

**MONUMENTAL WORKS CROWN A LIFELONG SCHOLARLY CAREER  
TIIT-REIN VIITSO 75**



Tiit-Rein Viitso's scholarly career began in the early 1960s when modern trends in linguistics reached Estonia. Viitso started to explore the possibilities for providing more accurate descriptions of the minor Finnic languages. Phonological systems became his favourite research area. Viitso's first article described phonology of the Luutsa-Liivtšülä subdialect of Votic (ESA VII); it was published already in 1961 when he graduated from university. In fact, the phonology of Finnic languages became his lifelong research interest. In 1966 he defended his candidate thesis on the expression plane of northern Veps, where the glossematic approach was used. In 1983 Viitso was awarded a doctoral

degree for his comparative study of the phonology of Finnic languages. This study was re-published with additions in his book "Liivi keel ja läänemeresoome keelemaastikud" (2008; *The Livonian language and Finnic linguistic landscapes*).

The more than 300 publications by Tiit-Rein Viitso include also articles on several other Uralic languages, such as Nenets (1970), Khanty (1980), and Sami (1985). He has been interested in principles of classifying languages, as well relations between the Uralic, Indo-European, and other language families of the Old World. Since his school days Viitso has been interested in Native American languages. Later, as an experienced linguist, he published some studies of Penutian languages (1971) and the classification of Athabaskan languages (1976). Viitso has been a valuable contributor to various Estonian encyclopedias; he has prepared surveys of the world's languages and language groups, provided linguistic maps of different continents with his own improvements, etc.

Tiit-Rein Viitso's first job was at the computing centre of the University of Tartu where he worked in 1965–1973. One of his favourite activities has been to suggest and to apply formal linguistic models for accurate presentation of phonological and morphological structures. Apart from phonology, he has played a significant role in working out the description of the morphological structure of Estonian and other Finnic languages. In 1976 Viitso published an article on the system of Estonian inflectional classes (in KK). The Viitso's model

of classificatory morphology was used by his students to prepare morphological descriptions of other Finnic languages. For example, Aime Kährik used it in her thesis dealing with Veps inflectional morphology (1980) and Jaan Õispuu in his thesis on Karelian inflectional morphology (1985).

In addition to in-depth studies of the structure of the Finnic languages, Viitso has for a long time been interested in the earliest history of the Finnic languages. He has studied early contacts of Finnic languages (1983), the oldest Finnic loanwords (1982), traces of the ancient Amber Road in the contemporary languages (1994; for an extensive overview of Viitso's work see Paul Alvre in *ESA* 44–45 (2000)). Proceeding from the Finnic background, Viitso wrote the hitherto most detailed description of the development of the Estonian language (see *Estonian Language (Linguistica Uralica. Supplementary Series / Volume 1 2003)*).

Tiit-Rein Viitso's own roots are in Virumaa. Votes used to be the eastern neighbours of this large northern Estonian county. Viitso's graduation thesis, which he defended at the University of Tartu in 1961, focused on nautical vocabulary in the Votic language. In fact, Viitso has ascribed great importance to the living environment of Finnic peoples inhabiting the coasts of the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Livonia as manifested in their language.

Viitso has also studied the language of his home region. His article about the languages of Virumaa (1996) provides a vivid picture of dialect diversity of this region. Recently, he suggested a new insight into the linguistic development of Virumaa (see *LU XLVIII 2012*).

However, his main focus has been on Livonians as a coastal people. The year 1973 witnessed the beginning of his lifework in the documentation and study of the Livonian language, which has continued to this day. Apparently, among Viitso's many other languages Livonian is the language that he has studied from the most varied perspectives, from speech sounds to vocabulary. His field work with Livonians highlights

the many-faceted meaning and significance that a linguist may have for a small people. Apart from scholarly study of the Livonian language, Tiit-Rein Viitso has been active in the development of standard Livonian; he has edited Livonian-language books and taught the Livonian language to the young generation of Livonians.

Viitso has been actively involved in the management of research and language matters as chairman of the Mother Tongue Society of Estonia in the 1990s and his decades-long work as editor of *Linguistica Uralica*. On the occasion of Paul Ariste's centenary in 2005 the Estonian Academy of Sciences valued Tiit-Rein Viitso's contribution to the study of the Finno-Ugric languages by awarding him the first Paul Ariste medal. Similarly to Paul Ariste, Tiit-Rein Viitso can be characterized by openness to what is extraordinary in language, the wish to highlight unique linguistic features. In 2011 Viitso was awarded the Wiedemann Prize, which is the most prestigious linguistic award in the Republic of Estonia.

In recent years Tiit-Rein Viitso's research activities have been crowned with remarkable monumental works. The year 2008 witnessed the book of the Livonian language and Finnic linguistic landscapes, which brings together Viitso's research papers and also includes a bibliography of his scholarly work. The year 2012 saw the publication of the most comprehensive Livonian dictionary ever published (T.-R. Viitso, V. Ernštreits, *Līvõkīel-ēstikīel-leṭkīel sōnārōntōz*), which shows intimate familiarity with highly different facets of Livonian lifestyle and the Livonian language. Viitso has been instrumental in the project of Finno-Ugric prosody; the book "Livonian Prosody" (MSFOu 255 2008) has come out in the framework of this project. Also, Viitso prepared about fifty distribution maps with comments for the linguistic atlas of the Finnic languages "Atlas Linguarum Fennicarum" (ALFE I–III 2004–2010). These examples show his comprehensive in-depth knowledge of the Finnic languages and the traditional

lifestyle of Finnic peoples. Tiit-Rein Viitso also acted as the editor of the second part of ALFE.

In the linguistic atlas of the Finnic languages, the linguistic maps prepared by Tiit-Rein Viitso and his explanations stand out by richness of historical phonological and morphological information. For example, the distribution maps for the word family *lähde*; *allikas* 'source, wellspring' are provided with a full phonological reconstruction of the forms in different languages that stemmed from the base form *\*läktek* (see ALFE I 402–403); it highlights primacy of South Estonian sound changes. Viitso presented also several other synonymous words with a restricted distribution, such as *eläke* in northern Finnish dialects, *hete* in Finnish and Karelian, *uhring*, *urting* in Veps, *ovaat* in Courland Livonian (its Salaca Livonian equivalent is *avat*; cf. the Latvian *avots* 'source, wellspring' < *\*avantas*).

Also, Tiit-Rein Viitso presented in ALFE a comprehensive survey of how comitative suffixes emerged from adpositions in several Finnic languages. The respective case endings developed in the southern group of the Finnic languages from different adverbialized case forms of the *\*kansa*-stem and in the eastern Finnic languages from various forms of the *\*kerta*-stem (see ALFE I 439–443). Suffixed forms of these stems show different shades of meaning; however, the Finnic languages reveal a noteworthy general tendency of grammatization of comitative and instrumental forms.

Viitso also showed multiplicity and at the same time systemicity of phonological developments in ALFE when he described the distribution of several nouns and verbs. A good example can be found in the noun families *ihminen*; *inimene* 'human being, person' (ALFE II 232–236), *vadelma*; *vaarikas* 'raspberry' (ALFE II 481–489), *vaaja*; *vai* 'pile, stake' (ALFE III 103–107) and in the verb families *rohjeta*; *julgeda* 'dare' (ALFE II 312–316), *ruveta*; *hakkama* 'begin' (ALFE III 197–201), *uida*; *ujuma* 'swim' (ALFE III

285–286), etc. Comparative presentation of multiple phonological developments highlights more general tendencies in Finnic languages, such as secondary emergence of *h*, on the one hand, and its loss, on the other, secondary consonantal palatalization with concurrent depalatalization, which gave rise even to prosodic changes, as well as various secondary developments in stops, sibilants, and affricates, where occasionally one can find similar tendencies in different peripheral areas of the Finnic languages, for example, in Livonian and South Estonian, and Karelian and Veps.

In addition to the study of phonological and morphological developments, Tiit-Rein Viitso has also been interested in meanings and their shades. Since his student papers he has been interested in the sea, coastal lifestyle, and fishing. The comprehensive Livonian dictionary lists hundreds of words related to the sea and fishing, which Viitso has been able to record from coastal Livonians. Their Estonian equivalents show interesting parallels that Viitso has found in the dialects of Virumaa, his home region. Finnic peoples have always lived close to waterbodies, be they large bays and lakes or small rivers. For a linguist, observation of flowing water and coastal dwellers has always implied understanding language change and the wish to document what is passing by and to explain it to other people. Tiit-Rein Viitso has achieved success in his endeavour in several ways, including the training of young researchers from among his students.

His colleagues and students express their cordial congratulations to the distinguished professor and wish him the joy of discovery in his work on languages!

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