

## Variation, change, and the Estonian partitive evidential

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This presentation proposes an explanation for semantic change and form variation in sentences containing the Estonian partitive evidential. The gradient character of grammaticalization phenomena is captured in constraints in Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG).

**The data** concerns the evidential marker (*lugevat*, (1)) that has evolved from an aspectual partitive (as in *raamatut*, (1)) of the present participle form.

- (1) *Ta leidis poisi raamatut kirjutavat.*  
He found the boy writing a book.

The form has become established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (K84, K85, I53, C91, H01, T08b); its semantics is parallel with that of the Estonian aspectual partitive (T04), which in turn originates from the nominal part-whole marking (L91, L75, K63).

Estonian evidentials express indirectness and epistemic modality (E01, E06, R71, E93, A04, E02a, E02b, K02, K07, K97, M02, M99, S06); these meanings appear in sentences with the partitive evidential as well (T08b, T08c). However, while many complementation patterns are strikingly dependent on the type of meaning (T08c), the correlation is only partial and heavily dependent on verb class if we examine the form of the common argument of the base and matrix predicates. The argument is expected to become more like an aspectual object (U69, U85). Table 1 features a sample of the distribution of epistemic (E) and indirect (I) meanings. Aspectual case with perception verbs as in (3) is well established with both meanings, and it appears in case of no clear epistemic or indirect meaning (5). Only indirectness or epistemic meanings occur without aspectual case (2, 4) (but note the variation between plural and singular), possibly since these meanings have frequent parallel forms of expression with these matrix verbs.

	Example	Case sg	Case pl	Asp. Sg	Asp. pl.	Sem.
(2)	uskus poisid (poisse) tulevat uskus poissi tulevat He believed that the boy(s) will come	part	nom (part)	+	- (+)	E
(3)	kuulis poisse tulevat kuulis poissi tulevat He heard that the boy(s) is/are coming	part	part	+	+	I, E
(4)	ütles poisse/poisid tulevat ütles poisi (poissi) tulevat He said that the boy(s) would come	gen	part /nom	- (+)	- /+	I
(5)	leidis poisi laulvat leidis poisid laulvat He found that the boy(s) was/were singing	gen	nom	+	+	-

Table 1.

The semantic change that is perceived as salient function change is matched with sporadic yet structured form change.

**Research questions:** The variation above is captured by grammaticalization approaches but causes serious problems for approaches with rigid interface. Can two types of constraints,

function and form related ones, represent the gradient relationship between form and meaning?

**Approach and methods:** Grammaticalization can be captured by combining several constraints in LFG, which encodes information at several levels and interfaces (B97, B96, T07):

- (a) formal constraints on the forms in the lexicon
- (b) semantic co-descriptions on lexical items, encoding several semantic and pragmatic meanings regardless of their perceived grammaticalization,
- (c) functional features associated with lexical items, encoding grammaticalized meanings.

Form variation that does not follow the semantic change remains at the form-related levels of description while the form change that follows semantic change is either related to a new function or not, reflecting the status of grammaticalization.

**Expected results:** Combining LFG and grammaticalization theories results in an account where the volatile relationships between linguistic form, function and meaning are historically explained and formally represented.