

MATI ERELT (Tartu)

## 90 YEARS OF THE MOTHER TONGUE SOCIETY

**Abstract.** The Mother Tongue Society (Emakeele Selts) was founded at the University of Tartu in 1920 and joined the Academy of Sciences in 1946. The main activities of the society have been scholarly communication, publication of research and language materials, dialect gathering, language management, and popularization of linguistic knowledge. Scholarly communication has been carried out in the format of meetings with presentations and conferences. Since 1968 an annual linguistic conference in honour of Johannes Voldemar Veski has been organized each year. In 1922–1940 the society published the journal "Eesti Keel" (Estonian Language); in 1955 the scholarly journal "Emakeele Seltsi aastaraamat" (ESA; Yearbook of the Mother Tongue Society) began publication. In addition to periodicals, the Mother Tongue Society has also published its proceedings. During the first period of independence the Mother Tongue Society committed itself to the organization of systematic collection of Estonian dialects. By the end of 1940 over 720,000 slips with dialect words and almost 6,500 pages of dialect texts and dialect surveys had been collected. After the war dialect gathering continued through local informants, but by the 1980s the possibilities to gather older dialects had been exhausted. The Mother Tongue Society paid a great deal of attention to language planning. In the pre-war years the Estonianization of foreign (mostly German and Russian) personal names was a major undertaking. In 1960 the committee of the Mother Tongue Society was set up for the purpose of recommended correct usage. Since 1997 it has functioned as an official norm-setting committee. Despite the fact that the Mother Tongue Society has primarily always been a scholarly society, it has also provided linguistic education of people as well as generated interest and created a positive image of the mother tongue. In the 1960s the society started to hold language days at schools, in the 1990s language days for Estonians living abroad. In 2000 the society started to publish a popular language journal "Oma Keel" (Our Own Language).

**Keywords:** Estonian language research, Emakeele Selts, Mother Tongue Society, dialect collection, language management, popularization of linguistic knowledge.

The Mother Tongue Society (Emakeele Selts) was set up at a time when the University of Tartu had become an Estonian-medium university, national sciences had become prestigious, and the management, collection, and study of the Estonian language were high on the agenda. Previously, language-management activities and the collection of language materials had taken place through the Estonian Literary Society, but as language activities expanded, it was necessary to set up a specialized linguistic association. The Mother Tongue Society was founded on 23 March 1920 at the University of Tartu. The idea to set up the society was suggested by Lauri Kettunen, then Professor of Finnic languages, on the example of the Finnish Society Kotikielen Seura. Kettunen was also elected the first chairman of the board

of the society, and he held this position until he left Estonia in 1925. His successor as the chairman of the board of the society was Andrus Saareste, who soon became Professor of Estonian at the University. He acted as the chairman with shorter intervals until 1941. Also later the society has been run mostly by professors of Estonian or Finnic languages at the University of Tartu.

Until 1925 the official name of the society was *Emakeele Selts* (Mother Tongue Society) although the unofficial name the *Akadeemiline Emakeele Selts* (Academic Mother Tongue Society) was common. The second statutes adopted in 1925 stated that the official was *Akadeemiline Emakeele Selts*, and it also acquired the rights of a legal person. This name was used until 1952. Since then the society has once again been known as *Emakeele Selts*.

Since its inception until 1946 the Mother Tongue Society was affiliated to the University of Tartu. In 1938 there was a plan to affiliate the society to the recently established Estonian Academy of Sciences and to restrict the rights of the society (by putting an end to the status of a legal person), but the society disagreed. The dialect work of the Mother Tongue Society was closely linked to the University of Tartu; they shared the dialect archive. Joining the Academy of Sciences would have meant that the collections would be split, which would damage dialect work. The opposition brought along some sanctions — dialect work was now funded through the Academy of Sciences, and the society received much less funding than before (Rätsep 2003). In May 1946, however, the society did become affiliated to the Academy of Sciences. In 1952 a decision was passed to relocate the institutions of the Academy of Sciences to Tallinn. In the same year, the Institute of Language and Literature, which had been established in 1947, was relocated to Tallinn, and the same destiny awaited the Mother Tongue Society. The society was moved in 1956, but the holdings had been relocated already in 1952, and next year they were deposited at the Institute of Language and Literature (for a more detailed discussion see Ross 1999b). Nowadays the Mother Tongue Society retains the status of an associated scholarly society of the Academy of Sciences.

The Mother Tongue Society is among those few scholarly societies in Estonia, which has been able to function almost throughout its history. Only under the German occupation (1941–1943) the society was not granted a licence. The situation was critical also in 1950 when the board of the Academy of Sciences passed a resolution suggesting that the board of the society should close the society. It had been the destiny of the Learned Estonian Society in 1950 and other societies as early as in 1940. The society was not eager to put this suggestion (actually command) into practice, and the skilful actions of the board (especially the co-chairman Arnold Kask) of the society resulted in the annulment of the decision by the board of the Academy of Sciences in autumn 1951 (for a more detailed discussion see Ross 1999a).

Because the Russian occupation had closed most societies and associations, the Mother Tongue Society had to fulfil also the tasks of previous other humanities societies. For this reason, the themes of presentations became wider, and new subsections were established: the section of folklore in 1966 and the section of linguistic poetics and stylistics in 1966. In addition to the broadening of the range of topics, the Soviet era witnessed an increase in the proportion of educational activities. Thus, more than before the society started to exhibit the characteristics of a cultural society, and as Ülo Tedre (2000) claimed, the Mother Tongue Society began to resemble to some extent the Estonian Literary Society, which had been closed in 1940. The regained independence was accompanied by the restoration of the previous societies, whereby the sections were no longer needed. The activities of the section of folklore came to an end when the Academic Folklore Society was restored in 1995. Also, the section of linguistic poetics and stylistics has stopped its activities.

Changes in the functions and structure of the society are reflected in its membership. While in 1940 the scholarly Mother Tongue Society had only 44 members, during the post-war period the membership kept growing until 1989 when the society had 427 members. The membership then somewhat decreased, stabilizing in the mid-1990s at three hundred and fifty.

The main activities of the Mother Tongue Society in its almost century-long history have been as follows:

- scholarly communication
- publication of research and language materials
- dialect gathering
- language management
- popularization of linguistic knowledge and increasing the image of one's native tongue

The times and needs keep changing; therefore, the proportion of these trends has been different at different times.

### **Scholarly communication**

The management of scholarly communication is one of the principal tasks of any scholarly society. In 1920–1940 this communication meant mostly communication of a small scholarly group of people who were affiliated to the University of Tartu; more recently it brought together people from Tallinn and Tartu who took an interest in the language. Scholarly communication in the Mother Tongue Society was carried out in the format of meetings with presentations and conferences. There is a custom to hold 6–7 meetings a year; there are 2–3 scholarly presentations at each meeting, mostly by linguists but sometimes also by other language experts. In addition to the meetings, the society has organized a large number of scholarly conferences, either independently or in cooperation with other research institutions. Since 1968 an annual linguistic conference named in honour of Veski has been organized each year. Johannes Voldemar Veski, a longtime chairman and honorary member of the society, died in March 1968, and in the same year it was decided that his anniversary (on June 27) would be celebrated by means of a linguistic conference. As of today 42 Veski Days have been held. As a rule, they are small-scale thematic conferences with 4–5 presentations. For example, during the past decades (2001–) the conferences have focused on language policies, language technology, strategy for the development of the Estonian language, moods in Estonian, language of journalism, the Estonian language at school, study of vocabulary, and the role of Estonian in the early days of the republic.

During the first post-war years, when the society was still affiliated to the University of Tartu, the Mother Tongue Society committed itself to training student language scholars. At the first post-war meeting on 9 December 1945 Veski made a proposal to set up a student language circle that would be affiliated to the society. The language circle was affiliated solely to the Mother Tongue Society up to 1948 followed by affiliation to the Mother Tongue Society and the Student Research Society up to 1951. Later the circle was affiliated only to the Student Research Society, and its links with the society weakened. The language circle held its own meetings with scholarly presentations and also scholarly conferences within the framework of the Student Research Society (for a more detailed discussion see Kingisepp 1999). In the 1980s the Mother Tongue Society began to organize each spring meetings where fifth-year students of the University of Tartu and the Tallinn Pedagogical University made reports about their graduation papers. This tradition was discontinued for a while but was revived during the second half of the 1990s under the name of student conferences.

During the past decade the society has also coordinated research. In connection with the elaboration of the strategy of developing Estonian, the society commissioned studies on the state of using Estonian in various domains and analyses of the state of research into Estonian. Volume 48 (2003) of the yearbook of the Mother Tongue Society (ESA) is fully devoted to the analysis of the state of research into the Estonian language.

### Scholarly publications

Publication of scholarly work has been an important activity of the Mother Tongue Society. In 1922–1940 the society published the journal "Eesti Keel" (EK; Estonian Language), which at that time was the only linguistic journal in Estonia. The journal published both scholarly articles on Estonian and its kindred languages and articles related to language management, and also provided an overview of the activities of the Mother Tongue Society. The editors in chief of "Eesti Keel" included our best-known scholars of Estonian and its kindred languages, such as Julius Mark, Andrus Saareste, Julius Mägiste, and Johannes Voldemar Veski. In 1940 the journal had to discontinue publication. For about fifteen years the society did not have a periodical. However, "Emakeele Seltsi aastaraamat" (ESA; Yearbook of the Mother Tongue Society) began publication in 1955 on the initiative of Academician Paul Ariste; he also served as editor in chief of this publication. In the early years of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society there had been also five volumes of "Akadeemilise Emakeele Seltsi aastaraamat" (1921–1926); however, this publication had been a yearbook in the direct sense of the word by publishing only overviews of the activities of the society. By contrast, "Emakeele Seltsi aastaraamat" rather served as a continuation of the journal "Eesti Keel"; it published both scholarly articles and annual overviews. In addition to Paul Ariste, Mati Ereht has served as editor in chief of the yearbook. Up to now 54 volumes of the yearbook have been published. As a scholarly journal the yearbook meets all the requirements set to a scholarly publication with an international reach — it is a peer-reviewed journal covered by major international databases.

In addition to periodicals, the Mother Tongue Society has also published its proceedings. In 1921–1940 47 publications came out in the proceedings series. In most cases their scope was that of an article, and they were often offprints of articles. However, the series also included some important books on language, such as "Valik eesti kirjakeele vanimaid mälestisi a. 1524–1739" by A. Saareste and A. R. Cederberg (1925–1931; A selection of the oldest texts in the Estonian literary language), "Eesti keeleõpetus I. Hääliku- ja vormiõpetus" (1927; Estonian grammar I. Phonetics and morphology) and "Lühike eesti keeleõpetus I" (1927; Short grammar of Estonian I) by Elmar Muuk, "Soome-eesti sõnaraamat" (1929; Finnish-Estonian dictionary) by Julius Mägiste, and "Õigekeelsuse ja keelekorralduse põhimõtted ja meetodid" (1938; Principles and methods of correct usage and language planning) by Valter Tauli.

During the Soviet era the proceedings of the Mother Tongue Society resumed publication as a separate series in 1958. The series included a number of important monographs and collections of articles, such as "Johannes Voldemar Veski keelelisi töid" (1958; Linguistic works by Johannes Voldemar Veski), "Võitlus vana ja uue kirjaviisi vahel XIX sajandi eesti kirjakeeles" (1958; Struggle between the old and new spelling in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Standard Estonian) by Arnold Kask, "Nonaginta" (essays in honour of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of J. V. Veski, 1963), "Centum" (essays in honour of the centenary of Johannes Voldemar Veski, 1974), "Huno Rätsep "Eesti keele lihtlausete tüübid" (1978; Types of Estonian simple sentences) by Huno Rätsep, "Keelekontaktid" (1981; Language contacts) by Paul Ariste, "Eesti murded ja kirja-keel" (1984; Estonian dialects and the standard language) by Arnold Kask, "Eesti

adjektiivisüntaks" (1986; Estonian adjective syntax) by Mati Ereht, "Eesti kirja- ja murdekeele morfoloogiat" (1989; Morphology of Standard Estonian and dialects) by Paul Alvre, "Nimisõna poeetilised sünonüümid eesti regivärsides" (1982–1992, second revised edition 2004; Poetic synonyms for nouns in Estonian runo verse) by Juhan Peegel, etc. Some books dealt with the kindred languages, for example, the following books by Paul Ariste: "Vadjalaste laule" (1960; Votic songs), "Vadja muinasjutte" (1962; Votic fairy tales) "Vadja rahvakalender" (1969; Votic folk calendar), and "Vadjalane kätkest kalmuni" (1974; A Votic from cradle to grave), as well as "Karjala Valdai murrak" (1962; The Valdai dialect of Karelian) by Paula Palmeos.

Since Estonia regained independence there have been many more opportunities to publish one's research. For this reason, relatively few proceedings of the Mother Tongue Society have been published. The most important ones include "Eesti taimenimetused" (1993; Estonian plant names) by Gustav Vilbaste, "Kihnu raamat" (1998; Kihnu book) by Theodor Saar, and "Eesti piiblitõlke ajalugu" (1999; A history of Bible translations in Estonia) by Toomas Paul. All in all 25 books have been published as proceedings in the course of fifty years.

Recent books published in addition to the proceedings include "Võru keel" (1997; Võru language) by Hella Keem and "Krimmi kogumik" (2002; A collection from the Crimea). The society also published a facsimile edition of "Grammatik der ehstnischen Sprache" (1875) by Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann and a comprehensive treatment "Estonian Language" (2003, second edition 2007 (*Linguistica Uralica*. Supplementary Series /Volume 1)), which is intended for foreigners. Recently, the Mother Tongue Society has focused on the publication of collections of dialect texts by dialect informants.

### Dialect collection

During the first period of independence the Mother Tongue Society committed itself to the organization of systematic collection of Estonian dialects. Before the existence of the Mother Tongue Society, dialect collection had to some extent been organized by the Estonian Literary Society. Prior to the First World War this society had called the readers of its journal "Eesti Kirjandus" (Estonian Literature) to collect dialect materials and referred to the need to compile a comprehensive dictionary of Estonian that would include words of both the standard language and dialects. Later, when dictionaries of the standard language were compiled separately, it was decided to compile a dialect dictionary. As a response to such calls people started to send dialect words to the society, but this activity was stopped because of the war. After the war attempts were made to continue dialect research, and some scholarships were awarded to individual researchers. In 1922 the Estonian Literary Society and the Mother Tongue Society signed an agreement that dialect research would be a task of the latter. 1922 saw the beginning of large-scale dialect collection. The main task was to collect words for the prospective dialect dictionary, but other materials were collected, too. This work was coordinated by Andrus Saareste and carried out by the awardees of dialect fellowships. The Estonian Literary Society and the state funded this activity. In 1926 a dialect committee headed by Saareste was set up in order to improve the coordination of dialect collection. By the end of 1940 over 720,000 slips with dialect words and almost 6,500 pages of dialect texts and dialect surveys had been collected. Since 1930 the collections were deposited at the Archive of Estonian and Kindred Languages (at some point called the Estonian Language Archive) at the University of Tartu. After the Second World War the collections of the archive were deposited at the Institute of Language and Literature. The end of the 1930s witnessed the creation of a network of dialect informants (i.e. local dialect informants). This work was carried out by Hella Keem.

Before the war the first dialect gathering competition was held in 1940. After the war dialect gathering continued through local informants; in 1955 their number exceeded 250 (Kaal 1970). Dialect gathering competitions were resumed in 1957, and the year 1962 saw the revival of the dialect committee. Several guides for dialect collection were published. In 1949–1958 "Kogumistöö juhendaja eesti keele alal" (1–7; A guide for collecting the Estonian language) was published. In 1960 it was replaced by "Kodumurre" (Home dialect), which included some other dialect-related material in addition to guidelines and questionnaires — descriptions of dialect phenomena, memoirs of dialect collectors, articles about dialect research and dialect researchers, etc. All in all 21 issues of "Kodumurre" were published (up to 1989 and issue 20 as late as in 2002). Also, the society started to publish texts submitted by the best dialect informants. The year 1956 saw the publication of the first volume of the series "Valimik Emakeele Seltsi korrespondentide murdetekste" (Selected dialect texts by dialect informants of the Mother Tongue Society), which includes texts from four different dialect areas. A year later the second volume "Pajatusi põhjarannikult" (Stories from the northern coast) and in 1969 the third volume "Tuulik, kadakas ja leib" (Windmill, juniper, and bread) (texts from the insular dialect collected by Aadu Toomessalu) were published. More recently, after a long break four other text collections of this series have come out — volume 4 "Lahemaa lugusid" (1989; Stories from Lahemaa), volume 5 "Tartumaa saja-aastaste jutud" (1995; Stories by hundred-year-olds in Tartumaa), volume 6 "Kuiis vanal Võromaal elati" (2005; The way they used to live in old Võromaa), and volume 7 "Ennemustisel Mulgimaal" (2008; Once upon a time in Mulgimaa).

In the 1980s the possibilities to gather older dialects were exhausted. The dialect conference held in December 1991 Tartu stated that the Mother Tongue Society had fulfilled its task of collecting older dialects and that now it was time to focus on variation in contemporary language. One could add to this that the ranks of dialect collectors had dwindled. According to Helju Kaal, in the 1980s the society had about 60 dialect informants. However, there were few informants who were still active, and the number of young informants was still smaller. The society now focused on a new method of dialect collection and research. The early 1990s witnessed a joint project of the Mother Tongue Society and the Department of Estonian at the University of Tartu "In-depth collection of Estonian dialect material". In the course of this project researchers recorded different generations of speakers of the so-called Võru semi-dialect and to some extent the Kihnu dialect in different situations. In the early 1990s some more traditional dialect gathering competitions were held, but in 1996 the dialect committee decided to discontinue this activity. Since 1996 no dialect gathering competitions have been held. Some former dialect informants have submitted their material to the society even later, and the society has received some dialect material in other ways, but the amount of this material is small by comparison with the earlier times. In 2000 there was an attempt to revive the dialect committee and dialect collection. For a while the committee made efforts to gather names, but this undertaking failed to provide any tangible results.

### Language management

While dialect collection was fully transferred from the Estonian Literary Society to the Mother Tongue Society in 1922, then with regard to language management the Estonian Literary Society largely retained its previous role. The language committee of the Estonian Literary Society, which had been set up in 1907, functioned as a committee that set the norm of Standard Estonian until 1940. The committee published "Eesti keele õigekirjutuse-sõnaraamat" (1918; Spelling dictionary of

Estonian) and a three-volume "Eesti õigekeelsuse-sõnaraamat" (1925–1937; Dictionary of Estonian correct usage), which was ten times larger in scope than the previous edition. Although the Mother Tongue Society did not have any official privileges to set the norm, the Mother Tongue Society paid a great deal of attention to language management. Issues of correct usage were often discussed at meetings and in articles published in the journal "Eesti Keel" (EK; Estonian Language). Moreover, the language issues that were codified by the language committee of the Estonian Literary Society had usually been previously approved by the board of the Mother Tongue Society because the same men who served on the board of the Mother Tongue Society were also members of the language committee of the Estonian Literary Society.

A major undertaking of the Mother Tongue Society in the field of name planning was the Estonianization of foreign (mostly German and Russian) personal names. The effort followed the example of Fennicization of personal names, which had been carried out in Finland at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At first the Mother Tongue Society worked in cooperation with the Estonian Literary Society by setting up a joint committee for changing names in 1921. However, in 1925 the committee and the organization were transferred to the Mother Tongue Society. The year 1921 witnessed the publication of several booklets that promoted and guided name changes: "Nimede valik ja soetamine" (Choice and adoption of names) by Lauri Kettunen, the article collection "Eestlasele eesti nimi" (An Estonian name for an Estonian), and a selected list of names "15 000 uut sugunime" (15,000 new family names). Promotional meetings were held, and promotional letters were sent out. However, the propaganda of the 1920s started to bear fruit later. Large-scale name changing started as late as in 1934 when the change of a foreign, dysphonic, or semantically undesirable name became free of charge for two years by law, and name-changing matters became the responsibility of state and local-government officials. The Mother Tongue Society supported this campaign, which was now carried out by the state, by publishing new selections of names: "Eesti nimi. Valik uusi perekonnanimesid" (1936; Estonian name. A selection of new family names), "Eestipäraseid eesnimesid" (1936; Estonian first names) by Julius Mägiste. During the campaign of Estonianization of names over 200,000 Estonians changed their names (for a more detailed discussion of the role of the Mother Tongue Society in the Estonianization of names see Henno 2001.)

In addition to general language management and name planning, the society also dealt to some extent with specialized language. In 1924 the society set up a committee of Estonian language-teaching terminology, which systematized the grammatical terms for schools. "Valik eestikeelseid grammatilisi oskussõnu" (A selection of Estonian grammatical terms) was published in the journal "Eesti Keel (EK 1925 : 20–35).

Issues of correct usage were repeatedly discussed by the board of the society and at meetings also during the post-war years. The society set up several temporary language committees for the purpose of working out rules for the spelling of Chinese and Greek names. The national committee of correct usage (VÕK), which was set up in 1960, functioned as an official norm-setting committee. However, the language committee of the Mother Tongue Society was set up for the purpose of recommended correct usage. In this connection the society decided to start the publication of a language-management collection "Kirjakeel" (Standard Language); its first issue came out in 1964. Unfortunately, at first the language committee remained a purely formal structure. It was as late as in 1969, when Rein Kull became chairman of the language committee, that the committee started to function properly and prepared a whole set of proposals for the national committee of correct usage. In 1972 the language committee organized its first competition of new words, which yielded such words as *taidlus* 'amateur performing arts', *taidleja*

'amateur performer', *pardel* 'shaver', *selve* 'self-service', *kohuke* 'glazed roll', *linnak* 'city; campus', *särgik* 'singlet', *püksikud* 'briefs', *türp* 'overalls', *eirama* 'ignore', etc. The activities of the language committee then lost momentum, and in 1978 no new language committee was formed. Also, the society published two more issues of the collection of articles "Kirjakeel" (1984 and 1985; Standard Language), after which it was discontinued. In fact, there had been a 20-year break since the publication of its first issue.

The language committee of the Mother Tongue Society was set up once again in 1993, and in 1997, when the national committee of correct usage was disbanded, it was granted the official right to set the norm. The committee consists of language managers representing different institutions, and they jointly pass the most important decisions with regard to language management. The decisions of the committee were gathered into a collection of articles "Kirjakeele teataja II. Emakeele Seltsi keeleteoimkonna soovitud 1993–2000" (2000; Standard language news II. Recommendations of the language committee of the Mother Tongue Society 1993–2000). The language committee was active during the period when the 1999 edition of the dictionary of correct usage "Eesti keele sõnaraamat ÕS 1999" was being prepared; more recently there has been less need for setting the norm. In 2002 the language committee of the Mother Tongue Society in cooperation with several other institutions held another competition of new words; this time the competition focused on the European Union. Similarly to the competition that had been held thirty years ago, it yielded a number of excellent coinages, such as *toukefondid* 'structural funds', *lõimima* 'integrate', *üleilmastuma* 'globalize', *lähimus* 'subsidiarity', *täislepimatus* 'zero tolerance', etc. (see Erelt 2003).

In the early 1990s the society took an active part in working out language policies. In 1994 the board of the society helped to draw up a new language act and to organize examinations in the state language. In the same year on the initiative of the society a committee of language affairs was set up at the Ministry of Education and Culture, which focused on recommended solutions of nationally important language issues (mostly with regard to Estonian as the state language). The board of the Mother Tongue Society also deserves the credit for the legal regulation of the norm of Standard Estonian.

In 2001 the Mother Tongue Society initiated in cooperation with the Tallinn House of Scientists and the Ministry of Education and Research a discussion "Estonian as a language of science and the European Union". Altogether seven discussions were held this year and the following year where people representing different fields analysed the situation of their specialized language. Then a general conference was held, which analysed the situation of the Estonian specialized language as a whole; the conference also adopted an appeal to the government. It could well be that these undertakings could indirectly contribute to the establishment of two national programmes: "Preparation and publication of Estonian-language university textbooks (2008–2012)" and "Support to Estonian-language terminology (2008–2012)".

### Popularization of linguistic knowledge and promotion of mother tongue

Despite the fact that the Mother Tongue Society has always been primarily a scholarly society, it has also dealt with linguistic education of people as well as with generating interest and creating a positive image with regard to the mother tongue. In the 1960s the Mother Tongue Society focused on comprehensive linguistic education (and not only practical language maintenance, which has always been a priority). On the initiative of Heino Ahven, an active academic secretary of the society, the society started to hold language days at schools in cooperation with the local education departments. The first language day was held in Viljandi in

October 1961. Both linguists and pupils have made presentations at language days. The organization of language days became a tradition that is still alive. After Estonia regained its independence, their number decreased at first; moreover, most of them were related to the celebration of the Mother Tongue Day on March 14. However, the new century has witnessed a new rise. In 2009 the society started a new project "Language days in the hinterland"; within this framework information and language days have been held at schools in the hinterland.

In 2008 the society held the first ever web-based word-collection competition, which was intended for secondary-school students. The aim was to collect new vocabulary used by young people, which cannot be found in dictionaries, to enliven the language activities of young people by new means, and to generate interest in the Estonian language.

In 2000 the society started to publish a popular language journal "Oma Keel" (Our Own Language), which is intended first and foremost for young people. In earlier times "Kodumurre" (Home Dialect) partly performed this role; however, its publication was discontinued during the confusion accompanying the time of regaining independence. "Oma Keel" is issued twice a year; it publishes popular articles about linguistics and language maintenance, Estonian dialects and other sublanguages, etymologies, introductory articles about our linguists and language institutions, surveys of new literature concerning the Estonian language, chronology of language events, etc.

Language days have been held also outside schools, both in Estonia and abroad. A new trend among the non-scholarly activities of the Mother Tongue Society is the organization of language days for Estonians living abroad. The first language day outside Estonia was held in Riga in 1989, but such language days became a tradition in 2001 when the language day organized jointly by the Mother Tongue Society and the Estonian Cultural Society of St Petersburg became an annual event. Since 2003 language days have been held on a regular basis for Estonians living in Moscow. Several language days have been held at the Estonian-medium school in Petseri. In the East language days have been held also in the Ukraine (Simferopol) and Belarus (Minsk). In the West language days have been held several times in various places in Finland, Sweden, Germany, Latvia (Riga), and Lithuania (Vilnius). Presentations have been made also in the UK (London) and the Netherlands (The Hague); Canada (Toronto) and even Australia (Melbourne and Sidney) represent more distant countries. In these undertakings the society acknowledges the support of the Ministry of Education and Research.

On the occasion of important anniversaries there is always a good reason to ask what next. The times have changed, and the needs have changed, too. There are several important linguistic institutions in Estonian, and there are several societies that deal with the Estonian language. However, as the only scholarly society the Mother Tongue Society has retained its role in scholarly communication. The task of the society is to spread the scholarly thought beyond the narrow circle of linguists and to overcome amateurism and populism in language matters. Direct scholarly communication is supported by publication activities. As there are ample opportunities to publish one's work now, today the role of the Mother Tongue Society is not as important as it used to be in this field. However, it is vital to retain the Yearbook of the Mother Tongue Society as a prestigious periodical and to keep its present high level. The language committee has to perform an important role in language management, and one hopes that the committee will be active in this effort. It is only natural that today one of the most important fields of activities of the Mother Tongue Society is to value our mother tongue and to popularize linguistic knowledge especially among young people.

Address:

Mati Erelt  
University of Tartu  
E-mail: mati.erelt@ut.ee

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