

## Number agreement in Soikkola Ingrian constructions with the verb *olla* ‘to be’

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Agreement between the subject and predicate is well described for major Finnic languages (see, for example, Hakulinen et al. 2004: §§1268–1312 on Finnish, Erelt 1999, Metslang et al. 2023: 581–585 on Estonian) but is less studied on the data from minor Finnic languages. In particular, this topic is not addressed in the major descriptions of Ingrian (Porkka 1885 and Laanest 1986). This paper focuses on the number agreement between the ‘be’ copula and a plural argument. In Soikkola Ingrian, there are three competing forms of the ‘be’ verb in constructions with a plural argument: the plural form (*ovad* ‘be.PRS.3PL’, *ölliid* ‘be.PST.3PL’), the singular form (*on* ‘be.PRS.3SG’, *oli* ‘be.PST.3SG’), and the impersonal form (*ollaa* ‘be.IPRS.PRS’, *ölltii* ‘be.IPRS.PST’), which is also rather frequent in these constructions, see examples (1) – (3).

- (1) *a nüüd lapše-d on laiže-d*  
and now child-PL.NOM be.PRS.3SG lazy-PL.NOM  
‘And these days the children **are** lazy.’
- (2) *a kurvi vergo-d hõõd ova-d mättaala-d*  
and smelt net-PL.NOM 3PL be.PRS-3PL low-PL.NOM  
‘And (as for) the nets (for fishing) smelt they **are** low.’
- (3) *hõõ ol-laa niin kovašt pakšu-d*  
3PL be-IPRS.PRS so very thick-PL.NOM  
‘They **are** so very thick.’

The data for this research are taken from the corpus of Ingrian texts recorded in 2006–2014 on the Soikkola peninsula. The size of the corpus is about 20 000 words (approx. 4 hours of recordings). This corpus contains 170 sentences with the copula *olla* ‘to be’ and a plural argument. These sentences became the main focus of our study.

The goal of the research is to reveal the factors that favour a particular variant of the predicate and determine the number agreement. Among the potential characteristics that could influence the choice we consider:

- the tense form of the verb (present or past),
- the word order (whether the nominal phrase in the plural precedes or follows the predicate),
- the sentence type (attributive, possessive, existential, proper inclusion or locative),
- individual features of the speaker.

The analysed material allows us to make the following generalisations:

1) Tense is one of the main properties that determine the choice of the predicate. In the present tense, in 56% of cases the predicate has the 3Sg form *on*, only 19% have the 3Pl form *ovad*, and 25% of examples contain the impersonal form *ollaa*. In the past tense, only 4% of

examples contain the 3Sg form *oli*, the majority (66%) have the 3Pl predicate *õlliid*, and in 30% the impersonal form *oltti* is used. Thus, it appears that the lack of number agreement between the predicate and the plural nominal argument is the dominant strategy in the present tense, while in the past tense the situation is the opposite. Note that in our data, the impersonal forms of *olla* ‘be’ are almost exclusively used in personal contexts, cf. (3).

2) The position of the predicate in relation to the nominal argument is an important but not a definitive factor. In the present tense, the 3Sg predicate occurs more often in the position preceding the nominal argument than vice versa (25 vs 16 cases respectively). The 3Pl and impersonal predicates are found mainly in the position following the argument. In the past tense, all the few instances of the 3Sg predicate *oli* were in preposition to the argument, but the 3Pl and impersonal predicates could either precede or follow the plural argument in about equal proportion (27 vs 34 and 12 vs 16 cases respectively).

3) The sentence type has some influence on the word order and consequently on the number agreement. For instance, in possessive clauses the most frequent order was possessor – predicate – possessee so the lack of agreement was more frequent. However, in the most frequent sentence types (existential and attributive), there were examples both with and without the number agreement.

4) Speakers have certain individual preferences in choosing the form of the predicate (singular vs plural vs impersonal), but quite often the same speaker employs two of the discussed forms. In our corpus, none of the speakers use all three possible variants.

This paper also considers arguments that have a morphologically singular form but express plural semantics (e.g. *vägi* ‘people’). In our data, they can combine not only with singular but also with impersonal predicates, cf. examples (4) and (5) from the text by the same speaker.

(4) *peřrää šoa-n ol-i=gi toiželain*  
 after war-GEN be-PST.3SG=PTCL different  
*vägi ol-i <.> družnoi vägi ol-i*  
 people be-PST.3SG united people be-PST.3SG  
 ‘After the war it was different (indeed). **People were, people were** together.’

(5) *peřrää šoa-n ol-i kaikkinee toiželain aiga*  
 after war-GEN be-PST.3SG very different time  
*kaig vägi ol-õtii družnoi-d*  
 all people be-IPRS.PST united-PLNOM  
 ‘After the war it was completely different time. All **people were** together.’

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