

On the Origin of the Ideas of Estonian Language Reformer Johannes Aavik

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Abstract: *In the 1880s, Russification became an officially sanctioned policy in the Governorates of Estonia and Livonia of the Russian Empire. This was a backlash against the Estonian national awakening movement and the Estonian language's right to exist was questioned. In such a socio-cultural situation in which Russian served as an administrative language, the language of education – both at lower and higher level – was Russian, and the only languages allowed for communication at school were Russian and German, the young Johannes Aavik developed his ideas of Estonian language reform. He was widely read in Latin, Greek, German, French, English, Finnish, and Russian; this is reflected in his diaries of 1897–1901. He had come to a firm conviction that the development of the Estonian language was hindered and the language was incapable of conveying new concepts or producing new terms. In his first programmatic article 'Eesti kirjakeele täiendamise abinõudest' (On the means to improve literary Estonian; 1905) he called for a systematic enrichment of Estonian and specified the ways of expanding its lexicon although at the time there was considerable doubt about the feasibility of the goal, and it was not even considered to be important. Gradually, Aavik's ideas on history, culture and language matured into an idea of a deliberate modernization of the language of the peasants so that it could serve as the official language of the Estonian state and would satisfy the needs of higher education. Putting into practice his ideas of vocabulary enrichment, including the free construction of new lexemes, Aavik managed to introduce changes into the morphological structure and syntax of the Estonian language, which is unique in the history of language planning.*

Keywords: *language reform, deliberate modernization and innovation, standard Estonian*

Introduction

The oldest known Estonian-language texts date from the 13th century; the first Estonian grammar and dictionary was published by Heinrich Stahl under the title *Anführung zu der estnischen Sprach* in 1637. In the 17th century, two literary languages (South-Estonian and North-Estonian) emerged. Eventually, thanks to the appearance of full Bible in North-Estonian the common literary language based on North-Estonian dialects took precedence. In this language, most of the newspapers, textbooks, and calendars were published. In the 19th century, Estonian peasants were mostly literate; however, the intellectuals were educated in a foreign language and the official language was not Estonian, but a foreign language. In 1803, the Estonian language began to be taught to future pastors in the German-language University of Dorpat (Tartu). In 1857–1861, the Estonian epic poem *Kalevipoeg* (The Son of Kalev) by F. R. Kreutzwald was published alongside a German translation and in 1862 it came out in a lower-cost edition. In the 1880s, Russification, as an officially sanctioned policy, was imposed on the literate Estonian people, which was a backlash against the Estonian national awakening movement and which questioned the Estonian language's right to exist.

The aim of the present article is the presentation and clarification of the origin of the ideas and the underlying motivation of Johannes Aavik, the reformer of the Estonian language, who was active in the province of the Russian Empire on the periphery of the high-culture area in Europe. The research concentrates on the description and analysis of the emergence and development of Aavik's ideas against the background of his individual development as well as the contemporary socio-cultural situation.

I Aavik's early years: education and development, 1894–1910

Social and cultural background, his interest in languages and history, the awakening of national identity

Johannes Aavik was born on 8 December, 1880, in the small village of Randvere, Kõiguste parish on the island of Saaremaa (Ösel), then part of the Governorate of Livonia of the Russian Empire. He first attended the German Preliminary School (1888–1889), then studied at the Elementary School (1890–1891 in Estonian, 1891–1894 in Russian) and was admitted into the Russian Gymnasium (1894–1902) of the Baltic-German dominated small town of Arensburg (Kuressaare).

Latin, Greek, German, French and Russian languages were taught at the Arensburg Gymnasium; in addition, the young Aavik independently learned Finnish and English. During his school years he translated the texts by Juhani Aho and Edgar Allan Poe into Estonian, a language which the students were not even permitted to use among each other; the only languages allowed for communication were Russian and German. The state university, then named Kaiserliche Universität zu Dorpat (in Tartu), was German- and Latin-speaking. Estonian intellectuals were educated in a foreign language (mostly German), and in several cases a foreign language was also spoken at home. The meetings of active young people of the snobbish Kuressaare were also held in the German language. German-Estonian bilingualism strengthened the German influence on the Estonian language. Russian served as an administrative language. Estonian peasants were baptised to become members of the Russian Orthodox Church and their children were given Russian names. Even the place names were Russianised – Tartu (Dorpat) became officially Yuriev in 1893. Johannes Aavik's father Mihkel Aavik, a parish clerk, was dismissed from work because of his inadequate Russian skills. The same happened to many other civil servants who were ethnic Estonians, including the headmaster of the Kuressaare Gymnasium; they were all replaced by monolingual Russians. It became more and more difficult to publish in the Estonian language, although Estonian-language books were still read in Estonian homes. Aavik realized that the purposeful Russification policy posed a deadly threat to the Estonian national identity (Vihma, 1993a, pp. 8–14).

Aavik was well-read already in his teen years: his thoughts on the history, culture and language of different nations were recorded in his diaries in which he used Latin, Greek, German, Estonian, Russian, French and Finnish languages. The part of the diary written in the period between 1897 and 1901 is of special interest (Aavik, 1897; 1897–1901). By 1897 he had developed a firm conviction that only full autonomy would prevent the loss of Estonian national identity; for him this meant that Estonian schools should establish Estonian as a medium of instruction, Estonians should have their own national Estonian-language university; Estonian should be the language of the government and of law courts – in short, Estonia should be more or less an independent country (Aavik, 1897). The ideas of an Estonian-language education and of Estonia as an independent country were promoted in the speeches by Aavik (1935), the ideological leader of young Estonians in Kuressaare. These speeches were delivered to the youth of Kuressaare in the Estonian language at the time when Russian had become the language of education, starting from the primary school, and an Estonian-language university had never existed. The Russification policy hindered the development of the Estonian language and it was therefore incapable of conveying new concepts or producing terms corresponding to

contemporary European developments at the turn of the century. Aavik was deeply convinced that Estonia should gain national independence and that the Estonian language also had a right to exist. This became the main principle which guided him in his activities in which the understanding of a language as an indicator of the educational and cultural level of a people always dominated. When translating from the European languages he was fortified in his belief as it revealed the miserable state of the Estonian language. According to Aavik, the reason for that – in addition to the official Russification policy – was the fact that there was no local educated elite who would use the native language (Aavik, 1900). He clearly worded his ideas about the Estonian language: 1) the Estonian language and its vocabulary which would satisfy the needs of Estonian peasantry is not able to meet all the requirements of the modern world, and 2) new concepts call for linguistic expression, that is, for new words (Aavik, 1900; Vihma, 1993a).

Being especially fond of Latin, Aavik read in the original many books that his teachers had not read, such as those by Petronius, Gellius, and Apuleius, as well as the Bible and the literature of the Reformation. He was interested in French as a daughter language of Latin. Prior to his graduation from the gymnasium, Aavik's knowledge of the Latin, Greek and French languages had exceeded that of his teachers, as he admitted in an interview of May 1961 (Vihma & Salla, 1999). Aavik's first literary attempts were recorded in his diary in January 1897. His diary entries from 1901 deserve special attention – they reveal Aavik's plan to write a book based on Ancient Rome, in which Ovid would play a major role. He prepared thoroughly: read works by Ovid, such as *Amores*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, as well as satires and odes by Horace; he studied the Roman environment and lifestyle of the time, including Roman customs and everyday life at home (Aavik, 1901c). However, Aavik never accomplished his belletristic intention; later, in 1957, he published an article in the *Mana* journal 'Yhe luuletaja suurjuubel: Publius Ovidius Naso' (Celebrating the Anniversary of a Great Poet) to commemorate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Ovid (Aavik, 1957).

The best student in his class, Johannes Aavik graduated from the Kuressaare Gymnasium in June 1902 and went on to study ancient languages in the University of Tartu, but because of financial hardship his studies in Tartu lasted for one year only (1902–1903). He distributed the journal *Nooreestlane* (A Young Estonian; Aavik, 1901a) in manuscript form, which he himself edited. The journal also included some of his translations and his article 'Eesti keel tulevikus' (The Estonian language in the future; Aavik, 1901b, pp. 33–40). Aavik's article had a meaningful beginning: "panta rhei – 'everything flows' – said Heraclitus, the old Ionian philosopher who was called 'The Obscure', and he was right." Proceeding

from this premise, Aavik concluded that language also changes, and his fantasy took him into the 25th century when Estonian words and forms will have shortened.

His knowledge of languages was the cause of admiration and bewilderment in Tartu. It was in Tartu where he translated three of Maupassant's short stories – 'The Horla', and others. Starting from 1902, Aavik's translations of Maupassant (1902), Daudet (1903), E. A. Poe (1903), Baudelaire (1905), Aho (1905) appeared and his articles were published (Vihma, 2000a).

The idea of a deliberate effort to modernise the language, 1902–1903

Johannes Aavik, being well-read, had understood that the story of nations and cultures in the world is a story of incessant struggle and destruction. The losers were mainly the ethnic groups who had no native language schools or full autonomy. With the graduation from the gymnasium, Aavik's ideas on the history, culture and language had matured into an idea of a deliberate modernisation of a language; in 1903 the idea was formulated in manuscript form in '*Eesti kirjakeele täiendamise abinõudest*' (On the means to improve literary Estonian) intended for publication in the first album by the *Noor-Eesti* (Young Estonia). However, the censor refused to license it (1904); the license was issued in 1905 when Aavik had already studied ancient languages free of charge in Nizhyn for two years, had escaped the massacre of Nizhyn rioters in 1905, and gone to Helsinki.

Call for the fast modernisation of literary Estonian and the methods of vocabulary enrichment, 1905

In his programmatic article '*Eesti kirjakeele täiendamise abinõudest*' (On the means to improve literary Estonian; Aavik, 1905a) Aavik gave a fair assessment of the state of the Estonian language and *called for a systematic enrichment of literary Estonian*. The idea of an intentional language change that was first put down by Aavik in his diary in his teens and then developed in a manuscript journal that he edited was now printed and reached a wider public. The young Aavik set a high goal to raise the status of the Estonian language so that it would compare with the great languages of culture. At the time there was considerable doubt about the feasibility of the goal, nor was it even considered to be important, as Ado Grenzstein, a journalist and teacher, the owner of the newspaper *Olevik* stated (Grenzstein, 1894; 1896; 1926; Kruusberg, 1921). Thus, in 1905, Aavik initiated a public campaign for the fast modernisation of literary Estonian and specified the ways of expanding its lexicon: firstly, by drawing on the language's own resources, and secondly, by drawing on other languages. The first was the use of

language-internal processes to create new words: 1) by derivation, which is the simplest way (*kattuma*, *mattuma*, *käänduma*), and by combining the base words; 2) by integrating the dialectal words into standard Estonian, he himself introduced many such words or used the Estonian-German dictionary by Academician Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann (Wiedemann, 1869; 1893). Estonian dialects should be studied thoroughly and the most suitable words for incorporation should be published in newspapers, he wrote. The second suggestion was to make use of foreign languages. Aavik supported the incorporation of new words from foreign languages: their foreign-ness should not be a discouragement, he assured those who were opposed to modernising the language by introducing a foreign element. The orthography of loanwords should be adapted for the Estonian phonetic system, and later the loans would be modified in accordance with the structure of the language. Aavik made a deliberate effort to include many of such loanwords in his article on Charles Baudelaire and decadence, ‘*Charles Baudelaire ja dekadentismus*’ (Aavik, 1905b). He drew special attention to the Finnish language, which, according to him, was “bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh”. The objective, again, was to transform – as quickly as possible – the Estonian language, which had developed under unfavourable conditions into a language that would meet all the needs of the intellectuals, both in belles-lettres and science, in spite of there being no Estonian-language education. A special focus should be placed on creating new technical terms in Estonian. In addition, each fully developed language should be capable of expressing abstract concepts by forming abstract nouns. The process of derivation existed in Estonian, but it should be used more widely, as he demonstrated in the following words: *kalduv* > *kalduvus*; *pidulik* > *pidulikkus*; *vaene* > *vaesus*; *noorus* > *nooruslik* > *nooruslikkus*, etc. Two years later, Aavik published the article ‘*Abstraktlikud substantiivid Eesti keeles*’ (Abstract nouns in the Estonian language; Aavik, 1907). The importance of terminology and abstract nouns was often the subject of Aavik’s later writings.

The ideas put forward by Aavik had wide-ranging repercussions and provoked some angry responses from Jaan Jõgever, a Slavist, a teacher; the comparative philologist and teacher Kaarel Leetberg; the journalist Johannes Voldemar Veski, later a teacher and lexicographer. The controversy was caused by disagreement about the main ideas: language was viewed as an *organism* with its natural, spontaneous development, so there was opposition to deliberate, intentional modernisation and codification which rested on the principle that language as a *medium* was subject to selection. Incidentally, Veski, who had opposed the coinage of new words by derivation, afterwards successfully derived terminology and took advantage of the rich stock of dialect vocabulary.

The maximum programme of linguistic modernisation, 1906

Beginning in the autumn of 1906, Aavik attended the University of Helsinki as a part-time student; he took courses in the Estonian, Livonian, and Mordvinic languages, Finnish language and literature, and Finno-Ugric phonetics. Only on 7 February, 1908, was he able to enroll as a full-time student and took examinations in all the courses he had attended. Admittedly, there were some breaks in his studies, either due to a lack of money or intensive creative work; in addition, he had a wide range of interests. In order to manage without financial support from home he worked on the Finnish-Estonian dictionary, continued translating and reviewing. He also wrote a Finnish language textbook for the Estonians, and an Estonian language textbook for the Finns, without including too many new words (Vihma, 1993b; Õispuu, 2001). In 1908, he passed the examinations in French language teaching and got the qualifications of a senior teacher of French as a Foreign Language and was occupied with standardising the Estonian language, participated in the activities of the Language Committee of the Estonian Literary Society and attended the Tapa Language Conference.

In 1906, without his Helsinki friend and roommate Lauri Kettunen being aware, he translated Paul Bourget's novel *Le Disciple* into Estonian, hoping that the *Noor-Eesti* would publish it. He included his maximum programme of language modernisation in it. However, the publishers rejected the manuscript, afraid to take the risk of publishing such an extensive work. Neither could Aavik personally afford to publish it. Moreover, the Estonian Literary Society refused to support the publication. Since Aavik did not receive any royalties and could not finance his studies, he was expelled from the University of Helsinki. The manuscript remained unpublished for years until the Loodus publishers printed it in 1930 (Bourget, 1930). The book together with its Appendix gives a fairly good overview of the scope of Aavik's work as a commentator and an editor of translated literature (Vihma, 1971a, pp. 157–165). First Aavik gave an overview of the author's life and work, and then analysed the plot in a more detailed way. His commentaries shed light on the historical background, listed place names and personal names. Literary comments, which include Aavik's subjective opinion, are the most interesting. The chapter on new linguistic features, '*Tarvitet keeleuendused*' specified the morphological and syntactic changes, such as the *i*-plural, the *i*-superlative, the *i*-past, *nd*- and *tet*-participles, word order, etc. The linguistic part ended with a glossary which contained 427 words with definitions. Before the translation of *Le Disciple* was published, Aavik succeeded in publishing a range of similarly structured translations and series of books of adventure and mystery, whereas he extensively used the modernised language and included a glossary (Vihma, 2000a, pp. 445–458).

While being a student of the University of Helsinki, Aavik had enjoyed studying Finnish literature, and Juhani Aho's style in particular, to which he had taken already in his schooldays. He continued reviewing, translating, and popularising French literature (Vihma, 2000a, pp. 21–32). The publication of Aavik's novella *Ruth* under a pseudonym of J. Randvere in Tartu in 1909 (Randvere, 1909), which had been written in a modernised language, generated heated literary polemics. In his letter to Friedebert Tuglas of 28 November 1909 (Aavik, 1909a) Aavik notified Tuglas about his intention to write a novel about the events which would take place in Helsinki, St Petersburg, Tallinn, and Kuressaare and on Saaremaa. A few extracts from that book, entitled *Tõelikkus ja unistus* (Reality and Dream), were published under J. Randvere's name (Randvere, 1910/1911). As he was passionately interested in style, he enjoyed the prose style of French authors, Paul Bourget's and Joris-Karl Huysmans' in particular (Aavik, 1909b; 1911).

In Helsinki he chose Paul Bourget's works as a topic for his thesis, which he wrote in French, and in May 1910 he took examinations in Romance literature, Romance philology, Russian language and literature, and Finnish language and literature. In 1910 he graduated from the University of Helsinki with a Cand. Phil. degree. The same year he attended a conference in Tallinn as a representative of the Estonian Literary Society together with the linguist and clergyman Harald Põld; at this conference Aavik's proposals were supported (one of the supporters being Villem Grünthal-Ridala) over Veski's opposition.

Thus it can be concluded that Aavik's Helsinki period suggests all the trends characteristic of his activities in the future.

II Devotion to language reform, 1911–1924

As a student, Aavik had prepared himself for implementing a large-scale language modernisation programme and, in 1911 he tried to put into practice the ideas initiated in 1905. Having arrived home in spring 1911, he was a frequent guest in the literary salon of the woman poet Marie Under, and wrote articles about language reform and orthography in his Kuressaare home. He was worried about the state of the Estonian language, he announced to the writer Eduard Hubel (Vihma, 1981). Strangely enough, that Jaan Jõgever, a Russophile, claimed that the Russian language had not heavily influenced the Estonian language and it had not impeded its development.

1912 was a prolific year for Aavik. His bibliography (Vihma, 2000) shows 30 articles in which he focused on the expansion of the lexicon, for example, in

'*Enam uusi sõnu*' (More new coinages; Aavik, 1912a); advocated the use of short forms for the singular illative in order to avoid longer *sse*-endings in '*Keele kaunima kõlavuse poole*' (Towards a more beautiful sound of the language; Aavik, 1912b); preferred shorter *i*-plural forms over *te*-plurals in '*Ilusa keele kõlaline inetus*' (The ugly sound of a beautiful language; Aavik, 1912c); attempted to do away with analytical constructions and change the German-influenced order of words, in '*Kõige suurem germanismus Eesti keeles*' (The biggest Germanicism in the Estonian language; Aavik, 1912d) and in '*Keelelised märkused*' (Linguistic notes'; Aavik, 1912e); and wrote a series of articles under the title of '*Väiksed keelelised märkused*' (Brief linguistic notes; Aavik, 1912f). He also published nine translations, including Aho's novel *Yksin* and Eino Leino's poem 'Ylermi' from Finnish, and Baudelaire's, Richepin's, J-H. Rosny's, and George Soulié de Morant's works from French. In his programmatic article '*Tuleviku Eesti-keel*' (The Estonian language in the future; Aavik, 1912g) Aavik addressed mostly young readership:

the best tool of human communication should be cultivated, organised and polished. There is no time to wait; therefore, the change process should be deliberately and intentionally accelerated. The task of modernising the Estonian language will be accomplished. To attain this objective the Estonian language should be purged of useless Germanicisms, excessive 'partitivism', and the anemia from which the language is suffering should be cured with healing juices from the dialects and with some 'healthy' Finnishisms.

At the same time there were some people, for example, Anton Jürgenstein (1915), a journalist and a public figure, who did not believe that the Estonian language would ever be appropriate for the purposes of the modern age, let alone the purposes of modern science.

Aavik managed to introduce changes into the morphological structure of the Estonian language (Raag, 1998; 1999), which is exceptional in the history of language reform, to be exemplified by such features as the *i*-plural, the short singular illative, or the *i*-superlative, artificially made up by Aavik. He expanded the use of derivation in word formation, especially in forming abstract nouns (*us*-derivations) and reflexive verbs ending in *-uma* from transitives, expounded in a book *uma-lõpulised refleksiivid. Nende moodustamine. Nende esinemine. Nende sõnastik* (The *uma*-ending reflexives, their formation, their frequency and their glossary; Aavik, 1920). The extent of the changes induced in the syntax is also unique in the history of language planning. The professor of Estonian language Mati Ereht, who has analysed the syntax reform, has reached the following conclusion:

“The syntactic innovation suggested by Aavik concerns word order, the opposition of totality–partiality, infinitive constructions and relationship between analytic constructions and the corresponding synthetic forms” (Erelt, 2001, p. 86).

Introduction of Finnish words into the Estonian language, 1912

The idea that the Finnish language should be used to enrich Estonian vocabulary emerged during Aavik’s studies: on the one hand, he developed a keen interest in the style of Juhani Aho; on the other hand, he translated and edited Finnish-Estonian dictionary and textbooks, which sharpened his attention and made him look for Estonian counterparts to Finnish words. He had also studied in a Finnish-language university. He could not but notice that there were words which resembled each other, were similar phonetically, that is, in their sound to the Estonian language, and so Aavik recommended that they should be used in Estonian. He proposed 85 Finnish words, in alphabetical order, which should be incorporated into the Estonian language (*Soome sõnad eesti kirjakeeles. Üks keele rikastamise abinõu*; Aavik, 1912h), which irritated Jõgever and Veski (1913). But Aavik was not put off by this attack against Finnishisms; he actually introduced 300 Finnish loanwords into standard Estonian (Rätsep, 1981, p. 296), and continued to propose new and new words (Vihma, 1995; 1996). In addition to his pedagogical activities he worked on the editorial staff of the newspaper *Postimees* (The courier), and on 20 November 1912 was elected a member of the Language Committee of the Estonian Literary Society and the editorial committee of the society’s journal *Eesti Kirjandus* (Estonian literature). At the same time, new articles continued to be published.

Special focus on the dialectal words, 1913

The bibliography of Johannes Aavik and the Estonian language reform reveals an undiminished flow of publications in 1913: *Keele kaunima kõlavuse poole* (Towards a more beautiful sound of the language; Aavik, 1913a), *Mõned keele reeglid. Nõuded ja soovid* (Some rules of language. Requirements and wishes; Aavik, 1913b), ‘*Eesti õigekeelsuse ja keele ilu küsimus: Vastuseletuseks hra Jõgeverile*’ (On the correct usage and beauty of the Estonian language: a response to Mr. Jõgever; Aavik, 1913c), ‘*Avalikud küsimused hra Leetbergile*’ (A public letter addressed to Mr. Leetberg; Aavik, 1913d). Thanks to the Finnish professor and philologist Eemil Nestor Setälä he learned about the language planning process in Hungary and wrote an article ‘*Keele-uuendus Ungrias*’ (Language innovation in Hungary; Aavik, 1913e).

In 1913, Aavik concentrated on drawing up instructions for collecting dialect words. His article '*Üleskutse ja juhatus Eesti murdesõnade korjamiseks*' (The call and instructions for collecting Estonian dialect words; Aavik, 1913f) and a book with the title *Üleskutse ja juhatus Eesti rahvakeele sõnade korjamiseks* (The call and instructions for collecting Estonian folk dialect words; Aavik, 1913g) are of special interest; he wrote them on behalf of the Estonian Literary Society. Aavik was one of the most passionate promoters of a systematic collection of dialectal material at the beginning of the 20th century and he was the first to develop and lay down a set of guidelines on how to collect dialects (Vihma, 1986, pp. 34–49; Pall, 1994, p. 13). In 1917, an Estonian-Finnish dictionary *Virolais-suomalainen sanakirja* (Kettunen, 1917), which contained many new Estonian words, was published in Helsinki. In the preface to the dictionary the author Lauri Kettunen (1917, pp. v–xv) defended the freedom of word coinage and analysed the principles of borrowing in “this season of language planning and enrichment”. In his book *Uute sõnade ja vähem tuntud sõnade sõnastik* (Glossary of new and lesser known words; Aavik, 1919), Aavik clearly preferred dialect words, which, in the 1921 revised and expanded edition (Aavik, 1921), made up about half or even more of the glossary (Kõpp, 1983).

In the language creation and standardisation process, Aavik established three principles on which to base his activity:

- 1) utility – expressed in the richness, clarity and brevity of the language;
- 2) aesthetics – not only the beauty of the sound, pleasing sound / euphony, but also conceptual, psychological, stylistic beauty should be emphasised;
- 3) native quality – each native language possesses unique features, not only in its phonetics but also in its grammar – characteristic word order, usage of object cases, etc.

Aavik as publisher

In order to popularise and explain his linguistic innovations, Aavik delivered talks and lectures and organised language courses, and he also set up his own publishing house Reform (1914–1917), renamed Istandik in 1917 (Vihma, 1971b, pp. 119–123; 1990, pp. 163–194). He started a journal *Keeleline Kuukiri* (Linguistic monthly; 1914–1916) to which the Estonian writers Villem Ridala, Johannes Semper, Friedebert Tuglas, and the linguists Villem Ernits and the Finn Lauri Kettunen contributed. Johannes Aavik himself, however, was the main contributor. Fifteen people responded when Aavik posed four questions about language reform in the journal *Keeleline Kuukiri* in 1914. The answers were printed in the subsequent issues and in 1916, Aavik summarised them.

All the respondents were certain that one day the Estonian language would be a well-established language of culture, and some were positive about the future development of the Estonians as a nation and their ability to achieve a high cultural level (Anton Jürgenstein, Peeter Põld). Villem Ernits, Villem Ridala, Harald Põld, and the writers Marta Sillaots and Henrik Visnapuu supported the radical language reform movement; the folklorist Matthias Johann Eisen, the novelist and playwright August Kitzberg, the textbook writer and teacher Juhan Kurrik, Peeter Põld, Johannes Voldemar Veski and Anton Jürgenstein were strongly opposed to the radical linguistic innovations; Jaan Jõgever and Jaan Tõnisson did not respond to the questionnaire (Aavik, 1916).

In the same year, Aavik's friend Lauri Kettunen (1916) published the article 'Viron kirjakielen uudistus' in volume 1 of the collection *Suomalainen Suomi*, dedicated to Johan Vilhelm Snellman's 110th birth anniversary in Finland. Dr. Lauri Kettunen, docent of Finno-Ugric languages at the University of Helsinki compared two reforms of literary Estonian: the reform of Estonian Germanised grammar and orthography in the 19th century (originated by Eduard Ahrens) and Aavik's language reform in the 20th century. There was fierce opposition to both of these reforms; both reforms were Finnish-influenced. In the 19th century, the supporters of the language reform won; what the result of the current language reform would be was too early to say, Kettunen (1916, p. 107) concluded. Kettunen agreed that new words were needed for new concepts, that the *i*-superlative created by Aavik was a 'fantastic' invention, and that it seemed to be quite a programmatic attempt at developing the Estonian language. At the same time he doubted the practicality of some new forms, for example the infinitive *kirjutada* > *kirjuta* or the 'sensational' use of *o*: *madu* > *mado*, *laduda* > *ladoda*. Incidentally, Aavik himself had already abandoned both of these ideas.

During the war the book prices in Estonia went up, but Aavik did not give up publishing. Between 1914 and 1933 Aavik's publishing house printed 70 books that used linguistic innovations, the majority of them were books of fiction translated, or edited, by Aavik. The series of books *Keelelise Uuenduse Kirjastik* published by Aavik contained linguistic works and the subseries included books of adventure, mystery and horror as well as humorous stories and novellas with such titles as *Hirmu ja õuduse jutud*; *Naljandid ja groteskid* and *Üldine novellikirjandus*. Aavik's works were also published by other publishers.

Free construction of new lexemes, 1913–1914

Aavik proceeded from the premise that language is a tool and as Man improves his other tools, he can and must improve language as well. He was convinced that the traditional methods and sources for the enrichment of Estonian would not suffice. During the process of compiling a glossary of new words in Tartu in 1913, he used his imagination to create a new method – artificial creation or free construction as Tauli (1977; 1984) called it. Proceeding from the thesis that a word is a phonetic symbol representing a concept Aavik came to an unprecedented conclusion: new roots can be formed artificially. It means that we can arbitrarily combine phonemes to make new roots. And after the idea of artificial creation of words had emerged, he immediately started to make experiments, to implement the idea in practice by using three methods: 1) transformation – *kaunis > jaunis, ujo > uje, esine > ese* (1913); 2) contraction – *selle asemel et > selmet, korda saatma > kaatma*; 3) combination – *veenma* (1914).

1914 should be regarded as the birth date of Aavik's philosophy of the language: he formulated the idea that, theoretically, 'the curve of language reform can be drawn to infinity' (Vihma, 2000b; 2001a; b). He summarised the tenets of his philosophy of language in a speech given at a meeting of the Estonian Literary Society in the Estonia Concert Hall in 1914. He also expressed his ideas in the book *Keeleuenduse äärmised võimalused* (Extreme possibilities of language reform), which he completed in 1918. However, it remained in a manuscript form as he could not publish it in the wartime. Later it was published by the Istandik, his own publishing house, under the favourable conditions in the Republic of Estonia, with Estonian the official language.

On 9 August, 1919, Lauri Kettunen was invited to take up the post of Professor of the Baltic-Finnic languages at the University of Tartu. He was commissioned to write an overview of Estonian language reform, which he presented in a more succinct form at a meeting of the Estonian Literary Society on 5 October, 1919, and which was published under the title *Arvustavad märkused keeleuendusnõuete puhul* (A critical overview of the Estonian language reform; Kettunen, 1919). Professor Lauri Kettunen honoured the traditions of the language and was therefore quite hesitant. The analysis, which has a strict structure, begins with some innovations which were deemed unsuitable, to be followed by more suitable ones. The author grouped the suggestions in the following way:

- I Unacceptable: completely unacceptable, partly unacceptable;
- II Acceptable: partly acceptable, completely acceptable.

The latter group was already in general usage: the innovations in morphology and syntax had been accepted. When he analysed the principles of language reform he seemed to like purposefulness and shortness, but he denounced vernacularism, the dominance of North-Estonian dialects, purism, etc. He joked about the principle of beauty and the anarchy caused by the innovations “just when the Republic of Estonia itself was overcoming anarchy and trying to recover” (Kettunen, 1948; Kettunen, 1999, p. 63). He became much freer in his discussion of new words in Finnish and in Estonian. Although he thought the controversy over the Estonian language reform was something that the Estonians had to settle themselves, he advised the Estonian language speakers to look closely at the neologisms in Aavik’s dictionary of new words and admonished that criticism was not enough and was not of much help. After Jaan Jõgever, Professor of Estonian Language and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy appointed Veski as lecturer of the Estonian Language in 1919, Kettunen commented that, in comparison with Aavik, Veski was but a dilettante (Kettunen, 1948; 1999, p. 63; cf. in this context Vihma, 2003).

In the Republic of Estonia, in the 1920s, Aavik published himself his theoretical works: *Rahvamurded ja kirjakeel* (Folk dialects and the standard language; Aavik, 1920). He analysed thoroughly and formulated his views in the book *Õigekeelsuse ja keeleuenduse põhimõtted. Yhes keeleuenduste astmelise liigitusega* (The principles of correct usage and language reform. Together with the graded classification of linguistic innovations; Aavik, 1924a), and *Keeleuenduse äärmised võimalused* (Extreme possibilities of language reform (*Keeleuenduse äärmised võimalused*; Aavik, 1924b). The three works constituted an entirety, that is, they formed the theoretical basis illustrated by a host of examples of grammatical innovations and new artificial lexemes.

Aavik’s most important theoretical work is definitely *Keeleuenduse äärmised võimalused* (Extreme possibilities of language reform). Here he analysed language reform as a phenomenon of applied linguistics in reference to an idea that language was not only a national and cultural treasure but *a means, a tool or a machine for human mental activity* (Aavik, 1924b, p. 8), which could and should be improved. The comparison with a machine was definitely shocking to both the general public and the community of linguists, but Aavik’s analytical, exploratory and creative spirit and the independent nature of his dreams and opinions enabled him to withstand violent attacks that went on for decades.

Aavik’s bold imagination led him to create a new revolutionary method, which has rarely been employed anywhere else in language planning. Aavik’s belief that *the word is a phonetic symbol representing a concept* and as symbols are conventional, at least in principle, then it is possible to coin new lexemes which

are arbitrary and historically unmotivated. This means that one can artificially combine the existing phonemes to make new words and grammatical morphemes (Vihma, 1992). The artificially-created new words by Johannes Aavik and their distribution have been investigated by the French scholar and translator Antoine Chalvin (2010a, b).

On 9 September 1942, Aavik wrote in his diary: “The idea and the activity of word creation grew from my own experience and it is unique and original in the development of all world’s languages” (Aavik, 2010, p. 64).

Aavik was not a traditional linguist-researcher – he was a visionary (Hint, 2010, p. 6). His achievement in the field of Estonian language reform was considerable. An ideal language rang like a symphony inside him. His fantasy and inventiveness knew no limits when he began realising his imaginary model of an ideal language. Aavik modelled the language by using the principles of spatial composition. For him, language was comparable to a building that needed constant renovations and in that sense, “the curve of language reform can certainly be drawn to infinity” (Aavik, 1924b, *motto*).

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