Variation in negation marking in Eastern Seto

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Seto is a South Estonian variety which is spoken in the border area of Estonia and Russia. Negation in Seto is formed with a negation particle which is added to a connegative verb form (1). The position of the negation particle varies: it may occur either preverbally (1), postverbally (2), or is repeated (double marking, 3). The postverbal use of negative marker is the most common pattern in Seto, i.e. it is the most frequent and unmarked order, at least historically. In the case of double marking, the first negation marker is placed either before or after the verb and the second one stands at the end of the clause.

(1) \( e\, vōq\, jät\ddot{q}\, vällä \)

\( \text{NEG can.CNG leave:INF out} \)

‘can not leave out’

(2) \( ku\, marjo\, saa\, ei,\, syss… \)

\( \text{if berry.PL.PRT get.CNG NEG then} \)

‘if (we) do not get berries, then…’

(3) \( inne\, e\, tälö\, vällä\, eiq\, ku\, keskpäivä \)

\( \text{before NEG come.CNG out NEG than mid.day.prt} \)

‘(S)he doesn’t come out before the midday’

Both closest contact languages of Seto – Standard (North) Estonian and Russian – use only preverbal negation markers. However, Standard Estonian and Russian differ in respect to general formation of negation: Standard Estonian uses special connegative verb form similarly to Seto (4); Russian, differently, only adds the negative marker to the (affirmative) verb form (5). Negation in Seto is different from Standard Estonian also in respect to tense marking: in Standard Estonian it is marked on the main verb, replacing the connegative verb form with past participle in the simple past (6). In Seto, the past tense is expressed with negation particle \( es \) + connegative verb form (7), compare examples (1-3) in present tense.

(4) \( kui\, marju\, e\, saa,\, siis... \) (Standard Estonian)

\( \text{if berry.PL.PRT NEG get.CNG then} \)

‘if (we) do not get berries, then…’

(5) \( ja\, zna\,-ju\, -\, ja\, ne\, zna\,-ju \) (Russian)

\( I\, \text{know-1SG}\, I\, \text{NEG know-1SG} \)

‘I know’

‘I don't know’

(6) \( me\, e\, saa\,-nud\, marju \) (Standard Estonian)

\( \text{We NEG get-PST.PTCL berry.PL.PRT} \)
‘We did not get berries’

(7) saa as marjo (Seto)

get.CNG NEG.PST berry.PL.PRT

‘(We) did not get berries’

The aim of the paper is to find out how much variation in the use of standard negation can be found in the present-day Seto which is strongly influenced by Standard Estonian and Russian. We look at the 1) position of the negative particle; 2) tense marking in negation in order to find out to what extent Seto has retained its own system and to what extent it copies the pattern(s) of contact language(s).

Data for the study comes from the fieldwork in Eastern Seto area (spoken in present-day Russia) from 2010-2016. In this area, there has been strong influence of both Estonian and Russian. All of the Seto speakers of the area are bilingual or even multilingual, as most of them have got education either in Estonian or Russian. Furthermore, at least nowadays, there is no large Seto-speaking community in the area.