lost' many people to urban centres, and several schools were closed down following the rationalisation of the educational system. Paradoxically, rural schools are and have been crucial in teaching Võro for multiple reasons: pupils can act in a natural linguistic background, teachers – and especially headmasters – are more willing to co-operate, and rural communities may serve as functioning language environments.

The strong national identity expressed by Estonians seems to work against local identities: it is difficult to maintain multiple identities if dominating ideologies and the national education system do not provide much support for them other than the identification of the state and of national and ethnic minorities. Also, the spelling dispute acts as a confusing factor for interested Võro-speakers. Many hold the view that standardisation of Võro is working against local variants and subdialects. The current administrative division does not support the (perhaps already lost) unity of the language area, because the distribution of services takes place along different borders. Other problems seem rather similar to those experienced by other lesser-used languages: small budgets, a chronic lack of funding, a market favouring more widely used languages, and so on.

The nearest objectives and expectations held by language activists would include: an increase in the number of schools where Võro is taught and in the number of pupils who have been familiarised with Võro. Moreover, it is vital to bring the concept of family into the picture again, i.e. to motivate an increasing number of parents and grandparents with small children to use Võro with the next generation. This may be achieved by introducing different measures, by utilising possibilities offered by ICT and the worldwide web, and by booking continuous progress in educational and related research.

10 Summary statistics

Numbers of students and teachers enrolled in or teaching Võro and total number of pupils in 2005-2006

	Võro	total
Primary school pupils in the area	approx. 380	approx. 7200
Students in university/higher education	20	not available
Teachers	29	not available

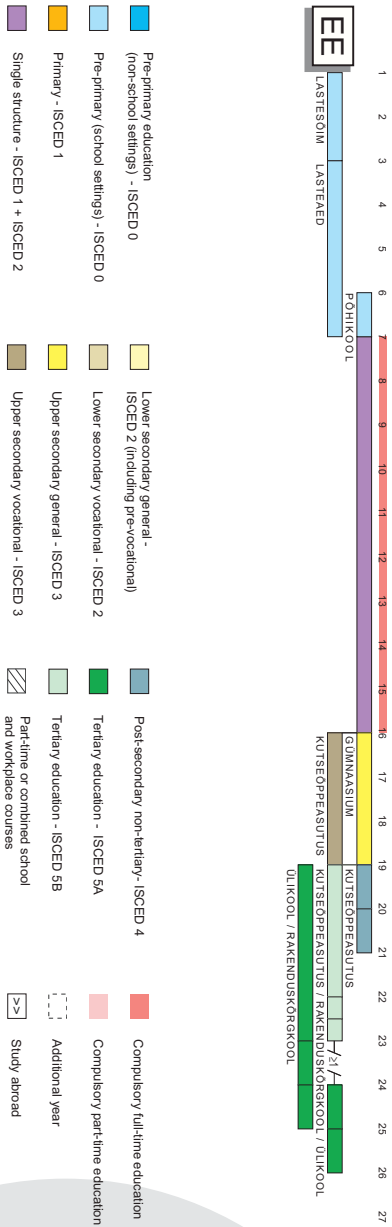
Source: EHIS; Võro Institute

Endnotes

- 1 Some authors believe that the destiny of old literary South Estonian was decided already in the 16th century, when it was full of vitality (see Ross, 2005).
- 2 The first Estonian awakening occurred in the 1880-1890s.
- 3 Language planning and policy (LPP) is seen here as “deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocations of their language codes” (Cooper, 1989, p. 45).
- 4 In Estonia parishes never had self government. However, population was recorded by churches. Thus the centuries of serfdom and restricted migration resulted in some parochial cultural unity
- 5 Ainsaar uses *deconcentration* for an exodus of the population from larger towns into less densely populated areas. *Suburbanisation* is a flow of the population into the nearest hinterland of bigger towns. Finally, *counterurbanisation* is migration into more distant areas. (Ainsaar, 2004, p.14).
- 6 Eesti Hariduse Infosüsteem: <http://ehis.hm.ee/> Retrieved: November 15, 2005.
- 7 Physical and social setting in which teaching and learning takes place (Brown, 2005, p.79).
- 8 Kara D. Brown. *Learning the Language: International, National & Local dimensions of Regional-Language Education in Estonia*. ©Kara D. Brown ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Education system in Estonia

Organisation of the education system in Estonia, 2003/04



Source: Eurydice.

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Wikipedia in Võro

<http://fiu-vro.wikipedia.org>



Other websites on minority languages

- Mercator** **www.mercator-central.org**
General site of the Mercator-project. It will lead you to the three specialised centres:
- Mercator Research Centre** **www.mercator-research.eu**
Homepage of the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. The website contains the series of Regional dossiers, a database with organisations, a bibliography, information on current activities, and many related links to minority languages.
- Mercator-Media** **www.aber.ac.uk/~merwww/**
Homepage of Mercator-Media. It provides information on media and minority languages in the EU.
- Mercator-Legislation** **www.ciemen.org/mercator**
Homepage of Mercator-Legislation. It provides information on minority languages and legislation in the EU.
- European Commission** **http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages/langmin/langmin_en.html**
On the website of the European Commission information is given on the EU's support for regional or minority languages.
- Council of Europe** **<http://conventions.coe.int>**
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995). European Treaty Series 148 and 157, Strasbourg.

Eurydice

www.eurydice.org

Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The sites provides information on all European education systems and education policies.

EBLUL

www.eblul.org

Homepage of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. This site provides general information on lesser used languages as well as on projects, publications, and events.

Eurolang

www.eurolang.net

Eurolang provides coverage of the concerns felt in the minority language regions in the European Union. Eurolang is EBLUL's news service.

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