

Personless Estonian
Isikuvabadus eesti keeles
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This paper concerns phenomena related to the category of person in Estonian, especially the reference of the main participants of the communicative situations – the speaker and the listener.

In Estonian, typically the reference to the speaker is made by using the pronoun *mina~ma* 'I' and the verb ending *-n*; the reference to the listener is made by the pronoun *sina~sa* 'you' and *-d*; as a polite variant, also the pronoun *teie~te* and the verbal ending *-te* may be used. As a matter of fact, such a double system is used only with indicative affirmative verb forms. Verb endings have been lost in negation, in quotative and jussive moods. In conditional, verb endings may be used optionally.

Estonian is a pro-drop language. It means that personal pronouns may be left out even if verb endings are not used and the reference to the person remains unclear. Such usages have been seen as a result of the politeness strategies (Pajusalu&Pajusalu 2004), but also as a result of difficulties in choosing between *sina* ja *teie*. According to Keevallik (1999), the rules governing the choice between *sina* and *teie* are vague and vary a lot.

In addition, there are many other constructions in Estonian what are used to avoid choosing between *sina* and *teie*; interestingly, many constructions are used also to avoid a clear reference to the speaker. Such constructions can be seen as impersonal constructions where the agent is defocused (cf. Siewierska 2008).

In this paper, I give an overview of strategies which are used to avoid a clear reference to the speaker and the listener. The data comes from the corpora of Estonian and from the media.

References

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