

Leelo Keevallik  
Tartu/Uppsala

## A Case of Stable Variation in Spoken Standard Estonian

The active past participle suffix in standard Estonian is fixed in grammars and textbooks as *-nud*. This is the only legitimized suffix in the written language where it is added to the verb stem. In the spoken usage, however, at least two other options are available besides the full suffix – *-nd* and *-d/-t*. In addition to this the stem can simplify in some verb types for the resulting form to be more easily pronounceable. Basically the following active past participle variants occur in the spoken usage of standard Estonian.

### 1. Vowel stem verbs

<i>saanud / saand</i>	'got'
<i>elanud / eland</i>	'lived'
<i>kirjutanud / kirjutand</i>	'written'
<i>planeerinud / planeerind</i>	'planned'

### 2. Consonant stem verbs, excl. lenis alveolar stops

<i>laulnud / laulnd / lauld</i>	'sung'
<i>kakelnud / kakelnd / kakeld</i>	'fought'
<i>võtnud / võtnd / võtt</i>	'taken'
<i>seisnud / seisnd / seist</i>	'stood'

### 3. Lenis alveolar stops at the end of the verb stem

#### a) as a single consonant

<i>leidnud / leidnd / leind</i>	'found'
<i>püüdnud / püüdnd / püünd</i>	'tried'

#### b) in a cluster

<i>andnud / annud / and</i>	'given'
<i>tundnud / tunnud / tund</i>	'felt'

### 4. A group of exceptions characterised by consonant clusters at the end of the stems

<i>lasknud / lasknd / lasnud / lasnd / last</i>	'let'
<i>tahtnud / tahtnd / tähnud / tahnd / taht</i>	'wanted'
<i>jooksnud / jooksnd / jookst / joost</i>	'run'

The first column gives the standard forms, the rest are colloquial variants. The last three groups (3.a., 3.b., 4.) are not numerous as far as the number of lexical items is concerned but they comprise frequently used forms in natural speech. It appears that the past participle paradigm is rich in variants in the spoken language. *-nd* is the most obvious colloquial alternative to the written norm. In consonant stem verb types it is sufficient to mark the active past participle with just the alveolar stop, but it is only after *l* sound that this variant occurs almost as often as *-nd*. Otherwise, it is *-nd* that prevails among the shorter options.

The interchangeable usage of shorter and longer past participle suffixes is by no means a new development in the Estonian language. On the contrary, it is not at all easy to trace its starting point back into history. There is a lot of variation in Estonian dialects as far as the participle is concerned. According to the dialect atlases by Saareste (1938, 1941, 1955), *-nud* has been more common in the whole

Eastern dialect area and in the Central dialect area around Viljandi. In the rest of North Estonia, the prevailing variant has been *-nd*. South Estonia is characterized by the idiosyncratic *nV(?)* suffix. Traditional dialectology has often disregarded the actual morphological heterogeneity and tried to arrive at coherent descriptions of the dialect grammars, thereby concluding that *-nud* came from the East and *-nd* was common elsewhere. But it is clear from any brief look at the original dialect texts that the usage has not been homogeneous anywhere, *-nd* props up in Eastern dialects just like *-nud* occurs all over the North Estonian dialect area. (Peebo-Peegel 1989.) The spread of the variants is schematically shown in Figure 1.

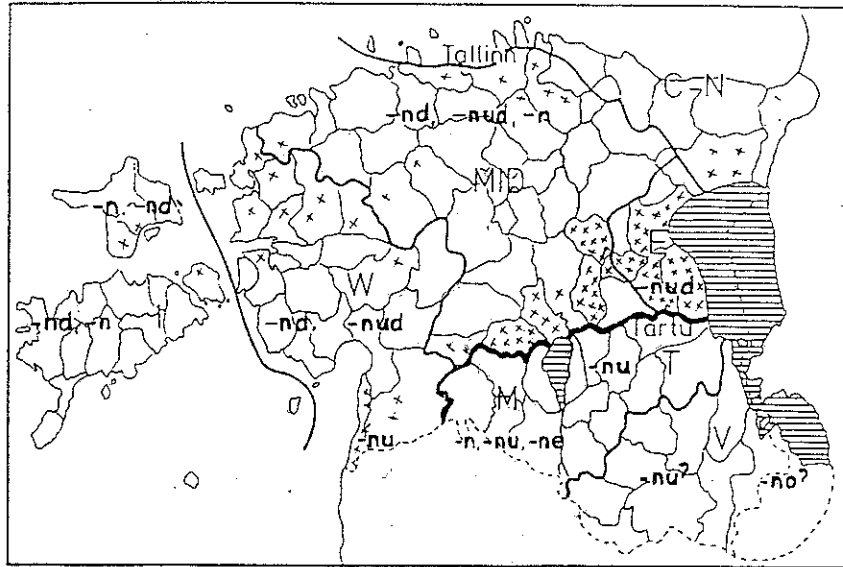


Figure 1. The spread of active past participle suffixes in Estonian dialects. + indicates the *-nud* forms given by Saareste in the dialect atlases (1939, 1941, 1955). The letters indicate the dialects of Estonian (North-Estonian: C-N = Coastal-Northeastern, I = Insular, W = Western, E = Eastern; South-Estonian: M = Mulgi, T = Tartu, V = Võru).

So, the great majority of North Estonian dialect speakers from the end of the 19th century onwards have not used *-nud* as the main variant. Its later domination in the common language may actually originate from the written language as collecting dialectal data started only from the end of the 19th century when literacy was spread even among peasants already. Before that the large dialect differences on the Estonian territory had been commented on very briefly. There is not sufficient data to make any conclusions about the earlier geographical spread of the active past participle variants.

The way to increase the time-depth of the study of the variable is to look at the preserved written sources that date from even earlier periods. The problems with such sources are the following. The first writers of Estonian and Estonian grammarians were not native Estonians but German and Swedish clerics who needed Estonian in their work. They lived in different areas of Estonia where they heard different language varieties and their experience of Estonian did not coincide. That *-nud* was taken into the written usage since the very first piece preserved in Estonian from 1524 may depend on several factors. First, it might have seemed most appropriate as if the full form of the suffix. Second, it is undoubtedly most universal and variation was probably neither wanted nor tolerated,

even if noticed by the foreigners. Their aim was after all to master Estonian quickly and painlessly according to a possibly systematic grammar. Third, it may be that the shortening had not taken place by the time when the first texts in Estonian appeared. This is the version of Raun and Saareste (1965: 66) who estimate that the disappearing of *u* from the Estonian dialects took place only in the 17th century. Their decision is of course again based on the scarce written data from the period.

It therefore makes sense to go further back and look at the related languages. It may well be that the variation is actually older than guessed according to the written data of Estonian. The origin of the suffix *-nut* has been argued about and it most probably dates from the late Balto-Finnic protolanguage because there are no corresponding suffixes in further related languages (Korhonen 1973: 178). In almost all the languages of the Balto-Finnic group there exists a suffix *-nuC* (either *-nut/-nud*, *-nug* or *-nu?*). The only exception is Livonian. And on the other hand, there is a variant *-nt(-nd)* in all the languages besides South Estonian, although in some cases dialectally (Finnish). The third variant is *-nu* that prevails in South Estonia and can also be found in most Baltic-Finnic languages. It should be noted, however, that these conclusions are drawn on the basis of grammars and language descriptions (Keevallik 1994: 8–20). A more thorough research on vernacular texts would certainly reveal additional variation as grammars tend to be idealizations. The initial table could look as the following. (The *-nuC* form in Vepsic occurs only in plural.):

Language	<i>-nuC</i>	<i>-nu</i>	<i>-nt</i>
Karelian	+	+	+
Finnish	+	+	+
Izhorian	+	+	+
Livonian			+
North Estonian	+	+	+
South Estonian	+	+	
Vepsic	+	+	
Votic	+	+	+

Table 1.  
The spread of active past participle suffix variants  
in the bigger Baltic-Finnic languages.

If not more, these results indicate that the active past participle suffix in the Balto-Finnic languages is prone to shorten through the loss of the vowel as well as through the loss of the final consonant. Actually, shortening via both losses would be of interest from the variationist point of view. In some languages the different variants are connected to different syntactic functions, e.g. in South Karelian where *t* can disappear only in the verbal functions (Turunen 1946: 106). The suffix is subject to easy shortening because it always occurs in the non-stressed noninitial syllables. The variation seems to be a general tendency in the Baltic-Finnic languages and often spontaneous. Still, nobody has wanted to describe it as belonging to the protolanguage and the governing conviction is that similar developments in the Balto-Finnic languages have taken place isolatedly (e.g. Laanest 1986: 76).

Whatever the origin, *-nud* and *-nd* (in certain contexts *-d/-t*) appear side by side in the Estonian common language. The *-nu* variant has probably resigned to some single 'dialect-flavoured' forms for a standard language speaker (e.g. the affected

usage of *lännu!* 'gone!'), whereas it of course prevails in South Estonian. At the same time, the extralinguistic meaning attached to the two common language suffix forms is far from the same. It is mostly through persistent standardization that the shorter option has been ejected from the 'proper' usage. The tradition of eliminating variability and colloquialisms from the written usage started with Hermann's grammar in 1884 and Hurt's writings from the same period (Keevallik 1994: 33–41). Before that the *-nd* form had been used interchangeably with *-nud* for two centuries, ever since its first appearance (discovery?) in 1693 (Hornung's grammar). A more normative approach to language became popular after Hurt and Hermann, and brought about the receding of the shorter past participle suffix from the writings. This was still not the very end of the exclusion of *-nd*. At the beginning of the 20th century an influential linguist Aavik started a language renewal movement in the frame of which he argued for the beauty of *-nd*. *-nd* was said to have several advantages compared to *-nud*. In some cases, especially after long verb stems with several short open syllables it was said to be rhythmically advantageous. It also lacked the annoyingly ugly *u* sound, which made the shorter forms more beautiful (Aavik 1916: 13). As can be assumed from Aavik's writings, the capital Tallinn had acquired the *-nud* usage by the turn of the century. This resulted in the common belief that the long suffix was the posh and elegant one, a belief not shared by Aavik. Aavik's arguments were popular among the writers and poets of the younger generation, so along with other renewals, *-nd* spread in literature and became one of the linguistic markers for the protagonists of the language renewal movement. It disappeared again under the pressure of normativism by the end of the 1930ies. If at the beginning of the century novel characters, especially those from the countryside, often used *-nd* forms (e.g. Tammsaare, Kivikas), then in the 1980ies and 1990ies they say only *-nud* (e.g. Unt, Traat Kaugver). Starting with the grammar book from 1939 (Muuk, Mihkla) no Estonian grammar or textbook ever mentions the shorter variant. That the consensus norms of the common language have thereby not changed can easily be heard in any informal Estonian context. (See also the comparison of historical data to contemporary recordings in Keevallik 1994.)

What has radically changed since the 1910–1920ies is the attitudes of the speakers towards the variation. It mostly goes unnoticed in speech although at some level everybody is conscious of the two possibilities and their related social meaning. When my father (a non-linguist) had to give an important public talk I somewhat jokingly advised him not to say *-nd*. He asked: have you noticed me saying that? (*Kas Sa oled tähele p a n d, et ma ütlen v õ i?*) The active past participle was short in the very utterance. Although the speakers are aware of both suffixes, there is a lot of over-reporting of *-nud* due to the natural belief that one speaks 'properly'. I also made a short questionnaire among my colleagues at the department of the Estonian language in Tartu. Three out of ten were sure that they never use the non-standard forms. Additionally two were convinced that they are able to control themselves at the lectures. One of them asked her students to record her usage during a lecture and the results showed a fair amount of *-nd* participles. I had also recorded a diploma discussion session a year before, where none of the department members had used *-nud* exclusively. This shows that the variation is not too conscious. In the questionnaire the subjects were asked to propose some influencing factors and to evaluate the two alternatives. Among probable causes the professional linguists mentioned the length of the word, the quantity of the stem, the verb type, the speech tempo, whether the form was stressed or not, frequency of usage of the form, age of the speaker, his/her dialect background, and the formality of the situation. Not all of these factors occurred influential in the closer study of contemporary usage (Keevallik 1994) but this is

as far the native speaker intuitions about the variation can go. The evaluations, however, were very emotional and mostly granted to the shorter form. *-nd* was low, characteristic of speech, more economical, and it could be used for artistic reasons, jokingly, to achieve greater expressiveness, or as a conscious imitation of somebody. The shorter form is not stylistically neutral – a fact that is reflected in stylistic and situational differences of the spontaneous usage. I also had a possibility to question a group of 26 school teachers of Estonian from all over the country. They are the people who are responsible for that no secondary school graduate would write non-standard forms in his/her graduation essay. The opinions of the teachers were more straightforward. 17 of them told they never use the shorter form and five of them reported to correct it every time they hear it from somebody. Two of the teachers claimed that everybody else around them uses merely *-nud*. The latter is clearly not an adequate observation as I have been looking for somebody like that for two years by now. Six teachers had noticed that they use both suffixes and one admitted that she uses mostly the non-standard variant. The Estonian teachers said that *-nud* reflects correctness and respect to mother tongue, whereas *-nd* indicates indifference, carelessness, and uneducatedness. They said that it was painful to hear it from the radio or TV, and that it hurted the ear. It also showed that the speaker was from among common people. Strong stylistic stigma is evident from the claim “I don’t think I use it even when I am annoyed or angry”.

The active past participle in spoken common Estonian is a good sociolinguistic and stylistic variable. The suffix variation is largely subconscious, but at the same time the speakers are able to stick to the standard variant if the situation is formal and demands careful use of the language (Keevallik 1994: 131–132). It reflects the speakers attention towards his/her speech. It can be presumed that speakers with different social background would use the alternatives in different quantities. The stylistic values of the two suffixes are clear. The interesting point to be made is that in print the shorter ending appeared for decades in poetry only, thus granting *-nd* in a written form a somewhat contradictory high-style value. The interchanging usage of *-nud* and *-nd* is a context sensitive linguistic variable.

#### Literature

- Aavik, Johannes 1916. Katsed ja näited II. Tartu.
- Keevallik, Leelo 1994. <*nud*> varieerumine tänapäeva eesti kõnekeeles. Magistritöö. Käsikiri Tartu Ülikooli eesti keele kateedris.
- Korhonen, Mikko 1973. Zur Geschichte des negativen Präteritums und Perfekts im Ostseefinischen und Lappischen. Commentationes Fenno-Ugricae in honorem Erkki Itkonen. Helsinki (Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura). 174–184.
- Laanest, Arvo 1986. Isuri keele ajalooline foneetika ja morfoloogia. Tallinn.
- Muuk, Elmar–Mihkla, Karl 1939. Eesti keskkooli-grammatika III. Vormiõpetus. Tartu (EKS).
- Peebo, Kadri–Peegel, Juhan 1989. Igal kohal oma lugu. Tallinn.
- Raun, Alo–Saareste, Andrus 1965. Introduction to Estonian Linguistics. Ural-Altische Bibliothek. Wiesbaden.
- Saareste, Andrus 1939. Eesti murdeatlas. Atlas des parlers estoniens I vihik. Tartu (EKS).
- Saareste, Andrus 1941. Eesti murdeatlas. Atlas des parlers estoniens II vihik. Tartu (EKS).
- Saareste, Andrus 1955. Petit Atlas des parlers estoniens. Väike eesti murdeatlas. Uppsala.
- Turunen, Aimo 1946. Lyydiläismurteiden äännehistoria I. Konsonantit. Helsinki (Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura).



Congressus Octavus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum  
Jyväskylä 10.–15. 8. 1995

**Pars III**

**Sessiones sectionum**

**Phonologia & Morphologia**

Redegerunt:

Heikki Leskinen  
Sándor Maticsák  
Tõnu Seilenthal

Moderatores  
Jyväskylä 1996

