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The Diachronic Development of the Seto South Estonian Case System: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract:

The present thesis analyses the diachronic development of the Seto case system within the South Estonian branch and the broader Finnic language subfamily. The main goal of this work is to demonstrate that Seto should not be considered a dialect of (North) Estonian, but rather a distinct South Estonian language with its own historical development. Through a comparative morphophonological approach, the study examines conservative and innovative features in Seto. By comparing Seto with other Finnic languages such as Estonian, Võro, Finnish, Votic and Livonian, the analysis shows that many similarities between Seto and Estonian are due to *Sprachbund* effects rather than direct genetic inheritance. The findings suggest that a purely tree-based classification is insufficient to describe the complex relationships within the Finnic languages. This research also seeks to contribute to the description of an endangered, lesser-known South Estonian variety and supports its recognition and further study.

Keywords: Morphophonology, South Estonian, Uralistics, Finnic languages, case system

Lühikokkuvõte:

Käesolev lõputöö analüüsib seto käänetesüsteemi diakroonilist arengut Lõuna-Eesti harusja laiemalt läänemeresoome keelerühma kontekstis. Töö peamine eesmärk on näidata, et seto ei ole (põhja)eesti murre, vaid iseseisev lõunaeesti keel, millel on omaette ajalooline arengulugu. Võrdleva morfofonoloogilise lähenemise kaudu käsitletakse seto keele nii säilinud kui ka uuenduslikke jooni. Võrreldes setot teiste läänemeresoome keeltega, nagu eesti, võru, soome, vadja ja liivi, näitab analüüs, et paljud sarnasused seto ja eesti keele vahel on pigem *Sprachbund*'i ehk keelekontakti nähtused kui otsese geneetilise pärandumise tagajärg. Uuringu tulemused viitavad, et ainult puhtalt puumudelil põhinev klassifikatsioon ei suuda adekvaatselt kirjeldada läänemeresoome keelte keerulisi omavahelisi suhteid. Käesolev töö aitab kaasa ühe ohustatud ja väheuuritud lõunaeesti keelevariandi kirjeldamisele ja toetab selle tunnustamist ja edasist uurimist.

Võtmesõnad: Morfofonoloogia, lõunaeesti, uralistika, läänemeresoome keeled, käänetesüsteem

Resum:

Aquest treball analitza l'evolució diacrònica del sistema de casos del seto a la branca de llengues sud-estonianes i, més generalment, dins el marc de les llengües fínniques. L'objectiu principal d'aquest treball és demostrar que el seto no és un dialecte de l'estonià (del nord), sinó una llengua sud-estoniana independent, amb una trajectòria històrica pròpia. A través d'un enfocament morfofonològic comparatiu, s'hi examinen tant els trets més conservadors com les innovacions del seto. La comparació amb altres llengües fínniques, com l'estonià, el võro, el finès, el votic i el livonià, mostra que moltes de les similituds entre el seto i l'estonià són resultat de fenòmens de Sprachbund i no pas d'una herència genètica directa. Els resultats de l'estudi també mostren que una classificació basada exclusivament en un model arbori no pot descriure de manera adequada les complexes relacions internes de les llengües Fínniques. Aquest treball també busca contribuir a la descripció d'una varietat del sud-estonià amenaçada i poc documentada, i dona suport al seu reconeixement i a la seva futura recerca.

Paraules clau: Morfofonologia, sud-estonià, uralística, llengües fínniques, sistema de casos

The Diachronic Development of the Seto (South Estonian) Case System: A Comparative Analysis

Alejandro Jiménez

June 17, 2025

Contents

1 Introduction

This work explores the morphological case system of Seto, a South Estonian language within the Finnic branch of the Uralic family. While it is often considered a dialect of Estonian, Seto retains many features that distinguish it genetically from Estonian. Through a detailed analysis of its case system and phonological alternations, this study argues that Seto represents a distinct language (within South Estonian) with its own diachronic development, rather than a dialectal variant of Standard (North) Estonian.

The main aim of this work is to investigate the structure and development of the Seto case system in comparison with related Finnic languages, including Estonian, Võro, Finnish, and Livonian. It should be noted that case endings in Seto are subject to different phonological features, such as vowel harmony, glottalization and quantity, and the use of certain cases, such as the translative, inessive, abessive and terminative, reflect either conservative or innovative developments.

In doing so, this work contributes both to the descriptive documentation of Seto, which remains underrepresented in Uralic linguistics, and to a typological discussion about case systems and language contact in the Finnic area. It also addresses the limitations of a purely genetic, tree-based classification of the Finnic languages by showing how *Sprachbund* effects have also shaped structural similarities, such as quantity, across distantly related varieties.

The analysis is based on glossed examples from different Seto texts, dictionaries and studies, as well as comparative data from related Finnic languages. A morphophonological approach is used to examine both segmental and prosodic features of case marking, focusing on morphological productivity, phonological alternations, and historical retention or innovations.

This work is structured as follows: Chapter 1 is the current introduction. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework, a morphophonological approach to the diachronic changes experienced by Seto, and the most important theoretical foundations used in each section of the present work. Chapter 3 outlines key phonological and morphological features of Proto-Finnic, including quantity, consonant gradation, vowel harmony and inflection types, and provides a broad overview of the Finnic case system along with its morphology and usage. Chapter 4 offers a descriptive background on the Seto language and its dialects, and discusses the defining characteristics of South Estonian. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the Seto case system, its synchronic forms and diachronic developments, including both productive and unproductive cases. Chapter 6 provides a comparative analysis between Seto and other Finnic languages and groups, such as Estonian, Võro, Votic, Livonian, and Finnish, highlighting both shared features and independent innovations. Finally, Chapter 7 draws the final conclusions about Seto's place in the Finnic family tree

and reflects on the importance of considering both the interaction of genetic factors and also the *Sprachbund* effects, which have shaped the current case system in Seto.

2 Theoretical Framework

The present work is aligned with the field of diachronic Uralic linguistics and specifically morphophonology, as it aims to explain the diachronic development of the case system of the Seto language as compared to other Finnic languages, such as Estonian and Finnish.
In order to do this, a synchronic analysis of the present-day case system of Seto and its dialects, along with an introduction to Finnic phonology and the Finnic case system will be necessary. The theoretical foundation for all of this will mostly be based upon Hagu and Pajusalu (2021), EKI (2011) and Iva (2007) in the case of the Seto case system, along with Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), Aikio and Ylikoski (2016), Sammallahti (1988) and Setälä (1890) in the case of the morphophonological development of Finnic and its different cases.

In the last section of this work, the functions and forms of many of the Seto cases will be thoroughly analysed and compared with other Finnic languages and groups in order to place Seto someplace in the traditional Finnic branch and to demonstrate that it does not indeed come from Estonian as a dialect, but rather, that the similarities are due to the complex system of Sprachbünde within the Finnic languages Viitso and Ernštreits (2012), Erelt (2003), Ariste (1948), Karlsson (2017) and Grünthal (2015).

3 Introduction to Proto-Finnic

3.1 Some Morphological and Phonological Features of Finnic

There are four morphological and phonological features that should be explained beforehand for better understanding of the present work, quantity, consonant gradation, vowel harmony and inflection types.

3.1.1 Quantity

In the Finnic languages, both vowels and consonants can have different quantities or *lengths*. In most Finnic languages, there are two: *short*, and *long*, in Estonian and the South Estonian languages, however, there are three: short (Q1), long (Q2) and overlong (Q3).

This distinction in length is contrastive, that is, when vowels or consonants with different lengths are placed in the same context, the meaning will be different. A clear example are the vowels in the Estonian words tuli ['tuli], tuuli ['tuːli] and tuuli ['tuːːli]. The first word is in the nominative and means 'fire'; the second word is a female name derived from the word *tuul* ('wind'); and the third one is the partitive plural of *tuul* ('wind'). As can be seen, the second and third degree cannot be told apart in the written language, as they are written the same way.

Also, words with a distinction in duration are not always contrastive only in a lexical sense, but also in a grammatical one. The genitive case will often (if this contrast exists in the word) have Q2, whereas the partitive (and the illative, in some cases) will have Q3. There are some inflectional types that do not follow this rule, however, as we will see with the word *rukis* in the next paragraph Erelt (2003), Asu and Teras (2009).

The same thing can happen with consonants, but in this case, the system of three quantities is reflected in the orthography in the case of plosives, but not with nasal or lateral consonants. It should also be noted that the graphemes *b,d* or *g* represent voiceless plosives in Estonian, whereas *p,t* or *k* represent voiceless geminate plosives; lastly, *pp,tt* or *kk* represent voiceless overlong geminated plosives. For example:

(1)   *riik* [riːk]   *riigi* [riːki]   *riiki* [riːkːi]
country.NOM.SG   country.GEN.SG   country.PART/ILL.SG
     [Q1]   [Q1]   [Q2]

(2)   *rukis* [rukːis]   *rukki* [rukːːi]
rye.NOM.SG [Q2]   rye.GEN.SG [Q3]

As for the nasals, we can see the following examples:

(3)   *lina* [lina]   *linna* [linːa]   *linna* [linːːa]
flax.NOM.SG [Q1]   city.GEN.SG [Q2]   city.PART/ILL.SG [Q3]

3.1.2   Consonant gradation

Consonant gradation, in the Finnic languages, is a process of alternation between either lenis and fortis consonants, or an alternation between assimilation and non-assimilation of consonants that happens word-medially in word lexemes. The forms of different words having either a lenis or an assimilated consonant will be called *weak grade*, and the cases which have either a fortis or a non-assimilated consonant will be called *strong grade*. Usually, the strong grade is found in historically open syllables and the weak grade, in historically closed ones. This is because the

original distinction (or allophony) was made between closed and open syllables.

For instance, the Finnish noun *kukka* (flower) is in the strong grade in the nominative, but in the weak grade in the genitive *kukan*. The very same thing happens in Ingrian and Karelian as well.

3.1.3 Vowel harmony

Vowel harmony is a process of long-distance assimilation whereby some phonological feature must be shared by all the vowels in a specific domain, such as a word. In the case of the Finnic languages, most of which (except for Estonian, Veps and Livonian) have vowel harmony, there is *palatal harmony*, that is, the vowels can be classified into two main types: palatal vowels (or front vowels) and velar vowels (or back vowels). There are only two exceptions to this, the neutral vowels [i] and [e], as they lack any counterpart back vowels; if a word has only neutral vowels, however, they will follow front vowel harmony Krisztina (1998), Goldsmith et al. (1995) Laura (2024), Karlsson (2017):

(4) *Talo*   *Talossa*
     house.NOM.SG   house.INE.SG

     'house, in the house'

(5) *Kylä*   *Kylässä*
     village.NOM.SG village.INE.SG

     'village, in the village'

The quality of the vowels in the first syllable will determine the vowels that can appear in the following syllables and also the ones the suffixes can contain.

3.1.4 Inflection types

In the Finnic languages, both nominals and verbs can be inflected; nominals are declined, verbs, conjugated.

The Finnic languages have a complex system of inflection where words can be categorised according to several criteria. This classification usually assumes an inflected word has two parts, namely, the stem, which can have different variations (consonant gradation or vocalic changes) and an inflectional ending, which can also have different alternations based on final stem changes Viks (2015). For instance, the Institute for the Languages of Finland (Kotimaisten kielten keskus or KOTUS) divides Finnish words into 78 different types (1-51 are nominal inflection types, and 51-78 are verbal inflection types), the Institute of the Estonian language(Eesti Keele Instituut or

EKI), on the other hand, divides Estonian words into 38 different types (1-28 are nominal inflection types, and 29-38 are verbal inflection types), in both languages, each type has different subtypes as well, making Finnic morphophonology especially complex. Erelt et al. (2018), ns1 (1961)

Lastly, the Võro-Seto macrolanguage is divided into 47 nominal inflection types and 38 verbal inflection types. Inflection tables and further information can be found in Iva (2007).

3.2   Overview of the Finnic Case System

3.2.1   Gender, number and case system

The Finnic languages, as is the case with all Uralic languages and their descendants, have no gender or morphological noun classes beyond some purely lexico-semantic distinctions. Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

As for the number, Uralic is thought to have had a 3-way distinction, singular, dual and plural; this distinction, however, was completely lost in Finnic, though we can still see it in some of the Saami languages, in Khanty and (Northern) Mansi, as well as the Samoyedic languages. In the case of Finnic and its descending languages, however, it was lost.

The singular is always the unmarked form, whereas the plural tends to be formed with an *-i* suffix plus the different case endings; this *-i*, however, didn't exist in the nominative nor the accusative. Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), Honti (1988)

Regarding the case system, it is believed Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001) that many of the current cases in the Finnic languages are not necessarily ancient, but a recent innovation, especially those related to location and those with semantic value. Proto-Finnic is usually reconstructed having at least thirteen cases and it is thought that it was in Finnic that adjective-noun agreement developed, as adjectives didn't originally decline in Uralic.

3.2.2   Core Cases

3.2.2.1 The nominative case

The nominative case in Finnic was the unmarked case, and it could probably function as the subject, a predicative expression, and as the object of an imperative, as well as be used in passive verb forms.

The singular nominative, as the unmarked case, didn't have a specific suffix; the plural, however, has a -t ending both in Proto-Finnic and in most of the Finnic languages. This suffix does not

exist in South-Estonian, where it is replaced by either a zero suffix or a glottal stop. This is the case both in the -t suffix for the plural nominative and the -t suffix for the third person plural in verbs, which is thought to have originated from deverbal nouns. Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

3.2.2.2 The accusative case

The accusative in Finnic was marked with an -m suffix, which eventually merged with the genitive -n mark through a regular Finnic sound change where final-word -m became -n. Thus, a lot of grammars don't mark the accusative in the Finnic languages as an actual separate case, however, we can see some pronouns where the accusative mark remains separate from the genitive as a remnant of the old Proto-Finnic accusative. Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001)

The accusative case is used to mark telic objects, except in passives and imperatives, where, as aforementioned, the nominative is used Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

3.2.2.3 The genitive case

The genitive case in the Finnic languages is used to mark the possessor and the attribute of nominalised verb forms, both for the subject or the object, giving us ambiguous constructions such as the following:

(6) *sotilaiden   ampuminen*
soldier-GEN.PL shoot-NOM.SG

'The shooting of/by the soldiers'

The genitive singular is reconstructed with an -n suffix in Proto-Finnic, this gave rise to the -n genitive suffix in most of the Finnic languages except for Estonian, Livonian and specific dialects from other Finnic languages Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), where the -n suffix disappears word-finally, not only in the case of the genitive suffix, but also in verbs and other noun forms.

The genitive plural, on the other hand, can be formed in two different ways in Finnic. On the one hand, there is the so-called *western type genitive*, which forms the genitive from the plural nominative suffix -t and the genitive suffix -n, v.g Est. kalade, with the loss of final -n (from *kalaðen and ultimately kala+t(+e)+n; on the other hand there is the *eastern type genitive*, which, while using the same suffixes aforementioned, also adds the plural -i suffix before them, v.g Vot. Kalojee (from *kaloiðen and ultimately kaloi+ten) Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

3.2.2.4 The partitive case

The partitive case, marked with the -tA suffix, was originally a locative case, specifically a separative (ablative), which we can see in some lexicalised adverbs with the same ending Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), such as kaukaa in Finnish (from kauka-ta, the separative of kauka-, meaning from far away), and also as a marker for the elative and ablative cases, which will be explained later on.

In today's Finnic languages, the partitive case is used to indicate indefiniteness, partiality or atelicity for objects. In Finnish, we could say the following two sentences:

(7) *ammun   lintua*
shoot-1SG bird-PART.SG

'I shoot at a bird.'

(8) *ammun   lintun*
shoot-1SG bird-GEN.SG

'I shoot the bird dead.'

The first one used the partitive and means *I shoot **at** the bird*, and the second one used the accusative/ genitive and means *I shoot the bird dead*, showing the completeness of the action. Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001)

3.2.3   Locative Cases

The locative cases are a subclass of cases in the Finnic languages which indicate location. They are usually reconstructed to have come from three distinct markers in Proto-Uralic, which, in conjunction with either an external or internal coaffix, whose development we will see in each subsection, form the totality of the Finnic locative cases.

Depending on which of these two latter markers is used, the Finnic locative system is usually divided into two classes: the so-called l-cases and the s-cases.

The l-cases represent the semantically marked set of the locative cases, indicating *external location*. The s-cases, on the other hand, are semantically unmarked; while they often indicate *internal location*, they aren't restricted to it and can be used in other more grammaticalised functions Aikio and Ylikoski (2016), as will be discussed further in this section.

Each subset of locative cases, both internal and external, can be divided into three distinct cases, an *in-case*, a *to-case* and an *from-case* Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), which will be labeled in the present work as *static case*, *directional case* and *separative case*, respectively.

3.2.3.1 The l-cases

This subset of three locative cases derives, as mentioned, from three distinct markers originating in Proto-Uralic and reconstructed in pre-Finnic as follows: *-nA, a locative marker, *-tA, a separative marker and *-ŋ, a lative marker, all of them preceded by the coaffix *-l; this gave rise to the (static) adessive case *-llA (< *-l-nA), the (directional) allative case *llEn (< *-l-en) and the (separative) ablative case *-ltA (< *-l-tA) Ylikoski (2016).

The latter coaffix seems to be a unique feature of the Finnic languages, as we cannot see it in any other Uralic language outside of the Finnic branch. Despite this, we cannot conclusively say that it is a unique Finnic development, since it can also be theorised that the prepositions *alde* ('onto') and *ala* ('on') in North Saami have the same origin as the l-cases, along with some adverbs like *olggul* ('from outside'), as theorised by Rasmus Rask Rask (1832).

3.2.3.2 The s-cases

This subset of locative cases derives from the same three markers from which the l-cases derive. However, instead of a coaffix -l-, a coaffix -s- is used; this gave rise to the (static) inessive case *-ssA (< *-s-nA), the (directional) illative case *-hVn (< *-s-in) and the (separative) elative case *-stA (< *-s-tA) Aikio and Ylikoski (2016).

This coaffix, moreover, has cognates in other western Uralic languages outside of the Finnic group. For example, the illative ending in Erzya (Mordvin) is -s and the elative in North Saami is -ste/stie, similar to Finnish -stA Ylikoski (2016). Both of these suffixes come from the *-s- coaffix, which, as hypothesised by Setälä (1890), might have come from a Uralic lative *-s-, which, in conjunction with the three aforementioned Uralic markers gave rise to the s-case system.

3.2.4   The semantic cases

The semantic cases are a subclass of cases in the Finnic languages which are not nuclear or locative, that is, they don't mark either arguments nor location, but rather the semantic relation between a phrase and its head.

3.2.4.1 The Translative case

The translative case can have several uses Erelt et al. (2000):

1. Indicate a change of state:

(9)   *Mari   muutus   väga **kurvaks***
      Mari change-PST.3SG very **sad-TRS.SG**

      'Mari became very **sad**.'

2. A temporary state in which one finds him or herself:

(10)   *Jüri on   siin rohkem nagu **õpipoisiks***
      Jüri be.PRS.3SG here more   like   **apprentice-TRS.SG**

      'Jüri is here more like an **apprentice.**'

3. A purpose:

(11)   ***Joomiseks*   ärge   seda vett   küll   kasutage,***
      drink.TRS.SG NEG.IMP this   water PART use.IMP

      'Don't use this water **for drinking**.'

4. A time:

(12)   *Töö   tuleb   **homseks**   valmis teha.*
      work come.PRS.3SG tomorrow.TRS.SG ready   do.INF

      'The work must be finished **by tomorrow**.'

Erelt et al. (2000). It's ending is usually -ks.

3.2.4.2 The essive case

The essive case is usually considered to be the counterpart of the translative case, as it usually indicates a state of being or the way something acts, in a more permanent way Erelt et al. (2000), Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

This state of being can also have some other meanings Erelt et al. (2000), such as:

1. Purpose:

(13)   *Kuurialust   kasutati   ka   **saunana**.*
      woodshed.PART.SG use.PST.PASS also sauna.ESS.SG

      'The woodshed was also used **as a sauna**.'

2. A requisite

(14) ***Kasutatuna*** *on* *see tervisele kasulik.*
use-PST.PTCP.ESS.SG be.PRS.3SG this health.ALL beneficial

'**When used**, it is beneficial to health.'

3. A stage of life

(15) ***Kahekümneaastasena*** *oli* *ta juba lavatäht.*
twenty-year-old.ESS be.PST.3SG s/he already stage.star

'**At the age of twenty**, she/he was already a stage star.'

4. A manner

(16) *Inimesi* *tuli* *lakkamatu* ***vooluna.***
person.PL.PART come.PST.3SG constant stream.ESS

'People came **in a constant stream**.'

Its ending is usually -na.

3.2.4.3 The abessive case

The abessive case can have a few nuanced functions, however, we could simplify its main functions as one indicating *lack or absence of.* Some of its functions are the following Erelt et al. (2000):

1. Show the lack of a companion or accompanying object:

(17) *Käisin* *reisil* *ilma* ***naiseta.***
go.PST.1SG trip.ADE.SG without wife.ABE.SG

'I went on a trip without my wife.'

(18) *Mari ei tihanud* *(ilma)* ***kingituseta*** *külla* *minna.*
Mari NEG dare.PST.3SG (without) gift.ABE.SG visit.ILL.SG go.INF

'Mari didn't dare to visit without a gift.'

As can be seen in these examples and the following, it is possible to omit the abessive preposition *ilma* in all contexts in Estonian Erelt (2003), in Finnish, on the other hand, the abessive is marked with the suffix -ttA, but the equivalent adposition *ilman* governs the partitive case Karlsson (2017):

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(19) *rahatta*
money.ABE.SG

'Without money'

(20) *ilman rahaa*
without money.PART.SG

'Without money'

Or, less commonly

(21) *rahaa ilman*
money.PART.SG without

'Without money'

2. Indicate the lack of a tool or means:

(22) *Ta sööb praadigi (ilma)* **kahvlita.**
s/he eat.PRS.3SG steak.PTCL (without) fork.ABE.SG

'He even eats steak (without) a fork.'

3. Indicate the absence of a state

(23) *Ta vaatas mulle (ilma)* **vihata** *otsa.*
s/he look.PST.3SG 1sg.ALL (without) anger.ABE.SG face.ILL.SG

'He looked at me (without) anger.'

4. Show the absence of a characteristic

(24) *(ilma)* **prillideta** *mees*
(without) glasses.ABE.SG man

'A man without (any) glasses.'

3.2.5   Other cases

There are other semantic cases, though the ones shown above are present in all the Finnic languages, while we have some other present only in a few Finnic languages or in some of their dialects Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001):

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Some examples include (among others) **the comitative case**, which indicates *company of* and is the counterpart of the abessive case. This case is present in Estonian, South Estonian and Votian with the suffix -ga, very rarely, only in Finnish and the Ala-Laukaa dialect of Ingrian, it also appears with the ending -ne and only in the plural, along with a possessive suffix, for instance Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), Markus and Rozhanskiy (2014).

Another example is the estonian **terminative case**, which has the marker -ni and indicates one of three things Erelt et al. (2000):

1. A spacial endpoint:

(25) *Kõndisime   aeglaselt **metsatukani***
      walk.PST.1PL slowly   forest.edge.TERM

      'We walked slowly **up to the edge of the forest**.'

2. A spacial endpoint:

(26) *Ootasin   teda   hommikust   **õhtuni***
      wait.PST.1SG 3sg.PART morning.ELAT evening.TERM

      'I waited for him from morning **to evening**.'

3. A quantity limit:

(27) *Närvid olid   kõigil viimse   **võimaluseni** pingul*
      nerves be.PST.3PL all.ADE final.GEN possibility.TERM tense

      'Everyone's nerves were stretched **to the (last) limit**.'

As a final example we could mention **the exessive case**, present in the Savo dialects of Finnish as a counterpart to the translative case and denoting *getting out of a state* (v.g FI *tärähtäneentä terveeksi*, from loony to healthy) and also as a locative in some cases (v.g FI *siintä*, thence, siitä, in standard Finnish) and also described in some other Finnic languages, such as Estonian or South Estonian Prillop et al. (2020), despite its not being as productive. Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001)

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4 The Seto Language

All the Finnic languages come from a proto-language believed to have been spoken more than two thousand years ago, which we call *Proto-Finnic*. While some dialectal differences had already developed before the year 500 BC, the first great diversification of Proto-Finnic happened around the Middle-Finnic period, that is, between the years 500 B.C and 200 A.D Pajusalu (2022). The two branches that developed thenceforth are called *inland Finnic (sisemaa-Läänemeresoome)*, which gave rise to old South-Estonian and, later, to the South-Estonian group; and *coastal Finnic (ranna-Läänemeresoome)*, which gave rise to the rest of the Finnic languages. Kallio (2014).

The Seto language belongs to the South Estonian (lõunaeesti) branch of the Finnic languages, along with the Võru, Mulgi and Tartu languages and the now extinct Kraasna, Ludzi and Leivu languages.

Around the year 500 AC, Seto dialects started to develop from the eastern dialects of South-Estonian and apart from the rest of the South-Estonian languages, retaining some features from old South-Estonian and developing some new ones due to both internal language changes and external factors such as the influence of the neighbouring peoples (such as the Baltics and Slavs) Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

4.1 The Seto dialects

Setomaa, where the Seto language has been historically spoken, can be divided into 12 village groups, usually called *nulgad*, 'corners' (*nulk*, in the singular). While the language differed slightly in each nulk, we can usually divide Seto into three big dialects with considerable differences: *Northern Seto*, *Southern Seto* and *Eastern Seto*Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

In Figure 1, numbers 1 to 4 represent different borders (1 = road, 2 = railway, 3 = Estonian-Russian border and 4 = Setomaa border), while 5 to 7 represent the different Seto dialects, 5 being northern Seto, 6 being eastern Seto and 7 being southern Seto.

Northern Seto (5), as can be seen in the map in the next page, is spoken around Mikitamäe and Värska, in Põlva county and Võru county, respectively. The interaction between these Seto speakers and the coastal inhabitants of the Räpina and Võnnu parishes has caused some linguistic features to be introduced into the Northern Seto dialects, which are not found in any other Seto area within Setomaa. Some examples include the opening of [i] to [e] in unstressed syllables (e.g. *pante* instead of *pandi*) and the opening of [u] to [o] in unstressed syllables as well, as we can see in the past participles, for instance *tulno* instead of *tulnud* Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

Eastern Seto (6) is, out of the three dialects, the one that's been used the least in literary works

and has had the smallest influence from literary Estonian and has had minimal connection with the western dialects, while being heavily influenced by Russian, its neighbouring language. It has, however, been preserved in traditionally important folk songs.

Southern Seto (7) has had the least amount of recent innovations when compared to the rest of the dialects. That's why it's intelligible to all Seto speakers and it's also the one that's been used in most of today's Seto literary works, as well as the Setomaa newspaper, among others Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

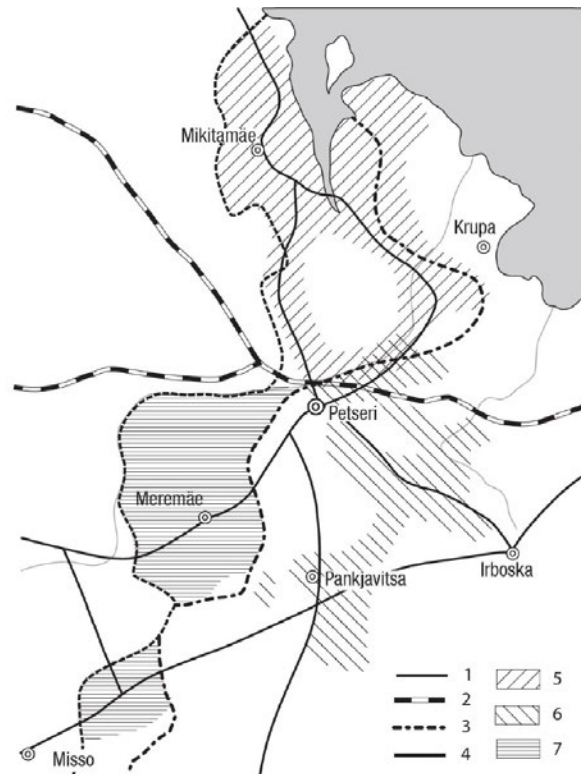Figure 1: Seto Dialects Hagu and Pajusalu (2021)

4.2   Defining Characteristics of South Estonian

In this section, the morphological and phonological characteristics of South Estonian will be highlighted and expanded in the following sections. These traits help justify the classification of South Estonian as a distinct group and also demonstrate the independent diachronic paths that its varieties have followed.

4.2.1   Features of South Estonian

1. Quantity system: South Estonian has developed a three-way length distinction, rare among the Finnic languages and found only in Estonian and South Estonian. This distinction is relevant in the case system, as it helps distinguish cases such as the genitive from the partitive or the illative.

2. Vowel harmony: South Estonian has retained the vowel harmony system which exists in all Finnic languages except for Estonian, Livonian and Veps. This points to a diachronic development completely separate from Estonian.

3. Glottal stop: The glottal stop is a phoneme very characteristic of South Estonian. Even though not all of its varieties use it, it is the only Finnic language which uses it contrastively.

4. Inessive -h: As seen in prior sections, the inessive case in the Finnic languages comes from the debuccalisation of the Proto-Finnic ending *-s-nA, which developed into *-h-nA. This ending is not as common in Finnic as *-ssA and, in fact, does not exist in Estonian. The South Estonian *-h-sA ending gave rise to three different endings in South Estonian, as seen in Figure 2, -hn, -h, and -n, none of which closely resemble the Estonian ending -s. Seto, in particular, adopted the ending -h.

5.Genitive plural formation: The genitive plural form in South Estonian, and Võro and Seto, in particular, is -i + dõ/de, unlike Estonian, which did not preserve the plural suffix -i and usually uses -de or -te.

These characteristics, among many others, point to the independent development of South Estonian as a Finnic group. They also support the classification of Seto not as a dialect of Estonian, but as a South Estonian language with distinct traits, which are shaped by both internal developments and external influences.

5   The Seto Case System

5.1   Short Descriptive Overview

The Seto case system has its origins in the old Finnic case system, very closely resembling other South-Estonian languages such as Võro and also, a little less closely, other Finnic languages. The

Seto language case system is comprised of the same core grammatical cases reconstructed in Proto-Finnic except for the accusative, along with the same locative cases and a few semantic cases.

In the following sections I'll talk about the Seto core cases, internal and external locative cases, semantic cases, and lastly, unproductive cases.

The core cases are *the nominative case*, *the genitive case* and *the partitive case*, and as is the case with most of the Finnic languages, *the accusative case* is only preserved in certain pronouns.

The locative cases reconstructed in Proto-Finnic are also the ones we find in Seto, namely, *the inessive case*, *the elative case*, *the allative case*, *the adessive case* and *the ablative case.*

The semantic cases we can find in Seto, on the other hand, are *the translative case*, found in many other Finnic languages; *the terminative case*, also found in Estonian or Veps; *the abessive case* and *the comitative case.* Together with these, there are also a few unproductive cases, namely, *the essive case*, *the instructive case* and *the prolative case.* Hagu and Pajusalu (2021), Iva (2007).

5.2 Historical Overview and Development

The Seto language shares a 13-case system with Võro, which developed from the Proto-Finnic case system and is much more conservative than Estonian in many ways Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

Seto retains many archaic case forms in certain expressions and adverbs, such as the *-i* instructive ending in *öi*, ("at night"), or *täüsi*, completely. Hagu and Pajusalu (2021)

We also find much more homonymy in Seto than in Estonian or Finnish in specific cases, we can see this in tüü or hüä, where the nominative and genitive share the same unmarked form, or in the same -st ending in both the elative and translative cases. Hagu and Pajusalu (2021)

5.3 Core Cases (nominative, genitive, partitive)

5.3.1 The nominative and genitive cases

Both the nominative and the genitive cases in Seto are typically unmarked in the singular, meaning they don't have any overt case suffixes.

That said, some words might show irregular or unpredictable markings, depending on the word, though these are not consistent at all. These usually reflect morphophonological distinctions rather than purely morphological markings. In some cases, the nominative ends in a glottal stop or some other consonant due to the omission of a vowel, which reappears in the genitive (e.g. nom: kiil', gen: keele or nom: aastak, gen: aastaga). The glottal stop is marked as **'** in Seto and **q** in Võro Iva (2007), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

In some other cases, however, omissions reappear in other cases, such as the partitive, but not in the nominative or genitive singular. For instance, *hüä* ("good"), has the same form in both the nominative and the genitive, where the consonant sound [ʋ] has been omitted. This sound reappears in the partitive *hüvvä*; in Võro, on the other hand, we can see this consonant is not omitted, keeping it in the form *hüvä* in both the nominative and genitive, and having a form equal to Seto, namely, *hüvvä*, in the partitive. It is also important to note that there is a strong tendency for nouns to end in a vowel in the genitive. Iva (2007)

The nominative plural is always marked by a glottal stop placed after the genitive root:

(28)   *käsi*   *käe*   *käe'*
        hand.NOM.SG   hand.GEN.SG   hand.NOM.PL

'hand (nom. sg), hand (gen. sg), hand (nom. pl)'

The genitive plural is a bit more complex:
It usually contains the suffix -i after the nominative root, like in *hüvvi* or *kiili*. Seto, as well as Estonian, has a three degree (välde) length distinction, which does not show in written language. The first degree is usually marked by a single vowel, whereas the second and third degrees are marked by writing the same vowel twice. Because of this, the genitive form coincides a lot with the illative form in the written form, but has a different degree when the word is pronounced.
For instance, *kässi* can either be the genitive plural of the word for **hand** (of the hands) or the illative plural (into the hands). In the genitive plural, second degree length is used, while in the illative plural, third degree length is used.
Apart from this, some nouns also have double marking, using not only -i, but also -de or -dõ, depending on vowel harmony, as in *hobõsidõ* (of the horses) or *tüküsside* (of the plugs) Hagu and Pajusalu (2021). In monosillabic words, these suffixes weaken and the -d- is replaced by -j-. For instance, **puidõ* becomes *puijõ* (of the trees).

5.3.2   The partitive case

The main suffix for the singular partitive case in both Võro and Seto is -t, which can appear both after a vowel or after a consonant. In some words, namely, words ending with a long vowel, a diphthong or a voiced consonant, a -d suffix may also be used. It is also common for the partitive case to have no mark at all, however, in this context, a final vowel lengthening will necessarily occur. In Estonian, disyllabic nouns with primary stress have the same form for the three nuclear cases, whereas in Seto and Võro, the partitive is made with a short (second grade) consonant gemination (e.g, kala, kala, kalla for fish, est: kala, kala, kala). We can also see the suffix -dA in

some pronouns, which might be geminated in eastern dialects of Võro and Seto (e.g kedä vs ketä). Iva (2007), Rätsep (1979).

In contrast to Estonian, the partitive case can never be produced in the exact same way as the nominative or the genitive case. While it can have zero-marking, the last vowel will always be lengthened in opposition to other cases. Iva (2007).

The main suffix for the partitive plural case in both Võro and Seto is -it, which stems from the -i plural suffix, the same used in the genitive, and the partitive mark -t. In most of the words that end in a vowel, the last vowel disappears and the -it ending will be used (e.g hobõsõ becomes hobõsit, tüü becomes töid and rikas becomes rikkit) Hagu and Pajusalu (2021), Iva (2007).

As can be seen in the examples and is usual in the Finnic languages, many words will have stem changes because of consonant gradation and other historical processes, that, however, is outside the scope of the present work.

The partitive case is usually the basis for the formation of the rest of the plural cases as well, however, the following exceptions should be taken into account:

1. The weak stem will be used in all plural cases with words where where the forms for the partitive and the genitive plural coincide or the last vowel of the word is long. For instance, if we look at the word kuld, *gold*, the strong stem is kuld-, and the weak stem, kull-, we can see that the partitive is made from the weak stem, as is expected, **kuldõ**, however, the rest of the cases are not formed from it, but from the weak stem. Instead of having the inessive kuldõn, the inessive kullõn is used Iva (2007).

2. The plural comitative case will be formed using the plural genitive.

3. In the -tE plural instances, all the plural cases are formed using the genitive plural instead of the partitive.

5.4   The Internal Locative Cases

The Seto locative cases include, as does Finnic, the inessive, a static internal case; the illative, a directional internal case and the elative, a separative internal case.

5.4.1   The inessive case

The Seto inessive ending is -h. As aforementioned, the inessive case in Finnic originally had the form *-nsA, which was simplified to *-ssA in most varieties of Finnic and, eventually, gave rise to

the ending used in most Finnic languages. However, there was an alternative form *-hna, where the *s* underwent lenition instead. This form is preserved only in the Ostrobothnian varieties of Finnish (e.g päähnäni instead of the standard päässäni, meaning *in my head*) and, as can be seen in figure 2 Toomse and Pajusalu (1998), in the South Estonian varieties. The old inessive suffix in South Estonian was -hn, which is still typical of the central dialects of Võro and was also the inessive suffix in the Lutsi language; from this suffix, two other suffixes arose: the -n suffix, used in Mulgi, some dialects of Võru (Rõu, Kan, Urv) and most dialects of the Tartu language, and the -h suffix, used in the eastern dialects of Võro (Vas, Räp, Plv), and also in Seto. Iva (2007), Toomse and Pajusalu (1998), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

Interestingly, in the Võro standard language, -n is used, based upon the fact that it was in the Tartu (South Estonian) literary language and also the one preferred in Võro; in Seto, on the other hand, -h is the only one used. The plural forms of the inessive will (mostly) be formed using this ending after the partitive root.
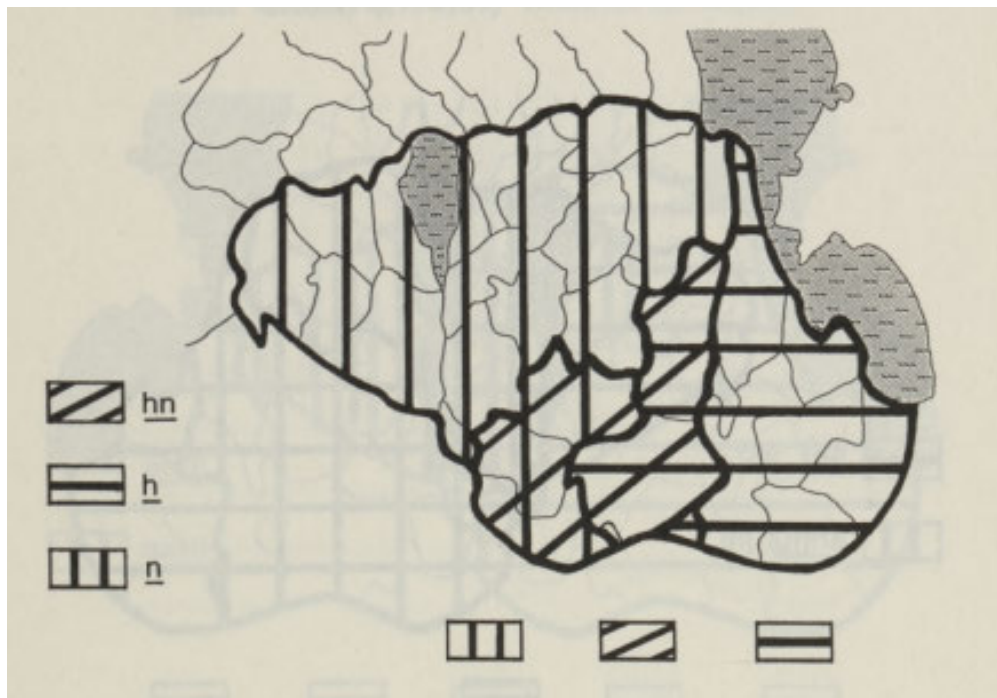
Figure 2: Inessive endings in South Estonian Toomse and Pajusalu (1998)

5.4.2 The illative case

In most instances, the illative case in Seto will either have no ending or have a -he ending. These are sometimes considered two separate cases: the normal illative, with the -he ending, and the additive case, which has the same functions but either has no ending or is geminated. It is important to clarify that the additive case is not productive in all words.

5.4.2.1 The *regular* illative case

The *regular* illative case tends to use the -he suffix, which comes from the Finnic suffix *-sen, but ended up undergoing a debuccalisation process and became *-hen Viitso (2003). A few exceptions should be taken into account, however Iva (2007):

1. Monosyllabic consonantal stems which in other cases have a disyllabic e-stem with a long vowel and an intervocalic resonant (m, n, l ,r) and stems with voiced consonants such as kiil- and veri- types (23 and 32) will take the ending -de:

(29) *kiil*   *kiilde*
      language.NOM.SG   language.ILL.SG

      'Language, Into the language'

(30) *veri*   *verde*
      blood.NOM.SG   blood.ILL.SG

      'Blood, Into the blood'

      This type of illative was general in South Estonian. Iva (2007)

2. In monosyllabic words ending in a long vowel, the -he suffix is geminated and its vowel assimilates with the final long vowel of the word Iva (2007). For instance:

(31) *tüü*   *tüühhü*
      work.NOM.SG   work.ILL.SG

      'Work, Into the work'

(32) *maa*   *maahha*
      land.NOM.SG   land.ILL.SG

      'Land, Into the land'

(33) *pää*   *päähhä*
      head.NOM.SG   head.ILL.SG

      'Head, Into the head'

3. Disyllabic words with a fixed stem and first or second vowel quantity will have the ending -htE Iva (2007):

(34) *täta*   *tätähtõ*
dad.NOM.SG   dad.ILL.SG

'Dad, Into the dad'

(35) *neio*   *neiohtõ*
maiden.NOM.SG   maiden.ILL.SG

'Maiden, Into the maiden'

4. Words ending in a consonant stem with either -s or -t will have a -tE illative ending:

(36) *käsi*   *kätte*
hand.NOM.SG   hand.ILL.SG

'Hand, Into the hand'

(37) *inemine*   *inemiste*
person.NOM.SG   person.ILL.SG

'Person, Into the person'

5. Type 20 words will have a -dE illative ending after a vowel, and types 23 and 32 words will have it after a consonant:

(38) *täüs*   *täüde*
full.NOM.SG   full.ILL.SG

'Full, into Full'

(39) *hiis*   *hiide*
sacred.grove.NOM.SG   sacred.grove.ILL.SG

'Sacred grove, Into the sacred grove'

(40) *verdi*   *verde*
blood.NOM.SG   blood.ILL.SG

'Blood, Into the blood'

(41) *kuu*   *kuudõ*
moon.NOM.SG   moon.ILL.SG

'Moon, Into the moon'

5.4.2.2 The additive case

The short illative or additive case, on the other hand and as stated, either has no ending or is geminated. In the first instance, we'll call the case *additive proper*, whereas the latter will be called *geminate additive*.

The additive proper is used in disyllabic words with a weak-grade root (types 36, 38, 41 and 46) and those where the partitive and illative roots coincide (types 42, 43 and 47):

(42) *kogõr*   *kokrõ*
      carp.NOM.SG   carp.ADD.SG

      'Crucian carp, Into crucian carp'

(43) *kuul'*   *kuuli*
      school.NOM.SG   school.ADD.SG

      'School, Into the school'

(44) *silm*   *silmä*
      eye.NOM.SG   eye.ADD.SG

      'Eye, Into the eye'

(45) *jalg*   *jalga*
      leg.NOM.SG   leg.ADD.SG

      'Leg, Into the leg'

The geminate additive is used in disyllabic words whose unmarked form appears in the strong-grade form and in which there is a lengthening contrast between the partitive (short or lengthened consonant) and the illative (overlong consonant). Examples of this include: nominative singular tarõ, partitive and illative singular tarrõ; talo, tallo; and häpü, häppü.

(46) *tarõ*   *tarrõ*   *tarrõ*
      house.NOM.SG   house.PART.SG [Q2]   house.ILL.SG [Q3]

      'Room, (Of) room, Into the room'

(47) *talo*   *tallo*   *tallo*
      farm.NOM.SG   farm.PART.SG [Q2]   house.ILL.SG [Q3]

      'Farm, (Of) farm, Into the farm'

(48) *häbü*   *häpü*   *häppü*
      shame.NOM.SG   shame.PART.SG [Q2]   shame.ILL.SG [Q3]

'Shame, (Of) shame, Into shame'

In most cases, the plural illative can be formed from the plural partitive. However, if the singular illative doesn't have a -he ending, that is, if a noun can be considered to possess the additive case, the -he ending will be optional in the plural. For example, nominative singular tarõ, illative singular tarrõ, and thus nominative plural tari and illative plural tarri(he), also nominative singular kuul', illative singular kuuli, and thus nominative plural kooliq, and illative plural kuulõ(he).

5.4.3 The elative case

The elative case is formed using the suffix -st, which is attached to the stem he same way the inessive is:

(49) *kuldõh*   *kuldsõst*
      gold.INE.SG   gold.ELAT.SG

'In (the) gold, Out of (the) gold

(50) *taloh*   *talost*
      house.INE.SG   house.ELAT.SG

'In the house, Out of the house

The plural elative is formed using the suffixes -Vst, -dEst, -tEst, -isist or -idsist.
The postposition seest or sisest, which governs the genitive case, can also be used, especially with plural nouns, instead of the elative Iva (2007).

5.5 The External Locative Cases

The Seto locative cases include, as does Finnic, the adessive, a static external case; the allative, a directional external case and the ablative, a separative external case.

5.5.1 The adessive case

The adessive case is formed using the suffix -l, which attaches to the stem analogously to the inessive:

(51) *keeleh*   *keelel*
      language.INE.SG   language.ADE.SG

      'In (the) language, On/at (the) language'

The plural adessive is formed using the suffixes -Vl, -dEl, -tEl, -isil or -idsil. The postpositions pääl käen and man, which govern the genitive case, can be used, especially with plural nouns, instead of the adessive case. Iva (2007).

5.5.2 The allative case

The allative case is formed using the suffix -lE, which attaches to the stem analogously to the inessive. The plural allative is formed using the suffixes -VlE, -dElE, -tElE, -isilE or -idsilE. Iva (2007).

As happens in Estonian, the first consonant of the suffix will be geminated when placed after a stressed syllable. However, unlike Estonian, this consonant will be a second degree geminate instead of a third degree geminate. Iva (2007), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021):

(52) *ma'*   *mullõ*
      I.NOM.SG   I.ALL.SG [Q2]

      'I', 'Onto me'

A non-geminate ending -lE, which was also typical of the Tartu (South Estonian) literary language, has become generalised both in the Võro and Seto languages after a secondary-stressed syllable, Iva (2007), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021), EKI (2011). For example:

(53) *kotus*   *kotussõlõ*
      place.NOM.SG   place.ALL.SG

      'Place', 'Onto the place'

(54) *elläi*   *eläjäle*
      animal.NOM.SG   animal.ALL.SG

      'Animal' 'Onto the animal'

Instead of the allative case, the postpositions pääle (which unlike Estonian, has second vowel quantity instead of third), kätte and mano, which govern the genitive, can be used. Iva (2007), EKI (2011)

5.5.3 The ablative case

The ablative case is formed using the suffix -lt, which attaches to the stem just like the ines-sive case. The plural ablative is formed using the suffixes -Vlt, -dElt, -tElt, -isilt and -idsilt. Iva (2007). The genitive-governing postpositions päält, käest and mant can be also used instead of the ablative.

5.6 Semantic Cases

5.6.1 The translative case

The translative case in Seto, as happens with the easternmost dialects of Võro, has a -st ending, whereas in other Võro dialects, it has a -s ending Iva (2007), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021), Toomse and Pajusalu (1998). For instance:

SETO

(55) *kiil'*   *keelest*
language.NOM.SG   language.TRS.SG(-*st*)

VÕRO

(56) *kiil'*   *keeles*
language.NOM.SG   language.TRS.SG(-*s*)

In the plural, on the other hand, we simply add the -i plural marker before the translative marker. For instance:

SETO PLURAL

(57) *keelist*
language.TRS.PL(-*i*+*st*)

VÕRO PLURAL

(58) *keelis*
language.TRS.PL(-*i*+*s*)

The postposition jaos (which governs the genitive) can be used as well instead of the translative case. Iva (2007)

5.6.2 The terminative case

The terminative case suffix is -ni' (e.g. *taloni'*, 'until/ up to the house'). The plural markers are -Vni', -dEni', -tEni', -isini' and -idsini'. The final glottal stop of the terminative case is pronounced in Seto and eastern Võro especially, not so much in other South Estonian dialects, mainly due to the influence of Estonian Iva (2007), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021)

5.6.3 The abessive case

The abessive case suffix in Seto is usually -ldAq, this interesting suffix appears mostly in southern Võro and Seto, and is believed to be a blend of the original ablative (-lt) and abessive (-dA') case endings. In other South Estonian languages and dialects, the suffix changes; in most Võro dialects, the suffix is either -dA(') ot -ttA('), whereas in Mulgi, it's usually -tte or -de , for instance Rätsep (1979), Iva (2007).

5.6.4 The comitative case

The comitative case suffix is usually -ga' in Seto. Because it comes from the Finnic postposition *kansak*, it does not follow vowel harmony and usually preserves the same form except in West Võro, where the form -gE(q) can be found as well (e.g. *hambagõ*, *meelege*).

The glottal stop may appear or not depending on the dialect, as it comes from the final velar plosive in the postposition and is less frequent in certain dialects, such as West Võro; in Seto and East Võro, however, it is always written and tends to be pronounced, despite this, it is not written in the Võro literary language but it is in Seto. Hagu and Pajusalu (2021), Iva (2007), Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

The comitative forms are made using the genitive stem, which means the comitative will have the same grade the genitive has.

In some personal pronouns, a geminate ending is also possible due to the assimilation of the glottal stop with the comitative case ending: for instance, the first person singular pronoun in the nominative is *ma'* (or *mina*), the genitive form, from which the comitative will be made, is *mu'*. With this in mind, we can see why the comitative form of this personal pronoun is *mukka'*; there is a gemination of the -ga' ending due to the glottal stop and the voiceless velar plosive assimilating. Iva (2007), EKI (2011).

5.7 Unproductive Cases

5.7.1 The essive case

The traditional Finnic -nA essive ending is not present in any South Estonian language, as this case has formally merged with the inessive case, which has absorbed all its functions and shares the same ending. Iva (2007):

(59)   *Ta*   *oll'*   *tütrikoh*   *liinah*
       s/he   be.PST.3SG   maid.INE.SG   city.INE.SG

'She was a maid in the city.[1]'

5.7.2 The instructive case

The instructive case does not have a specific case ending in either Estonian or South Estonian. In Estonian and Võro it appears only in the plural and is not fully productive in all words Iva (2007). According to Erelt et al. (1995), the instructive case is on a border between an actual case and an adverb but can't be considered either; an attribute can modify a noun in the instructive case, so it is clearly not an adverb, however, this case cannot be used with most words and has really limited usability, so it is not a case per se either. That said, the instructive case be *a little productive* in some instances, as it exists in some lexicalised words in the Seto language Keem and Käsi (2002).

The instructive ending, when used, has the same formal form as vowel-suffixed weak plural stems (e.g. käsi, keeli, pooli...), that means the plural genitive can be interpreted as an instructive and many adverbs of place, manner and time come from this form Iva (2007), for instance, *kotus-sidõ*, which means *somewhere*, can be thought of having been derived from *kotus*, *place*, in the instructive case.

5.7.3 The prolative case

The prolative is usually considered not a case, but an adverb in both Estonian and South Estonian Suoniemi-Taipale (1994), it is not productive in any of the Southern Finnic languages as a case Norvik et al. (2021), but it can sometimes be used in certain varieties to create some adverbs (e.g. *maildõ*, 'by land', from malõ; *merilde*, 'by sea', from meri).
As can be seen from the examples, the prolative ending in South Estonian is -ldE.

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[1]This sentence was provided by Prof. Karl Pajusalu.

6 Comparative Analysis

6.1 Methodological Note

In this section I will conduct a comparative analysis of the Seto case system with the one in other Finnic languages. Proto-Finnic will also be used as a reference. However, it should be taken into account that the separation of the Finnic languages is quite complex and cannot be accounted for *only* as a "tree" Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), Salminen (1998). The Finnic languages are traditionally divided into Northern Finnic and Southern Finnic; however, while Northern Finnic can be considered a real and distinct dialect group, Southern is a rather complex amalgamation of different *non-Northern Finnic dialects* that, in many cases, share similarities due to proximity, but did not develop together. In this work, I'm going to follow the classification proposed by Viitso (1998), that is, the Finnic languages will be divided into 4 groups: Livonian, South Estonian, Maa and North Finnic. As can be seen in Figure 4, Proto-Finnic could be divided into 4 big dialect groups, which developed at different rates. Firstly, Livonian and South Estonian probably diverged from Finnic, creating their own dialect groups with specific features we'll take a look at in the following section. Livonian forms its own group, South Estonian, as has already been explained, gave rise to the South Estonian languages, from which Võro, Seto, Mulgi and Tartu are the ones still spoken today. The Neva group, on the other hand, gave rise to Maa and North Finnic. Maa would later result on the one hand in Estonian and, on the other, Chude, which is comprised by East and Northeast Estonian dialects and Votic proper. North Finnic, which has its own two groups based upon the voicing of plosives and the merger of weak obstruents, is comprised by all the other Finnic languages, namely, Finnish, Karelian, Ingrian and Veps.

Unlike the so called *Southern Finnic group*, the Northern Finnic group actually seems to be consistent.
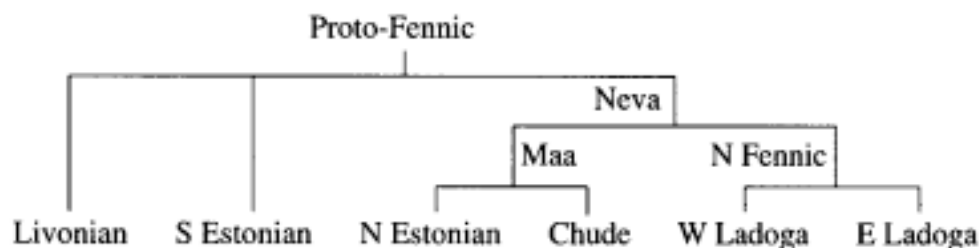

Figure 3: The division of Finnic Viitso (1998)

6.2 Language Contacts and Internal Changes

Language contacts have also affected the case system and the overall grammar of the different Seto dialects.

Northern Seto (Põhjaseto), as mentioned before, has been influenced by the Võro speakers of the Räpina and Võnnu, that is, eastern Võro in particular Iva (2007), Pajusalu (2000). As noted, this can be seen in the opening of [i] to [e] and [u] to [o], among other things: The old South Estonian participle (which was heavily declined, unless the ones we see in the Finnic languages today) had a -nUq ending, from the Proto-Finnic ending *-nUt. In the aforementioned Võro-speaking areas, this ended up closing to nO(q) in some instances (e.g tulno). Iva (2007), Hagu and Pajusalu (2021). East Seto (Idaseto), as aforementioned, has been the dialect of Seto with the least influence from both Estonian and other Seto (and South Estonian) dialects. The main influence has been from Russian, as it was *surrounded* by Russian villages. Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).
Lastly, South Seto (Lõunaseto) is the most conservative dialect out of the three and the one understood by all other dialects. It is also used in the written materials of modern Seto, that is, *the standard language*, even though it isn't standardised per se Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

For all of these reasons and mainly because of the conservativeness of this dialect specifically, it will be the one to be used in the comparisons.

6.3 General Differences and Similarities Between Groups

Livonian, as the earliest language to split from Finnic, has had several innovations not found in other groups, but also several archaisms, which is the reason for it to be considered the first group or language to split. For instance:

1) The Proto-Finnic contrast *ktt : *kt, later *htt : *ht, and eventually ⁺tt : ⁺d, has been preserved in livonian in the partitive singular and illative singular of some words, such as the numerals Viitso (1998).
The Proto-Finnic numerals ***ükci** [ykt͡si] (one) and ***kakci** [kakt͡si] (two) are reconstructed as having the partitive forms ***ükttä** and ***kakkta**, later ***ühtta** and ***kahtta**, and the illative forms ***üktehen** and ***kakthen**, later ***ühtehen** and ***kahthen**. This distinction has been maintained in Livonian, giving us īdtõ in the partitive and īdõ in the illative for the numeral ikš (ükci) and kōdtõ in the partitive and kōdõ for the illative in the case of the numeral kakš (*kakci) Erelt (2003), Viitso (1998).

In the rest of the groups, a merger has arisen and this contrast does not exist anymore:

In South Estonian we have *ütte* and *katte*, differentiated by the partitive being Q2 and the illative, Q3. This gave rise to the Seto forms *ütte* and *kattõ* for both the partitive and the illative. In Estonian, on the other hand, we have *ühte* and *katte* for both the partitive and the illative and similarly *ühte* and *kahtõ* in Votic. We also have yhtä and kahta (P.Sg), and yhteen and kahteen (Ill.Sg) in Finnish, it is clear that while it has different case endings, the phonological contrast has also merged. Erelt (2003).

2) The *-a stem of some nominals has shifted to an *-e stem in every group except Livonian. Let's take a look, for instance, at the word for lake Viitso (1998) in Livonian and the rest of the groups:

From *järvi (GSg järv**e**-n), in Proto-Finnic, we have *jōra* (N.Sg and G.Sg) in Livonian (Courland), but *järv (G.Sg järve)* in Estonian and South Estonian, and *järven* in Finnish and Karelian. Viitso (1998)

3) The Proto-Finnic diphthong *ai has been mantained in both Livonian and South Estonian, the second group to split, but became *ei in all the other languages. For instance, the Proto-Finnic *haina (hay), gave rise to hain in Seto and āina in Livonian, whereas it have rise to hein in Estonian, eina in Votic and heinä in Finnish and Karelian.

As we've been able to see, Livonian and South Estonian share some similarities, which makes us think that they split closer together as compared to the other groups. However, we can also find many differences in the development of **South Estonian** that set it apart from all the other groups:

For example, the Proto-Finnic clusters *pc^j and *kc^j gave rise to *ts [t^{j}s^j] in South Estonian, which we can see in Seto words such as lats' or kaks' (from *lapci and *kakci). On the other hand, the other groups have developed a *ps(^{j}) cluster for *pc^j and a *ks cluster for kc^j, except vor Votic, which mantains *hs* for both: We can see laps (Livonian) laps (Estonian) lahsi (Votic) lapsi (Finnish) and laps (Veps) Viitso (1998), Erelt (2003).

6.4 Core Cases endings

We've already seen the Seto case system and its development briefly in section 6, let us compare its core cases now to those of Livonian, Estonian, Votic and North Finnic.

6.4.1 The nominative and genitive case

The nominative case is unmarked in the singular and has a *-t ending in the plural, which has ended up splitting into several different endings:
In Mulgi and Tartu, there is zero-marking, unlike in Võro and Seto, where there is a glottal stop. In the rest of Finnic languages, we have either a -d or a -t ending (or both). Viitso (1998), The original genitive singular suffix **-n** has been lost in every group except in North Finnic, which has retained it. That means only Finnish, Karelian, Ingrian and Veps mantain this suffix. Viitso (1998)

For example, if we take a look at the Finnic word *nimi* (GSg *nime**n**) (name), we'll find that it gives rise to the genitive singular form *nime**n*** in Finnish, Karelian, and Ingrian, and *nimi**n*** in Veps. It is clear that all of them mantain the -n suffix; on the other hand, we can see *nime∅* in Estonian, Votic, Võro and Seto, and *nim∅* in Livonian. We can also take a look at the Finnic word *koira (G.Sg *koiran), "dog", which gave rise to the genitive forms *koira**n*** in Finnish, Ingrian, Veps and Karelian, that is, all the Northern Finnic languages; on the other hand, we see *koera∅*, in Estonian and *koira∅* in Votic, Võro and Seto. It is also important to note that Livonian did not inherit this Proto-Finnic word and instead uses piṇ, from the Proto-Finnic word *peni, which was eventually replaced by *koira in most cases. The Proto-Finnic genitive is *penin, and the one in Livonian is piṇ. We also have this word in Seto as *pini or peni*, or even *koirapini*, meaning "dog". We can find *peni* in Estonian, meaning "hound", *penakka* in Karelian, meaning "brat" and even peni in Votic, meaning "female dog". Kotus (2023)
The genitive plural markers *-ten and *iten were distributed more unevenly, on the other hand. -*ten was used in North and East Estonian, West Finnish and (probably) Livonian, whereas *-iten was used in all the others. Viitso (1998). *-iten had a double plural mark, *-i-* and *-t*. Current Seto mostly uses the mark *-i* followed by either *-de* or *dõ* in the genitive plural. Unlike Estonian, which, as would be expected, uses a *-te* or *-de* ending Erelt et al. (1995).

6.4.2 The partitive case

The original partitive singular is *-tA (or *-dA), which, as explained in section 5.2.4, comes from an old Uralic separative case. The partitive plural is made merely adding the *-i plural marker before the suffix, thus giving *-ita. Both the partitive singular and the partitive plural show a great variety of changes in the different Finnic varieties Viitso (1998), which are too complex and out of the scope of the present work. In any case, we can see some of the resulting endings in the following table (Figure 5), which shows the partitive singular endings in the different groups based on Viitso and Ernštreits (2012), Erelt (2003), Ariste (1948), Karlsson (2017) and Grünthal (2015).
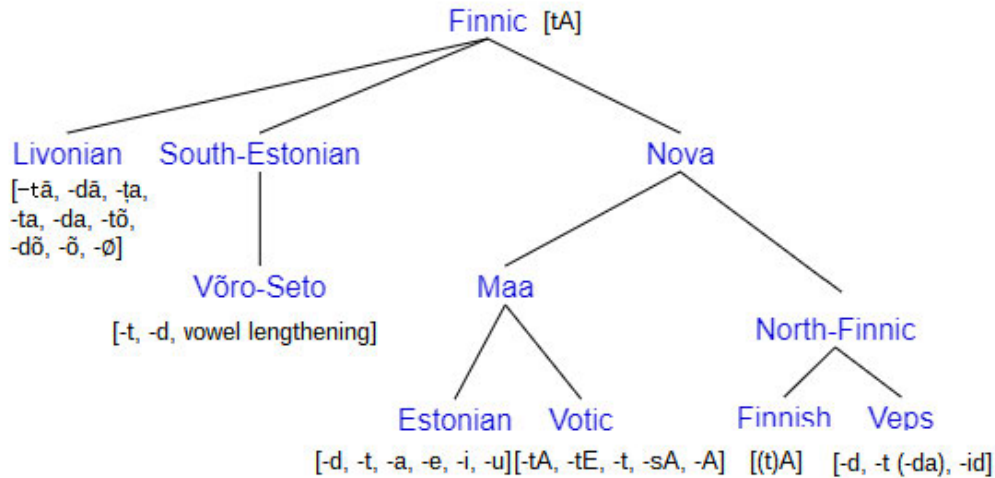
Figure 4: Partitive endings in Finnic

6.4.3 The locative cases

The locative and semantic cases are way easier to follow, let us explain how the different endings arose in the different groups and show them clearly in the tables in Figure 6, 7 and 8:

The external locative cases (the adessive, allative and ablative) had, as aforementioned, the endings *-llA, *-llEn and *ltA, respectively (see section 5.3.1 for a more detailed explanation). These cases had different changes in the different groups:

Group 1: Livonian

Livonian is a bit of a special case, because it has developed a dative case, which does not exist in any other Finnic language, due to the influence of the Latvian language.
Because of this, the l-cases are not fully productive.
The dative case has undertaken a lot of the locative and lative functions the l-cases used to have, and the elative and an adpositional construction with *kä'dstõ*, the separative ones.
The locative cases appear mostly in fossilised adverbs showing location, position or temporal location. Blokland and Inaba (2018). Despite this, Viitso (2016) presents a list which includes these three cases, with the endings -l or -õl for the adessive, -lõ, -l or -õl for the allative and -ldõ, -ld, -õld or -ldõst for the ablative.

Group 2: South Estonian

As mentioned before, the endings for the l-cases in Seto South Estonian are -l for the adessive (*-l-nA< *-lnA< *-llA, -l), -lE for the allative (*-l-en < *-lEn < lE) and -lt for the ablative (*-l-tA < *-ltA < lt) Hagu and Pajusalu (2021).

Group 3: Maa

In estonian, similarly to South Estonian, we have -l for the adessive, -lE for the allative and -lt for the ablative. In Estonian, however, there is no vowel harmony in the allative case vowel. Erelt (2003)

Group 4: North Finnic

Unlike Estonian and South Estonian, the endings in Finnish or Veps, for instance, maintain the last vowels of the suffixes and change the vowels of the adessive and ablative according to vowel harmony:
In Finnish we have -llA for the adessive, lle for the allative and -ltA for the ablative, Veps and Karelian l-cases are a bit different, but are outside of the scope of this work. Karlsson (2017), Grünthal (2015).

The internal locative cases or s-cases (the inessive, illative and elative), on the other hand and as aforementioned, have the endings *-ssA (-s-nA), *-hVn and *stA, respectively (see section 5.3.2 for a more detailed explanation). These endings had different changes in the different groups as well:

Group 1: Livonian

In Livonian, we can see the endings -sā, -sõ or -s in the inessive, -zõ, -õ or -z in the illative and -stā, -stõ or -st in the elative. Unlike the l-cases, these are fully productive in Livonian Viitso and Ernštreits (2012), Blokland and Inaba (2018).

Group 2: South Estonian

In Seto, the inessive ending is -h. As explained in previous sections, the Proto-Finnic ending *-ssA comes from *-s-nA; thus, in South Estonian, instead of having a simplification from *-sn to *-ss, like most Finnic languages, it suffered a lenition from *-sn to -*hn and finally to -h Iva (2007).

The illative case will either have no ending or a -he ending, which comes from the Proto-Finnic suffix *-sEn, which suffered a debuccalisation process and became *-hen, and eventually lost the final nasal Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001).

The elative case has the ending -st, from the Proto-Finnic *-stA Iva (2007).

Group 3: Maa

In Estonian, we have a -s ending for the inessive, a -see or -∅ ending for the illative, and a -st ending for the elative. Erelt (2003)

Group 4: North Finnic

In (standard) Finnish, we have the -ssA ending for the inessive, which comes from the Proto-Finnic simplified form of -*s-nA; a -Vn or -hVn ending for the illative, which comes from -hEn in Proto-Finnic, and a -stA ending for the elative Karlsson (2017).

7   Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present work has been to analyse the diachronic development of the Seto (South Estonian) language as compared to that of other Finnic languages, such as Livonian, Finnish or Estonian, while paying special attention to South Estonian as a group. Through a comparative morphophonological approach, I aimed to demonstrate that Seto is not a dialect of Estonian, but a separate language from the South Estonian group, with its own diachronic development.

A central part of this work focused on the Seto case system, especially its morphological forms, phonological alternations, and syntactic functions. The data presented show that Seto preserves vowel harmony, which Estonian has lost, and affects several case endings. It has also developed several case suffixes either no longer present in Standard Estonian or which have emerged in a completely different manner. Some examples of this include the inessive -h (e.g. *liinah* 'in the city'), in contrast with Estonian -s (e.g. *linnas* 'in the city'); the translative with an -st ending, (e.g. *keelest*), contrasting with Estonian -ks (e.g. *keeleks*) and the form -s, which we find in most dialects of Võro (e.g. *keeles*); the -ldAq suffix in the abessive (e.g. *küläldä'* 'without the village'), in contrast with Estonian -ta (e.g. *külata* 'without the village'); the terminative -ni, which does not exist in Estonian; and also some remnants of old cases still present in some adverbs, such as the prolative (e.g. *maildõ*, 'by land').
These forms reflect not only older South Estonian developments, but also show innovations unique to Seto, shaped by phonological processes that interact with case marking. This supports the view that the Seto case system has had a distinct diachronic development not reducible to Estonian dialect variation.

The comparative section, specifically, helps clarify further that, given the order in which the Finnic languages split, many of the similarities we find between Seto and Estonian are probably a Sprachbund effect rather than the result of dialectal or genetic connection; This helps explain why, for instance, we find Q3 in both Estonian and Seto, but not in Votic, which is more closely related to Estonian than Seto is.
Apart from this, we can also note that the influence of Russian or Võro in Eastern and Northern

Seto, along with the conservative nature of Southern Seto, support the idea that different Seto dialects have innovated or maintained different traits that are not shared with Estonian.

Overall, the findings show that a tree-based division of the Finnic languages is insufficient to account for many developments in South Estonian and Seto, in particular; both genetic connections and Sprachbund diffusion must be considered to understand how the current Finnic varieties have developed.

This work also aims to contribute to the description of Seto, a lesser-known language within the Finnic branch of the Uralic family, by describing both its case system and how it has developed diachronically.

Future research could expand this work by focusing not only on Seto's case system, but also on the verbal system, the negation suffixes or other syntactic and semantic features.

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A   Glossing Abbreviations

1SG   first person singular

2SG   second person singular

3SG   third person singular

1PL   first person plural

GEN   genitive

NOM   nominative

PART   partitive

ILL   illative

ELAT   elative

INE   inessive

ADD   additive

TRS   translative

TERM   terminative

ABESS abessive

COM   comitative

PST   past tense

PRS   present tense

IMP   imperative

NEG   negation

PTCL   particle (emphatic)

Q1   quantity grade 1 (short)

Q2   quantity grade 2 (long)

Q3   quantity grade 3 (overlong)

RÕU   Rõuge dialect

KAN   Kanepi dialect

URV   Urvaste dialect

VAS   Vastseliina dialect

RÄP   Räpina dialect

PLV   Põlva dialect