

# From similarities to differences: the influence of the related first language on the acquisition of Finnish and Estonian

Annekatriin Kaivapalu

Jyväskylä University/Tallinn University

The 5th Autumn Seminar of Corpus Linguistics

27.10.2010



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ



# Background 1

- Transfer (cross-linguistic influence, L1 influence) is now universally recognized as a **major factor** in second language acquisition (Granger 2008)
- "the ultimate goal of transfer research [is] the explanation of how the languages a person knows **interact in the mind**" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 111)



# Background 2

- Most studies of cross-linguistic influence have been based on limited and manually analyzed data
- The few empirical studies based on learner corpora have focused on large Indo-European languages, mainly English
- The results are not automatically applicable to structurally and typologically different languages, e.g. Estonian and Finnish



# Aims of the presentation

- To introduce the project *Cross-linguistic influence and second language acquisition: corpus-based research* of Tallinn University
- To discuss some of the preliminary results of the project



# Cross-linguistic influence and second language acquisition: corpus-based research

- A research project of the Institute of Estonian Language and Culture of Tallinn University
- Financed by Estonian Science Foundation (2010-2013)
- Is based on the parallel use of learner Estonian and learner Finnish corpora
  - Estonian Interlanguage Corpus (EIC)  
<http://evkk.tlu.ee>
  - International Corpus of Learner Finnish (ICLFI)  
<http://www oulu.fi/oppijankieli>

# Research topic

How cross-linguistic influence, especially the first language (L1) influence determines second and foreign language (L2) acquisition and learning (SLA)?



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ



# Some objectives and possible outcomes of the project

- To examine morphological, morphosyntactical and lexical influence and to find out differences between **closely related** and **unrelated** L1 influence on SLA
- To find out **factors interacting and competing** with L1 influence in the acquisition and processing of L2
- To investigate relationships between **L1 influence** and **L2 proficiency**



# The starting points

- When symmetrical objective similarity occurs between the structures of Estonian and Finnish, the cross-linguistic influence is also symmetrical
- Estonian learners of Finnish and Finnish learners of Estonian prefer to use semantically, fonologically and morphologically similar forms of both languages in the producing of target language





# Data: Pilot corpora of EIC and ICLFI

	<b>EIC</b>	<b>EIC</b>	<b>ICLFI</b>	<b>ICLFI</b>
	<b>FinB1</b>	<b>FinB2</b>	<b>EstB1</b>	<b>EstB2</b>
Texts	21	24	21	24
Tokens	3500	4600	4385	5859
Length of texts	44-589	46-578	63-404	74-549
Length on average	167	192	208	244



# Method

- All inflectional forms of nouns were selected from the texts
- All selected forms were analyzed focusing on convergence and divergence between Estonian and Finnish
- Forms of relative singular
  - EIC – B1 23, B2 41
  - ICLFI – B1 87, B2 75



# Estonian and Finnish: convergence of relative singular

- Words with the same or a very similar stem, meaning and inflection in Finnish and Estonian (SSSI)

*lopu + sta*

end + ELAT

*lõpu + st*

end + ELAT

- Words with a different stem and meaning, but similar inflectional pattern (DSSI)

*taulu + sta*

picture + ELAT

*laulu + st*

song + ELAT

- Close stem, the same meaning, but different inflectional pattern which exists in other words of the learners' L1 (CSDI)

*luonno + sta vs. linnu + st*    *looduse + st vs. lautase + sta*

nature + ELAT    bird + ELAT    nature + ELAT    plate + ELAT



# Estonian and Finnish: divergence of relative singular

- Words with the same or a very similar stem and meaning in Finnish and Estonian, but with different stem changes in inflection (SSDI)

<i>keskuk<b>se</b> + sta</i>	<i>kesk<b>u</b>se + st</i>
centre + ELAT	centre + ELAT

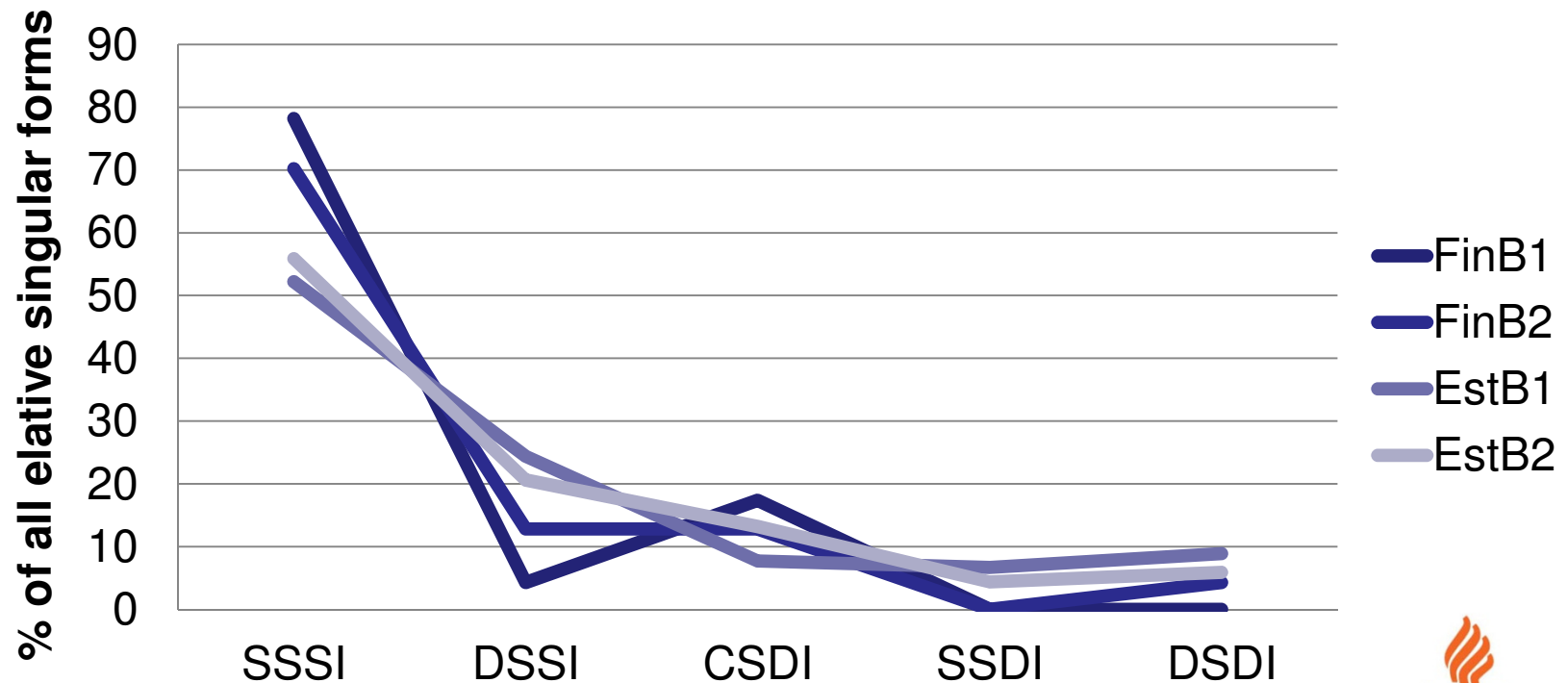
- Words with both a different stem and inflection (DSDI)

<i>tilant<b>ee</b> + sta</i>	<i>olukor<b>ra</b> + st</i>
situation + ELAT	situation + ELAT



# Preliminary results

## Usage of relative singular forms by Finnish learners of Estonian and Estonian learners of Finnish



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ



# Some preliminary conclusions

- Both Estonian learners of Finnish and Finnish learners of Estonian prefer to use forms based on similar lexico-grammatical patterns in L1 and L2
- The cross-linguistic influence on the producing process of Estonian and Finnish relative singular forms is symmetrical
- For Finnish learners of Estonian lexical similarity is more salient; for Estonian learners of Finnish, in addition to lexical similarity, similarity of inflectional pattern is also quite salient



# References

- Granger, Sylviane 2008. Paper presented in ASKeladden seminar in Bergen University 23.10.2008  
<http://askeladden.uib.no/begivenheter.page>
- Jarvis, Scott, & Pavlenko, Aneta 2008. *Crosslinguistic influence in language and cognition*. New York/London: Routledge.
- Ringbom, Håkan 2007. *Cross-linguistic Similarity in Foreign Language Learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.

