

# Poetic metre as a function of language: linguistic grounds for metrical variation in Estonian runosongs

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on the relationship of language and metre in case of oral poetry, more exactly, to what extent and through which processes the changes in language have induced the changes in metre in case of Estonian runosong, a branch of common Finnic poetic-musical tradition. The Estonian language has gone through a series of notable phonological changes during approximately last 500 to 700 years that have systematically shortened the word forms; the extent of these changes varies across dialects. At the same time the language of runosongs has partly resisted these changes, and partly adopted; the archaic and new word forms are in concurrent use, and vary geographically. The metre of Estonian runosongs appears to be a transitional form from quantitative runosong metre (Kalevala metre) to the accentual runosong metre (both of them syllabic metres). The current study shows that the transition depends directly on the average syllabic length of the words in runosongs (the longer the words, the more quantitative the metre, and vice versa), which in turn is induced by the shortening of words in dialectal language. The closer look at the points of tensions between the metre and language, i.e. the geographical distribution of the morphological forms that are critical for building the verses in quantitative metre and have been systematically retained in runosongs (but shortened in language) shows that in two metrically innovative areas runosongs have given up preserving the archaic word forms, while in big central area between a linguistically and metrically conservative centre in the North-East of Estonia and two innovation centres in Western and Southeastern Estonia the archaic and newer word forms are used concurrently. The slight difference between the metre of western and southeastern runosongs follows the prosodic patterns of dialectal language.

The side topic of the article discusses the questions of the evolution of runosong in the light of newer theories of emergence of Finnic languages (in the first millennium BC) and poetic system of runosongs, but apparently the metrical variation of runosong is entirely explicable by the impact of much later language changes (approximately 500 to 700 years ago) and seems not to be able to answer the questions related to the emergence of the poetic tradition.

Keywords: runosong; metre; language; variability; language history; folklore

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## Introduction

It is and has been evident for the researchers of metre that there is an inherent connection between the metre and the language, and there are numerous books and articles written on the topic. The properties of language determine the selection of tools poets have at their disposal. Indigenous folk metres should represent, from the synchronic point of view, the poetic form best suitable for the language in question, or as Ilse Lehiste has put it, based on her studies on folk metres: “Prosodic structure of a language is crystallized in the metre of folksongs in this language” (Ross, Lehiste 2001: 3). While the symbiosis of language and metre in the case of literary poetry can mostly be observed only by comparing languages, or in some cases also throughout historical layers of language, folkloric texts offer a possibility to observe this connection on much more granular scale, looking at metrical variation’s possible grounds in dialectal prosody.

The current study focuses on a historically enduring oral-poetic system, Estonian branch of Finnic runosong tradition, is exploring tensions between isochrony in the metre and in spoken language that have emerged in the process of language change, and demonstrates that the metre is flexible, rather than crystallized, evolving symbiotically with language and adapting itself to language changes. The study relies on my research on metrical variation of Estonian runosongs and the discovery that the songs, collected most actively at the end of 19th century from all over Estonia, metrically represent a transitional stage from a quantitative to an accentual metre (Sarv 2008: 16–46; 2015). The main research question of the current article is to what extent and through which processes and adaptations did the language changes induce the changes in metre. For that, the metrical changes have been juxtaposed to the changes in the prosodic system of Estonian; the general outcomes are quantified with the help of statistics on syllabic length of words in songs and in dialectal language; the main grammatical forms and structures that have caused the tensions in metre, and their geographical spread have been observed. The parallel occurrence of word forms from different historical layers of language is well-known and almost universal feature of enduring oral-poetic systems (see e.g. Bailey 1995, Sarv 2011a), the current study seems apparently to be the first approaching this phenomenon with large data. Along with the main theme, the article also discusses the possible alternatives of the evolution and spread of the runosong tradition, in the light of newest theories of evolution of Finnic languages (Lang 2018) and runosong (Frog 2019), as a side-topic.

## Runosong and its metre

The study focuses on the linguistic incentives of metrical developments in Estonian runosong during last 700 years. This chapter aims to give some information about basic features of runosong, and its alternative evolution theories, as a very general background for understanding runosong and its metre.

Runosong<sup>1</sup> is a poetic-musical tradition that has been shared by several (but not all) Finnic peoples. The main poetic features include a stichic form, a syllabic metre with a trochaic core and specific regulations of stress and quantity, and regular use of mutually interdependent alliteration and parallelism. The poetic form of runosong has been a common mode of expression, the use of which extends from narrative and lyric songs to a variety of other poetic genres that include charms, proverbs, riddles, and sayings (see Krikmann 1997, Kuusi 1994). In addition to the poetic form, there are plots, motifs, and formulae known and spread across the different linguistic branches of runosong area.

Runosong with its poetic form is generally believed to have emerged before the final division of late Proto-Finnic into separate languages, when, according to Finnish linguist Mikko Korhonen (1994), the language acquired the prosodic qualities that were suitable for a syllabic metre. There have been several theories on the evolution of runosong,<sup>2</sup> it has been considered to have evolved on the basis of previous poetic culture of Uralic, Finno-Ugric or Finnic peoples (e.g. Helimski 1998) and/or in coherence of developments of language prosody (Korhonen 1994), there has been around a theory of Baltic origin of runosong (Niemi 1918), and most recently, Finnish researcher Frog (2019) has proposed the hypothesis that runosong has been developed in the process of adaptation of Germanic alliterative metre for Finnic languages. The idea seems plausible in the light of new discoveries in the field of archaeogenetics that prove the people with genetic component common to Uralic-speaking populations arrived in present-day Estonia along with a specific type of burials, the so-called *tarand* cemeteries, in the middle of first millennium BC, encountering, in Northern and Western Estonia, a population of Scandinavian (Palaeo-Germanic) origin using stone-cist graves (Saag et al. 2019). Archaeologist Valter Lang has, in the frames of his new theory on the evolvement of Finnic languages drawing on linguistic, archaeological and archaeogenetic research (Lang 2018), suggested that the coherent and rich

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<sup>1</sup> On the variegated use of terms on the Finnic common song tradition see Kallio et al. 2017. The Estonian scholarly term for runosong is *regilaul*.

<sup>2</sup> For the thorough overview of various theories on the origins of the metre and poetic form of runosong see Frog 2019.

archaeological culture that developed in Northern Estonia during the Pre-Roman Iron Age (in the second half of first millennium BC) as a mixture of both cultures also formed the centre where Late Proto-Finnic language evolved with a notable layer of early Germanic loanwords and phonological impact (mainly after the divergence of South Estonian and Livonian branch) and spread further to various parts of the current Finnic language area, developing into different cultures and languages (ibid.: 219–260), by large during the first millennium AD. On the one hand, it would be logical to assume that the evolution of runosong was part of the same processes, i.e. the arrival of Uralic-speaking population to the Baltic Sea region and blending with a local population of Scandinavian origin. On the other hand, adoption of this idea would mean that South Estonian has remained outside of the culture where runosong emerged.

As we do not have the written sources from the early times, we can theorize on the emergence and early phases of runosong only in very general frames, in analysing the variability of the tradition of the last couple of centuries when it was documented, and juxtaposing to the data of other fields of research. On the basis of the materials from the period of written sources, starting from the scarce notes about runosongs in Middle Age chronicles to the systematic and abundant documentation of runosongs in the 19th and 20th centuries, more sound research can be done only on the metrical developments during the more recent phases of the history of runosong.

Generally, Finnic runosong is considered to follow a specific metrical pattern that combines quantity and stress to create the trochaic rhythm with four stresses.<sup>3</sup> The main constraints of this pattern were discovered by Arvid Genetz in 1881 (Genetz 1884) on the basis of Karelian folksongs. The system formulated by Genetz is called Kalevala metre; it is a kind of ideal model of which there are always a certain number of exceptions in recorded folksongs, in some regions the deviations are prominent enough to be expressed as new, different rules (cf. Saarinen 2018: 75).

The model of Kalevala metre can be described according to the trochaic schema &XXABABAC& (Sarv 2015: 7): in this model, ‘&’ denotes an obligatory word break; stressed syllables<sup>4</sup> of multisyllabic words fall on the strong positions (A) when they are long and on weak positions (B) when they are short. In two first positions, the constraints do not apply, and stressed syllables do not occur in last verse position (C). Verse positions are mostly filled by one syllable but can be filled by two light syllables, mainly in the first two positions.

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<sup>3</sup> Alliteration in Finnic runosongs is not bound to metre.

<sup>4</sup> In Finnic languages, stress is on the first syllable, as a rule.

Verses containing stressed syllables on weak position are distinctive to this metre; such verses are called ‘broken lines’ in the research tradition for their effect of rhythmic discrepancy (strong verse positions and metrically relevant word stresses do not coincide).

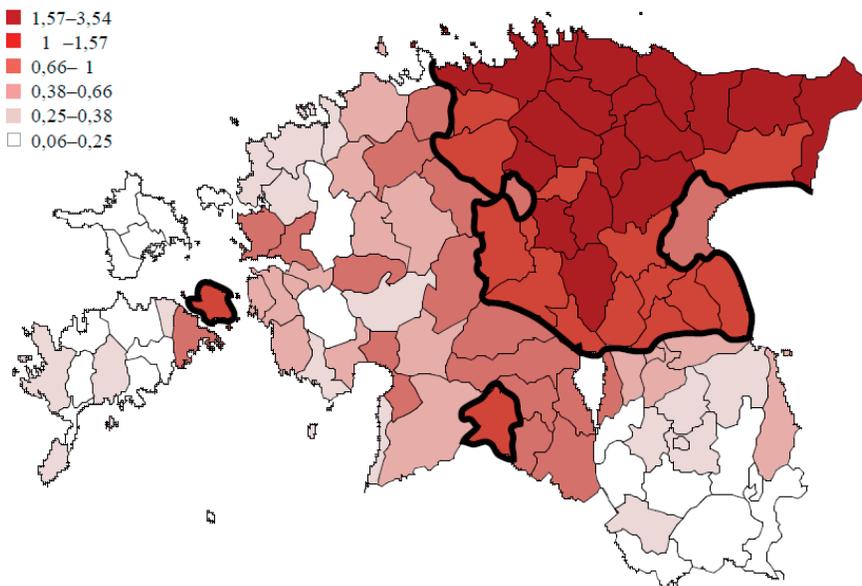
## Metrical variation in Estonian runosong

This chapter gives an overview of the geography of metrical variants of runosong in Estonia (presented in more detailed way in Sarv 2015), outlines the innovation centres and development directions of metrical innovations, and marks some connections with the spread of most archaic layers of runosong melodies and settlement history.

In 19th-century theories, the metre of Estonian runosong was described as syllabic-accentual trochees with lines containing dactyls “to vivify the rhythm” (Särg 2005: 72–89). The discovery of the quantity-based model of Kalevala-metre described on the basis of Karelian runosongs by Genetz was soon assumed to apply to the whole runosong tradition, including Estonian runosongs (Särg 2005: 94). In general approaches, the metre of Estonian runosongs was handled during the whole 20th century according to the model of Kalevala-metre as a quantitative trochaic form with specific rules concerning the quantity of stressed syllables (e.g. Tedre 1998: 550). The deviation of Estonian runosongs from the Kalevala-metre is addressed most notably by Richard Viidalepp (1959: 121–126) who admits an infiltration of accentual metre to some extent into Estonian runosong due to language changes and the impact of contacts with foreign syllabic-accentual poetry. Jaak Põldmäe (1978) also notes the variability of runosong metre and detects seven more “pure” metrical types present in the runosongs. The extent of deviation generally remained unstudied, and was usually discussed as marginal, or even as erroneous (like in Laugaste 1977: 144–145). Only in the 21st century was an overview of metrical variation in Estonian runosong attained with the help of computer-assisted analysis that considerably facilitated research on metre (Sarv 2008).

Runosong tradition in Estonia has been extensively documented since 1880s when the tradition was already in the stage of falling out of use in most places due to general processes of modernization, and disparagement by clergymen and Western-minded intellectuals (Sarv, Oras 2020). Most of the information we have about runosong tradition in Estonia, including texts and melodies, has been gathered in the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. For my study of the runosong metre (Sarv 2008), I took, as a rule, 500 verse lines from each rural parish of Estonia (although

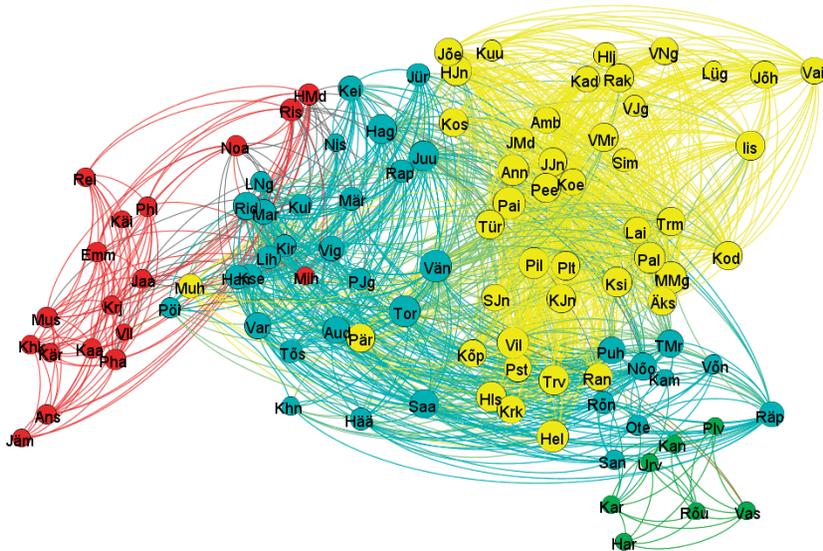
that number of lines was not available from every parish), a total of 52,382 lines, and detected the percentage of lines with seven metrical features in set of lines of every parish (for the methodology, classification of lines, and more detailed results of this study see Sarv 2015). The main result of the study was the discovery that from the North-East towards the West and South-East of Estonia, the quantitative principle was gradually replaced by an accentual principle (short stressed syllables were more and more placed to the strong positions of the trochaic schema rather than in weak verse positions), leading to the unexpected outcome that in about half of Estonia the accentual verse system dominates over the quantitative system (Map 1). The spread of (1) lines with positions filled by two syllables (45%–9%), (2) heptapositional lines (with eighth position unfilled, 43%–0%), and (3) lines with pre-beat (9%–0%) are each in positive correlation with the spread of distinctively accentual lines, and in negative correlation with the spread of broken lines.



Map 1. The proportion of the broken lines representing the quantitative principle (short stressed syllables placed in the weak positions of trochaic schema) ranging from 35% to 3% compared (divided) to the share of the lines with a distinctively accentual principle (short stressed syllables placed in the strong positions of trochaic schema) ranging from 43% to 10%<sup>5</sup>; the black line divides the areas of quantitative and accentual principles' dominance (Sarv 2008: 46).

<sup>5</sup> Long stressed syllables are in both cases placed in the strong positions of trochaic schema.

On the basis of metrical similarities and differences, Estonia can be divided into three main areas (Map 2): (1) a compact area representing a more quantitative metre, spreading from North-East of Estonia southwards; (2) the western area of more accentual metre; (3) the southeastern area of more accentual metre. Prosodic structure of Estonian dialects was considerably affected by series of phonological changes that distinguish it from the Finnic protolanguage, and also, for example, Finnish and Karelian (see e.g. Rätsep 1989, Viitso 2003a, Pajusalu 2012). These changes (most strikingly the shortening of words) are reflected variably in runosong metre. A notable feature of Estonian runosong is the systematic, at the same time geographically variable use of archaic and sometimes pseudo-archaic word forms that do not reflect these phonological changes (Peege 2006: 41). The language of runosongs of southeastern part of Estonia and on western islands is clearly more innovative compared to the runosongs of Northern or Central Estonia. It is logical to assume that linguistic reformulation of verse lines has also brought along the changes in metre, and to interpret the metrical developments towards a syllabic-accentual metre in Southeast and West Estonia as innovations.



Map 2. Metrical areas of Estonian runosong. Each dot on the map represents a parish, which are grouped together using the network modularity algorithm (Blondel et al. 2008) used in Gephi application (Bastian et al. 2009), on the basis of metrical closeness of parishes calculated by summing the differences of percentages of lines with 7 different metrical features (Sarv 2008, 2015) between each pair of parishes.

In this context it is necessary to point out that there is a notable positive correlation between the use of the quantitative principle in metre and the number of texts written down from a parish.<sup>6</sup> Although the interests and preferences of the collectors have definitely amplified this tendency, it is also a well-known fact that the tradition has been more vibrant and rich in so-called ‘song areas’ on the Northern Estonian coast, in Mulgimaa, as well as in the Seto area where the tradition has been preserved into the present day. This does not concern only runosong tradition, but traditional culture in general (see e.g. Viidebaum, Loorits 1932; Krikmann 1997; Kaarma, Voolmaa 1981). The island Muhu and its neighbouring parishes on the island of Saaremaa and on the mainland also have a rich song heritage, and at the same time, the metre is notably more quantitative in Muhu island proximity than in further surrounding areas. The settlements of the Iron Age, where the blending of populations of different origins took place, and, according to the Valter Lang’s theory, where specific Finnic language and culture emerged, were located on the Northern Estonian coast, with another centre in Saaremaa and in West Estonia in the region in question (Lang 2018: 213–220; see also Kriiska et al. 2006: 24).

In her study on runosong melodies, Ingrid Rüütel has noted tendencies similar to distribution of quantitative metre, what concerns the North and West of Estonia: the most archaic layer of speech-like melodies with narrow range, and also swing melodies are known in the distinct regions of North and South-West of Estonia (see Map 1 and Map 2 in Rüütel 1998), and are absent in the areas that have been inhabited in later periods, for example in Northwestern Estonia. She supposes that the most archaic melody layer has probably formed together with poetic form of runosong, and may trace back to the Northern and Western Estonian cultural unity in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Rüütel 1998), i.e. in the period what Lang considers as the period of evolution of Late Proto-Finnic in restricted region of North Estonia (along with West Estonia).

The similarities in the spread of melody types and metre as well as the scarcity of songs in many locations of more innovative metre and melodies in Saaremaa and Western Estonia, as well as in Southeastern Estonia leaves an impression that, for some reason, the most archaic layer of runosong tradition (with quantitative metre and specific melody types) did not spread easily to newer areas of settlement or, in other words, the spread of runosong along

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<sup>6</sup> The correlation coefficient of the percentage of broken lines typical to quantitative runosong metre and the number of runosongs from a parish in Estonian database of runosongs  $r = 0,49$ . The database (Eesti regilaulude andmebaas 2003–2019) contains at the moment approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all the runosong texts collected from Estonia.

with settlement seems to be characterized by metrical innovation or relaxing of metrical principles. The reasons for this phenomenon and processes leading to it remain unclear at the moment, but it seems, that Coastal Estonia, Muhu and Mulgi have exhibited conservative features also in other phenomena, for example in clothing (cf. Kaarma, Voolmaa 1981).

The runosong as a poetic form is commonly treated as a common Finnic heritage (e.g. Korhonen 1994, Frog 2019). If we consider the model of Kalevala-metre as the proto-form of Estonian runosong, Map 2 reveals two separate, and metrically slightly different innovation centres on the southeastern periphery and on the western islands, and two separate transition areas between predominantly accentual and predominantly quantitative metres, which exhibit similar metrical qualities.

However, since linguistically, South Estonian and Livonian were among the first branches to diverge from the Finnic proto-language (Pajusalu 2012, Kallio 2014), we can hypothesize, alternatively, that the runosong poetic form might have been developed under the conditions of linguistic and cultural blending in Northern Estonia during the Pre-Roman Iron Age in the second half of 1st millennium BC in the branch of Finnic called Gulf of Finland Finnic by Petri Kallio (2014), and was subsequently adopted in South Estonia later, while not reaching to Livonian where the runosong form is unknown. The questions of the impact of the settlement history and the spread of runosong form remain open here, and hopefully can be solved in future.

The following analysis proceeds from the assumption that quantitative runosong metre following Kalevala model in principle was first adopted all over Estonia, and then began to change, with the main question to what extent and how did the language changes induce the changes in metre.

## Language prosody and poetic metre

Use of metrical systems in a language is to some extent dependent on the language's prosodic system (see for example Korhonen 2004; Lotman 1998: 1853, 1858–1859; Jakobson 1979: 148–150; Jakobson 1985: 3, etc.). In written poetry, the existence (or rather lack) of prosodic features in a language may lead to the preference of certain prosodic features engaged by metrical systems in that language. In case of oral poetry, one could presume that its metre has formed and developed together with the language and become optimally adapted to that language (Dufter 2003: 195; Korhonen 2004; Lehiste 2000: 38; Ross, Lehiste 2001). Runosong, which definitely belongs to a primarily oral

culture with long history, should be a perfect example to observe such a symbiosis. Estonian runosong provides here an extraordinary material (1) with large collections of folksongs where the origin of songs has been meticulously recorded next to song texts; (2) with local settlement patterns enduring for centuries (due to the historical conditions) that have allowed language dialects and variants of the runosong metre with distinctive local character to emerge; (3) with significant changes in the prosodic system of language during the last 1000 years. Thus, there exist good preconditions for studying the interaction of language and metre, and, from the synchronic perspective of differences between dialects,<sup>7</sup> the changes in language indeed seem to be reflected in the metre of runosong.

Metre is a model for the rhythmical organization of a text. Rhythm is created through the repetition of certain units. It is considered that, generally speaking, a language has a natural rhythm, i.e. an endeavour for isochrony of linguistic units that can be, for example, structured in morae, syllables, feet, stress groups, or words. Metrical patterns are usually formed on the basis of simple rhythmic schemata, and correspondence constraints define the relationship between metrical patterns and linguistic units, “constraining” the sequencing of linguistic units in comparison to non-metrical language (Kiparsky 2006: 138). A metre of folk poetry might hypothetically be a metre that is in optimal accordance with the linguistic rhythm of the language in question, a generalised model of language rhythm, similar to Ingrid Rüütel’s proposal that folk melodies are a generalised model of speech intonation (Rüütel 1998).

Moreover, musical performance (first and foremost a recurrent melody and melodic rhythm) may neutralize prosodic features that are linguistically meaningful, in runosong, for example, the basic tone, quantity as well as dynamic stress relevant as features of language prosody are often neutralised in musical performance (cf. Ross, Lehiste 2001: 131–132; Lehiste 2004; Särg 2005). On the basis of runosong, we can propose a more general assumption that, in the case of folk song metre, in order to compensate for the loss of prosodic features during a musical performance, the most important prosodic oppositions of the language structure should be actualized in the verse system.

Researchers’ opinions diverge concerning what constitutes the main unit of rhythm in Estonian and in Finnish, the most researched Finnic languages.

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<sup>7</sup> The notes on dialectal variation and forms throughout this article refer to the situation of the first half and middle of the 20th century, when most of the data on Estonian dialects have been collected, and not on the later or contemporary developments concerning the levelling of the dialects under the influence of literary language.

Martin Ehala considers Estonian as a mora-timed language (Ehala 1999: 459), Arvo Eek, Toomas Help and Mihhail Lotman as a syllable-timed language (Eek, Help 1986: 35; Lotman 1998: 1859), and it is also characterized by foot isochrony (Eek, Meister 1997; Ross, Lehiste 2001: 37–56; Pajusalu 2012: 206–207). The basic rhythmic units of Finnish have been assumed to be feet and morae; O'Dell et al. have shown on the basis of acoustic studies that tendency to isochrony manifests itself in morae and at the phrasal level, but possibly also in feet (O'Dell et al. 2007).

The direct transfer of linguistic rhythm theory to poetic metre theory has been criticized, since other phonological and prosodic features are also involved in the shaping of metre (see e.g. Dufter 2003). Thus, as has been emphasized by Mihhail Lotman (1998: 1853), it is not the individual prosodic features that need to be taken into account as factors shaping the metre, but the language's entire prosodic system. The prosodic system of Proto-Finnic is outlined in Mikko Korhonen's approach to the emergence of runosong metre and its linguistic preconditions (Korhonen 1999); an overview of the prosody of Estonian can be found in Tiit-Rein Viitso's article in the academic overview of the Estonian language (Viitso 2003b: 10–20); in the research on runosong, a whole chapter has been devoted to the prosody of Estonian in books by Jaan Ross and Ilse Lehiste (2001: 37–56) as well as by Taive Särg (2005: 15–19).

There is also the question to what extent folk metre can resist the shaping of the metre by the prosodic system of spoken language due to the power of tradition with its formulaic expression and specific registers, or for example due to the high or low prestige of one or another poetic system in cultural contact.

Mihhail Lotman has listed some universal principles governing the relationship of language prosody and metre, the following of which may be relevant in case of runosong. In languages with strong dynamic stress, the application of a syllabic principle in the metre is inhibited by the reduction of unstressed syllables. Strong dynamic stress inhibits the use of the principle of quantity in the metre even in languages where there exists phonological opposition of long and short syllables (Lotman 1998: 1853). Elaborated and pervasive alliteration occurs only in these poetic systems where, in addition to the accentual principle, an additional prosodic feature participates in the formation of the poetic system (Lotman 1985: 63–64; 1998: 2070).

If we consider the model of Kalevala-metre as the proto-form of Estonian runosong and compare it to the metrical situation of Estonian runosongs of the late 19th to the early 20th century, we are able to juxtapose metrical changes with the changes in language phonology and prosody presented in the works of linguists (Eek, Help 1986; Rätsep 1989; Viitso 2003a; Pajusalu 2012).

The Estonian language has undergone a series of significant, interrelated changes that have contributed to the formation of the Estonian language, and separation of it from other Finnic languages: due to regular and systematic vowel syncope and apocope (loss of vowels respectively in the middle and in the end of words), loss of intervocalic *h* leading to the contraction of syllables, and some other, more occasional sound losses the number of syllables in word forms diminished; instead of the binary opposition of short and long syllables, the system of three quantity degrees (short, long, overlong) emerged encompassing two word-initial syllables (and with a tendency to foot isochrony); the language type changed from a predominantly agglutinative to a more inflected language, and in connection with it the referential load of initial syllables increased, while oftentimes including in addition to the meaning of the root also grammatical information; the prosodic prominence of the initial syllable increased and that of the following syllables, decreased; the choice of vowels in post-initial syllable diminished. Karl Pajusalu states that due to the systematic sound losses word prosody of Estonian (and Livonian) has become typical of a fusional language – stressed syllables becoming structurally more complicated, and unstressed more simple, similar to the neighbouring Indo-European (more Germanic than Baltic) languages (Pajusalu 2012: 209). These changes differ by dialects and sub-dialects of Estonian in terms of quality as well as extent, and they did apply only partially in the most conservative, Northeastern Coastal dialect where the opposition of long and overlong quantity degree did not develop, nor has the loss of sounds been that extensive as elsewhere (Must 1987: 42, 154, 355). Since Northeastern Estonian songs represent metrically more conservative metrical form too, and the runosongs of western and southeastern regions are linguistically clearly more innovative (not retaining systematically archaic word forms), I have chosen the songs of latter mentioned regions, in particular, as reference point for metrical innovations.

Comparing the changes in language to the changes in metre, we can hypothesize following linguistic incentives for metrical changes of Estonian runosongs:

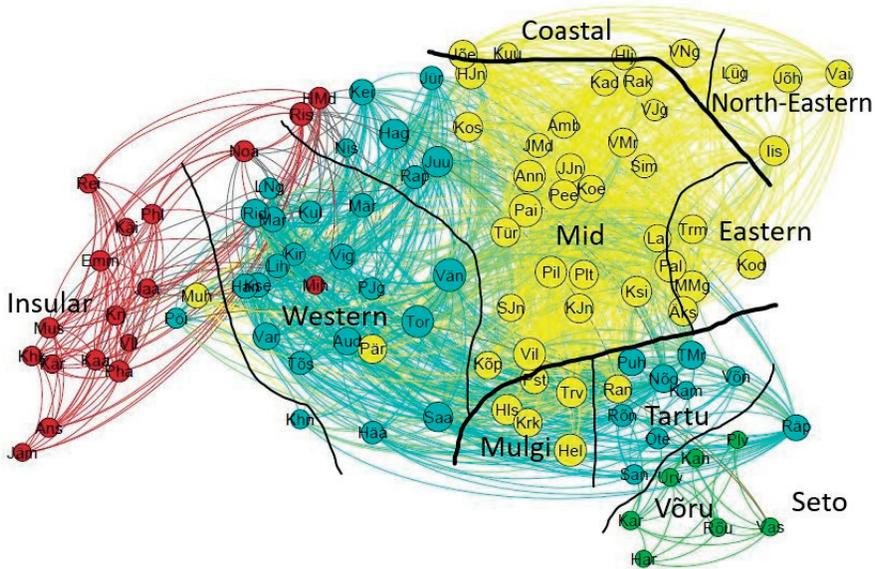
- 1) the increase of prosodic prominence as well as referential load of the stressed (word-initial) syllables results in the increase of accentual principle in runosong metre;
- 2) the reduction in prominence and pronunciation of the successive syllables has not been so severe that it threatens the syllabicity of metrical form – although there occur increasing deviations of the principle of one syllable corresponding exactly to one verse position (and isochronous

- unit of melody), there are still clear regularities in how syllables of different qualities and quantities are placed to verse positions;
- 3) disappearance of the clear quantity opposition of short and long stressed syllables (phonological bifurcation of long syllables) results in the loss of importance of quantity opposition in the metrical system and changes in functions of syllables of different quantity in the metre:
    - a. the function of long stressed syllables to mark the opposition of strong and weak positions of the metrical schema with the help of quantity is maintained, but not that of short stressed syllables (which gradually have acquired a function similar to long stressed syllables – to mark strong positions)<sup>8</sup>;
    - b. the function of short stressed syllables to form double positions (two syllables in one verse position) becomes much more general (for example in line *viis aga/ minda/ v̄arava/ poole/ ‘brought me towards a gate’, the double positions underlined*);
    - c. in runosongs of Southeastern Estonia stressed syllables with overlong degree of quantity acquire a metrical option to be divided over two verse positions (the syllables in overlong quantity degree often have emerged on the basis of two historical syllables as a result of syncope or apocope, for example *\*täi-si > täis* ‘full of’);
  - 4) the transfer of apocope to the songs has resulted in unfilled last verse position (catalectic verse) when convenient (*kui ma/ hakkana/ laule/maie > kui ma/ hakkana/ laule/ma ø* ‘when I am going to sing’).

## Linguistic and metrical dialects

A connection between language and metrical features seems to exist; however, its specific manifestation is obscure and hard to pin down. Since we do not have much information on the directions and incentives of the changes in language because of the lack of written historical documents in Estonian dialects, we are not able directly to trace the impact of the language changes on the spread of metrical innovations. If we draw the borders of main dialect areas on the metrical map (Map 3) we see immediately that metrical and linguistic regions do not coincide in several important details.

<sup>8</sup> One could think that short stressed syllables just became indifferent to metrical constraints, but clear geographical distribution of their placement (on Map 1) reveals the obvious change of metrical function of short stressed syllables.



Map 3. Metrical areas of Estonian runosongs (Map 2) with borders of Estonian main dialects and subdialects.

Comparing the dialectal and metrical divisions (Map 3) we can observe the following:

- 1) main linguistic division into South Estonian and North Estonian does not appear in metrical division, namely, the westernmost South Estonian subdialect (Mulgi) belongs together with the more conservative metrical area in north of Estonia;
- 2) in case of two other main subdialects of South Estonian, metrical variation nearly follows the dialect borders, Võru forming the specific southeastern metrical area, and Tartu being a transitional form in between Võru and North Estonia<sup>9</sup>;
- 3) Northeastern Coastal dialect border is not present in metrical division, metrically conservative area in runosongs reaches far more southwards encompassing the Eastern Estonian dialect area and most of the Mid Estonian (in addition to Mulgi);

<sup>9</sup> The fourth, easternmost area of South Estonian dialect, Seto area, was not included in metrical analysis, because of its specific song culture – it is using the poetic code of runosong, but at the same time different type of melodies, which often presume repetitions of parts of verses as well as additional syllables, and would require also different method for analysis (Sarv 2008: 16).

- 4) metrically innovative area on western islands almost coincides with the insular dialect area, with relevant exception of metrically conservative Muhu island with its neighbouring parishes on mainland and Saaremaa (mainland parishes that metrically belong together to innovative islands tradition have had notable amount of Swedish population, similarly to some regions on islands, where runosong tradition has been scarce and casual);
- 5) transitional metrical area of Western Estonia is larger than Western Estonian dialect area, encompassing also the western part of Mid Estonian dialect.

To sum up, the borders of metrical and dialectal regions are overlapping only partly. Of course, when dividing Estonia into dialect areas, linguists have taken in account different features (lexicon, morphology, etc.), and innovations in language prosody can have been spread in different ways. The process of significant language changes encompassed North and South Estonian dialects, partly the whole Southern Finnic area, including also Livonian, and transformed these languages considerably different from other Finnic languages (Rätsep 1989: 1511–1518; Pajusalu 2012). The changes took part during a longer period; on the basis of early writings, mostly of place names, linguists have deducted these to have been happened during 13th–16th centuries (Rätsep 1989: 1518). According to historians, there evolved a certain tendency to cultural convergence in Estonia during 12th and 13th centuries; probably due to the increasing population density, there were more contacts between the different parts of Estonia, which by this time formed a cultural whole that was clearly different of neighbouring countries (Jaanits et al. 1982: 418; Trummal 1987). The linguistic innovations changing the prosodic system apparently crossed the dialect borders, and as we consider these as incentives for metrical changes, it is not surprising that the metrical variation does not always follow the dialect borders.

There is no common view, however, among linguists how and why the changes took off. They have been supposed to have evolved, in very general terms, under the influence of Baltic and Germanic languages (Eek, Help 1986: 19), or, more exactly, due to the contacts with Low German (e.g. Pajusalu et al. 2002: 64) or Swedish and German (Wiik 1996: 238). Huno Rätsep has also presented the idea that the changes were a result of inner development of Finnic dialects, and proposes that the changes might have started from the Southern Estonian dialect area (Rätsep 1989: 1515, 1521). In addition, Pajusalu (2012: 220) mentions possible substrate phenomena as potential factors contributing to the development of features characteristic to the Southern Finnic languages

(Estonian and Livonian) – i.e. hypothetical influences of other, now extinct Finno-Ugric languages, and Baltic and Slavic influences.

As we saw previously, in theoretical terms, the metrical innovations can easily be related to the changes in language prosody – in particular, to increase of the prominence of the stressed syllable and loss of the clear quantity opposition. Yet, we still miss the link that would tie together metrical variation with variation of dialectal prosody that could prove the presumed causal relationship between the linguistic changes and metrical variation.

In a synchronic view of 19th- and 20th-century runosong texts, the most striking and well-observable phenomenon of these interrelated language changes is the variation in syllabic reduction of word forms, caused by sound losses, particularly systematic syncope and apocope. Pajusalu admits that there are differences in the spread of syncope and apocope in Estonian dialects: it is most limited in the Northeastern Coastal dialects, its occurrence varies in Northern Estonian, and it is more regular in South Estonian (Pajusalu 2012: 209). Juhan Peegel, in his analysis of the morphology of Estonian runosong language, mentions that, in runosongs, the absence of syncope and apocope is so general that there is no reason to pay special attention to it (Peegel 2006: 41). Regional differences in the occurrence of word forms with and without syncope and apocope in runosongs are remarkable, though. In the northern Estonian runosong area word forms without shortening occur regularly; in southeastern and western runosong areas, word forms with syncope and apocope occur more often, especially in the centres of metrical innovation in the South-East and on the western islands (see examples 1 and 2).

Sõidan **teeda** sõidan **maada**,  
 sõidan **sildada sinistra**,  
 sõidan **sildada punasta**,  
**rohelist** **roosilista**,  
**maada** maksa **karvalista**.

I ride the ways, I ride the lands,  
 I ride the blue bridge,  
 I ride the red bridge,  
 the green one, the rosy one,  
 the land of the colour of liver.

Example 1. Song excerpt from Haljala in Northern Estonia (H II 9, 338/9 (11)), the unshortened word forms are in bold.

Salgu sõitsin, salgu jõutsin,  
 võrsta sõitsin Venemaad,  
 poole võrsta Poola maad,  
 sada võrsta Saksa maad,  
 sain siis naise narmikust,  
 talu tihe tammikust.

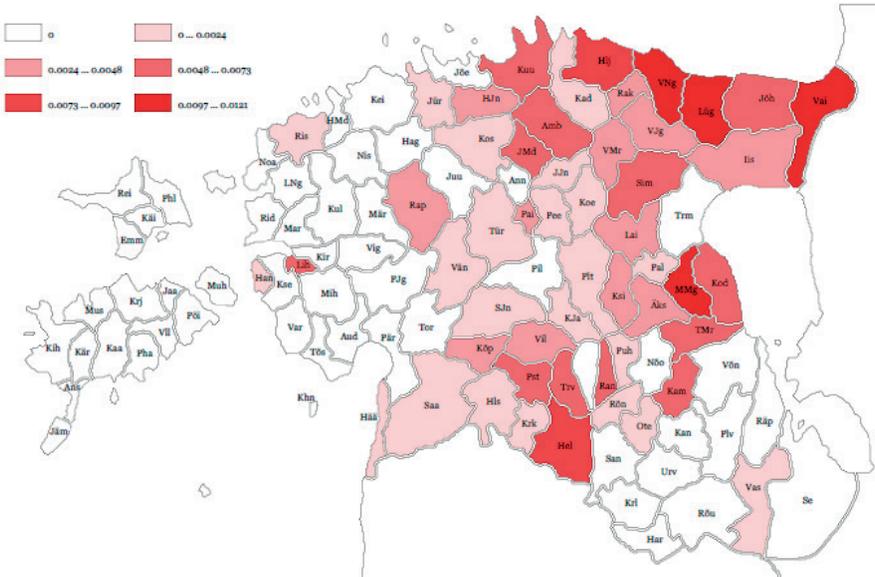
I rode with group, I reached with group,  
 I rode a mile of Russian land,  
 half a mile of Polish land,  
 hundred miles of German land,  
 then I got a wife from a meadow,  
 from a thick oak-wood of a farm.

Example 2. Song excerpt from Kihelkonna on western island Saaremaa (EKmS 4° 2, 58 (12)), word forms with regular vowel syncope or apocope are underlined.

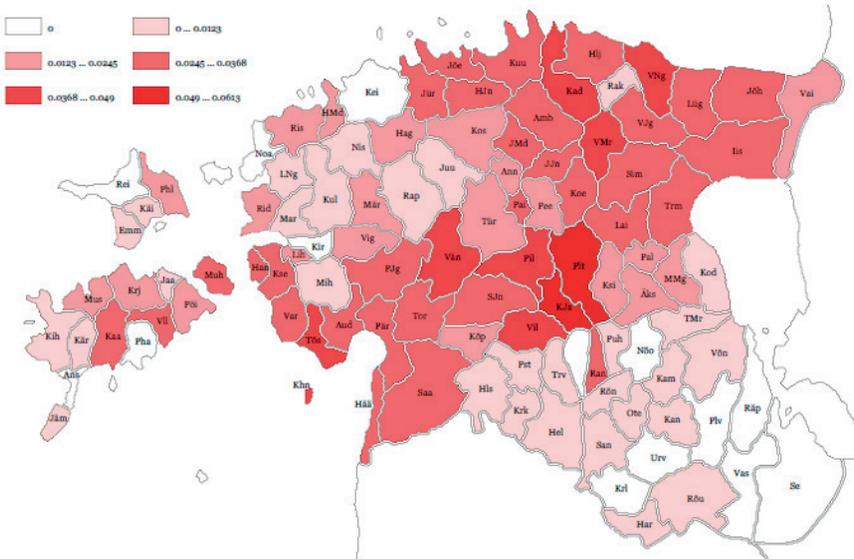
With the help of Estonian runosongs' database we can map the occurrence of specific word forms. From the observation of various forms of word *mina* 'me' in partitive (accusative) case (Maps 4–7) we can see that the most archaic form *minuda* is spread mostly in North-East Estonia, the syncoped form *mind* in northern and central area of Estonia, the syncoped and apocoped form *mind* in Western Estonia, and the specifically Southern Estonian form *minno* as a result of late gemination of *n*, in Southeastern Estonia. The spread of different word forms is overlapping; older and newer word forms can be used next to each other by the same singer and within the same song according to metrical needs that adds notable amount of flexibility to the composition of verses, especially when quantity is still relevant (cf. also Abondolo 2001: 89).

In addition to regular vowel syncope and apocope, also other sound losses have occurred in Estonian that have shortened the words: loss of single intervocalic stops on the border of first and second syllable (*\*käten* > *käe*) and further in the word (*\*kalata* > *\*kalaa* > *kala*) as well as loss of intervocalic *h* further in the word (*\*kirvehella* > > *kirvel*) (Viitso 2003a: 166–169; 186–187).

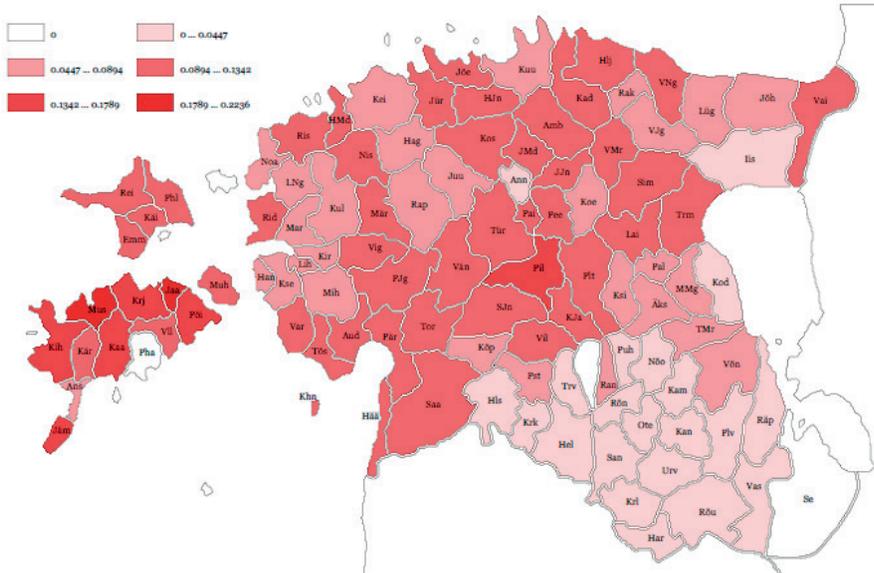
Next to newer word forms, for that kind of cases, runosong has often found its ways to retain old syllabic structure (and quantity of stressed syllable) either by preserving the original consonant or some kind of its weakened form or just the syllable boundary (the word *valgel* 'in the light' occurs in songs in different forms: *valgehella*, *valge'ella*, *valgella*, *valge'el*, *valgel*; in addition there are parallel forms from the same stem with short initial syllable *valulla*, *valul*).



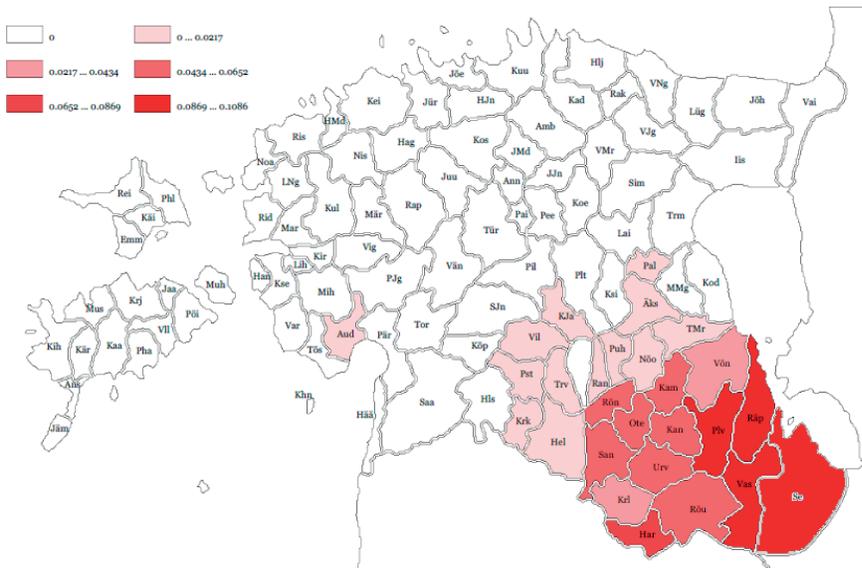
Map 4. Spread of the unshortened form *minuda* 'me' (partitive case) (percentages of songs in parishes containing this form in the database of Estonian runosongs).



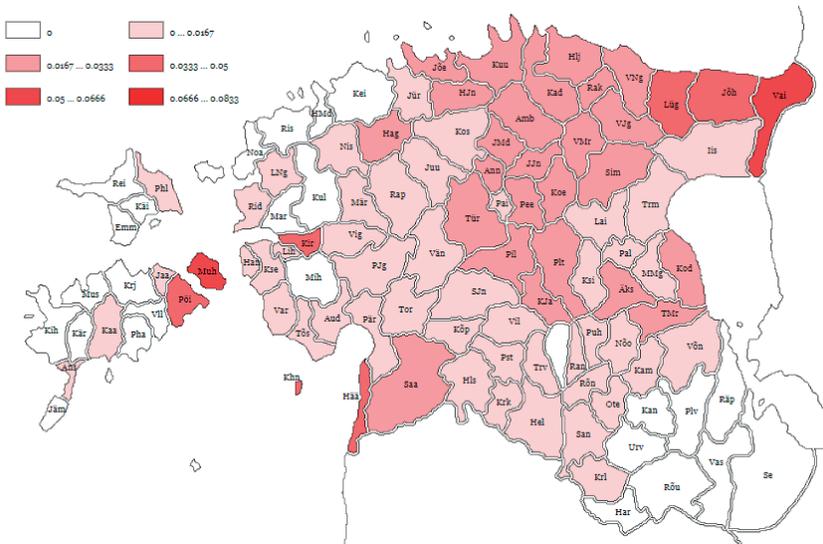
Map 5. Spread of the syncoped form *minda*.



Map 6. Spread of the syncoped and apocoped form *mind*.



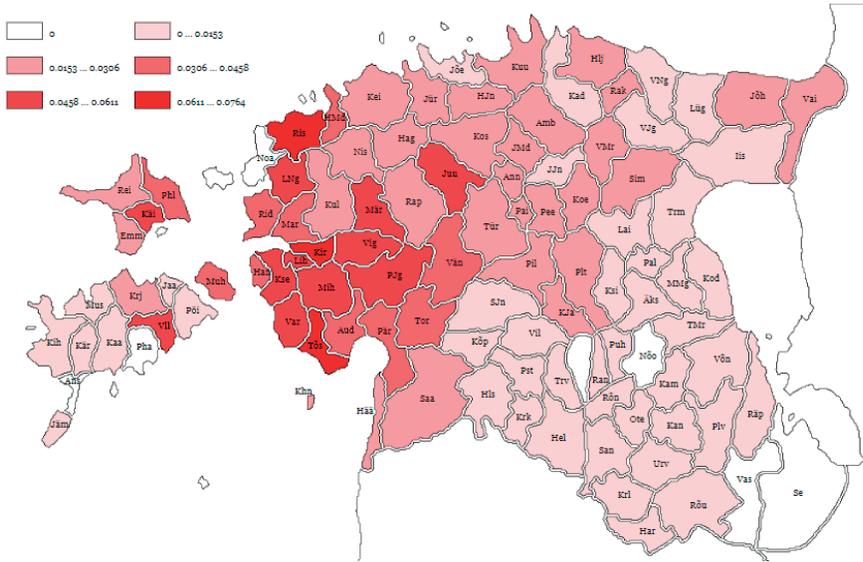
Map 7. Spread of the Southern Estonian form *minnu, minno*.



Map 8. Spread of the form *tubaje* (percentage of the number of songs per parish containing this form in the database of Estonian runosongs).

The use of morphological forms of different stages of language development can be found everywhere in runosongs. For example, the syllable with long vowel or diphthong can be easily interpreted as two (historical) syllables in metrical framework, like in lines *neiud / mängi/sid mä/ella* ‘the maidens were playing on a hill’ or *ennem /ma tö/ö tü/ütan* ‘I will rather annoy a work’, whereas the similar part of word is interpreted as monosyllabic in other cases: *läksin /mäele / mängi/ma ø* ‘I went to play on hill’ or *tuhat / tööd jäi / to-a / juure* ‘I left thousand works at the chamber’. For another example, the illative case form of *tuba* ‘chamber’ is *tuppa* ‘into a chamber’ with consonant gemination in contemporary Estonian, but in runosongs often trisyllabic *tubaje* with short initial syllable (both from < \**tupahen*). The spread of both forms are depicted on Maps 8 and 9 (Southern Estonian dialect has a different root *tare* for chamber).

In the context of Estonian runosong, the consistent use of syncoped and apocoped word forms is rare. Most often the word forms with mentioned sound losses can be found in the western part of Võro dialect area, where the metrical system allows overlong syllables to fill a foot (or two metrical positions) (see example 3). In spite of that, the parallel older and longer word forms are used in other variants recorded from the same region, and it is almost impossible to find runosongs without any historical unshortened word forms.



Map 9. Spread of the word form *tuppa*.

Mis sääl / var-va/ vah-/jel ø,  
 ki-nä / möt-sa / kes-/kel ø?  
 Ta-lu oll / tü-tär / tam-mō-/kō-nō,  
 Pe-re-/pii-ga/ lin-nu-/kō-nō,  
Kann / kul-la-/du kä-/en ø,  
 Pi-kōr /hō-pō-/du pe-/on ø;  
 Sör-mō / täüs / sör-mus-/sid ø,  
Käe /var-rō / va-sit-/sid ø.

What's there between the trees,  
 in the middle of the nice forest?  
 Farm-daughter, an oak,  
 young lady, a bird,  
 a golden jug in her hands,  
 holding a silvery beaker,  
 the fingers full of rings,  
 the arms full of coppery ones.

Example 3. Excerpt of a song from Urvaste in Western Võro (H II 36, 29/30 (39)); for understanding the verse rhythm, the foot boundaries are marked with /, the syllables divided into two verse positions are in bold, the word forms that have also parallel longer forms in runosongs are underlined, and the empty catalectic position (due to the apocope) is marked with ø.

With amazing success, runosong in general has resisted vowel syncope and apocope and several accompanying changes that took part in everyday language. This enabled it to preserve traditional formulas and, at the same time, the adjacent use of older and newer word forms added flexibility to the poetic composition, and supported the use of quantitative metre ensuring a larger selection of words with the particular structure.<sup>10</sup> The regional variation of runosong language reflects different degrees of resistance to the mentioned changes. The further shortening of the word forms and reduction of non-initial syllables observable for example in Insular dialect and in Mulgi dialect (see Pajusalu 1996: 61) has reached to runosongs only marginally.

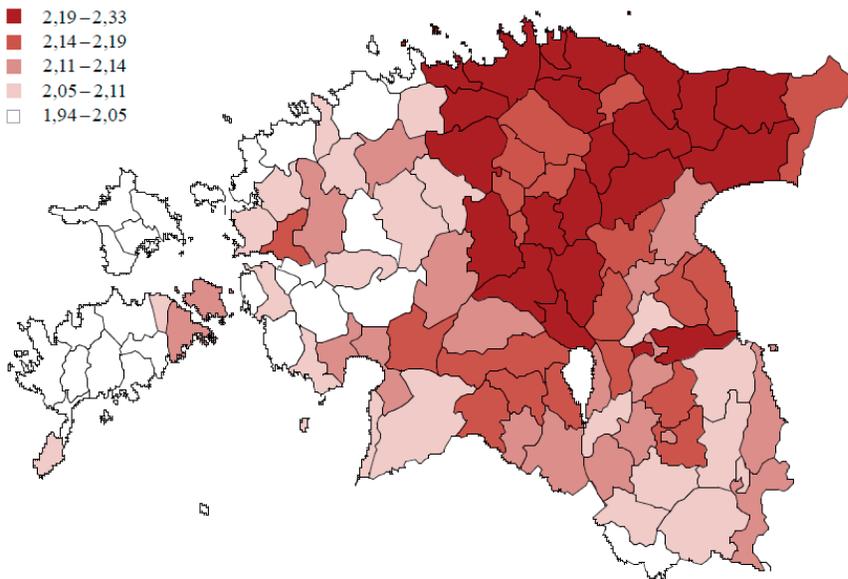
## Syllabic structure of runosong compared to that of dialectal language

With regard to the Finnish language, Pentti Leino has shown that the Kalevala-metre is able to make the most comprehensive use of the Finnish vocabulary, i.e. there are practically no word structures in Finnish that the Kalevala-metre cannot employ, and there are relatively few of those whose normal usage frequency is distorted by the Kalevala-metre (Leino 1982: 237–249). However, insofar as one of the stylistic features of the Estonian runosong is a generous use of archaisms, there is a good reason to hypothesize that the runosong verse metre has enforced a particular choice of words with certain structure from the bulk of possible word forms and archaic forms of the language. My previous research had already shown that in the regions with a more metrically conservative runosong tradition the average word length in syllables tends to be greater than in the areas with more innovative meter (Sarv 2000: 46–64). On the basis of my research corpus, I surveyed the percentage of occurrence of words with a different number of syllables from each parish and the average length of words in runosongs (Map 10). It turned out that the distribution of broken lines typical to the quantitative runosong metre is in positive correlation with the distribution of trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic words, while the

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<sup>10</sup> The flexible use of word forms of different historical layers of language can almost be considered as universal feature of oral poetry (see Sarv 2011a; Saarinen 2018: 76; Frog 2019: 36; Kiparsky 1968; Bailey 1995; also Foley 1996; Coleman 1999), although Frog, in his comments to the current article, suggested that the necessity to use archaic word forms for the sake of metre (with different structure than contemporary ones) probably is relevant only where this is connected with syllabic or moraic rhythms – in accentual verse, a syllabic variation in a single word does not seem to emerge as often as metrically relevant.

distribution of lines typical to accentual runosong metre is in positive correlation with the distribution of mono- and disyllabic words. The strongest correlation ( $r = 0.83$ ) was, however, between the percentage of broken lines and the average word length (which ranged from 1.94 in Kärđla on western island Hiiumaa and 1.99 in Hargla, the southernmost parish in South-East Estonia to 2.33 in Haljala on the northern coast). There is thus a systematic relation between the word length in runosongs and metrical variation.

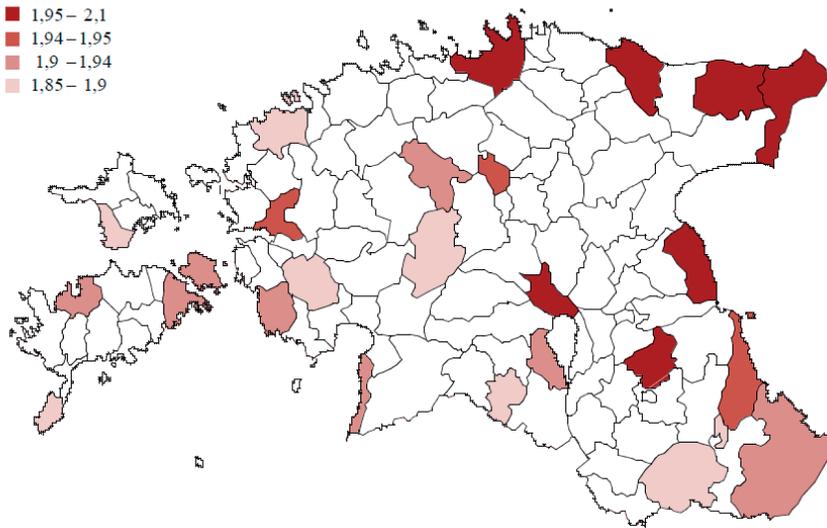


Map 10. The average number of syllables per word in Estonian runosongs (Sarv 2008: 87).

As already mentioned, the use of archaisms in Estonian runosongs is frequent and systemic, and the words are on average longer than in ordinary speech. Nevertheless, we still need to determine whether the word length in runosongs follows similar patterns to that of regular speech in order to make an evidence-based claim about the impact of language prosody on metrical variation. We do not have any statistics on the average length of words in Estonian dialects at our disposal; syncope and apocope have taken place in most part of Estonia. There are regional differences in the systematic shortening of the words, but we do not get the clear overview of that on the basis of descriptions of dialects.

In order to shed light on the relationship between the lengths of runosong words and dialect words, I used the dialect examples included in Andrus Saareste's "Väike eesti murdeatlas" ("A Small Atlas of Estonian Dialects"; 1955,

89–103) where one and the same short text is translated into the dialectal language of 26 parishes chosen diffusely from all over the country “to get a general overview of the dialects and possibility to compare them with each other” (ibid.: 8). I counted the number of syllables in these texts and calculated the average for each text, which ranged from 1.85 in Karksi, Mulgi area of Southern Estonia to 2.1 in Viru-Nigula on Northern Coast. The results are depicted on Map 11.



Map 11. Average number of syllables in dialect examples of “A Small Atlas of Estonian Dialects” by A. Saareste (1955) (Sarv 2008: 87).

Although the results on syllabic distribution in dialectal language are based on very scarce and sparse data, and on average words are longer in runosongs than in dialect excerpts, they reveal quite similar tendencies (correlation coefficient  $r = 0.65$ ): we can see that there are longer words in the eastern part of Estonia (except for in the area of southernmost Võru dialect), and shorter ones in the southern and western part of Estonia. Even the more conservative runosong area on the island Muhu and in neighbouring parishes in Western Estonia can be traced on the language map. Thus, it is in principle possible to conclude that a language with shorter words has given rise to the use of accentual runosong metre and a language with longer word forms has retained the quantitative runosong metre.

There is still one notable area where the average length of words in dialectal texts and runosongs is different, which is Mulgi dialect area in Southern Estonia. Metrically it belongs to the conservative area with longer than average words, but the dialectal language of this area is known as one of the most centralized and “worn out”: the first, stressed syllable has been pronounced with special intensity, whereas in successive syllables vowels have been reduced, sometimes lost, and secondary stress has been weakened (Pajusalu 1996: 45, 61). Similar phenomena have happened in the Insular dialect and Livonian; successive syllables have been reduced also in Latvian dialects with a Livonian substrate (*ibid.*: 61, 67). Pajusalu has supposed (*ibid.*: 62, 68) that these changes may have happened under the influence of Germanic languages. The shortened forms characteristic of the Mulgi dialect exist in runosongs to a very limited extent, for example in verbs, in the first person plural (*päästam* < *päästame* ‘we save’; *istum* < *istume* ‘we sit’), in the third person plural past tense (*kõneliv* < *kõnelive* ‘they spoke’; *kuuliv* < *kuulive* ‘they heard’), in the third person singular past tense (*ütel’* < *üteli* ‘s/he said’; *võt’s* < *võtse* ‘s/he took’), and occasionally in other parts of speech (*lühikse* < *lühikese* ‘short’ in genitive case; *mikeg* < *mikege* ‘with what’) (cf. Pajusalu 1996: 61–62, 148, 324–327). Late vowel losses in subsequent syllables have systematically not penetrated into runosongs in other areas either. They appear only as rare exceptions in songs of Western Estonia (*kasvatanud* < *kasvatand* ‘has grown’, *pand* < *pannud* ‘has put’), in songs of the island of Hiiumaa slightly more often (*uhaks* < *ohakas* ‘thistle’; *liikused* < *liikused* ‘they moved’, *süüaks* < *süüakse* ‘it is eaten’), although in everyday language the shortened forms have been common.

In studying where the discrepancy between average number of syllables of runosongs and dialectal data was greatest, it turned out mainly to appear in the parishes along the borders of metrical regions (see Sarv 2008: 90). If this would apply for the more complete data on dialectal language as well, it would mean that, in the metrical core areas, the metre conforms better to the usage of regular language, whereas in transitional areas, runosong appears to have been more resistant to the changes in language – differences between runosong language and regular language are greater. This hypothesis should be checked with more comprehensive dialect data.

The statistics on the length of syllables (presented in Table 1) shows that in runosong on average, there is slight preference to 2- and 4-syllabic word forms compared to regular language, which naturally support the trochaic rhythm. The difference shows that the trochaic metrical pattern has an impact on the choice of word form, and this, to a certain extent, dominates over the natural rhythm of language in poetic expression.

Table 1. Percentage of words of different lengths in runosongs and in dialectal texts.

	1-syllabic	2-syllabic	3-syllabic	4-syllabic
in runosongs	18%	61%	12%	9%
in dialectal texts	27%	56%	15%	3%

The results obtained largely confirmed my earlier assumption that quantitative runosong metre uses longer words than accentual runosong metre. This conclusion can be interpreted in two ways:

- 1) metre motivates the choice of word forms with specific structures amongst the all possible (including archaic) word forms of language;
- 2) the existence of words with a certain structure in the language motivates the choice (or development) of the metre of folksongs in the dialect in question.

In all probability both the principles have acted in interrelationship. The process of mutual adaptation of language structure and metre of runosong could be outlined as follows: an earlier quantitative metrical form (hypothetical Kalevala-metre) was more suitable for the more archaic stage of language and longer word forms. When the words started to become shorter, the singers still tried to maintain the metrical system by using (and evidently also constructing) archaic word forms. The less it succeeded and the more contemporary word forms were used, the more runosong acquired the qualities of an accentual metre. Together with the change of metrical norms, the motivation to use archaic word forms diminished, and the prosodic features of the language of runosongs again became closer to regular language.

## Tensions between the language and metre

Systematic use of archaic word forms has been considered as one of the most characteristic features of Estonian runosong, runosong language has even been considered as a kind of common language crossing dialect borders. Juhan Peegel, in his thorough study on the morphology of the language of Estonian runosongs, emphasizes, however, that the most characteristic feature of the language of runosongs is that it is based on dialectal language, which determines the morphological forms used in it (Peegel 2006: 198–199).

On the one hand, archaic word forms have been conveyed in connection with formulaic phraseology, the recurrent use of stereotypical elements; on the other hand, the newer word forms did not fit metrically into the traditional verse lines. To avoid the developing incongruences of metre and language,

one possibility was to retain older word forms. However, in addition to the stereotypical, the traditional side the folkloric transmission always includes innovation and creativity. In creating new verse lines, preserving the old morphological forms could not be a goal in itself. The word forms were chosen from the local dialect, and used (or generated in case of pseudoarchaisms) following the example of the older word forms and verse lines.

Drawing upon Juhan Peegel's discussion of the morphology of the runo-song language (Peegel 2006), I will examine how the word structures that are important from the perspective of the alteration of the verse system appear in runosong. Peegel considers the most remarkable feature of the language of runosongs its abundant use of morphemes promoting the formation of quadrisyllabic word forms (Peegel 2006: 200). Their use in runosongs could be characterized as follows: quadrisyllabic word forms fit well with the trochaic structure of runosong metre; in the course of language changes, these forms started to shorten in everyday language. Initially, the archaic quadrisyllabic morphological forms were preserved in folk songs; when, however, such a forms became uncomfortably dominant, the metre gave in and allowed the omission of a syllable from the end of the verse line. We can assume that the process of language changes first emerged in the regions where these changes have been realized in the metre of runosongs as well.

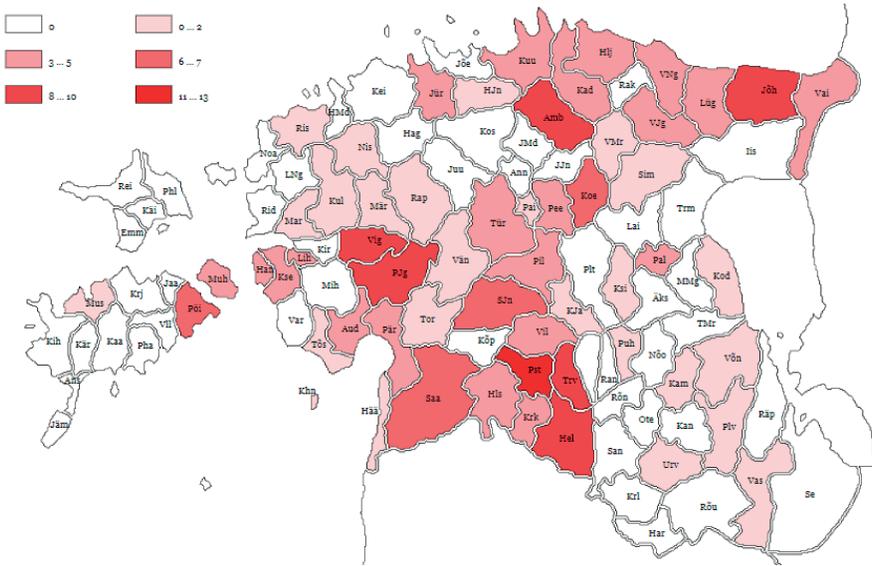
In addition to quadrisyllabic word forms, the structures crucial for the quantitative runosong metre have been trisyllabic word forms beginning with a short syllable, which have a key position in the formation of broken verses characteristic to quantitative runosong metre. In spoken language, these words have often changed (shortened and also geminated in places). In the following, on the basis of Peegel's study (*ibid.*: 33–197), I will give an overview of how the main types of these word structures have been handled in runosongs.

1. In the adjectives ending with *-eda*, the nominative of singular has often been shortened by a syllable in colloquial language (*pime* – Nom. : *pimeda* – Gen. 'dark'), according to Peegel, in runosong language, the archaic form of the nominative case *pimeda* has been usually retained,<sup>11</sup> only in runosongs of the insular region do these words occur without the last syllable as in everyday language (*ibid.*: 41–42). Peegel does not mention the geminated forms of South-East Estonia (*pimme*), nor estimates its distribution.

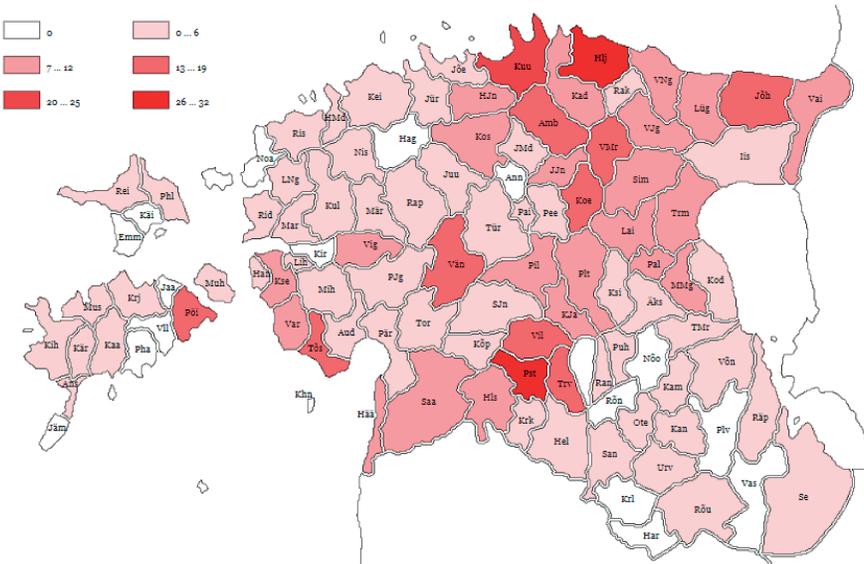
When checking Peegel's claims on the basis of the occurrence of the forms of the chosen example, we see that indeed, the form *pimeda* is found in most of mainland Estonia (in addition to the islands, also South-East Estonia has

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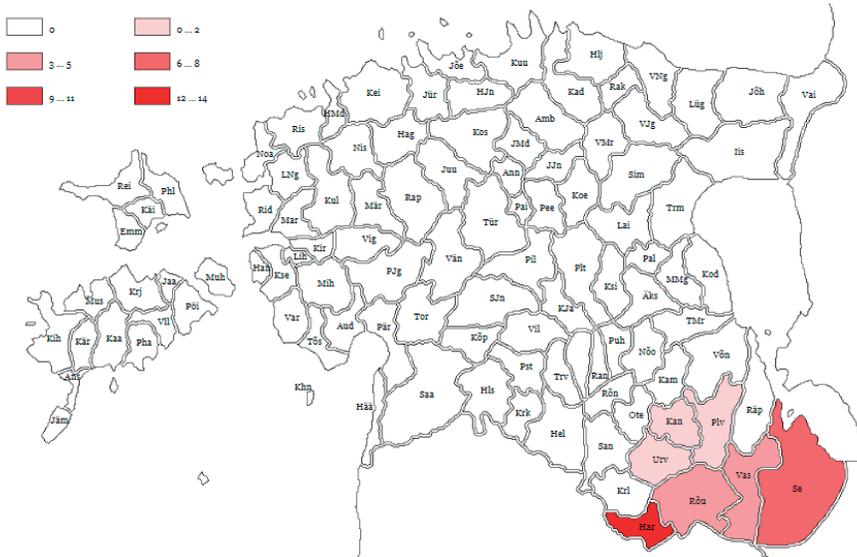
<sup>11</sup> The same option has been used in the literary poetry as well (Lotman, Lotman 2007: 121).



Map 12. Distribution of unshortened variants of word *pime* 'dark' in Estonian runosongs: *pimeda*, *pümeda*, *pümedä* (may include forms in homonymous genitive, data from the Estonian runosongs' database).



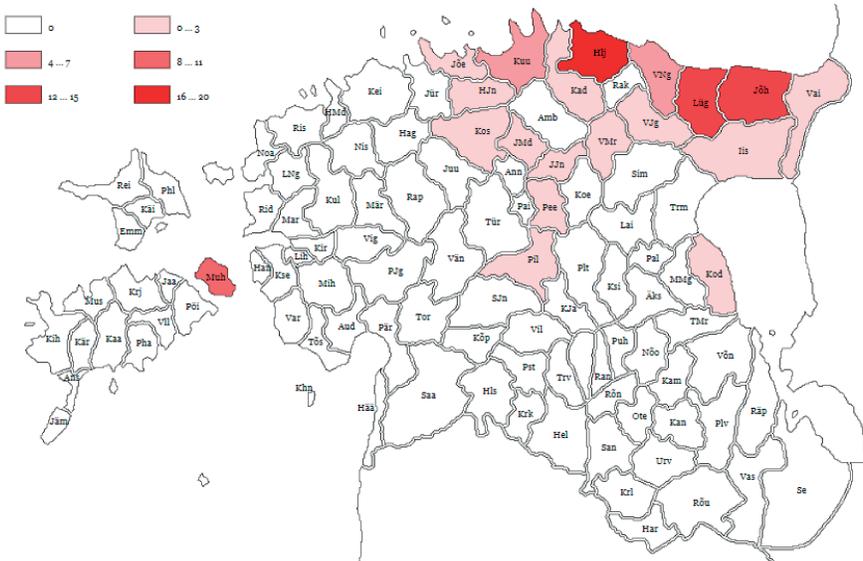
Map 13. Distribution of shortened variants of word *pime* 'dark' in Estonian runosongs: *pime*, *püme* (data from the Estonian runosongs' database).



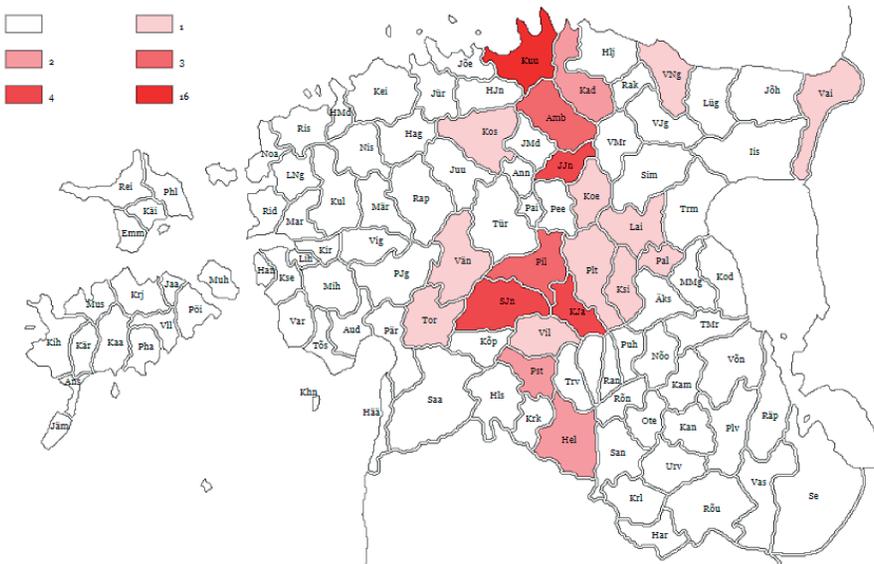
Map 14. Distribution of geminated variant of word *pime* 'dark' in Estonian runosongs: *pümme* (data from the Estonian runosongs' database).

fewer occurrences) (Map 12), but the shortened form *pime* or *püme* is more frequent and occurs all over Estonia (Map 13), while in the southeasternmost region, the geminated form (*pümme*) has been adopted (Map 14) (cf. also map on the forms of *sagedasti* in Saareste 1955: 30).

2. For retaining or constructing a trisyllabic word form necessary for metrical reasons, in runosongs disyllabic words starting with a short syllable (often in the naming of family members) may sometimes receive a possessive suffix that has been lost in regular dialectal language, and which in poetry does not always convey exact meaning; sometimes also a meaningless short syllable has been added to the word forms in nominative case (*emani* 'my mother', *isani* 'my father', *omani* 'my own', *kodoni* 'my home', *emada* 'mother', *isada* 'father', *külada* 'village', *koduje* 'home', *kanaje* 'hen'). According to Peegel, possessive suffixes do not occur at all in runosongs of Western Estonia, which in similar cases often uses the suffix *-gi/-ki* (*minagi* 'even I') (Peegel 2006: 46–47, 132–138). The distribution of the word forms *emani* 'my mother' and *emagi* 'even the mother' according to the Estonian runosongs' database is presented on Maps 15 and 16, revealing that use of trisyllabic forms of the word *ema* in the nominative case has not been necessary in the whole of Western Estonia, except for Muhu island (the South Estonian form *imä* does not use either of the suffixes observed here).

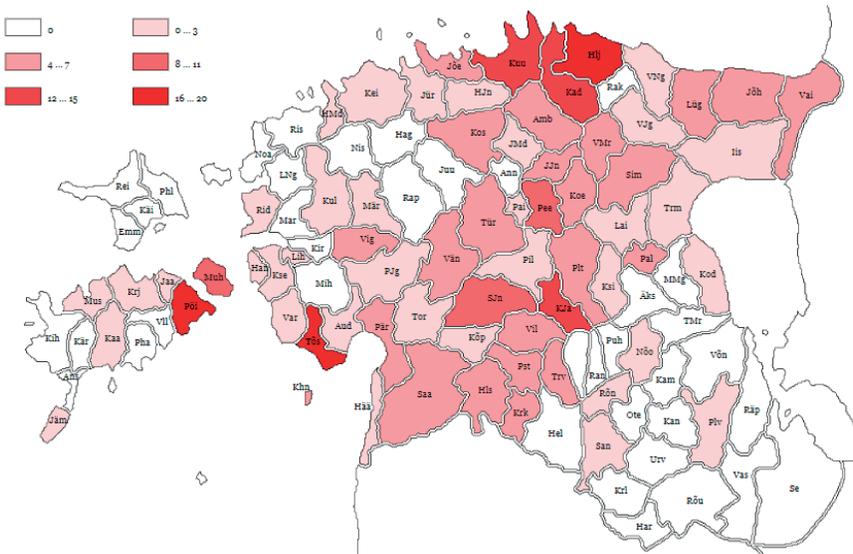


Map 15. Spread of the word *ema* 'mother' with possessive suffix *emani*, *emäni* 'my mother' on the basis of Estonian runosongs' database.

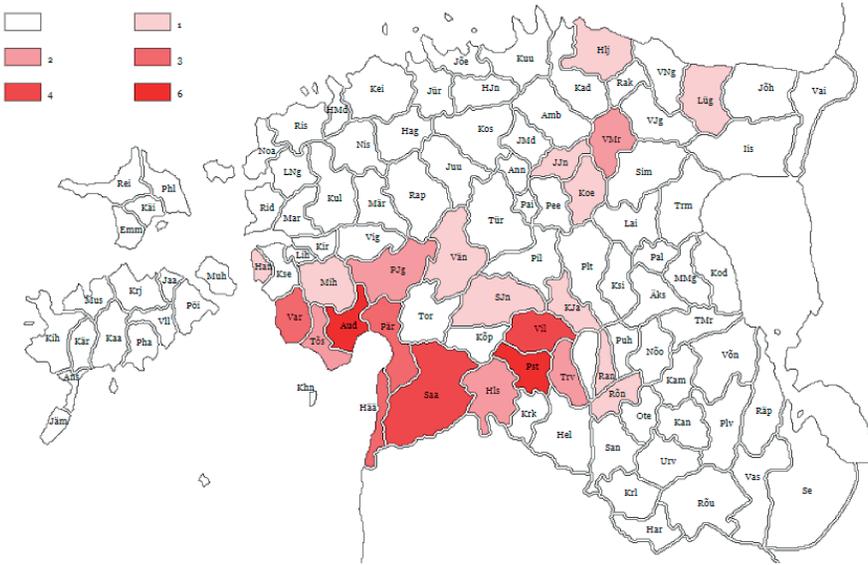


Map 16. Spread of the word *ema* 'mother' with suffix *-gi* *emagi*, *emägi* 'even the mother' on the basis of Estonian runosongs' database.

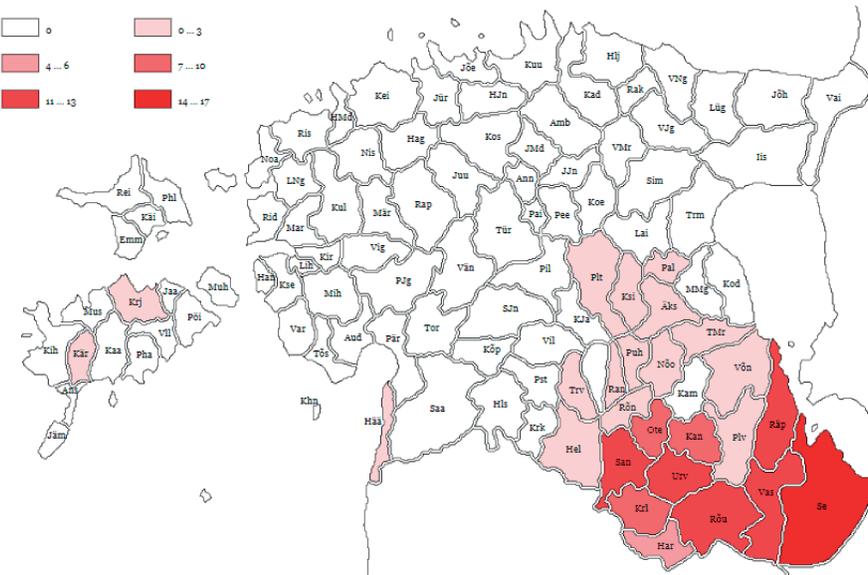
3. In disyllabic roots starting with short syllable the runosong language has retained suffix *-da* in the partitive case singular (*iluda* ‘of beauty’, *emada* ‘of mother’, *isada* ‘of father’, *minuda* ‘me’, *luguda* ‘of story’, *tubada* ‘of chamber’ *mägeda* ‘of hill’). In regular everyday language, this phenomenon is known in the Northeastern Coastal dialect and in the Eastern Estonian dialect. Peegel notes that the runosongs of Northern Estonia and Mulgi region are full of this kind of forms, in southeastern runosongs they occur only very rarely. In Southeastern dialects, these forms have undergone gemination, and geminated forms are used in runosongs as well (*minnu* ‘me’, *kiuvi* ‘of stone’) (ibid.: 53–54). Map 17 presenting the spread of the unshortened word form *emada* ‘of mother’ shows that the unshortened form is widely spread in Estonian runosongs (with exception of the South-East of Estonia where the geminated forms *immä*, *emmä* are usual – Map 19). In southwestern region the parallel short form *emat* is in use (Map 18), whereas in other dialects the partitive form is homonymous with nominative.



Map 17. Distribution of the unshortened variants of word *ema* ‘mother’ in partitive case: *emada*, *emäda*, *emädä* (on the basis of Estonian runosongs’ database).



Map 18. Distribution of the shortened variant of word *ema* 'mother' in partitive case: *emat* (on the basis of Estonian runosongs' database).

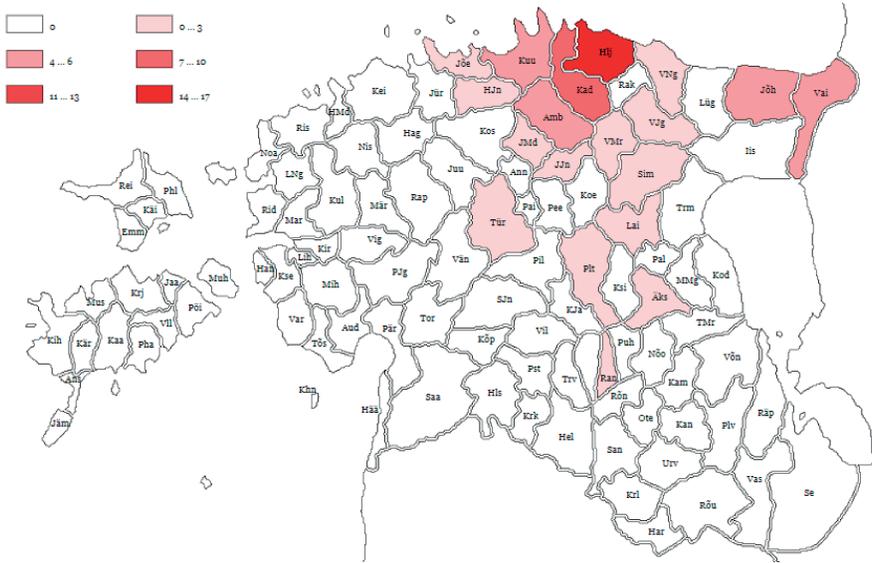


Map 19. Distribution of the geminated variants of word *ema* 'mother' in partitive case: *immä*, *emmä* (on the basis of Estonian runosongs' database).

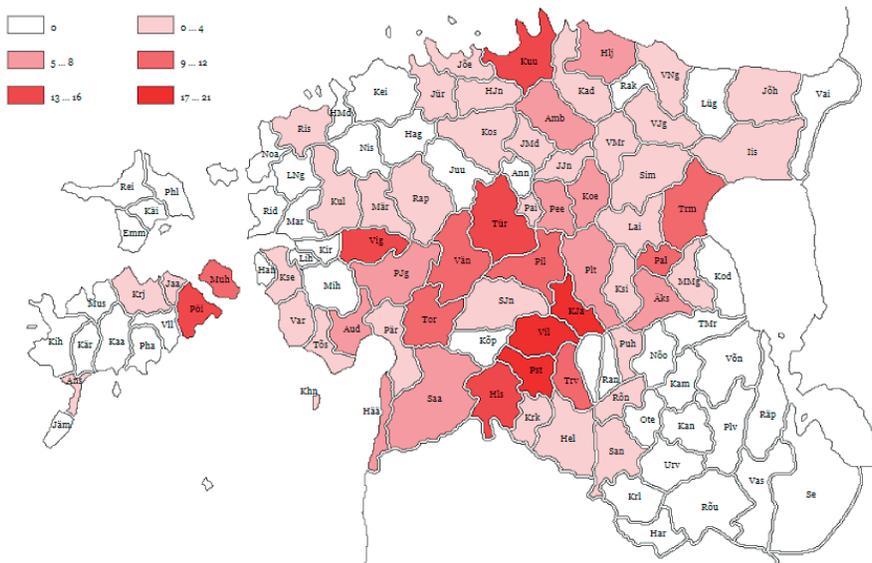
4. Peegel claims, that in disyllabic roots (predominantly starting with short syllable), the runosong language has retained suffix *-da* in the partitive plural case (*sanuda* ‘of words’, *kanuda* ‘of hens’, *muneda* ‘of eggs’, *mehida* ‘of men’); in the Northeastern Coastal dialect area, in Mulgi area, and in Muhu island together with neighbouring Pöide there occurs also the partitive case plural with the *-ja/-je* suffix (*mihijä* ‘of men’, *nugeje* ‘of knives’, *linuje* ‘of flax’, *kaeruja* ‘of oats’ etc.) (ibid.: 65–67). In the database of Estonian runosongs, for example, the form *mehida* occurs in 101 songs in wide area of North-Estonia, the forms with *-ja/-je* (*mihijä* and similar) occur in 35 texts mostly from the Northeastern Coastal dialect area, but also in 3 texts from Mulgi area.

5. According to Peegel, one of the most notable distinctive features of the morphology of Estonian runosongs is abundant occurrence of the illative case with the *-je* suffix (see Maps 8 and 9). In dialectal language, this form occurs mainly in the Northeastern Coastal dialect; in folksongs, the form occurs in a much wider area, in Northern Estonia, in the Mulgi and in the Tartu dialect area. The occurrence of the form mostly concerns disyllabic roots starting with short syllable (which in dialectal language have been geminated, as a rule, and thus the original short syllable has been transformed to the long one, e.g. *tuppa* < \**tupahen*) (ibid.: 72–79). In the insular dialectal language as well as in runosongs, ungeminated shortened forms of the illative are in use (*tuba*, *jõge* – see Saareste 1955: 45).

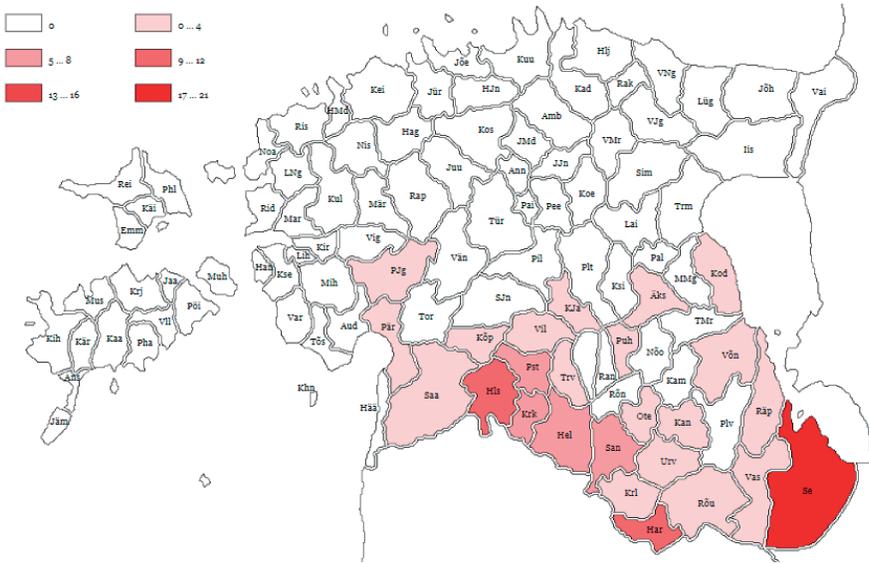
6. The illative case suffixes *-sse* and *-se* (*ojasse* or *ojase*, *pajusse*, *latterisse*) are, according to Peegel, regular in the whole Northern Estonian dialect, but known as an option in the Mulgi dialect next to shortened forms with the suffixes *-s*, *-z*. In songs of the Mulgi area, the longer forms prevail and seem to reflect an older usage. In other areas of Southern Estonia the occurrences of illative case with the *-sse* suffix are probably loans from Northern Estonia (Peegel 2006: 76–77). The distribution of the different illative forms in case of the stem *oja* ‘stream’ is depicted on Maps 20–22.



Map 20. Distribution of the illative case variant *ojaje* of the word *oja* 'stream' (on the basis of Estonian runosongs' database).

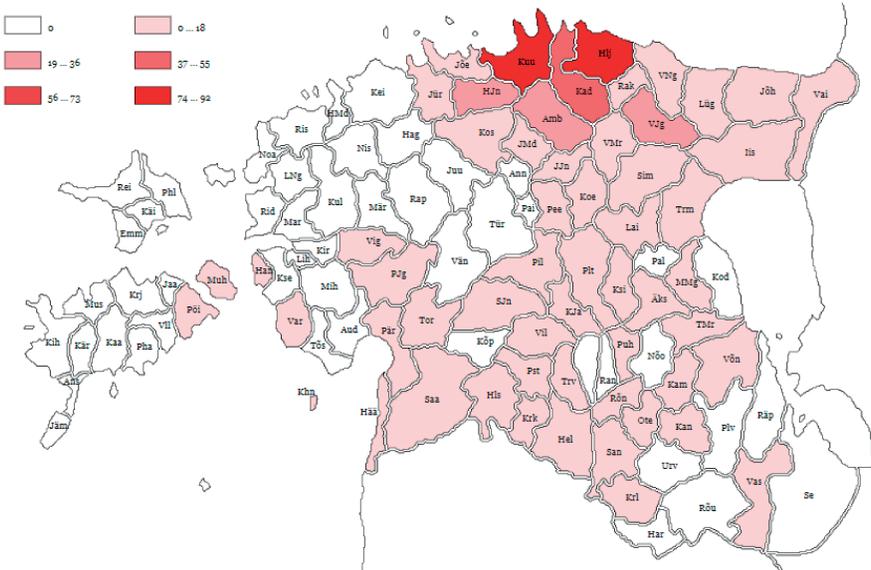


Map 21. Distribution of the illative case variants *ojasse*, *ojase*, *oeasse* of the word *oja* 'stream' (on the basis of Estonian runosongs' database).

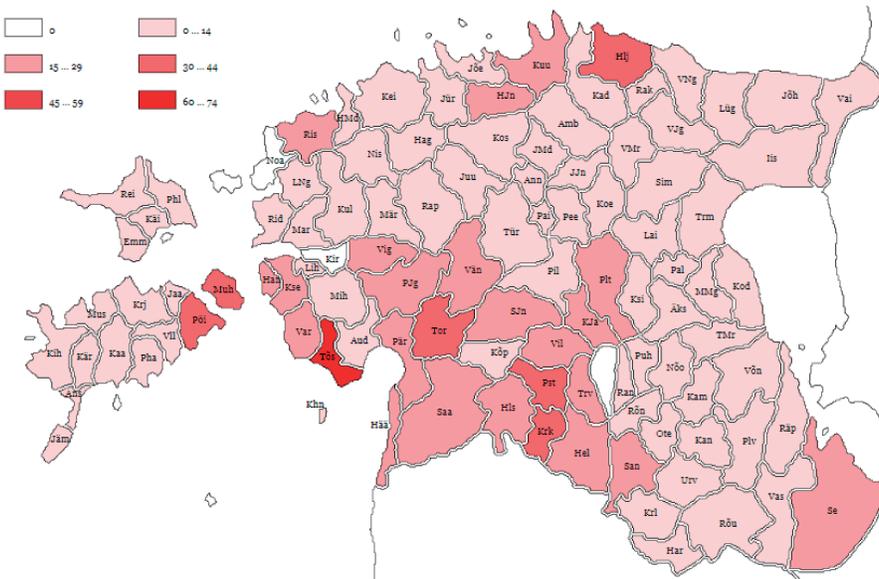


Map 22. Distribution of the geminated illative case variant *ojja* of the word *oja* ‘stream’ (on the basis of Estonian runosongs’ database).

7. In several grammatical cases (inessive, excessive, adessive, ablativ, translative) the historical end vowel has been preserved in folksongs of Northern as well as Southern dialect area (*kanalla* ‘at the hen’, *toassa* ‘in the chamber’), as an alternative to syncoped forms (*kanal*, *toas*); in Northeastern Coastal dialect unapocoped forms have been preserved in everyday language as well. Peegel notes, that his material does not allow him to give statistical overview on the geographical (dialectal) distribution of apocoped and unapocoped forms (*ibid.*: 82–109, 198). It is not easy to get such an overview with the help of runosong database either as the word forms in the database lack grammatical tagging. On Maps 23 and 24 the spread of apocoped and unapocoped variants of one of the most frequent adessive word forms *vahel* ‘in between’ is presented: the apocoped version is known all over the land, unapocoped version is also widely used, but absent in most parishes of islands and Western Estonia, as well as in the southeasternmost area (Võru dialect).



Map 23. Spread of the unapocoped variant *vahella* of the word *vahel* 'in between' in the texts of the Estonian runosongs' database.



Map 24. Spread of the apocoped variant *vahel* 'in between' in the texts of the Estonian runosongs' database.

8. The old suffix *-kse* of the present tense that in current language is used only in impersonal mode, is in runosongs sometimes preserved in personal mode of 3rd person singular. Peegel presents the long list of examples where the stems starting with short syllable clearly prevail, referring this to be used as an option to preserve the trisyllabic word forms starting with short syllable (*küsikse* ‘asks’, *palukse* ‘bids’, *nähikse* ‘seems’ etc.). In Southern Estonian runosongs the apocoped form of this suffix *-s* occurs, but not that often and only in specific words (*näüis* ‘seems’, *tunnus* ‘feels’) (ibid.: 186–192).

The preservation of older trisyllabic word forms starting with short syllable in Estonian dialects can be summarized as follows:

- 1) all over Estonia the word forms have been often shortened by one or more syllables, except for Northeastern Coastal dialect (and partly in Eastern dialect), where syncope and apocope have not been taken place;
- 2) in Southeastern dialects (Võru, Seto) the word forms under question have been usually shortened, and often also geminated, thus the short first syllable has become a long one;
- 3) in addition to regular gemination in Southeastern dialects, the gemination of stem consonant is an option to form illative in most of Estonia (except for Insular dialect and Northeastern Coastal dialect); gemination sometimes occurs in other word forms in various dialects as well.

It turned out that older trisyllabic forms occur most regularly in the runosongs of the area of Northeastern Coastal dialect where the forms have often been preserved in dialectal language too, but such forms have been preserved in runosongs, when deemed necessary, all over Northern Estonian metrical area and partly in that of Western Estonia, more often in songs of the Mulgi area and Muhu island together with neighbouring Põide parish. In southeastern area, where these forms have often been geminated, there is no tendency to preserve the archaic forms that differ from customary dialect usage. Use of older and newer forms is not exclusive, they even occur within the same song, securing the flexibility in formation and use of word forms according the needs of the metre. Systematic use of word forms that are different from those used in regular language of dialect in question, refers to the potential rupture points of the metre. This potential has been realized in runosongs of Southeastern Estonia and Western Estonia, where the language use of runosongs is closer to the regular language.

We may consider among the reasons of cardinal changes in the verse metre the decrease in the number of syllables in words, and mostly in the dialects of

Southeastern Estonia the change of the short stressed syllable into a long one which is important from the perspective of quantitative metre. The outcome of the process of change or the choice of the most appropriate verse metre proceeded from the prosodic characteristics of spoken language on the one hand, and on the other hand, from the earlier verse metre because transitions are never abrupt but rather gradual – the use of both archaic language forms and broken verses as well as that of strictly octapositional verses has decreased gradually, or as Juhan Peegel has expressed it: “Between old word forms unknown in current language, and new word forms used in the living language, there has been a centuries long fight, in which the older forms have had to retreat” (Peegel 2006: 199).

### Innovation centres of metrical changes

In the preceding discussion, we saw that the innovations in metre are clearly related to the linguistic innovations, most remarkably to the shortening of word forms, and in the case of stem gemination also to the alteration of the quantity of stressed syllables. Although some researchers have considered South Estonian runosong metre as a “pre-Kalevalaic” metrical form (see e.g. Kuusi, Tedre 1987: 37–42; Kuusi 1994: 43–46), there are several reasons to reject this idea: 1) the language of South-East Estonian runosongs (of Võru and Tartu dialect) is clearly innovative having gone through radical language changes, and the metrical form of South-East Estonian runosongs in general is in accord with the prosodic structure of renewed language (as shown previously); 2) the runosongs of Mulgi area that belong to South Estonian linguistically, clearly are developed on the basis of a quantitative system (although the system already reveals the signs of disintegration), belonging metrically together to the northern area of quantitative runosong – the signs of “pre-Kalevalaic” verse systems are impossible to be detected here; 3) it would be hard to explain the occurrence of broken lines typical to quantitative metre in South Estonian runosongs (3% to 13% in Võru dialect area) if the quantitative system was not known there; 4) the specific feature of South-East Estonian runosong metre to stretch the syllables of overlong quantity over two verse positions can only have emerged as a result of considerably late linguistic innovation that evoked overlong syllables, and cannot be considered older than that.

When considering the possibility of the theory introduced in the start of this article, that runosong might be evolved in the stage of late Proto-Finnic after the divergence of South Estonian and Livonian, we would still need an

explanation to the question when and through which processes runosong was adopted to (various regions of) Southern Estonia (what could only happen along with population from North). Looking at the distribution patterns of metrical and linguistic features in runosongs, it had to happen before the radical linguistic changes, at least in Mulgimaa, otherwise the preservation of historical word forms would be impossible. Linguistically, Mulgi dialect has adopted most of North Estonian dialectal features among the South Estonian dialects (e.g. Wiik 1999), the closer look to the timing of these influences would probably help to answer the question about the causes of metrical similarities and some common linguistic features of Mulgi runosongs and runosongs of Northeastern Estonia. In the peculiar features of runosongs of Võru region, their stylistic features, and “friability”, usually attributed to the Latvian impact (Salve 2004: 173), we could look for the traces of substrate or pre-Kalevalaic poetic tradition indeed.

If we, however, proceed from the alternative assumption that the quantitative runosong system was first adopted all over Estonia, and then changed under the influence of language changes, the logical explanation for the spread of broken and accentual verses (representing quantitative and accentual verse systems respectively) would be that the innovations did not happen evenly in the whole Western-Southern zone, but proceeded from two different centres of innovation: the core areas of accentual verse on the western islands and Southeastern Estonia (see Map 2). This would also explain the relative conservatism of the runosong verse metre in Mulgi area that geographically remains between the two centres of innovations, and the slight qualitative difference in the metre of the two core areas of accentual verse.

Juhan Peegel has on several occasions expressed the opinion that the study of runosong language would help us to shed light into the language history as well (Peegel 1997; 2006: 7, 207, 246; see also Kuusi 1994: 55). I have been rather sceptical to this idea, because the runosong language is so variable linguistically and morphologically, including maintaining word forms of different historical stages of language alongside each other, in addition to forms that have never existed in ordinary language, formed by analogy, or that are otherwise specific to runosong language (for example, the very general infinitive suffix *-maie* < *\*-mahen*, in literary language *-ma*, that is very useful to compile quadrisyllabic word forms, like *laulemaie* ‘to sing’). In the broader perspective of prosodic system rather than that of single morphological forms, the geographical spread of features of runosong language could reveal the direction of language changes.

The difference between the changes of the Western and Southeastern Estonian verse metre accords with the rhythmic structure of the dialectal

language and respective language changes. A peculiar feature of the runo-song metre of Southeastern Estonia is the ability of an overlong syllable to fill two verse positions. This kind of syllabic principle could be expected in case of changes in the rhythmic type of language. In runosongs of Southeastern Estonia this could be related to the historical stage of the Estonian language, when, according to Arvo Eek and Toomas Help (1986), foot isochrony was dominant: as a result of syncope, a long syllable formed the whole foot followed by a second syllable with secondary stress in the case of multisyllabic word forms (cf. also Ehala 1999: 460). Syncope is more general in South Estonian dialects than in North Estonian dialects; in addition to the regular syncope, also more sporadic sound losses in South Estonian dialects have often occurred in the second syllable, transforming the first syllable to overlong one (for example *poisikesed* 'little boys' > *poiskesed*, see Pajusalu et al. 2002: 77). In this kind of word form, the secondary stress of the former third syllable has usually been preserved in Võru and Tartu dialects (Viitso 2003a: 162). In accordance with this prosodic phenomenon, the overlong syllable can fill two verse positions, and the syllable with secondary stress has retained its strong verse position in runosongs of South-East Estonia.

In Northern Estonian dialects, the secondary stress is weakened, and in connection with this, losses in speech sounds have taken place rather from the third syllable onwards, including various morphological word endings (*poisikesed* 'little boys' > *poisiksed*, see Pajusalu et al. 2002: 137). This linguistic change has first and foremost proceeded from the innovation centre of the western Estonian islands, encompassing also the area of the Mulgi dialect. Strong secondary stress in the Võru and Tartu dialects on the one hand and weak secondary stress in the Mulgi dialect (see Pajusalu 1996: 45) on the other explain, why the phenomenon of stretching an overlong syllable over two verse positions is spread in runosongs of the southeastern area but not in songs of the Mulgi region.

On the basis of 1) the innovation processes revealed in a synchronic metrical map of runosong; 2) the arguments showing that metrical innovations have emerged as a result of linguistic innovations, most explicitly through the series of radical changes in Estonian including syncope, apocope, gemination and divergence of the long syllables into two quantity classes (overlong and long); 3) the metrical peculiarities of the two innovation areas being coherent with the features of the prosodic (more exactly rhythmic) structure of dialects it is logical to assume (or hypothesize) that the linguistic changes have, similarly to metrical innovations, proceeded from two innovation centres: one in South-East of Estonia and another one on western islands. As the language of runosongs has been more conservative due to the formulaic language and

metrical restrictions, the linguistic changes can be presumed to precede the metrical changes. This would explain the relative conservativeness in metre compared to the relative innovativeness in dialectal prosody in Mulgi area: two separate innovation waves in dialectal language have spread further and overlapped, resulting in an especially shortened and centralised dialect, while neither of the two waves have reached to the area in runosong language. The spread of syncope, more typical to the Southeastern dialects, has varied across different stems and word types, and spread widely in North-Estonian dialectal area. The shortening of words and reduction of vowels in the non-initial syllables, characteristic to the western innovation area, has spread from the west at least as far as the Mulgi area. The innovations spreading from two areas, and resisted in runosongs in the middle of Estonia, must have reached the dialectal language earlier and probably have jointly contributed to the formation of the Estonian language as we know it today. As the innovation areas lie on the borders of the Estonian linguistic area, it is also logical to assume the impact of foreign language and cultural contacts, probably mixed populations in these regions (the possible cultural contacts in all the metrical core areas are discussed more thoroughly in Sarv 2011b).

## Conclusions

The study succeeded to demonstrate the dependence of metrical variation on linguistic variation in the case of Estonian runosong metre. Innovations in runosong metre, more exactly the transition from quantitative runosong metre to accentual runosong metre could be linked with linguistic innovations on the more general level of prosodic features, as well as on the more granular level in the shortening of word forms by one or more syllables, especially due to regular vowel syncope and apocope.

The language of runosong, in particular in the North Estonian metrical area, has resisted these changes, retaining archaic word forms quite systematically, whereas in South-East Estonia and in Western Estonia the mentioned changes have been adopted to runosong. For closer study the tension between the innovations in dialectal language and traditional, quantitative metre was studied on the level of morphological forms, most critical for composition of verses with quantitative runosong metre. The well-known tendency of oral poetry to use concurrently alternative historical or contemporary word forms, was analysed with the help of the data in Estonian runosongs' database. The results revealed that the overlapping use of alternative forms is spread in quite

a large area in central part of Estonia, but the innovation centres in West and South-East Estonia had given up in runosongs the resistance to the linguistic changes due to the metre and instead, had reformed metrical principles.

With its archaic language and linguistic variation, runosong is able to offer, if not the clear answers, then hints of the development of linguistic changes which have been documented only occasionally in the early fragments and writings of Estonian. Data on variation of runosong metre and language suggests that the radical innovations have proceeded from the same innovation centres and have met in central Estonia to jointly contribute to the formation of the features characteristic of the Estonian language. Mentioned language changes behind the metrical variation observed in this study apparently derive from time period of approximately last 700 years. Therefore, the observations did not give us hints about the emergence of the poetic form of runosong, and gave no answers to the question, if South Estonia was included to the cultural phase where runosong emerged or not. It was possible to explain metrical variation in runosong purely with linguistic incentives that supports the idea expressed in the very start of the article that metre of oral poetry develops in symbiosis of language.

The future research in neighbouring disciplines, and closer exploration of linguistic forms could help us find answers to the questions that have remained open. If we assume that runosong developed in the north of Estonia (in Gulf of Finland Finnic) then when did it spread to Southern Estonia? Did it spread to Southern Estonia evenly or are there differences between the South Estonian dialects? Why are Muhu, Mulgimaa and Setomaa known as 'song areas' where the tradition (in case of Muhu and Mulgi area also the metre) has been more conservative? What kind of processes have resulted in more innovative metre and melodies in the areas of later settlements?<sup>12</sup>

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