

## Synonymous Locative Constructions in Estonian

Jane Klavan  
University of Tartu  
[jane.klavan@ut.ee](mailto:jane.klavan@ut.ee)

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

1

## Expressing Space in Estonian

### Locative cases:

	Lative	Locative	Separative
Interior	laua-sse <b>illative</b> [into table]	laua-s <b>inessive</b> [in table]	laua-st <b>elative</b> [out of table]
Exterior	laua-le <b>allative</b> [onto table]	laua-l <b>adessive</b> [on table]	laua-lt <b>ablative</b> [off table]

### Adpositions, mainly postpositions:

peale [on:ALL, onto]	peal [on]	pealt [on:ABL, off/from on]
sisse [in:ILL, into]	sees [in]	seest [in:ELA, out of]

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

2

## Parallel Use of Locative Cases and Adpositional Constructions

“The vase is on the table”



1) **Locative Case Cx:** Vaas on laual.  
vase:nom be-prs:sg3 table:ade

2) **Adpositional Cx:** Vaas on laua peal.  
vase:nom be-prs:sg3 table:gen on

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

3

## Synonymous Locative Constructions in Estonian

### Handbook of Estonian (Erelt, M., Erelt, T., Ross, K. 2007: 191):

- several adpositions have more or less the same meanings as case inflections

### Linguistic Studies on Estonian Locative Constructions

- Ojava, L. 2009. A Production Task on the Use of Adessive Case and the Adposition *peal* in Expressing Spatial Relations.
- Kesküla, K. 2009. Postposition *peal* and Adessive Case in Expressing Spatial and Abstract Relations in Estonian.
- Salm, S. 2010. The Factors Influencing the Use of Estonian Adpositions *sees* ‘in’ and *peal* ‘on’ and the Corresponding Locative Cases.
- Klavan, J.; Kesküla, K.; Ojava, L. (forthc.). The division of labour between synonymous locative cases and adpositions: the Estonian adessive and the adposition *peal* ‘on’.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

4

## Parallel Use of Locative Cases and Adpositional Constructions



X is on Y

1) X on Y-I  
X be:PRES-3SG Y:ADE

2) X on Y-i  
X be:PRES-3SG Y:GEN on

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

5

## Grammatical Synonymy

- Cognitive grammar** (Langacker 1987, 2008) & **construction grammar** (Goldberg 1995, 2006)  
=> there is no (absolute) synonymy in language
- The Principle of No Synonymy:**  
“If two constructions are **syntactically distinct**, they must be **semantically or pragmatically distinct**” (Goldberg 1995: 67)
- The concept of **construal**: one and the same situation may be construed in alternative ways (Langacker 1987: 138-141, 2008: 55-89).  
– It may be hypothesised that locative cases and adpositions are means to express one and the same situation from a different perspective.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

6

## General Prediction

- Case affixes are used to express more abstract relations and adpositions more concrete ones:
  - **Adpositions** are semantically **more specific** than cases and they are used to express the **less predictable spatial meanings**;
  - **Cases**, on the other hand, are **more abstract** and used to express **more frequent spatial meanings**.

(e.g. Bartens 1978, Comrie 1986, Hagège 2010: 37-38, Lestrade 2010b, Luraghi 1991: 66-67, Ojutkangas 2008).

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

7

## The Data

- Adessive**: the fiction sub-corpus of the morphologically disambiguated corpus (size 104 000 words; <http://www.cl.ut.ee/korpused/morfkorpus/>)
- Peal**: the fiction sub-corpus of the balanced corpus (size 5 million words; <http://www.cl.ut.ee/korpused/grammatikakorpus/>)

	Adessive	Peal
<b>Synonymous occurrences</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Non-synonymous occurrences</b>	1397	268
<b>Total nr of instances analysed</b>	<b>1697</b>	<b>568</b>

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

8

## The Variables Coded

Total number of variables coded: **32**

- 1 dependent variable** -> realization of the locative phrase: "ade", "peal"
- 31 independent variables**:
  - Semantic (21 variables)**: properties of Tr and Lm (animacy, countability, mobility, size, number, meaning group, type), type of relation between Tr and Lm, relative size between Tr and Lm, type of contact between Tr and Lm
  - Morpho-phonological (3 variables)**: lexical complexity of LmP, length of the LmP in words and syllables
  - Syntactic (7 variables)**: word order, clause type, verb, syntactic function of LmP, word class of Tr/Lm

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

9

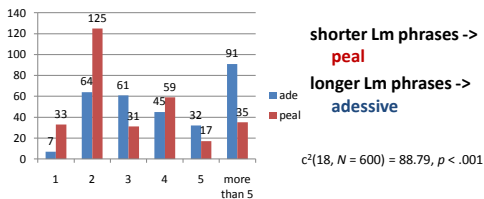
## Significant Variables

- Semantic variables**:
  - Meaning group of the Lm: abstract, body part, location, object
  - Mobility of the Lm: mobile, static
  - Size of the Lm: small, large
  - Animacy of the Lm: animate, inanimate
  - Relative size between Tr and Lm: canonical, same, non-canonical
- Morpho-phonological variables**:
  - Lexical complexity of the Lm word: compound word, single word
  - Length of the Lm phrase in syllables
  - Length of the Lm phrase in words
- Syntactic variables**:
  - Word class of the Lm: noun, pronoun
  - Word class of the Tr: noun, pronoun, verb
  - Number of the Tr: singular, plural

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

10

## Length of the Lm phrases in syllables



(1) MJ\_A: **Kai peal**oli meeletu trügimine...

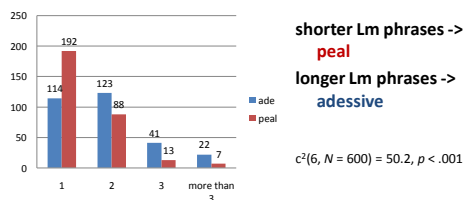
On the pier people were pushing madly...

(2) ILU1980\stkt0105: Ja seal need isandad tal **divanitoolidel** on.  
And there his masters are, on the couch chairs.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

11

## Length of the Lm phrase in words



(3) MJ\_A: **Kai peal**oli meeletu trügimine...

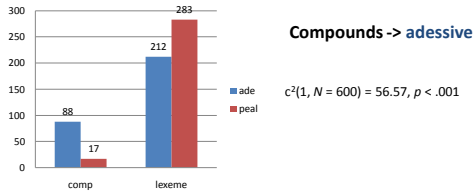
On the pier people were pushing madly...

(4) ILU1980\stkt0105: ... seisab **mingi kirikut meenutava hoone trepil**  
... he/she is standing on the steps of some building that looked like a church.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

12

## Lexical complexity of the Lm

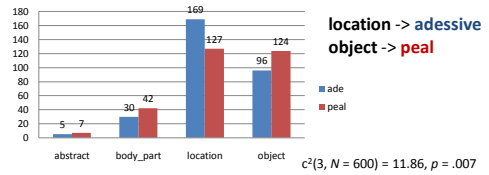


- (5) ILU1980\stkt0063: Hele kolmnurk **rõdupõrandal** suurenes tasapisi.  
The light triangle **on the balcony floor** was slowly growing.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

13

## Type of Lm

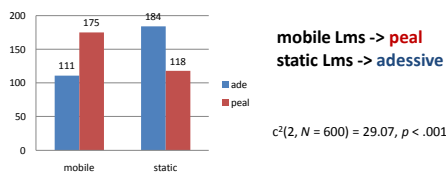


- (10) ILU1980\stkt0038: Järve liikumatuses hakkab inimene **teisel kaldal** kohe silma.  
In the stillness of the lake you notice the person **on the other side** immediately.
- (11) PB\_S: Istusin **laua peal**.  
I was sitting **on the desk**.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

14

## Mobility of Lm

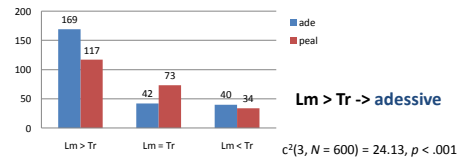


- (6) HK\_L: Elektripliidi kõrval **kapi peal** oli veekeetja.  
There was a kettle **on the cupboard** next to the stove.
- (7) ILU1980\stkt0063: Hele kolmnurk **rõdupõrandal** suurenes tasapisi.  
The light triangle **on the balcony floor** was slowly growing.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

15

## Relative Size between Tr and Lm

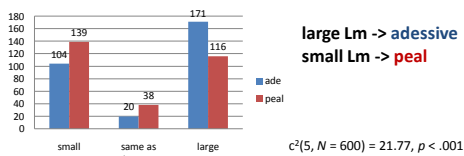


- (8) ILU1980\stkt0111: Kohiramm veetis suurema aja ajast **üksikul saarel** ...  
Kohiramm spent the majority of his time **on an isolated island**...

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

16

## Lm Size



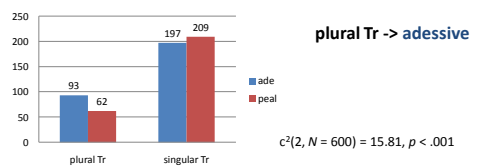
- (12) ILU1980\stkt0111: Kohiramm veetis suurema aja ajast **üksikul saarel** ...  
Kohiramm spent the majority of his time **on an isolated island**...

- (13) KR\_M: "Jalutame sinna eemale , seal **kivide peal** on mõnus istuda..."  
'Let's walk there, it is nice to sit there **on the rocks**...'

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

17

## Plural vs. singular Tr

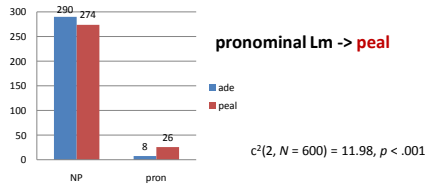


- (14) ILU1980\stkt0023: Paigad **küünarnukidel ja hõlmadel** tükkisid lahti ...  
Patches **on the elbows and flaps** started to come apart...

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

18

## Word Class of Lm



(16) JKruus\_S: ... laev , mille **peal** nad seal lõunas merel lõbusõitu tegid ,  
läks põhja ...  
... the ship, **on which** they were cruising there on the sea there in the  
south, sank ...

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

19

## laual vs laua peal 'on the table'

- Lexical complexity of the Lm

LocPh	compound		lexeme		Total
ade	5	0.42	7	0.58	12
peal	2	0.18	9	0.82	11

- Number of the Tr

LocPh	notap		plural		singular		Total
ade	0	0.00	5	0.42	7	0.58	12
peal	1	0.09	2	0.18	8	0.73	11

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

20

## teel vs tee peal 'on the road'

- Lexical complexity of the Lm

LocPh	comp		lexeme		Total
ade	8	0.67	4	0.33	12
peal	0	0.00	16	1.00	16

## trepil vs trepi peal 'on the stairs'

- Lexical complexity of the Lm

LocPh	comp		lexeme		Total
ade	2	0.2	8	0.8	10
peal	0	0.0	6	1.0	6

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

21

## Conclusions (1):

- Adposition peal** tends to be used when:
  - the Lm phrase is **shorter than 5 syllables**
  - the Lm phrase **shorter than 3 words**
  - Lm is **mobile**
  - Lm ≤ Tr**
  - Lm is **small**
  - Lm is an **object**
  - Lm is **animate**
  - Lm and/or Tr is a **pronoun**

=> Adpositions are more specific than case

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

22

## Conclusions (2):

- Adessive** is used more frequently when:
  - the Lm phrase is **longer than 5 syllables**
  - the Lm phrase is **longer than 3 words**
  - Lm is a **compound**
  - Lm is **static**
  - Lm > Tr**
  - Lm is **large**
  - Lm is a **location**
  - Tr is **plural**

=> Cases are more abstract than adpositions

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

23

## Further Issues

- Correlational analysis**
- More corpus data:** spoken language
- Further experimental studies** – both linguistic and meta-linguistic
- Other factors:**
  - Language acquisition (both L1 and L2)
  - Idiolect & dialect
  - Register
  - Language history

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

24

## References

- Erelt, M., Erelt, T., and Ross, K. 2007. Eesti keele käsiraamat. [Handbook of Estonian]. Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.
- Goldberg, A. 1995. *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, A. E. 2006. *Constructions at Work: The Nature of Generalization in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klavan, J., Kesküla, K. and Ojava L. *To appear*. The division of labour between synonymous locative cases and adpositions: the Estonian adessive and the adposition peal 'on'. In S. Kittilä, K. Västi and J. Ylikoski (eds.), *Studies on Case, Animacy and Semantic Roles*. John Benjamins.
- Langacker, R. W. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Volume I: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, R. W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

25

# THANK YOU!

A synonym is a word you use if you can't spell the other one.

**Burt Bacharach (1928 - )** *US songwriter*

SKY: Re-Thinking Synonymy 2010, Helsinki

26