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Exonyms

Estonian names in the Finnish language

Submitted by Finland**

Summary

Finnish and Estonian are close cognates, with a large number of common words. However, the contents and inflection of the words do not always correspond to each other. One of the problems is whether recognizable Estonian place names should be adapted to Finnish and whether they should be inflected just as any other foreign names or as the corresponding Finnish words. It used to be recommended that the words in the Estonian names that have counterparts in Finnish should be adapted to Finnish pronunciation and inflected according to it.

In the spring of 2004, the Finnish Language Council of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland considered the inflection of Estonian names and decided to recommend a set of general guidelines in compliance with the recommendations issued at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names. According to the guidelines, foreign language names should be preserved in their original forms as far as possible and not adapted to Finnish.

The main principles of the recommendation by the Finnish Language Council were as follows:

(a) Estonian names are inflected just as any other loan words quoted in Finnish texts (that is, foreign language words that have not been adapted to Finnish);

(b) The old (few) conventionalized names (that is, names adapted to Finnish) are to be preserved: for example, Tallinna (Tallinn), Tartto (Tartu), Hiidenmaa

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(Hiiumaa) and Saarenmaa (Saaremaa). The cardinal points in the determining part of the names are translated just as in the case of other foreign place names: fi Itä-Virumaa (< Ida-Virumaa “East Virumaa”), fi Länsi-Virumaa (< Lääne-Virumaa “West Virumaa”);

(c) Names that have been completely adapted to Finnish are to be inflected as Finnish words;

(d) Names of natural features and dwellings are not to be distinguished by any different inflection;

(e) People who know Estonian can go on inflecting Estonian names according to the Finnish inflection.
