

Workshop proposed for the 51th Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea*,  
Tallinn, 29th August – 1st September 2018

### **Circum-Baltic languages: varieties, typology and change**

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The languages of the Circum-Baltic region belong primarily to the Indo-European (Baltic, Slavic, Germanic) and Uralic (Finnic, Saami) families. These languages have historically developed common features which have triggered discussions over a possible *Sprachbund* (see e.g. Stolz 1991). The University of Stockholm research project “Language typology around the Baltic Sea” (1991–1996) yielded the 2001 compendium “The Circum-Baltic languages” (Dahl, Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001a, 2001b), in which it was concluded that the region is more properly regarded as a contact superposition zone (Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Wälchli 2001). The Indo-European languages of this region are considered close to Standard Average European (SAE) languages, while the Uralic languages fall on the periphery of SAE or outside of it entirely (Haspelmath 1998, 2001). The area as a whole forms part of a buffer zone between SAE and Central Eurasia (Wälchli 2011).

Language comparison and typological generalizations have thus far been based overwhelmingly on studies of standard language. It has been observed that the SAE features are more typical of the standard forms of European language than their non-standard variants (Fiorentino 2007, Seiler 2016). If a language lacks an established standard form, studies rely on other available material, primarily from dialects. Thus a single language form is often taken to represent the language as a whole. In order to obtain a more accurate picture, it is necessary to analyze the languages of this region in all their variety, to compare different forms of the same language as well as similar/analogous forms of different languages. Without including non-standard language varieties, the resulting picture is coarse and one-sided, from both a static and a dynamic perspective (Kortmann 2010, Murelli, Kortmann 2011, Auwera 2011, Wälchli 2011, Szmrecsanyi, Wälchli 2014).

The rapid development of corpora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century creates better opportunities for comparison of language variants. Corpora may represent different registers, regional dialects, idiolects, communication channels (verbal, written, online) etc. Such diverse corpus material is well-suited for identifying characteristic features of particular language variants. Direct comparisons of usage in different languages are made possible by parallel corpora of texts translated into many languages, such as European Parliament and United Nations texts, popular fiction texts, the Bible, etc. (Cysouw, Wälchli 2007, Dahl 2007). The use of parallel corpora also highlights the need to consider different registers: these corpora offer comparisons of one written register, which may in different languages reflect very different sociolinguistic factors and which may differ considerably from other variants of the same language.

The Baltic language area has developed as a result of historical contacts between historical language forms. In the modern world, language contact is no longer as dependent on geography; interaction takes place online and English has become the *lingua franca*. Changes are being

observed which are bringing languages on the periphery of SAE closer to typical SAE languages (Heine, Kuteva 2006, see also Lindström, Trigel 2010, Metslang 2009). The boundaries of language areas may not be stable, and they may be formed by shared or diverging trends of language change rather than by the presence or absence of stable features (see Campbell 2016).

We welcome presentations which bring new data and knowledge regarding the common and distinctive features of Circum-Baltic languages:

- concerning standard or non-standard varieties of Circum-Baltic languages using data reflecting actual language use (e.g. corpora)
- concerning different levels of language (phonetics and phonology; morphosyntax; (lexical) semantics and pragmatics) from typological perspective
- pointing out the changes taking place in this region both in terms of individual language features as well as in the delimitation of the language area itself.

Please send your provisional abstract to Helle Metslang ([metslang@ut.ee](mailto:metslang@ut.ee)) and/or Andra Kalnača ([kalnaca@latnet.lv](mailto:kalnaca@latnet.lv)). Abstracts must not exceed 300 words excluding references. Deadline: **Sunday, 12 November 2017.**

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