

## RENATE PAJUSALU 60

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On 13th November 2023, Renate Pajusalu (née Elango), Professor of General Linguistics at the University of Tartu's Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics, celebrates her 60th birthday. After graduating from Nõo Secondary Science School, Renate started her university studies in Estonian Language and Literature at the University of Tartu in 1981. Since then, Renate has been an active member of the University. Having grown up with faculty members in a family of physicists parents and a pedagogical research professor grandfather, Renate has also always been a *child* of the University.

Renate graduated from the University of Tartu on three occasions with a bachelor's degree in Estonian Language and Literature (with honours) in 1986, a research master's degree in Estonian language in 1993, and a doctoral degree (also in Estonian Language) in 1999. During her academic studies from 1986 to 1989, Renate worked as a junior researcher at the Department of General Linguistics in the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory under the supervision of Haldur Õim. Then, she worked as a teacher in the Practical Estonian Language Chair of the Department of Estonian as a Foreign Language from 1989 to 1993. In 1994, Renate returned to work at the Department of General Linguistics, where she worked as a lecturer, with a few years gap while working in Finland, throughout and just beyond her doctoral studies until 2000.

Renate's scientific career also extends beyond the University of Tartu. She spent many years disseminating her knowledge in Finland. In the mid-90s Renate lived with her family in Turku where she worked as a lecturer in Estonian language at the University of Turku for the 1996/1997 academic year. After leaving Turku, Renate obtained her PhD in Tartu and then worked as an Associate Professor of General Linguistics at the University of Tartu from 2000 to 2007. In 2007, she was appointed as a Professor of General Linguistics at the University of Tartu. From 2009 to 2011, Renate worked also as a Professor

of Estonian Language and Culture at the University of Helsinki, and simultaneously continued her professorship at the University of Tartu.

In addition to her research and teaching, Renate has dedicated several decades of her life to university leadership at various levels. Since 2007, she has been the Head of the Department of General Linguistics at the University of Tartu. From 2014 to 2019, she also served as the caring and people-centred Head of the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics. Regarding other leadership positions, Renate has been a member of the Academic Commission of the University of Tartu since 2016 and also of the University of Tartu Senate since 2020. In addition, Renate is a highly-valued member of many university-related and broader scientific committees and councils both in Estonia and abroad. In 2020, Renate was honoured with the University of Tartu Medal, for her long-term substantial contribution to the development of the University.

From the beginning, Renate's interests in linguistics have focused on interactive communication and language in use. Her bachelor thesis, completed in 1986, was entitled "The Communicative Functions of General Interrogative Sentence in Estonian" (supervisor: Haldur Õim), and her research master's thesis, completed in 1992, was entitled "Regulative Dialogue in Estonian" (supervisor: Haldur Õim). The investigation of communication led Renate to innovative research into referential devices in Estonian linguistics. In 1999, she defended her doctoral thesis on "Deictics in Estonian" (supervisor: Haldur Õim). Perhaps it is not a coincidence that active engagement with demonstratives is already evident in the preface of her master's thesis, where a typewritten text features a striking correction: the sentence "*Kuna aga see mõistmise olemus kõige selgemalt ilmneb seal, kus see on häiritud, jõudsingi vahenditeni, millega dialoog ise ennast viltuvajumisest päästab, s.o. reguleeriva dialoogini*" ["However, since this essence of understanding becomes most evident where it is disrupted, I arrived at the means through which the dialogue itself saves itself from tilting, i.e., reaching to the regulative dialogue."] had the determiner *see* 'this' covered with correction fluid.

Renate's research covers a wide range of topics. In addition to studying referential devices (demonstrative and personal pronouns), she is fascinated by communication norms and politeness, and particularly with cross-linguistic comparisons where Estonian often falls between

the norms of Finnish and Russian. She has also investigated verb semantics and the expression of motion/location, grammar (including relative constructions and conditionals), and first and second language acquisition. Renate played an important role in the completion of the comprehensive treatment of “Estonian Syntax” (2017), where she contributed to the writing of two chapters about noun phrases and referential relations.

In a broader context, Renate has shown great interest in semantics, pragmatics, and language typology. She has engaged in significant international collaborations and led several research projects that have significantly expanded knowledge about the Estonian language in relation to other languages on topics such as reference, language acquisition, the relationship between semantics and grammar, and language typology. Through research projects, supervision, and teaching, Renate has nurtured a whole new generation of researchers in these areas. Renate has also played a crucial role as a creator and maintainer of the linguistic bridge between Estonia and Finland, from which Estonian linguistics has greatly benefited.

Students have always regarded Renate as one of their most beloved and highly regarded teachers. At the University, she has taught introductory courses in linguistics, semantics and meaning, language research methods, psycholinguistics, language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and language typology. Renate’s lectures are engaging, thought-provoking, and infused with humour. She has the ability to explain patiently and eloquently complex topics in a way that supports learning and understanding that also extends to popularizing linguistics through her presentations in a language accessible to the general public.

Renate has been both a teacher and mentor to young people throughout her distinguished career. She has supervised numerous successful university defences including 13 doctoral theses and 15 master’s theses; several of which have even received awards in national student competitions. In 2003, and on Renate’s initiative, the first National Linguistics Olympiads were organized in Estonia where linguistic training courses were also held for school students. Since then, Estonian teams have successfully participated in the International Linguistics Olympiads. Renate’s enthusiasm for sharing linguistic knowledge with young people through research, teaching, and organizing the Linguistics Olympiads (both in Estonia and internationally) is invaluable.

Renate has also been highly influential in devising learning materials. Clear thinking and an enjoyable writing style characterize Renate's textbooks. One notable example is her co-authored Estonian language textbook for Finnish speakers entitled "Keelesild" (1999) ["Language Bridge"] / "Meie keelesild" (2017) ["Our Language Bridge"], which has had numerous reprints. Another example is her university textbook "Sõna ja tähendus" (2009) ["Word and Meaning"] which has also had multiple reprints and provides a comprehensive introduction to linguistic semantics in an accessible format.

Most importantly, being with Renate is never boring! She is such a pleasant, caring, and witty companion. Her stories and musings on any topic – be it a recently read book, a memorable opera visit, or observing flowers and trains with her grandchild – are captivating, and her culinary creations more than delicious. She always has a language question in mind or is engaged in a new and exciting research project. We cannot wait to hear all the interesting ideas that Renate will offer us as a food for (linguistic) thought in the coming decades.

On behalf of friends and colleagues

Helen Hint, Maria Reile, Piia Taremaa and Ann Veismann