

Linguistic consultation services in Estonia

Peeter Päll (Institute of the Estonian Language)

Language consultation service started with the establishment of the institute (at the time, Institute of Language and Literature) in 1947 but regular service was introduced on 12 August 1966. The Institute of the Estonian Language is the main consultation centre for language questions in Estonia. Advice is given on issues regarding standard language: orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics, etc. Questions concern general language, terminology and names; for terminology there is a special department in our institute and for names there exist various databases and authorities as well.

Largely the present services can be divided into two main directions: 1) direct consultations to interested persons and bodies either by telephone or by e-mail; 2) self-service consultation whereby various electronic resources may be used to find an answer. Telephone service currently runs on all working days from 9–12 and 13–17, an average workload is 30 calls per day; 6000 per year. The quantity has slightly decreased in recent years, probably thanks to the addition of electronic consultation services. All recommendations are registered in a database that currently holds records starting from the year 1991 (more than 160,000 records). Advice by e-mail was introduced in 2004 with an online webform through which the questions come to our database. The number of e-mails is still increasing, currently it amounts to almost 3000 mails per year.

Users can also refer to our electronic sources independently: 1) *Keelenõuvakk* (consultations' database, an edited extraction of the phone calls database, 7600 records); 2) short recommendations on specific topics on the consultation service's homepage (*keeleabi.eki.ee*); 3) articles from language consultation volumes issued originally as booklets; 4) various other databases (place names, declension of surnames, advisory dictionary of document language). As most of our dictionaries are available online, including the Dictionary of Standard Estonian (*Eesti õigekeelsussõnaraamat ÕS*), these can be included as reference sources. Dictionaries are well used, e.g. online ÕS has more than 19,000 queries daily. All main sources are integrated into an online application called *e-keelenõu* (electronic consultations, *kn.eki.ee*).

Currently there are 9 people involved with language consultations but this is not their only (and often not the main) task. Our tasks also include compiling and updating the Dictionary of Standard Estonian (ÕS), compiling the online Handbook of Standard Estonian (*õigekeelsuskäsiraamat*), providing courses for standard language use (incl. for teachers; there are other actors also in this field, e.g. the Language Care Centre in Tartu where our institute is one of its founders), various actions for language care, including annual competition for clear communication awards, articles and public lectures, etc. Some of us specialize into names planning, EU language use, clear language (the Clarity movement), etc. We work in close cooperation with departments within our institute (mainly the department for dictionaries and the department for terminology), as well as with our universities. Main rules for the standard language are approved by the Language Board at the Mother Tongue Society (*Emakeele Seltsi keeleteimkond*).

In planning future activities of our services we try to find ways to encourage people to find answers independently, which allows us to reach more people in language matters. We need to develop more user-friendly applications and use the opportunities provided to us by modern technology. Acting in social media environment in an accountable and trustworthy manner is certainly our priority in coming years. We constantly monitor the feedback and analyze our databases in order to serve better our community.