



NEW BILINGUALISM: RESULTS OF ESTONIAN-UKRAINIAN NARRATIVE SKILLS TEST



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EAAL CONFERENCE, 18-19.04.2024

INTRODUCTION

- Since 2022 the number of ethnic Ukrainians in Estonia has abruptly increased (about 50,000 refugees have arrived). While Estonian-Ukrainian bilinguals have been living in Estonia before that, it is nevertheless a new type of bilingualism, especially as far as Ukrainian children who learn Estonian in various schools are concerned.
- Estonian-Ukrainian bilingualism is relatively new: it is not known how Ukrainian children acquire Estonian and how their language proficiency evolves.
- Vabaduse Kool (Freedom School) - established in 2022, especially for Ukrainian refugees children. Ukrainian-Estonian immersion school (grades 7-12). Partial late immersion (60% of the subjects in Estonian, 40% in Ukrainian)



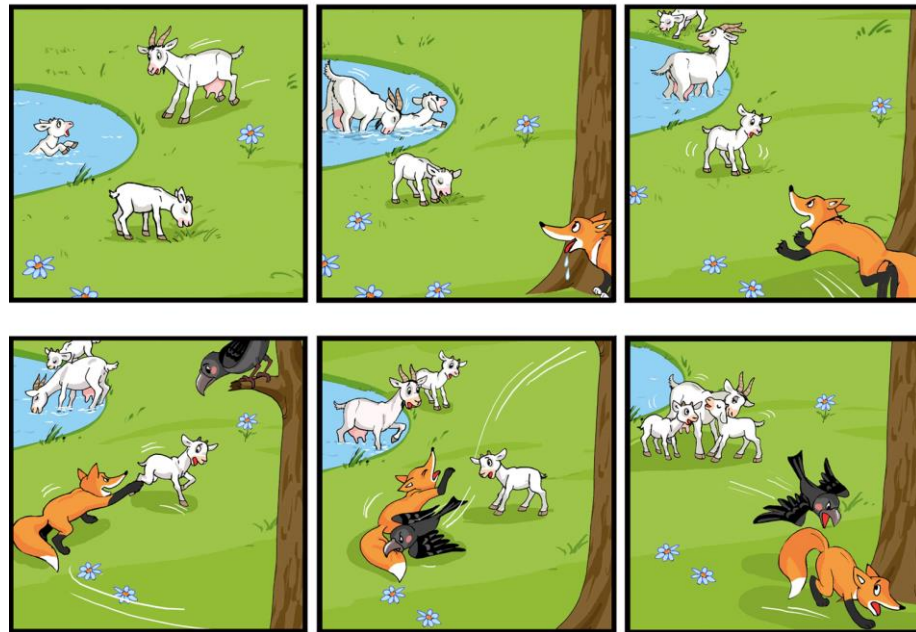
AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- The aim is to establish the level of narrative skills in Ukrainian and in Estonian after 1.5 years of learning Estonian and partly in Estonian.
- Narrative skills are considered as the most general language skills (Gagarina et al. 2016), so one can assume that good narrative skills in L1 are an advantage for good narrative skills in other languages. Therefore, we look into **connections between the complexity of the Ukrainian and the Estonian narratives.**
- In addition, the children's lexicon size in both languages and the distribution of various parts of speech is discussed.



METHOD

- Standard narrative skills test with 6 pictures (MAIN) administered to 15-16 students of the Ukrainian-Estonian school (15 children, 8 girls, 7 boys).
- Two different testers conducted the test (two different stories) in either language on different days.
- The macro-structure elements of the narrative (the composition of the story, understanding) were determined according to MAIN standard protocol; on the micro-level, the lexicon and parts of speech as well as the number of tokens and types were investigated.

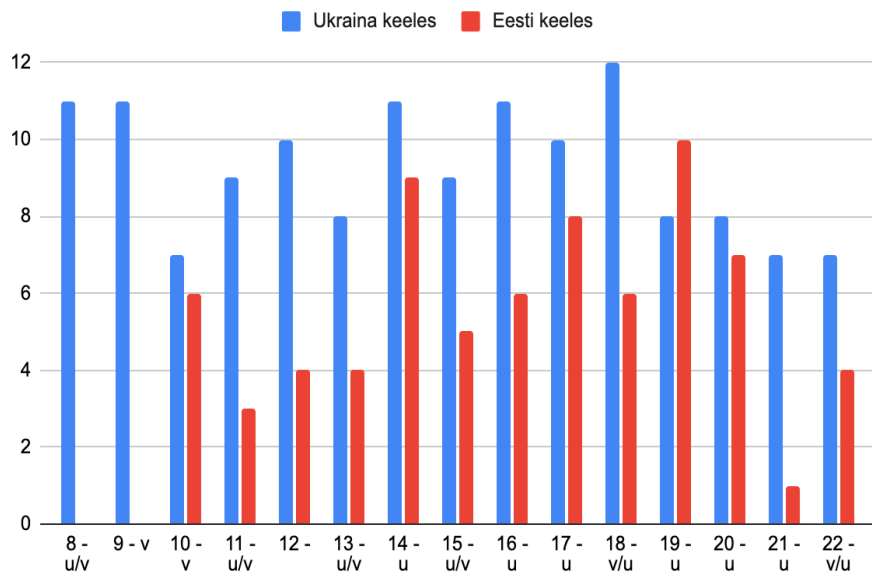


THE CHILDREN'S LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

- **Home languages:** 7 Ukrainian, 2 Russian, 3 Ukrainian/Russian, 3 Russian/Ukrainian, 1 unknown
- Does this show the real picture or is it wishful thinking/projection of one's desired identity?
- Of 15 children, one wished to switch to Russian, others narrated in Ukrainian.



RESULTS 1. THE STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVES



- The macrostructure consists of the constituent parts of the text, indicating whether the narrative has a beginning and an end, whether it provides the time, place and characters of the action, and the extent to which the aims of the action, the reactions and intentions of the characters are reflected (Shapiro, Hudson 1991).
- As has been shown, the **home language does not necessarily predict richness or complexity of the narrative**. Two children with Russian as their home language showed comparable (or even better) performance than some only Ukrainian speaking children. The Estonian narratives were not more complex for those with a more complex Ukrainian narrative.



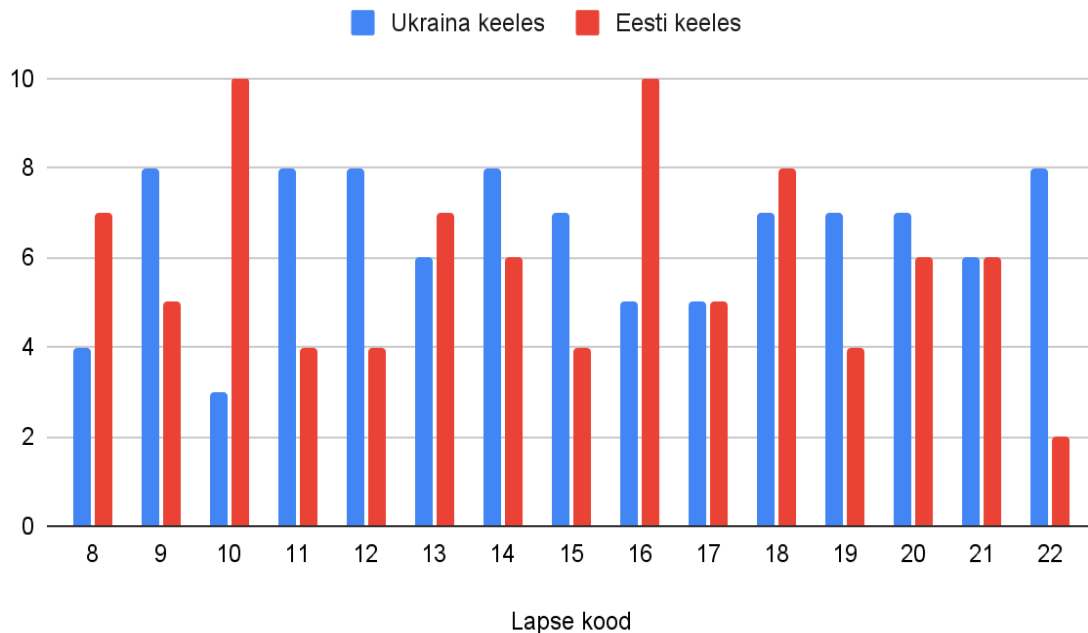
RESULTS 2. COMPREHENSION OF THE NARRATIVE

- The quite good results in Estonian show that there is some passive knowledge of Estonian.
- The story in the picture was understood, although there were no linguistic tools to convey the story.
- **The main difficulty was with the meaning of the verb *tundma* 'to feel', which meant that only a few answered the questions on IST words correctly.**



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RESULTS 3. The features of the Ukrainian narratives

- Surzhyk/Suržyk - a cluster of Ukrainian-Russian transitional varieties; “mixed language” in popular perception, although does not fit mixed languages criteria in the strict sense
- Rather a fused lect: patterns of mixing: Ukrainian phonology and inflectional morphology, a lot of Russian lexicon; morphosyntax can be both Ukrainian and Russian
- One child mentioned with shame that she speaks Suržyk, however, only one word in her narrative would qualify as such: *okončannja* ‘(nerve) endings’, cf. Russian *окончания* and Ukrainian *закінчення*



RESULTS 3

- Difficulties in classification of lexemes: contacts between closely related varieties; difference between Standard Ukrainian and naturalistic usage
- All children assigned feminine gender to *собака* ‘dog’ as in Russian; in Standard Ukrainian it is masculine
- A Russian stem with Ukrainian phonology and/or morphology was classified as Suržhyk but still there were some unclear cases
- For closely related language, probably, clause or utterance level would be better, and not parts of speech approach?
- *kljuv* ‘beak’ - Russian (Ukrainian *дзюб* *dzjub*), not a very frequent word, so we cannot decide how usual it is in spoken Ukrainian, but *kljuvyky* ‘little beaks’ has a clear Ukrainian phonology = Suržyk?



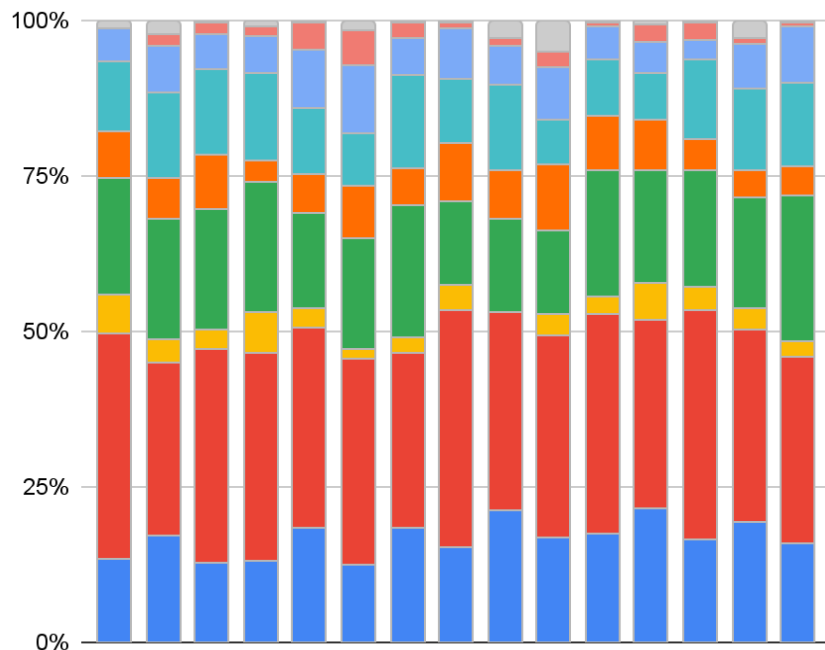
RESULTS 3.

- Significant differences between narratives. The smallest number of tokens: 72 (173 types), the highest 179 (458 types)
- Since the children are older than MAIN protocol recommends, understanding could be 0 points based on formal criteria
- Answers based on experience and knowledge of the world: the dog pulls the cat's tail because it is a sensitive place with a lot of nerve endings
- The majority had difficulties in formulating what mother-bird would think about the dog and the cat
- Adult-like formulations: *aggressive; allegorical; in the biological sense; I don't have an exact solution for this problem* etc.

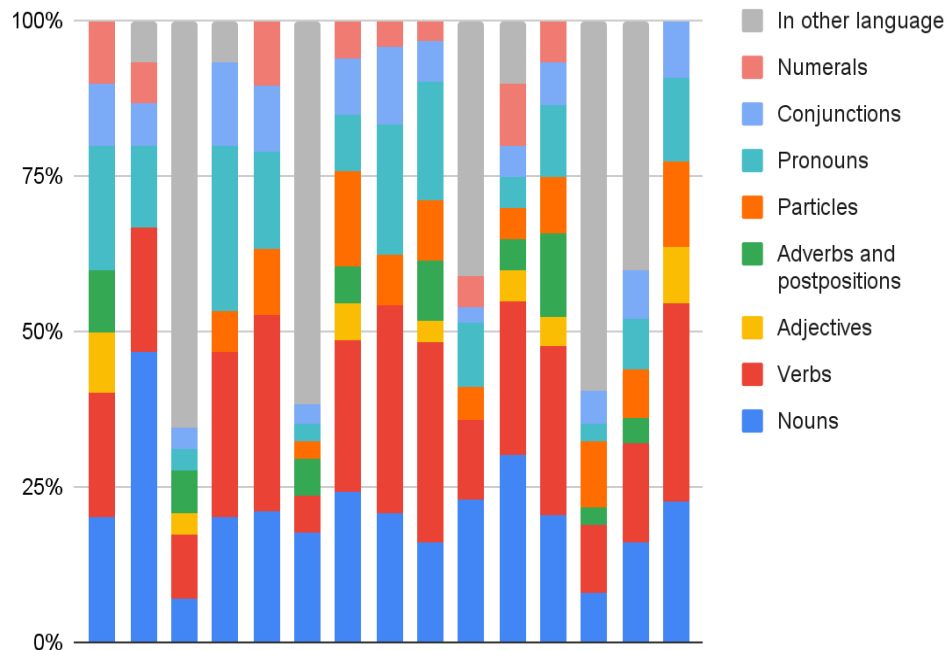


RESULTS 4. Distribution of the Vocabulary into parts of speech (lemmas)

UKRAINIAN

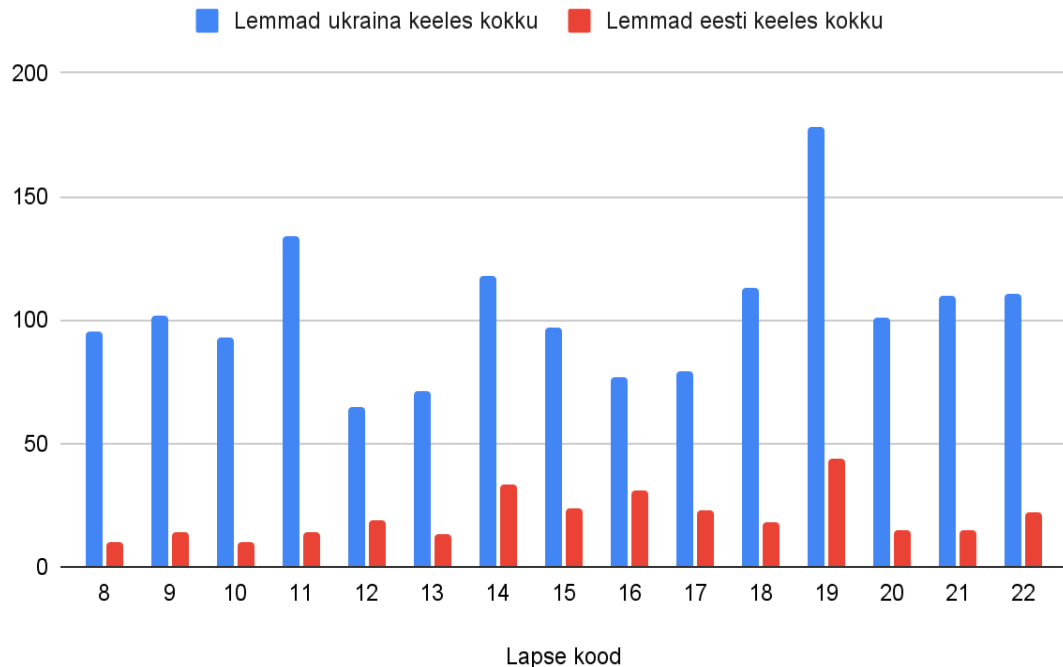


ESTONIAN



RESULTS 5. LEMMAS IN BOTH LANGUAGE

- Vocabulary in Estonian is limited (10-44 lemmas).
- Of the three children with the best vocabulary in Ukrainian, two have a larger vocabulary also in Estonian.
- There is a correlation between the vocabulary of the two languages ($p=0.06$), but it is not statistically significant (due to the small sample size).



RESULTS 6. THE FEATURES OF ESTONIAN NARRATIVES

- The stories are short, lack coherence and do not form a meaningful whole. Structurally were children's narratives more like a descriptions or namings. Children don't have linguistic inventory to create a story.
- Children often use words from other languages, e.g. English or Russian.

Example

*PAR: see on mother sheep.
*PAR: see on daughter sheep.
*PAR: see on other daughter sheep.
*PAR: ja see on river.
*PAR: ja see on see rebane.
*PAR: ja see on tree rebane.
*PAR: see from a tree.
*PAR: mother sheep say other daughter sheep.
*PAR: and other daughter sheep it's a grass.
*INV: aga proovi eesti keeles nii palju, nagu sa oskad.
*PAR: no rebane walk järve.
*PAR: järve.
*PAR: metsakits.
*PAR: see on kõik.



CONCLUSIONS

- Although no clear correlation between complexity of narratives in Ukrainian and Estonian was attested, one can still assume that the hypothesis can be confirmed on a larger sample and narrative skills in Ukrainian may be linked to narrative skills in Estonian.
- The Estonian-language narratives were brief and lacked the necessary coherence; both lexicon and grammar resources were insufficient for production of a coherent story.
- Yet the children do have a passive command of Estonian because nearly half of them have higher scores for comprehension in Estonian than in Ukrainian. Possibly, they had already understood the procedure during the Ukrainian test and they did not over-analyse; the responses are short and more concrete.
- The length and complexity (the no of lexemes) does not depend on the declared home language.
- Several peculiar points: the abundance of verbs in the Ukrainian-language narratives; the co-occurrence of closely related varieties in the narratives etc.
- The text can be administered to older children (14-16 years old) but in that case it is necessary to acknowledge possible limitations: adult-like logic and lexicon. If the proficiency in one language (in Estonian in this case) is pretty small, the test is not suitable for measurement of language skills.



References

Gagarina, Natalia; Klop, Daleen; Tsimpli, Ianthi M.; Walters, Joel 2016. Narrative abilities in bilingual children. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 37, 11–17. doi: 10.1017/S0142716415000399.

Shapiro, Lauren R.; Hudson, Judith A. 1991. Tell me a make-believe story: Coherence and cohesion in young children picture-elicited narratives. – *Developmental Psychology*, 27 (6), 960–974. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.27.6.960>

Thank you for listening!

Aitäh! Дякую!