

Estonian syntactic cases are actually semantic

Merilin Miljan
merilin@ling.ed.ac.uk

Estonian, a non-Indo-European language, boasts with a total of fourteen morphological cases. These fourteen cases include three grammatical (syntactic) cases and eleven semantic (independent) ones. The grammatical cases are NOMINATIVE, GENITIVE and PARTITIVE, the rest include six locative cases (interior and exterior) and semantic cases such as TRANSLATIVE ('becoming'), TERMINATIVE ('up to, until'), ESSIVE ('as'), ABESSIVE ('without'), and COMITATIVE ('with'). Traditionally, a distinction is made between grammatical and semantic cases, a fact which is reflected in the grammars of modern Estonian, as well as in various syntactic theories more generally. Yet, I am going to show that the division of the morphological cases into abstract (syntactic) and concrete (semantic) is not entirely justified in the light of the Estonian data. Instead, I will argue that grammatical cases in Estonian are actually semantic, though in terms of underspecification.