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### THE EARLY HISTORY OF ESTONIAN SPEECH PROSODY STUDIES

**Abstract.** The paper provides an overview of research on Estonian speech prosody from the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th century, focusing on the discovery of three levels of word stress and quantity. The priests of mainly German origin founded Estonian linguistic tradition. The lexical stress on the first syllable was probably known before it was first mentioned in the grammar (Stahlen 1637); the existence of secondary stress was clearly stated by J. J. A. Hirschhausen (1827). Till the 19th century it was difficult to realize that the duration was not a correlate of stress in Estonian. The Estonians' perception was of utmost importance in discovering the three quantity degrees, as the (supposed) first recording of three quantities in vowels ("Agenda Parva" 1622 by unknown author, presumably of South-Estonian origin) as well as their theoretical description (Masing 1824) were given by native speakers.

Keywords: Estonian, prosody, word stress, word quantity.

#### 1. Introduction

This paper presents an overview of research on Estonian speech prosody from the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th century, focusing on the discovery of three levels of word stress and quantity.<sup>1</sup> The notions of syllables having primary, secondary, and weak stress and short, long, and overlong degrees of quantity (Q1, Q2, Q3)<sup>2</sup> were discovered by the 1820s and are still used, though discussions about their details continue.<sup>3</sup>

The article analyses early written texts in Estonian (since the 13th century), early Estonian grammars (published since the 17th century) by non-Estonian priests, writings of Baltic-German Estophiles and of the first

<sup>1</sup> See also: Ariste 1939, 1984; Kask 1958, 1970; Лийв 1962; Pikamäe 1959.

<sup>2</sup> The terms Q1, Q2 and Q3; long and short duration, primary stress and secondary stress are used in this article to denote prosodic phenomena as we understand them today, this terminology cannot be attributed to the authors whose works are reviewed.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., it is discussed in which way exactly segmental sounds or syllables are involved in identifying quantity degrees (Hint 2001; Eek, Meister 2003; 2004) which are sometimes marked also as A1, A2, A3 (Eek, Meister 1997). Most recent extensive publications on Estonian prosody are the treatment by Ilse Lehiste (Ross, Lehiste 2001 : 37–56) and the collections of papers on the subject (Estonian Prosody: Papers from a Symposium 1997; see also Proceedings of the Finnic Phonetics Symposium 1998).

linguist of Estonian origin O. W. Masing (published in 1810–30s). The notions concerning prosody appear in the spelling used as well as in theoretical concepts. The discussions on the prosody often concern recording duration of the phonemes (see Kask 1958; 1970). One might suppose that researchers' linguistic background had some influence on their speech perception and viewpoints on prosody.

## 2. Early written texts

The oldest sources in Estonian (from the 13th to the beginning of the 17th century, Ehasalu, Habicht, Kingisepp, Peebo 1997) use variable spelling, which gives us indirect information on the notions concerning prosody. The spaces between words in writings show that obviously primary stress — the main marker of word boundaries in the Estonian language — was known. Two oppositional durations in vowels and explosives were marked in different ways (Table 1).

Probably the first attempt to record three degrees of vowel quantity can be found in a Catholic handbook "Agenda Parva" (1622), which includes some texts in the southern dialect of Estonian (SE) (Table 1). There Q3 is marked by means of the circumflex (*maâ loôya* 'the creator of the land'). It is also remarkable that long vowels in the non-initial syllables — a characteristic feature of the South-Estonian dialect — were marked once (*saggeête* 'often'). Considering the difficulties the foreigners often have in specifying quantity relations in Estonian words, one might suppose that the author of this text was a native speaker of Estonian (see also: Saareste 1938).

A verse by Fabricius "Every stress is placed on the first syllable" is an undated observation on word stress, probably from the beginning of the 17th century (quoted by Gutsclaff 1648 : A3).

## 3. Early grammars

The first study on Estonian was "Anführung zu der Esthnischen Sprach" by Heinrich Stahl (Stahlen 1637).<sup>4</sup> This grammar, similarly to previous church literature, uses several ways to indicate two oppositional durations in vowels and explosives. However, the German-like spelling was used rather systematically; later it was simplified and promoted by Bengt Gottfried Forselius and Johann Hornung (1693, see: Kask 1970 : 65–68). Nowadays the term "old spelling" is used for it. It doubled the subsequent consonant to record two durations of vowels, but it made impossible discrimination between quantity oppositions in consonants<sup>5</sup> and between long and short initial syllables<sup>6</sup> (Table 1). The old spelling was used until the second half of the 19th century (Kask 1958).

According to H. Stahl, lexical stress is on the first syllable of a word, its acoustical correlate being the pitch: "The first syllable of every word is

<sup>4</sup> It is the tradition in Estonian linguistics to write this name as Heinrich Stahl, although in the title of his grammar is written: "[---] publiciert von M. Henrico Stahlen" and probably the right name was Henricus Stahell (see: Raag 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Except two quantities in explosives marked by using different letters.

<sup>6</sup> According to the German-like spelling, all initial syllables were considered to be long, consisting of 1) (C)VC or 2) (C)VV.

Table 1

Overview showing discrimination between short and long duration in first-syllable vowels and between three degrees of quantity in the early history of research into Estonian prosody

|  | Quantity degree           | Duration  | long  |  |
|--|---------------------------|---|---|--|
|  |                           | short   | Q2  | Q3   |
| Early written texts since 13th century | Model<br>Examples         | V, VCC<br>tema [temà],<br>temma [temà]<br>'he, she'   | VC, VV, V <sub>1</sub> V <sub>2</sub> , Vh, V <sub>circumflex</sub> , V <sub>circumflex</sub> <sup>h</sup><br>kule [kūle] 'listen!', keelda [kêlda]<br>'to forbid', kaes [kâz] 'with',<br>suhre [sūre] 'big' Gen., ô! [ô] 'o!',<br>pâhstoma [pâstoma] 'to fast' |  |
| Agenda Parva 1622                      | Model<br>Examples         | V<br>sina [sinà]<br>'you'   | VV<br>wiide [vīde]<br>'five' Gen.   | VV <sub>circumflex</sub><br>loôya [lôja]<br>'creator'          |
| Stahl (Stahlen) 1637                   | Model<br>Examples         | VCC (also VC)<br>innimenne [inimene]<br>'people',<br>iho [ihò] 'skin, body'   | Vh (also VC, VV)<br>sahma [sâma] 'to get', Some [sōme]<br>'Finland', meeles [mēles] 'in mind'   |  |
| Gutslaff 1648                          | Name<br>Model             | commune<br>VCC  | grande<br>V <sub>circumflex</sub><br>V <sub>acute</sub> in case of dotted letters<br>(also V, Vh, V <sub>circumflex</sub> <sup>h</sup> )  |  |
|  | Examples                  | jummal [jumàl]<br>'God'   | kôle [kôle] 'die' Sg. 1P,<br>kôlma [kôlma] 'to die', pûssa [pûsa]<br>'hip' Gen., hórma [hórma] 'to rub',<br>te, teh [tê] 'way', mēhs [mês] 'man'  |  |
| Old spelling:<br>in open syllable      | Model                     | –<br>(syllable, consisting short vowel, is always considered to be closed)  | VC  |  |
|  | Examples                  | –   | sada [sāda] [sâda] 'send!', 'to get'  |  |
| in closed syllable                     | Model                     | VCC   | VV  |  |
|  | Examples                  | sadda [saDà] 'hundred'  | saad [sâD] 'get' Sing. 2P   |  |
| Masing 1820, 1824                      | Name<br>Model<br>Examples | kurz<br>V(C)C <sub>tilde</sub> or virgula, VCC<br>liña (or linña),<br>linna [linà] 'flax',<br>kala (or kalła),<br>kalla [kalà] 'fish' | mittlere<br>V<br>SE lina [lîna]<br>'town' Gen.  | gedehnt<br>V <sub>acute</sub><br>SE lína [lîna]<br>'town' Acc. |

always high-pitched, and the rest goes downwards, like in *armastama* 'to love'." (Stahlen 1637 : 1). H. Stahl adds that in compounds the initial syllables of both components are high-pitched, i.e. both are stressed (Stahlen 1637 : 1). He does not mention secondary stress, but this phenomenon is indicated by double consonants after a short vowel in syllables with a secondary stress, e.g. *innimenne* 'human being' (Stahlen 1637 : 3).

In the second Estonian grammar, "Observationes grammaticae circa linguam Esthonicam" by Johann Gutsclaff (1648), category *accent* was used to describe prosodic phenomena: "Estonian accents are acute and circumflex. The circumflex is marked for long vowels. The acute occurs in the verse by Fabricius: "Every stress is placed on the first syllable" (1648 : A3). It seems that for J. Gutsclaff *acute* was the word stress itself while *circumflex* denoted long vowels in writing, opposed to short vowels.

J. Gutsclaff divides vowels into three categories, which, however, are not categories of the same kind in the modern sense: "In the case of vowels, three qualities (*valor*), are noted and marked: long, ordinary and tenuous (*grande, commune, tenue*). Namely, the Estonians pronounce some vowels either in great extension, which they have until now marked with the letter *h*; or they pronounce them with the normal pitch; or they make the sound somehow thin [---]. To discriminate them, an extended vowel should be marked by a circumflex, a thin sound by two dots, and may the normal sound be without any [marking]." (Gutsclaff 1648 : A verso). The vowels *grande* and *commune* probably correspond to long and short vowels (Table 1). As the author uses the category *tenue* for difference in quality, it stands for the dotted letters *ä, ö, ü*. It seems that J. Gutsclaff uses the term "vowel qualities" for the features denoted by different markings in "Agenda Parva" (1622).

There is a difference in the use of the circumflex by J. Gutsclaff and "Agenda Parva". The author of "Agenda Parva" probably tried to use the circumflex only for Q3, in order to discriminate it from Q2, while J. Gutsclaff used it for both of them, e.g. *Sēmne* [*sēmne*] 'seed' Gen., but *pūssa* [*pūsa*] 'hip' Gen. (1648 : A verso). It may mean that J. Gutsclaff, who came from Germany, could not perceive the three quantity degrees and did not understand the rules of using the circumflex in "Agenda Parva". J. Gutsclaff also used the circumflex to denote long vowels in non-initial syllables, which is common in southern dialects. However, J. Gutsclaff's open-minded attitude towards prosody is reflected in the fact that he admitted the possibility that long vowels may occur in non-initial syllables, which means that he accepted the difference between vowel duration and stress.

In the case of consonants, J. Gutsclaff also pointed out the difference in pitch for short and long duration. "The quality of a consonant is the same, but in gemination the pitch is higher, as is known also in other languages." (Gutsclaff 1648 : A2). It is interesting that J. Gutsclaff perceived and marked Q3 both in vowels and in consonants in the illative, interpreting it as the sharpening of the second syllable vowel, e.g. *līna* [*līna*] 'town' Gen. — *līná* [*? līna*] 'into town', *Darto* [*tar̥to*] 'Tartu' Gen. — *Dartó* [*?*] 'into Tartu' (1648 : F2 verso, F).

In his handbook on Estonian language, "Manuductio ad Linguam Oesthonicam, Anführung zur Öhstnischen Sprache" (1660), Heinrich Göseken pointed out that in Estonian meaning determines the functions of

prosodic features: "One must pay attention to the accent (*Accentus*) or stress/tone (*Ton*) in this language: if it is not used properly, one may be misunderstood." (1660 : 12). According to H. Göseken, stress, rising pitch, and lengthening occur all together in the first syllable: " [---] the first syllable in every word is said with a higher pitch and a longer duration, like *wāsto tūllēmā* 'to come from the opposite direction'." (1660 : 12, 13). H. Göseken's predecessors H. Stahl and J. Gutsloff did not claim directly that duration has a role in forming word stress in the Estonian language.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this erroneous statement that stood until the 19th century could be attributed to H. Göseken.

H. Göseken discriminate between the notions of vowel duration and quality, which enabled him to present clearly the opposition between two durations: "The words in the Estonian language must be pronounced either as short or as long." (1660 : 12). He described the overlong quantity of some monosyllabic words,<sup>8</sup> denoting the phenomenon by the Latin word<sup>9</sup> *Emphatico*: "Monosyllabic words could be articulated as either short or long, so that the emphatic, especially prominent words are pronounced with a higher pitch." (Göseken 1660 : 12).

H. Göseken described the impact of the prosodic rhythm of a language on word stress: "If two monosyllabic words are joined together, then one gives its higher tone (*Ton*) over to the other, and one is pronounced longer and the other shorter, while both words are emphatic, for example, in *Lou-kõijr* 'lion'" (1660 : 12). In borrowed names stress may shift to the position of typical Estonian stress, so that *Maria* occurs side by side with the form *Maarja* (Göseken 1660 : 12).

Johann Hornung's<sup>10</sup> remarkable achievement was the first description of Q2 and Q3 in his "Grammatica Esthonica" (1693). He wrote that during declension certain monosyllabic words, e.g. *nael* 'nail', have genitive and accusative forms with a similar spelling, the only difference being a "more acute stress" on the first syllable (Hornung 1693 : 19–20) (Table 1).

The bulky volume on the Estonian language by Anton Thor Helle, supplemented by Eberhard Gutsloff, "Kurtzgefasste Anweisung zur Estnischen Sprache" (1732) was the first source where one can find a discussion on two oppositional durations of voiced consonants on the border between the first and the second syllables, as in the words *lina* 'flax' — *linna* [*liinna*] 'into town'<sup>11</sup> (Table 2). These oppositions are characterized by accent and duration, using the expression "more acute pronunciation" for long duration, and "soft and fast" for short duration (Helle, Gutsloff 1732 : 3–4).

<sup>7</sup> It may be that H. Stahl and J. Gutsloff were in the same opinion with H. Göseken but they took it for granted and therefore did not write about it.

<sup>8</sup> Although the domain of quantity degree is two syllables, some monosyllabic words also are considered to be overlong if they contain long segmental sounds, where duration and pitch movement are comparable to same features in the first syllable of Q3 words (cf Ross, Lehiste 2001 : 43).

<sup>9</sup> In some places H. Göseken uses scientific terms in Latin in his German text, and this is one of the occasions.

<sup>10</sup> J. Hornung's works are influenced by Johann Gotlieb Forselius (Kask 1970 : 65–68).

<sup>11</sup> The proposal to record these differences in writing was accepted for some critical cases only, such as *miinna* [*minä*] 'I' — *minna* [*minna*] 'to go'.

Table 2

**The first attempts to discriminate between short and long duration  
in sonorants and sibilants after the first syllable**

|                                     |  | short  |   | long                                       |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|---|
|                                     |  | Q1   |   | Q2   | Q3  |
| <b>Helle,<br/>Gutsleff<br/>1732</b> | <b>Model</b>                             | C <sub>tilde</sub> C                         |   | CC   |   |
|                                     | <b>Examples</b>                          | liñna [linà]<br>'flax'                       |   | linna [liñna] [liñna]<br>'town' Gen. Acc.  |   |
| <b>Masing<br/>1820,<br/>1824</b>    | <b>O. W. Masing's<br/>interpretation</b> | short  | intermediate  | long, accented                             |   |
|                                     | <b>Model</b>                             | VC   | VCC,<br>V(C)C <sub>tilde</sub> or virgula   | VCC,<br>V <sub>acute</sub> CC              | V <sub>acute</sub> CC<br>V <sub>gravis</sub> CC |
|                                     | <b>Examples</b>                          | SE lina<br>[līna] [lîna]<br>'town' Gen. Acc. | liña (or línna),<br>linna [linà] 'flax',<br>kaļa (or kaļļa),<br>kalla [kalà] 'fish' | linna,<br>linna,<br>[liñna]<br>'town' Gen. | línna,<br>linna<br>[liñna]<br>'town' Acc.       |

August Wilhelm Hupel in his "Ehstnische Sprachlehre für beide Hauptdialekte" (1806)<sup>12</sup> made some good remarks on Q1 words. He mentioned that the second syllable is sometimes longer than the first one (Hupel 1806 : 9, 12), e.g. *villoom* [vilòm] 'more chilly' and the intervocalic consonant sounds as if it were single, e.g. in word *werrew* [verèv] 'red'.

#### 4. Baltic-German Estophiles

At the beginning of the 19th century some Estophiles with a mainly Baltic-German background tried to improve the erroneous spelling of the Estonian church language and especially the recording of degrees of consonant quantity.<sup>13</sup> The discussions took place mainly in the journal "Beiträge zur genauern Kenntnis der ehstnischen Sprache", and some notes and experimental spellings published there enable us suppose that sometimes three degrees of quantity were perceived. The short and long durations were consciously opposed to each other in first-syllable vowels using quantity or/and pitch, and in consonants after long and short vowels using the characteristics of different levels (e.g. "fast" for "short" — "sharp" for "long"). The difference between the long and overlong quantity degrees were discussed as different accents of the long syllable.

Friderich Heller (1822) first pointed out that the intervocalic consonant in Q1 words is short, but his statement was neglected.

The beginning of the 19th century witnessed the discovery of secondary stress. P. H. Frey (1813 : 2—4, 14; 1818 : 72 etc) described long non-initial syllables, W. F. Steingrüber (1816 : 20; 1826 : 27) declared that the 3rd syllable was longer and stronger than the rest in 4-syllable words. O. W. Ma-

<sup>12</sup> This is the second, revised edition of the Hupel's grammar, published firstly in 1780.

<sup>13</sup> The old spelling used did not enable the writer to record any quantity oppositions in consonants, except explosives.

sing (1820 : 13, 1824 : 17 etc) discussed contradictions in writing non-initial syllables, as in these syllables the double consonant after the vowel sometimes marks the shortness of the vowel as is common in stressed syllables. Only J. J. A. Hirschhausen (1827 : 38–40) stated that a non-initial syllable is intended to be prominent where it is stressed, but this stress is weaker than the main stress.

## 5. Otto Wilhelm Masing

The first linguist of Estonian origin, Otto Wilhelm Masing (1763–1832), encountered some problems while trying to express the prosodic system of his language in the framework of an alien paradigm. He did not write any comprehensive study on linguistics, but there are several shorter writings (Masing 1820; 1824; 1827 etc).

O. W. Masing uses the term "stress/accent" (*Ton*) to signify the dominate state of the syllable, which is characterized as "strong, acute, dominating". His linguistic knowledge makes him believe that longer duration is always the acoustical correlate of stress.<sup>14</sup> O. W. Masing perceived and claimed that the initial syllable of a Q1 word is short, so he had to state that it was unstressed at the same time (1820 : 10; 1824 : 21–22).<sup>15</sup> By differentiating short and long initial syllables, O. W. Masing actually discovered one of the main prosodic principles used in *regilaul*.

O. W. Masing determined (and used diacritical marks to denote them) three degrees of quantity both in vowels and consonants, but he suggested a rather relevant theoretical ternary system for vowels only. He considered the difference between Q1, Q2, and Q3 in vowels as a difference in their duration and calls it *Währung* ('worth, quality'), which is either 'short' (*kurz*), 'medium' (*mittler*), or 'extended' (*gedehnt*) (Masing 1824 : 6) (Table 1). In the case of consonants the first two quantity levels actually mean short consonants after a long or a short vowel; the third level is long duration covering Q2 and Q3, which O. W. Masing differs due to the accent (1820 : 9–12; 1996 : 41) (Table 2).

## 6. Summary

During the 17th century, the linguists of mainly German origin founded the Estonian scientific linguistic tradition. This tradition also covers the first linguists of Estonian origin at the beginning of 19th century. The main points in the history of prosodic studies could be summarized as follows: 1) The lexical stress on the first syllable was probably known before it was first mentioned in a grammar (Stahlen 1637). It was soon shown that the prosodic rhythm of the language has an impact on the placement of stress (Göseken 1660). Secondary stress was sometimes marked in spelling (Stahlen 1637), but theoretical discussions with regard to this problem start-

<sup>14</sup> Similar generalizations were common in the 19th century prosody studies (see: Preminger, Brogan 1993 : 4) based on well-known Indo-European languages, but it was not the case of Estonian and Finnish.

<sup>15</sup> O. W. Masing is not systematic in this question; sometimes he declares that the first syllable of Q1 words is stressed (1820 : 12). This confusion may be caused by using the term "stress" for longer duration as well as for other correlates of stressedness.

ed at the beginning of the 19th century. J. J. A. Hirschhausen (1827) claimed that longer Estonian words reveal secondary stress.

2) The first grammars state that pitch is the correlate of stress (Stahlen 1637; Gutschlaff 1648). However, for a long time it was also believed (fixed in Göseken 1660) that in Estonian the first, stressed syllable is always longer than the other syllables. The first Estonian linguist O. W. Masing (1820; 1824) discriminated short (in Q1 words) and long initial syllables (in Q2 and Q3 words). However, as regards duration as an indispensable correlate of the stress, he claimed that the first syllable in Q1 words is unstressed. The real understanding of separate quantity and stress appeared later (Ahrens 1853).

3) Two durational oppositions in the vowels of first syllable were known in early written sources and mentioned in the first grammar (Stahlen 1637). The opposition between Q2 and Q3 in vowels (diphthongs) was first described by J. Hornung (1693). Two durational oppositions in the explosives after the first syllable were known in early written sources and mentioned in the second grammar (Gutschlaff 1638). A similar phenomenon in other consonants was firstly mentioned by A. T. Helle and E. Gutschlaff (1693). Quantity oppositions were usually described by duration and pitch features in vowels, and by pitch and timbre features in consonants. The Estonians' perception is of utmost importance in discovering the three quantity degrees; Estonians provided the (supposed) first recording of three quantities in vowels ("Agenda Parva" 1622 by an unknown author, presumably of South-Estonian origin) as well as their theoretical description (Masing 1824, using duration as its acoustic correlate). O. W. Masing (1820; 1824) worked out several ways of spelling to record all the three quantity degrees in vowels and consonants (Tables 1, 2).

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#### **РАННЯЯ ИСТОРИЯ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ПРОСОДИИ ЭСТОНСКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

В статье дается обзор изучения просодии эстонского языка с XVII по начало XIX века, основное внимание при этом сосредоточено на открытии трех долгот и трех степеней ударности. Традиция эстонского языковедения зародилась прежде всего в трудах духовных лиц немецкого происхождения. Что ударение в слове находится на первом слоге скорее всего было известно еще до того, как это впервые отмечено в грамматике (Stahlen 1637), о существовании побочного ударения впервые написал Хиршхаузен (Hirschhausen 1827). До XIX века ученым трудно было понять, что в эстонском языке долгота не является коррелятом ударения в слове. Труды ученых эстонского происхождения стали определяющими при открытии системы долготы, так как первая заметка о трех предполагаемых долготах встречается в католическом справочнике «*Agenda Parva*» (1622), переводчиком эстонской части которого считается человек южноэстонского происхождения. Теоретическое описание трех грамматических долгот первым дал пастор и языковед эстонского происхождения О. В. Масинг (Masing 1824).