

University of Tartu
Faculty of Social Sciences

Narva College
Study Programme “Languages and Multilingualism at School”

Eva Bekker

**THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: ENGLISH
BORROWINGS IN ESTONIAN TIKTOK YOUTH DISCOURSE**

Bachelor’s thesis

Supervisor: *Lect.* O. Orekhova, MA

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Kinnitus

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PREFACE

English is one of the most influential global languages, playing a central role in business, entertainment, politics, science, and education. Due to globalisation and the dominance of English in digital communication, its impact is increasingly visible in many languages, especially at the lexical level. English terms, slang, and general vocabulary are entering everyday speech. In Estonia, English is the most widely spoken foreign language. According to the 2021 census, 48% of the population speaks English as a foreign language, highlighting its strong presence in Estonian society (Statistics Estonia, 2022). English is also institutionalised through education, as it is widely taught in schools and is significant in the daily lives of young people (Põiklik, 2023). This wide exposure to English, both inside and outside the classroom, has changed how young people communicate. English words and slang often replace Estonian words, especially online on platforms like TikTok. Studies show that Estonian teenagers often use English words, including slang, emotional words, and trendy phrases (e.g., *cringe*, *oh my god*), which are often changed to fit Estonian grammar (e.g., *addi mind*, *ma quittisin*) (Eesti Keele Instituut, 2024). English words are sometimes chosen when there is no Estonian equivalent (e.g., *outfit* vs. *riietus*) or when words like *anyway* add special meaning (Novaator, 2020). The thesis argues that the widespread exposure to English, particularly through social media, is rapidly accelerating the incorporation of English words into the speech of young Estonians. This phenomenon occurs even when Estonian equivalents are available and is significantly altering the vocabulary and linguistic practices of young people.

The study aims to give an overview of English as a global language and its role in shaping vocabulary across different domains such as business, politics, science, entertainment, and education; to examine the lexical influence of English on other languages with a particular focus on slang, terminology, and general vocabulary in the Estonian context; to outline the main processes and functions of borrowing, including the reasons for adopting loanwords and the ways they are adapted in the recipient language; to explore the role of social media, particularly TikTok, as a key environment for the spread of English borrowings among young Estonians; and to analyse why these borrowings are often preferred even when suitable Estonian equivalents exist, taking into account factors such as prestige, identity, media exposure, and globalisation. The research

problem therefore lies in understanding how and why young Estonians borrow English expressions, how these borrowings are adapted, and what attitudes young speakers hold toward this phenomenon.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two main chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter I provides the theoretical background by examining English as a global language, its influence on other languages, and its particular significance in Estonia, especially within education and communication. The chapter also details the primary processes, motivations, functions, and adaptations associated with lexical borrowing, and introduces TikTok as a significant platform for youth language. Chapter II constitutes the empirical section, outlining the research methods and data, analyzing English borrowings in Estonian TikTok content. The conclusion synthesises the findings and considers their implications for language change in Estonia.

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INTRODUCTION

English Borrowings as a Contemporary Sociolinguistic Trend

Haugen (1950) describes borrowing as a process that can be analysed in terms of how linguistic material is transferred and integrated into the recipient language. Later contact-linguistic research has consistently confirmed that lexical items are particularly prone to transfer in situations of contact, since they can spread rapidly and enter everyday usage without requiring immediate restructuring of grammar. This understanding has been further developed in typological and comparative work, where borrowing is treated not as an exceptional event but as a normal part of how languages evolve under social and cultural influence (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009).

A key contribution to the modern study of borrowing is the Loanword Typology project and the comparative handbook edited by Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009). Importantly, Haspelmath (2009) explicitly states that borrowing is a well-established research area, noting that “There is a large amount of previous research on loanwords in individual languages” (p. 35). This observation is particularly relevant for contemporary studies because it frames lexical borrowing as a phenomenon with both deep historical roots and a wide empirical base. At the same time, the typological framework provided in this handbook allows researchers to interpret borrowing not simply as isolated lexical transfer, but as a patterned sociolinguistic and cross-linguistic trend. In other words, borrowing is widespread across languages, but it is not random: it reflects the changing communicative needs of communities, the structure of cultural exchange, and access to influential donor languages (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009).

In the present era, lexical borrowing has become particularly prominent due to globalisation, intensified intercultural communication, and the expansion of internationally shared media and technology. Crystal (2003) argues that English has achieved global influence to an unprecedented extent, and describes it as “the international language of communication” (p. 1). This explains why English is currently a dominant source of lexical material in many languages, including in European contexts: its global status provides constant exposure even outside formal bilingualism.

In addition, contemporary borrowing trends are not limited to a single domain, such as technology or professional terminology. Research shows that English lexical influence is visible across many registers and contexts, including formal institutions (education, international relations, science)

and everyday informal communication. The typological perspective emphasises that borrowing patterns often cluster around domains linked to cultural prestige, innovation, and global relevance, which makes borrowing a useful indicator of social change rather than merely linguistic change (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009). Crucially, the presence of English loanwords can therefore be interpreted not simply as “new vocabulary” entering a language, but as an outcome of broader sociocultural dynamics in which linguistic choices reflect the realities of modern communication.

Another feature that distinguishes borrowing as a contemporary trend is the increasing speed of diffusion. Although languages have always borrowed, modern communication environments allow lexical items to circulate quickly and to become widespread in a remarkably short time. While this acceleration is often attributed to media and digital communication, it can also be grounded in contact-linguistic descriptions of how contact effects operate at the level of discourse. Matras (2022) highlights that the structural effects of bilingualism and contact are visible not only in language systems but in actual language use, explaining that code-switching and mixing “capture the structural effects of language contact and bilingualism/multilingualism at the level of discourse production rather than the language ‘system’” (p. 10). Even though Matras’ discussion is broader than lexical borrowing alone, it supports a key point for contemporary borrowing research: modern contact phenomena should be examined as part of real communicative behaviour, where lexical items spread through usage, repetition, and socially embedded practices.

Similarly, Winford (2003) frames contact linguistics as a field concerned with how languages influence one another through multilingual interaction, discussing contact outcomes that include borrowing and other contact-induced effects. In the open sample chapter introducing the field, he provides concrete examples of contact outcomes and language mixtures, for instance, describing creoles as “English lexicon” or “French lexicon” (p. 6). While creolisation represents a more intensive contact outcome than borrowing alone, Winford’s examples reinforce a fundamental idea: lexical material is central to many contact phenomena and is often the most immediately visible linguistic resource transferred between communities.

Studies in borrowing typology provide evidence for the cross-linguistic relevance of loanwords as a research topic and emphasise the accumulated depth of earlier research (Haspelmath, 2009; Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009). At the same time, work on the global status of English provides a sociocultural explanation for why English has become an especially powerful donor language in

the modern era (Crystal, 2003). Contemporary contact-linguistic perspectives also highlight that contact outcomes are closely linked to discourse practices and real-life communication, supporting the view of borrowing as part of ongoing change in language use rather than merely a long-term historical process (Matras, 2022; Winford, 2003).

Social Media as a Linguistic Ecosystem

Digital communication has reshaped the ecology of everyday language use by expanding the amount, visibility, and social reach of informal writing. In his review of language change and digital media, Androutsopoulos (2011) argues that the key development is not simply that “new media language” influences offline varieties, but that language change is increasingly located “within digital written usage” itself (p. 9). From this perspective, social media is best understood as a space where vernacular writing becomes massively scalable and socially consequential. The internet does not merely speed up pre-existing processes of change; rather, it contributes to “the evolution of digital writing as a new domain of communication” (p. 9). This matters for lexical borrowing and lexical innovation because online platforms multiply opportunities to encounter, reuse, and circulate new items, while simultaneously making them more public and more easily replicable.

One of the most frequently discussed characteristics of online discourse is that it pushes writing toward conversational immediacy, encouraging linguistic forms that resemble speech in pace, interpersonal orientation, and stylistic flexibility. Eisenstein et al. (2014) contend that technology-mediated communication has substantially increased informal written interactions. As much of this communication occurs in rapid, conversational settings, written language has adapted to new communicative demands, fostering the emergence of innovative linguistic forms such as abbreviations, creative spellings, and neologisms (Eisenstein et al., 2014). While their analysis centers on Twitter, their argument extends to online discourse more generally: when writing is rapid, interactive, and closely linked to everyday social relationships, it provides a particularly fertile environment for lexical experimentation, including borrowed vocabulary, fashionable expressions, and ephemeral innovations. Furthermore, Eisenstein (2014) emphasise that online language change should not be conceptualized as a single, unified “internet dialect.” Rather, they demonstrate that the adoption and dissemination of new forms are socially patterned and frequently influenced by factors such as geography and demographic variation (Eisenstein et al., 2014). These

findings indicate that online diffusion is shaped not only by platform features but also by social structures, suggesting that questions about what spreads, where it spreads, and among whom it spreads are fundamentally sociolinguistic rather than purely technological.

A central reason why social media functions as an “ecosystem” for lexical trends is its capacity to support rapid diffusion through dense interactional networks and repeated exposure. Research on lexical innovation increasingly treats diffusion not as a simple count of occurrences but as a socially patterned process. Würschinger (2021) points out that social media platforms are useful for research because they provide abundant real language and enable the study of how new words are used and spread on a large scale. He frames diffusion as a networked phenomenon: new words spread through networks of communicative interaction, and the pathways of diffusion can differ substantially even when overall frequency looks similar. This argument directly supports the idea that online lexical trends are not only “popular words” but also social trajectories: an item may appear frequently because it is intensively used within a narrow community, or it may become broadly diffused across communities (Würschinger, 2021).

Repetition and imitation are not accidental side effects but core mechanisms of trend formation in online discourse. Digital platforms encourage users to reproduce linguistic material that is already circulating: catchphrases, short reactions, stylized expressions, and recognizable formats. This aligns with Androutsopoulos’s broader claim that what is “new” in new media language is not only isolated forms but “new resources and strategies for written language production and meaning making” (Androutsopoulos, 2011, p. 9). These strategies include practices that make linguistic items more “portable” and easier to repeat, such as short expressive markers, formulaic constructions, and stylized punctuation. Once such items become recognisable, they can accumulate social meaning, functioning as signals of belonging, stance, or alignment with a trend. In this sense, the “ecosystem” metaphor is appropriate: online discourse involves continuous competition, selection, and reinforcement of items, where some innovations stabilize and spread, while others remain local or disappear quickly (Androutsopoulos, 2011).

Another important dimension of diffusion is that online language is produced and circulated by identifiable social actors whose linguistic choices carry indexical value. Schneier notes that quantitative approaches to social media “have yielded insights into how linguistic forms may be diffused across online social networks,” and can show how individuals “adopt and use newly

enregistered features for performing social identities” (Schneier, 2021, p. 2). This helps explain why influencers and highly visible creators can function as “models” for linguistic norms in online spaces, even without being official authorities. If particular styles become entrenched through repeated public performance, influential users can intensify diffusion by repeatedly displaying the same features to large audiences and embedding them in recognizable persona-driven discourse. Schneier (2021) emphasizes the “flesh-and-blood performer of language” (p. 2), reminding that behind large datasets, there are individuals whose linguistic performances reflect socially meaningful linguistic performance. This is especially relevant for platforms dominated by creator-centered communication, where the audience not only consumes content but also imitates linguistic patterns as part of participation (Schneier, 2021).

Social media ecosystems show that diffusion is not purely a matter of global homogenization. Even though platforms enable instant communication across distance, Eisenstein et al. (2014) show that diffusion can reproduce “existing fault lines” (para. 1) rather than producing a single unified variety (Eisenstein et al., 2014, para. 1). This is particularly relevant for research on English borrowings in Estonian youth discourse because the main issue is not only the presence of English-derived items, but also their patterns of circulation within specific communities, the meanings they acquire in use, and the social groups that function as early adopters or key amplifiers. Overall, existing studies suggest that online discourse creates conditions in which informal writing becomes widely visible, written communication increasingly approximates conversational interaction and supports lexical innovation, and the diffusion of new forms follows socially structured network pathways (Androutsopoulos, 2011; Eisenstein et al., 2014; Schneier, 2021).

The impact of English has historically been considered a lexical rather than grammatical effect on Estonian morphology. According to Eesti Keeletoimetajate Liit (2024), this effect may extend to syntax as well. For example, comparative forms are increasingly constructed using adverbs such as *rohkem* or *enam* (e.g., *rohkem huvitav* instead of standard *huvitavam*), reflecting patterns found in English. Similarly, non-standard forms in passive constructions, such as *ollakse kirjutatud* instead of *on kirjutatud*, indicate structural interference from English. Other changes include shifts in pronoun usage (e.g., *minu vanaemaga* instead of *oma vanaemaga*) and increasing reliance on analytical constructions that may reduce variation in expression (Eesti Keeletoimetajate Liit, 2024). The increase in these patterns of language interaction implies not only lexical acquisition

but also reduced complexity in language use. Additionally, English-derived words and phrases frequently appear in conversations, especially among younger speakers who often use them in informal conversations, online chats, and social profiles (Vihman et al., 2022). This trend, known as “Estonglish” in English-speaking societies in Estonia, demonstrates the growing interaction between the language and its Estonian speakers, which continues to evolve (Novaator, 2020).

It can therefore be hypothesised that young Estonians increasingly use English borrowings in everyday speech not only because of constant online exposure, but also because these words serve social and pragmatic functions, such as expressing identity, prestige, or engagement with trends. Many of these borrowings undergo different levels of linguistic adaptation, becoming integrated into Estonian through phonological, morphological, and syntactic changes. This trend may support the normalisation of English lexical material in informal Estonian, even when suitable Estonian equivalents exist, and may contribute to gradual lexical erosion.

CHAPTER I ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE: ROLE, BORROWING, AND DIGITAL YOUTH DISCOURSE

1.1 English as a Global Lingua Franca

1.1.1 Lingua Franca and English

Definition of Lingua Franca

The term lingua franca is usually taken to mean “any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language” (Samarin, 1987, p. 371). Linguists generally agree that the term lingua franca refers to a language used as a common means of communication between speakers who do not share the same native language. Brosch (2015) notes that historically the term lingua franca denoted a specific contact language used in the Mediterranean area, but over time it developed into a broader concept referring to any vehicular language facilitating communication across linguistic boundaries. In this broader sense, a lingua franca is defined by its function rather than by its origin or structural properties (Brosch, 2015). Scholars emphasise that lingua francas emerge from practical communicative needs in multilingual contexts such as trade, migration, education, and international cooperation, and they may take the form of either an established natural language or a contact variety (Samarin, 1987; UNESCO, 1973). Because intelligibility and efficiency are prioritised, lingua francas are typically characterised by flexibility and adaptability, with usage shaped by speakers and contexts rather than strict normative standards (Brosch, 2015; Gobbo, 2021).

English as a Lingua Franca

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) refers to using English as a common language among people with different native languages, with the main goal of understanding each other and communicating effectively, rather than speaking like native English speakers (Seidlhofer, 2004). From this point of view, ELF is not seen as a fixed type of English but as a flexible way of communicating that adapts to users' needs (Jenkins, 2009). Research on ELF shows that people in international and cross-cultural situations work together to ensure they understand each other and adjust their English use to make it clearer and more effective (Hülmbauer, 2008; Mauranen, 2006). Sacchetto's (2019) research also shows that ELF is used in real-life international contexts, where

people from different language backgrounds often choose English to communicate, including in schools, social events, and workplaces across Europe. She explains that in situations where many languages are spoken, English is not just another language people know, but the main language they use to understand each other and communicate when they do not share a native language (Sacchetto, 2019). Therefore, ELF can be defined as English used as a context-driven, user-shaped communicative resource for interaction among speakers with different linguistic backgrounds.

1.1.2 English in International Communication

Within the context of globalisation, English has emerged as the dominant language for international communication, especially in the global economy and business sectors. Crystal (2003) asserts that the proliferation of English is intrinsically connected to international economic activity, given its extensive use in trade, finance, multinational corporations, and international organisations. English has assumed a “special role” in global communication by serving as a common medium across national and linguistic boundaries, particularly in professional and institutional settings (Crystal, 2003).

In international business environments, English is frequently adopted as the working language to facilitate cooperation among employees who do not share a common native language. Grigoryeva and Zakirova (2022) highlight that employing a single working language significantly enhances efficiency, noting that “using a single language is much more convenient and time-saving than translating to many different national languages” (p. 50). Consequently, English is commonly utilised for meetings, negotiations, documentation, and internal communication within multinational companies. Jenkins (2009) argues that, in professional and international contexts, the principal value of English lies in its communicative effectiveness rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms. She observes that in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) settings “the emphasis is not on conformity to native speaker norms, but on successful communication and mutual understanding” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 201). This functional perspective accounts for the widespread adoption of English in multinational workplaces, where clarity and cooperation are prioritised over linguistic accuracy.

International mobility further strengthens the role of English in economic and professional communication. The rise in labour migration, transnational careers, and remote work has led to multilingual workplaces where English often serves as the default medium of interaction.

Seidlhofer (2011) notes that English is regularly selected in international professional contexts because it is the most practical communicative option for speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, stating that “another factor accelerating language change is that the overall changes in the environments in which English is used mean that the language is used more and more for practical purposes by people with very varied norms and scopes of proficiency” (p. 212).

Empirical research demonstrates that English is essential for facilitating intercultural understanding in professional communication. Grigoryeva and Zakirova (2022) conclude that the use of English in intercultural contexts contributes to communication that is “clearer, more productive, and time-saving” (p. 48), particularly within business and institutional interactions.

Mauranen (2006) views English as a lingua franca as a phenomenon shaped by contemporary globalisation and increased international mobility. She characterises ELF as “a child of the postmodern world” (p. 2) that transcends national boundaries and lacks fixed centres, underscoring its fundamentally transnational nature. Within this framework, English operates as part of a broader transcultural flow, allowing speakers to adapt the language to their specific communicative needs and contexts. Rather than being used uniformly, English is utilised across various in-groups and specialised domains, assuming different forms depending on the communicative situation. This perspective is especially pertinent to international professional communication, where English functions as a shared medium enabling interaction among linguistically diverse participants in business, institutional, and professional contexts (Mauranen, 2006).

Overall, English in international communication and business can be characterised as a functional working language shaped by global economic structures, professional mobility, and the practical demands of multinational interaction. Its widespread use in business contexts contributes to its status as a key medium of international cooperation and coordination.

1.1.3 English in Media and Entertainment

In contemporary sociolinguistic research, media and digital communication are widely recognised as key environments for language contact and lexical change. Unlike institutional contexts, media and entertainment expose speakers to English through informal, repetitive, and socially meaningful interaction. Ferreiro (2019) emphasises that, in particular, social media has become a space where users “come into contact and most influence each other and, consequently, language” (p. 42). This

type of exposure is especially relevant for vocabulary, as lexical items can be noticed, repeated, and reused without formal instruction or conscious reflection. Ferreiro (2019) explicitly states that “vocabulary is one of the aspects of language that is more vulnerable to change” (p. 42), linking this vulnerability directly to the Internet's massive impact on everyday communication. Social media platforms introduce new lexical items not only through technological terminology but also through slang, trends, and the resemanticisation of existing words. As a result, English words can become globally recognisable in a matter of days (Ferreiro, 2019, p. 42)

English in social media and digital communication

Social media and online communication have become key environments for the spread of English lexical material across languages. Bulycheva and Safonkina (2016) note that at the present stage, borrowing of English words is most active in the Internet sphere, which serves as one of the main channels of contemporary language contact (p. 1). The authors further emphasise that “one of the most important channels for the influx of anglicisms into the Russian language has become the Internet” (p. 2). Due to the dominance of English in digital platforms, interfaces, and online content, constant exposure to English vocabulary facilitates its incorporation into everyday communication (Bulycheva and Safonkina, 2016, pp. 2–3). This constant exposure facilitates the direct incorporation of English words into everyday communication, particularly in informal online contexts. Studies of social media discourse show that English lexical items are often used alongside native-language elements, forming hybrid expressions that reflect the influence of global digital culture (Dass, 2025). The dynamics of online interaction further intensify lexical borrowing. Dass (2025) notes that digital communication is increasingly characterised by informal, shortened, and creative language, as social media platforms prioritise brevity and speed (p. 1). The author further explains that digital communication fosters the adoption of slang, abbreviations, and new modes of expression, thereby driving linguistic innovation and the development of internet-based language (p. 3). In addition, social media is described as “a fertile ground for the creation and dissemination of new vocabulary and expressions” (Dass, 2025, p. 5). In such contexts, English words and expressions are repeatedly encountered through hashtags, memes, and viral content, increasing their salience and recognisability. Repetition and imitation thus become central mechanisms through which English lexical items spread across linguistic communities.

Youth exposure

Youth language has been identified as a particularly important site for observing lexical change, as youth slang reflects contemporary social phenomena and rapidly evolving linguistic practices (Tsibizova & Galankina, 2021, p. 686). Anglicisms form a significant part of contemporary youth slang: in their corpus, almost 70% of the collected lexical units consist of borrowings or derivatives of borrowings, indicating a strong influence of English (p. 3). The authors also emphasise that youth slang is widely represented in social networks, blogs, Internet publications, and chats, which confirms the central role of online and informal communication in the spread of anglicisms (p. 3). Kaljuk (2025) similarly argues that youth slang reflects broader sociocultural processes, noting that anglicisms are frequently adopted to express modernity, group belonging, and alignment with global trends.

Importantly, youth-driven lexical innovations often emerge first in online environments before spreading to offline communication. As Ferreiro (2019) observes, “the kids of today will be the adult speakers of tomorrow” (p. 49), which highlights the long-term significance of youth language practices for future language change.

Why this matters for vocabulary

The pervasive presence of English in media, entertainment, and social media has direct implications for lexical borrowing. Lexicon is the most flexible component of language and therefore the most susceptible to contact-induced influence. Studies consistently show that English lexical items are integrated into other languages through everyday use, repetition, and social meaning-making rather than through formal language learning (Bulycheva & Safonkina, 2016; Vilariño Ferreiro, 2019). Media-driven exposure thus functions as a key mechanism through which English influences the vocabularies of other languages, particularly in informal and youth-oriented registers. This understanding provides a necessary theoretical foundation for analysing lexical borrowing as one of the primary forms of English influence in contemporary multilingual societies.

1.1.4 English in Education

English is a key part of formal education worldwide because of its central role in global communication, science, business, and technology. As countries join international networks, English language teaching (ELT) is increasingly prioritized to prepare students for academic and professional success. Research shows that integrating English into curricula develops not only

linguistic competence but also intercultural communication skills and the ability to engage with diverse global communities (Canese & Spezzini, 2023). In Europe, for example, English is the most studied foreign language, with over 96% of upper secondary students learning it in general education and large majorities in vocational tracks, surpassing Spanish, French, and German (Eurostat, 2025). Within the European Union, foreign language education promotes multilingual competence; however, English clearly dominates school curricula. According to Eurostat (2025), more than 96 % of upper secondary students in the EU studied English as a foreign language in 2022, far exceeding any other language. Similarly, Eurydice (2019) reports that in most European countries, English is the primary first foreign language taught in schools, reinforcing its role in international communication and cultural participation (Eurydice, 2019).

English in Estonia's education system

In Estonia, English also plays a central role in formal education. The Estonian Ministry of Education reports that students typically learn at least two foreign languages, with English most often chosen first (A-language) in Estonian-medium schools, ahead of German and French (Estonian Ministry of Education, 2022). Census data from Estonia highlight English's growing importance beyond schools. In 2021, about 48% of the population spoke English as a foreign language, up from 40% in 2011 and 26% in 2000, showing long-term growth in proficiency. Among 15–29-year-olds, 90% speak at least one foreign language, most often English (Statistics Estonia, 2022).

These figures reflect broader trends in Estonia. About 74% of 15-34-year-olds speak English, compared to much lower rates in older groups, highlighting the impact of early language education on generational differences in English competence. Estonia's strong English proficiency is also evident in international rankings. In the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Estonia scored 561 points, significantly above the global average of 488, placing the country in the *High* proficiency band among non-English-speaking nations (EF English Proficiency Index, 2025).

Overall, these data show that English learning in Estonia is built into schools and is common in everyday life. Schools give students the basics for learning English, while how people use English and changes between generations help create a large group of English speakers. This mix makes English both a school subject and a useful tool for talking with others, getting around, and engaging with culture for young Estonians and the wider population.

1.2 Impact of English on other Languages

1.2.1 Lexical borrowing as the primary form of influence

Borrowing within Language Contact Theory

Lexical borrowing is recognized in language contact research as the most common and earliest type of contact-induced change (Haugen, 1950). Both older and newer theories agree that words are borrowed more easily than grammar, especially when bilingualism is limited or contact is not very intense. Haugen (1950) describes borrowing as bringing words from one language into another and notes that words are usually borrowed first because they require little change to the receiving language (pp. 212–213). Thomason (2001) supports this view, explaining that vocabulary can be borrowed even when contact is weak, while changes to grammar usually need stronger and longer contact (pp. 70–72).

Large-scale comparative studies from a typological perspective confirm this tendency. Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009) demonstrate in their work on loanword typology that lexical borrowing is a cross-linguistically robust phenomenon. All languages borrow words to some extent, though the rates and affected semantic domains vary (pp. 35–38). Collectively, these approaches establish lexical borrowing as a central concept in the theoretical study of language contact and influence.

The widespread nature of lexical borrowing can be attributed to the structural properties of the lexicon. Lexical items belong to open word classes, enabling languages to expand their vocabularies without fundamentally altering grammatical systems (Thomason, 2001). Treffers-Daller (2010) observes that new lexical material can be incorporated at relatively low cognitive and structural cost, particularly compared with changes in syntax or morphology (pp. 18–20). This explanation is consistent with Thomason's (2001) contact scale, which posits that vocabulary borrowing requires less social and linguistic pressure than structural borrowing (p. 71). Borrowed words may initially appear as foreign elements but can later undergo phonological or morphological adaptation, gradually integrating into the recipient language system (Haugen, 1950, pp. 214–215). Collectively, these accounts indicate that lexical borrowing constitutes a low-threshold mechanism of influence, making it especially suitable for analyzing early and ongoing contact effects.

Borrowing beyond gap-filling

Although lexical borrowing is frequently associated with the need to name new objects or concepts, research demonstrates that borrowing extends beyond purely referential gaps. Loanword typology studies reveal that borrowed items often coexist with native equivalents, particularly in domains related to culture, technology, and social interaction (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009). These findings indicate that borrowing is motivated not only by necessity but also by social and pragmatic considerations. Poplack, Sankoff & Miller (1988) found that borrowed words can show social meaning and signal a speaker's identity, group membership, or style, even when similar native words exist (Poplack et al., 1988, pp. 52–54). Treffers-Daller (2010) adds that people often borrow words to fit in with certain cultural models or communities, not only because they lack native terms (p. 24).

1.2.2 Key Aspects of the Borrowing Process: Motivations, Functions, Linguistic Adaptation

Lexical borrowing is widely recognized as a frequent outcome of language contact. Research consistently demonstrates that vocabulary is more susceptible to external influence than other linguistic subsystems. As Treffers-Daller (2010) observes, “the vocabulary of a language, considerably more loosely structured than its phonemics or its grammar, is beyond question the domain of borrowing par excellence” (Treffers-Daller, 2010, p. 17). This perspective accounts for why lexical borrowing is often the earliest and most visible indicator of contact-induced change.

A primary motivation for lexical borrowing is the incorporation of new cultural items and conceptual elements resulting from language contact. Studies indicate that lexical borrowing predominantly occurs because the recipient language adopts both cultural elements and “the names along with them from some external source” (Liu, 2024, p. 107). Borrowing enables speakers to efficiently label new objects, practices, and ideas introduced into their cultural environment. Furthermore, lexical borrowing is closely linked to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic influence, rather than being solely a response to lexical deficiency. Liu (2024) highlights that lexical borrowing “is regarded as being strongly motivated by both conceptual influence and acceptance” (p. 112), and that such borrowing can be beneficial and enduring for the recipient language. Empirical research focusing on the language of Estonian youth reveals that the use of English borrowings is notably prevalent in casual conversations. For instance, a study examining slang among schoolchildren found that around 15% of the vocabulary consists of borrowed terms, with 39% derived from English (Keevalik, 2003). This finding indicates that borrowing is closely

linked to specific social groups and contexts of communication, rather than being uniformly distributed throughout the language. Consequently, the phenomenon of borrowing is influenced not only by a lack of equivalent native words but also by wider cultural and conceptual shifts that arise from interactions between languages (Keevallik, 2003).

At the same time, borrowing frequently occurs even when native equivalents exist. Social factors such as prestige, group identity, and positive attitudes toward the donor language all play crucial roles. Haspelmath (2009) emphasises that lexical borrowing is influenced by social motivations, stating that “factors influencing lexical borrowing include social prestige and grammatical adaptation of words” (Haspelmath, 2009, p. 36). Borrowed words may reflect speakers’ orientation toward particular cultural models or social groups rather than purely communicative necessity.

Loan words serve multiple functions within the recipient language. Primarily, they expand the lexical inventory by providing terms for new or specialized concepts. In contact situations, lexical borrowing is characterized as “a process by which means of expressions are enriched” (Matras & Adamou, 2022, p. 4), thereby enhancing the expressive capacity of the recipient language. Beyond their referential function, borrowed words frequently acquire stylistic and social significance, signaling modernity, professional competence, or affiliation with particular communities. Cognitive motivations also contribute to lexical borrowing. Benő (2017) contends that “lexical borrowing is not only motivated by cultural factors linked to prestige or economical aspects but also by the speakers’ need for new lexical-semantic categories and for highly expressive metaphorical terms to operate with, which makes them borrow words” (Benő, 2017, p. 53). This suggests that languages borrow words to fulfill cognitive and expressive needs that existing vocabulary cannot fully address. For instance, phrases like *tegin cheatiga* illustrate the incorporation of English lexical elements into Estonian grammatical structures, highlighting informal communication and fostering mutual understanding among speakers. A similar trend can be observed in the phrase *minu vend vihkab, aga mina fännan* (‘My brother hates it, but I am a fan’), where the English-derived noun *fan* is adapted into the Estonian form *fänn* and subsequently used as a verb. This not only demonstrates morphological adaptation but also showcases the creative application of borrowed terms beyond their original grammatical roles. In these examples, borrowing serves as a reflection of group identity, expressiveness, and engagement with global digital culture (The Estonian Language Blog, 2013).

Linguistic adaptation is a central stage in the borrowing process. Borrowed words typically undergo modification to conform to the phonological, morphological, and grammatical patterns of the recipient language. Jdetawy and Hamzah (2020) assert that “loanwords borrowed from any donor language have to undergo certain processes to make them fit appropriately into the recipient language. These processes include substitution to fit the recipient language’s sound structure” (p. 6). Morphological and morpho-syntactic integration are also common. Alvanoudi (2017) documents instances where loanwords are “phonologically and morpho-syntactically integrated in [the recipient language]”, including the combination of foreign stems with native affixes (p. 14). These cases illustrate that borrowed items are not simply inserted but become integrated into the grammatical system. Studies distinguish between naturalised and non-naturalised loanwords, showing that some items become fully integrated into the language system, while others retain their original English form. Naturalised borrowings may incorporate productive suffixes such as *-er*, *-ing*, and *-ist*, and may also form compound structures combining English and Estonian elements, which indicates a high level of morphological integration. In contrast, non-naturalised items such as *app*, *comeback*, and *catwalk* may be used in Estonian texts without full adaptation, particularly in domains such as media and lifestyle (Haugen, 1950; Weinreich, 1953; Haspelmath, 2009).

Linguists categorize borrowing into 5 types: lexical, structural, semantic, direct, and indirect (Crystal, 2003). Lexical borrowing involves adding individual words from one language to another and is the most common type because vocabulary is flexible (Njagi, 2016). Structural borrowing refers to adopting grammatical patterns, while semantic borrowing involves changes in meaning influenced by another language (Winford, 2003). Direct borrowing refers to the process in which words are adopted without significant alterations to their phonological or morphological structure. Whereas indirect borrowing entails the phonological and morphological adjustments of a borrowed term to align with the norms of the target language. This may involve alterations in sound, changes in tone, and even shifts in meaning (Arokoyo, 2020). In practice, these categories often overlap, especially in casual conversations and mixed language use.

The second aspect looks at how borrowed elements are adapted. When something is borrowed, it usually isn't used exactly as it is; instead, it often changes to fit the sounds, forms, and grammar of the new language (Jdetawy & Hamzah, 2020). This can include adding native prefixes or suffixes,

marking grammatical cases, and adapting to existing word formation rules. The degree of adaptation can vary from minor changes to fully integrated forms that become essential parts of the language.

The third aspect considers the communicative role of borrowed words. Borrowed terms often emerge out of necessity to express new concepts and can add variety to language use (Matras, 2009). Particularly on informal platforms like social media, borrowed elements often help convey emotions, make judgments, and shape personal identity.

The extent of adaptation varies: some words retain foreign features, while others become fully nativized. Nonetheless, adaptation is a key indicator that a borrowed item has transitioned from temporary use to becoming part of the recipient language's core lexicon (Benć, 2017).

1.3 Social Media as an Environment for Contemporary Language Change

Social media as an everyday communication space

From a linguistic perspective, social media provides a dynamic environment for innovation, facilitating the rapid spread and acceptance of new words, phrases, and grammatical patterns. Digital interactions “reshape linguistic norms, creating new opportunities for language play and creativity” (Ekayati et al., 2024, p. 605). Furthermore, social media serve as “amplifiers for linguistic change, enabling users to disseminate new expressions and constructions to a global audience almost instantaneously” (p. 605). Due to this rapid circulation and high visibility, social media operate not only as channels of communication but also as everyday linguistic environments where emerging forms of language, such as slang, neologisms, and borrowings, become integrated into routine interaction. The boundaries between online and offline communication are increasingly blurred. Research on adolescents’ communicative practices indicates that participation in social networks is now an inseparable aspect of daily life, with language used online directly influencing everyday spoken interaction (Koroleva, 2016).

1.3.1 Overview of TikTok as a Social Media Platform

TikTok is a short-form video social media platform that enables users to create, watch, and share videos, often enhanced with music, sounds, text overlays, filters, and editing effects (D’Souza, 2025). The platform is designed for continuous content consumption and rapid interaction; users engage through likes, comments, shares, and the re-use of audiovisual elements, resulting in a

highly participatory environment rather than a one-directional broadcasting medium (TikTok Newsroom, 2020). This structure facilitates “everyday” content production, allowing ordinary users to participate in trends and circulate content without requiring professional media resources (TikTok Newsroom, 2020).

A central feature of TikTok is its algorithmically curated *For You* feed, which serves as the primary mechanism for content discovery. According to TikTok, the system ranks and recommends videos based on multiple factors and adapts to user signals over time, resulting in a personalised feed (TikTok Newsroom, 2020). Rather than being organised around following a fixed list of accounts, TikTok prioritises content discovery that is continuously optimised through algorithmic curation (TikTok Newsroom, 2020). This structure accounts for TikTok’s reputation for rapid virality, as content can reach large audiences through recommendation dynamics even when creators lack an established follower base (TikTok Newsroom, 2020).

TikTok is one of the biggest and most important social media platforms in the world. DataReportal (2025) reports that TikTok’s advertisements reached 1.59 billion users in January 2025, underscoring the platform’s extensive global reach (DataReportal, 2025). Regional growth patterns further demonstrate this expansion; Reuters (2025) states that TikTok surpassed 200 million monthly users in Europe by September 2025, indicating particularly strong adoption in European markets and among younger users (Reuters, 2025). Mobile industry analyses also confirm TikTok’s prominence: Briskman (2026) reports that TikTok ranked first globally in both downloads and time spent in 2025, reflecting not only a large audience but also exceptionally high engagement levels (Briskman, 2026).

TikTok’s user base is predominantly youth-oriented, a factor of particular significance for research on contemporary youth language and lexical innovation. Although exact demographic distributions differ by country and measurement method, global reports consistently identify TikTok as a platform with a notably large proportion of young and young-adult users compared to other services (DataReportal, 2025). This demographic composition is important because youth communities are often early adopters of linguistic innovations, such as slang, creative word formation, and borrowed lexical items. Furthermore, TikTok’s globalised content ecosystem increases routine exposure to English-dominant cultural material, as many viral trends circulate

through English-language audio, captions, and hashtags before being replicated across languages (TikTok Newsroom, 2020; DataReportal, 2025).

Collectively, TikTok's short-form, multimodal format, algorithmic discovery system, extensive user base, and participatory creator tools position it as a highly influential platform for disseminating cultural and linguistic trends. The interplay of high exposure, frequent repetition through trend-based imitation, and strong user engagement fosters a communicative environment in which linguistic forms can spread rapidly and become normalised through everyday use (TikTok Newsroom, 2020; DataReportal, 2025; Briskman, 2026). TikTok, therefore, serves not only as an entertainment platform but also as a valuable empirical site for analysing contemporary language practices and the diffusion of lexical items, including English borrowings, within specific speech communities such as Estonian youth (Reuters, 2025; DataReportal, 2025).

1.3.2 TikTok as a Source of Modern Language Trends

TikTok serves as a significant generator and distributor of contemporary language trends due to its design, which promotes repetition, imitation, and rapid dissemination of concise, memorable content. In contrast to platforms that focus on follower networks, TikTok's recommendation system emphasizes content discovery and repeated exposure. As a result, users frequently encounter identical phrases, captions, and sound-based "catchwords" within short timeframes (TikTok Newsroom, 2020). These dynamics facilitate the accelerated diffusion of lexical items, as repeated exposure enhances familiarity and normalizes new expressions within the platform's communication environment (Ekayati et al., 2024).

TikTok trends are propelled by the platform's multimodal structure, which facilitates the circulation of language through audio clips, captions, on-screen text, and comments in addition to speech. Audio frequently serves as an organizing template, with users adopting the same sounds and reproducing associated phrases and meanings, thereby enabling rapid memetic dissemination across networks (Abidin & Kaye, 2021). Consequently, lexical items achieve "viral" status not solely due to their inherent meaning, but because they are embedded within repeatable audiovisual templates that users are both socially and technically incentivized to replicate (Pilipets, 2023; Abidin & Kaye, 2021).

Because TikTok trends circulate globally, the platform also facilitates the spread of English-derived lexical items into non-English-speaking communities. Viral formats often originate in English-dominant pop-cultural contexts and travel internationally through the same audio and caption templates, making English lexicon highly visible even for users whose everyday language is not English (Abidin & Kaye, 2021). Studies of slang on TikTok show that users frequently adopt innovative forms such as acronyms, creative respellings, and semantically shifted words, which are easy to copy and reuse in fast-paced interaction (Syafaah, 2023). In this environment, English borrowings and hybrid forms can spread especially quickly because they are packaged as part of “participation” in a trend: using the same word becomes a signal of being up to date and aligned with a global youth style (Zulli & Zulli, 2020; Syafaah, 2023).

In summary, TikTok’s algorithmic amplification, imitation-driven culture, and template-based multimodality establish optimal conditions for the emergence and normalization of new lexical items. Trends propagate through repeated exposure and widespread replication, while platform affordances actively facilitate remix and large-scale redistribution (TikTok Newsroom, 2020; TikTok Support, n.d.; Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2023). As a result, TikTok functions not only as a platform for language use but as a dynamic environment where vocabulary is generated, disseminated, and socially validated, making it a particularly significant context for examining the diffusion of English borrowings within youth speech communities.

1.3.3 TikTok in the Estonian Context

TikTok constitutes a highly relevant digital environment for observing lexical change among Estonian youth. According to DataReportal, TikTok’s advertising reach in Estonia in early 2025 was approximately 35.1% of the adult population (about 386,000 users aged 18+), increasing to 37.9% (about 412,000 users) by late 2025 (DataReportal, 2025). At the same time, Estonia demonstrates exceptionally high overall social media penetration, with approximately 1.01 million social media user identities, representing over 75% of the population (DataReportal, 2025). These figures indicate that TikTok is not a peripheral platform but a mainstream component of everyday media consumption, particularly among younger users, which makes it a plausible site for identifying emerging lexical patterns.

From a linguistic standpoint, English influence on Estonian is most clearly observable at the level of vocabulary. Research on Estonian youth language shows that contact with English primarily

manifests in the borrowing of individual words and expressions rather than in large-scale grammatical restructuring (Kask, 2021). Similarly, the Estonian Language Institute notes that young speakers readily incorporate English-origin items into informal speech and youth registers, reflecting both frequent exposure and positive attitudes toward English (Korkus, 2024). This aligns with broader findings that social media environments encourage non-standard, hybrid, and innovative lexical forms, including slang, abbreviations, and loanwords (Rini & Ekayati, 2024 & Bhati, 2025). In the Estonian context, TikTok therefore provides a setting in which English lexical items are repeatedly encountered, reused, and normalised.

TikTok's algorithmic structure further strengthens this process. The platform's recommendation system repeatedly exposes users to similar content based on previous interactions, thereby increasing the frequency with which particular words, phrases, and expressions are encountered (TikTok Newsroom, 2020). Repetition is a well-established factor in lexical entrenchment, and studies show that TikTok expressions are often transferred from online usage into everyday spoken communication (Wardhana et al., 2025). Moreover, research on TikTok-related slang indicates that young users adopt English-derived forms not only for referential purposes but also to signal trend participation, modernity, and group belonging (Sari et al., 2025). In Estonia, where young users are heavily embedded in digital culture, similar mechanisms can be expected to operate.

Taken together, the combination of TikTok's widespread reach in Estonia (DataReportal, 2025a; DataReportal, 2025), the documented lexical influence of English on Estonian youth speech (Kask, 2021; Korkus, 2024), and empirical evidence of TikTok-driven language change (Wardhana et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025) provides a strong theoretical basis for examining English borrowings on Estonian TikTok. TikTok can therefore be regarded as a key environment where anglicisms enter, circulate, and become embedded in contemporary Estonian youth language. This directly motivates the empirical analysis in the following chapter, which focuses on identifying English borrowings in Estonian TikTok content and exploring the reasons for their use.

Conclusion

English currently serves as a dominant global language and constitutes a significant source of lexical influence on numerous languages, including Estonian. Contact with English is particularly intensive in informal and digital domains, where speakers are frequently exposed to international media, popular culture, and online communication. Research in contact linguistics indicates that

vocabulary is the most permeable aspect of language, which accounts for the primary impact of borrowing on the lexical system rather than on grammar or phonology. Borrowed words arise in response to new concepts, communicative needs, identity formation, and stylistic preferences, and may undergo phonological, morphological, and semantic adaptation as they are integrated into the recipient language.

Social media serve as a central environment for contemporary language change by facilitating rapid, informal, and highly repetitive communication. Platforms such as TikTok amplify linguistic trends through algorithmic recommendation systems, imitation-based practices, and the global circulation of audiovisual templates. These conditions foster the widespread adoption of English lexical items, even when native equivalents are available. In the Estonian context, where young people are deeply engaged in digital culture and frequently encounter English-language content, TikTok provides a particularly salient context for examining the emergence and normalization of anglicisms in everyday youth speech.

CHAPTER II. PATTERNS AND FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH BORROWINGS IN ESTONIAN TIK TOK COMMUNICATION

2.1 TikTok as a Linguistic Environment

In recent years, TikTok has emerged as one of the most significant platforms influencing how young people communicate and utilize language. Its content distribution, driven by algorithms, ensures that users are frequently engaged with short videos showcasing contemporary trends, cultural allusions, and linguistic developments. Particularly for Estonian users, TikTok serves as a venue where local linguistic practices interact deeply with globally prevalent English-language content.

Unlike traditional media formats, TikTok facilitates the fast sharing and imitation of language patterns. Users do not merely consume content; they actively recreate and modify expressions, including those borrowed from English. The platform acts as an effective setting for monitoring real-time changes in language, particularly in informal contexts.

Therefore, TikTok was selected as the primary source of data for this study. The platform offers insights into authentic and spontaneous language use among young speakers of Estonian, making it especially valuable for examining how English lexical items are incorporated into daily communication.

2.2 Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis

The methodology of this study is based on qualitative content analysis of linguistic data collected from Estonian TikTok users. The data was gathered manually by observing and selecting videos that appeared in a personalised TikTok feed. In order to maintain the dataset's relevance and consistency throughout the research process, a dedicated TikTok account was created specifically for this study. The decision was made to ensure that the data collected would be as representative and focused as possible, allowing for a thorough exploration of language usage within the platform.

Over the course of several weeks, the algorithm of this account was purposefully influenced to emphasise and prioritise content that was presented in the Estonian language. This was achieved by interacting with relevant material, including following Estonian content creators, engaging with

videos in Estonian, and consistently selecting content reflecting local linguistic practices. The algorithm then evolved to primarily feature TikTok content from Estonia, allowing for a more focused and precise analysis of language use among Estonian speakers.

The choice of methodology is motivated by the nature of the research aims which focus on identifying loanwords and understanding their functions, adaptation, and patterns of usage in real communicative contexts. Previous studies have shown that social media platforms offer valuable resources for examining language evolution, as they capture natural language usage and enable researchers to monitor the development of new linguistic trends in real time (Würschinger, 2021).

The criteria for selecting the data included videos produced by users who speak Estonian, content that showcases either spontaneous or semi-spontaneous speech, and instances where English lexical terms are integrated into Estonian dialogue. Special emphasis was placed on identifying recurring phrases and usage patterns. The aim was to document individual instances of English borrowings as they emerged in authentic conversations, prioritizing naturally occurring examples over scripted or translated material.

The gathered instances were analyzed based on several criteria:

- the type of borrowing (lexical, structural, semantic, direct/indirect)
- the extent of linguistic adaptation (phonological, morphological, syntactic)
- the communicative function of these borrowings

Approximately 40 videos were analysed, along with their captions and comment sections. This number was considered sufficient, as clear recurring patterns in language use began to emerge at this stage. It became evident that the same types of expressions, structures, and vocabulary items were repeatedly used across different videos, indicating a certain level of consistency in the linguistic behaviour of young users. In particular, specific English borrowings appeared significantly more frequently than others, suggesting that the range of commonly used vocabulary is relatively limited and stabilised within this context.

Table 1. *Analytical classification of English borrowings*

Expression	Type of borrowing	Adaptation	Function
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sest et <i>they are the nastiest part of my makeup</i>	Direct	Entire English clause is inserted without modification.	Expressive / stylistic
<i>no offense</i> aga...	Direct	Borrowed as a fixed discourse marker. No modification.	Used to soften the statement and make it sound less direct or offensive.
olen <i>flow state</i> 'is	Direct + structural	English term adapted with Estonian case ending (-is), indicating integration into grammar.	Used to describe a specific mental or productive state that is more naturally expressed in English than in Estonian.
kuidas sa <i>rateksid</i> iseenda <i>outfitti</i>	Direct + structural	English term adapted with Estonian case ending (-ksid, -i), indicating integration into grammar.	Used to talk about evaluation in a casual and modern way, especially in contexts related to social media and appearance.
mis on sinu <i>type</i>	Direct	English noun used within Estonian syntax. Direct insertion.	Used to discuss personal preferences in relationships in a way that sounds more natural in youth and online communication.
läksin <i>deitele</i>	Lexical	English noun <i>date</i> modified to fit the Estonian grammar.	Used to refer to dating situations in a more informal and internationally influenced way.

ma <i>struggle</i> 'in sellega	Direct structural	+	English verb <i>to struggle</i> adapted with Estonian ending (-in), indicating speaker using it in a first-person narrative.	Used to express difficulty in a more relatable and informal way.
ma ei <i>suppress</i> 'i seda enam	Direct structural	+	English verb <i>suppress</i> integrated into Estonian grammar.	Used to express difficulty in a more relatable and informal way.
on aeg <i>lock in</i> 'ida	Direct structural	+	English phrasal verb <i>lock in</i> adapted with Estonian infinitive marker (-ida).	Used to express motivation or focus in a way that reflects trends from online productivity culture.
ma olen täiesti <i>cooked</i>	Direct		English slang used metaphorically; meaning is transferred rather than form adapted.	Used to express a strong emotional or mental state in a humorous or exaggerated way.
see on <i>bänger</i>	Lexical		Adapted pronunciation/spelling; used for strong positive evaluation (music/content).	Used to strongly evaluate something positively, especially in music or entertainment contexts.
<i>lust</i> 'ima	Direct structural	+	English root adapted into Estonian verb system with meaning shift.	Used creatively to express a feeling of a strong attraction.
<i>plain</i> tatar	Direct		Direct insertion of an English adjective.	Used humorously to describe something simple or basic.

<i>ragebait</i> 'ed mind	Direct + structural	Internet slang term used conceptually, adapted with Estonian ending (-ed).	Used to describe a mental state influenced by online content.
<i>feeling</i> natuke <i>mentally unstable</i>	Direct	Mixed-language construction, direct insertion.	Used to express emotional state in a softer or more indirect way.
suur <i>urge</i>	Direct	English noun used directly, no modification.	Used to describe a strong desire in a way that sounds more natural or expressive in English.
isa <i>smash</i> 'is Xboxi	Direct + structural	English verb <i>smash</i> adapted into Estonian past tense (-is).	Used to describe an action in a dynamic and informal way influenced by gaming and internet language.
<i>homegirlidega</i> tiktoke teha	Direct + structural	English noun <i>homegirls</i> adapted directly using the Estonian ending (-ga).	Used to refer to social interaction and group identity.
Spotify <i>blend</i> 'id	Direct + structural	Platform-specific term adapted into Estonian morphology.	Used to refer to a specific digital feature that does not have a commonly used Estonian equivalent.
ma <i>surrend</i> 'in selle tunde, ma <i>releas</i> 'in selle	Direct + structural	English verbs <i>surrend</i> and <i>release</i> are modified by using Estonian endings in order to adapt them to Estonian grammar.	Used to describe emotional processes in a way influenced by self-help.

Nublu <i>carry's</i>	Direct structural	+	English verb <i>carry</i> + Estonian ending.	Used to evaluate or describe someone's role or performance.
vaadake seda <i>blush'i</i>	Direct structural	+	The term <i>blush</i> is adapted with Estonian inflection.	Used in beauty-related contexts where English terminology is more common and widely understood.
nii et, <i>chill'i</i>	Direct structural	+	English verb <i>chill</i> adapted with Estonian case ending	Used to describe relaxing or calming down.
kus kõik <i>cool'i'd</i> eesti kpop <i>stannid</i> ennast peidavad	Direct structural	+	English slang (<i>cool, stan</i>) combined with Estonian morphology	Used to describe a specific social group and shared interests.
kui tuleb mingit <i>fallout'i</i>	Direct structural	+	English noun <i>fallout</i> adapted into Estonian language by adding the ending (-i)	Used to describe conflict or consequences.
nüüd panen <i>primerit</i>	Direct semantic	+	Borrowed term from beauty discourse; adapted to Estonian grammar. No available Estonian equivalent, therefore the term is integrated into vocabulary.	Used in beauty-related contexts where English terminology is more common and widely understood.
alustame <i>base'iga</i>	Direct structural	+	Borrowed term from beauty discourse; adapted to Estonian grammar.	Used in beauty-related contexts where English terminology is more

			common and widely understood.
teen alguses <i>brush'iga</i>	Direct + structural	Borrowed term from beauty discourse; adapted to Estonian grammar.	Used in beauty-related contexts where English terminology is more common and widely understood.
tähtis on ka enda <i>hairlin'i</i> hästi sisse <i>blendida</i>	Direct + structural	Combination of noun + verb borrowings. Verb <i>blend</i> adapted into Estonian infinitive form.	Used to explain a process in detail in a way that reflects tutorial-style communication.
mul on alati <i>baby hair'id</i> püsti	Direct + structural	English term adapted with Estonian plural marker	Used to describe appearance using commonly accepted English beauty terminology.
ma <i>exposin</i> ennast	Direct + structural	English verb <i>expose</i> adapted into Estonian present form	Used to describe revealing something in a dramatic or expressive way.

2.3 Discussion of the Collected Data Results

The analysis of the collected TikTok data shows that the use of English borrowings in Estonian youth speech is not random, but follows clear and recurring patterns. The examples presented in the table demonstrate that English words are used in different ways: sometimes they are inserted directly into Estonian sentences, and sometimes they are combined with Estonian grammar, and in many cases, they are fully adapted into the language. This suggests that English elements are not simply borrowed, but are actively integrated into everyday communication.

A significant factor contributing to this phenomenon is the context in which these expressions occur. Numerous instances arise from fields like social media, beauty content, and entertainment, where English frequently serves as the global lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2004). Consequently, many speakers first encounter these terms in English and tend to use them instinctively even when suitable Estonian alternatives exist. This aligns with theoretical discussions indicating that borrowing is closely tied to cultural and technological influences.

In addition to these observations, similar tendencies have been noted in Estonian media discussions. For example, Pullerits (2026) in a recent article in *Postimees* highlights that the increasing use of English expressions among young Estonians is closely connected to their everyday interaction with digital environments and global media. The article points out that English has become a natural part of informal communication, especially among younger speakers, who often encounter new concepts and expressions first in English. At the same time, it emphasises that while some language users view this trend as problematic, others see it as a normal outcome of language development rather than a direct threat to Estonian (Pullerits, 2026).

These patterns can also be understood in the broader context of English use in Estonia. English plays an important role in both education and everyday communication, being the most commonly taught first foreign language, and around 48% of the population speak English, with up to 90% of young people having knowledge of at least one foreign language, most often English (Statistics Estonia, 2022). In such a context, it is not surprising that English vocabulary is easily accessible and frequently used, which is also visible in the analysed TikTok data, where speakers often switch to English expressions naturally and without much effort. This observation also fits with general findings in language contact research, which suggest that vocabulary tends to move more easily between languages and can be used without major structural changes (Haugen, 1950; Thomason, 2001; Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009). The examples analysed in this study show similar tendencies, as English words are repeatedly used, adapted, and integrated into Estonian speech, often in predictable ways that reflect both exposure and everyday communication habits.



Figure 1. Example of a TikTok comment expressing difficulty recalling Estonian vocabulary. The user states that sometimes they cannot remember the appropriate Estonian word and therefore use an English alternative, although they consider this practice undesirable (“sometimes the word just doesn’t come to mind and you have to use [English], but it is awful”).

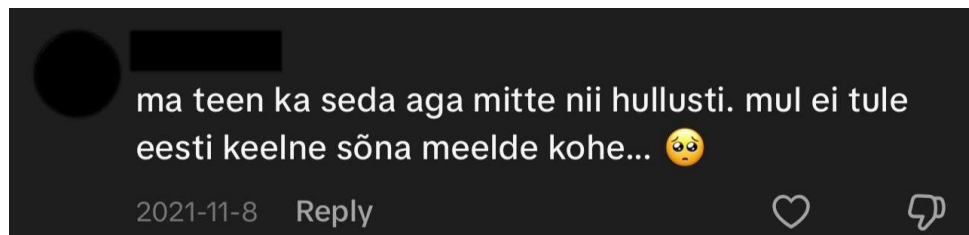


Figure 2. Example of a TikTok comment highlighting spontaneous use of English due to lexical accessibility. The user explains that they also use English words, but not excessively, and notes that Estonian equivalents do not come to mind immediately (“I do this too, but not that much. I just can’t think of the Estonian word right away”).



Figure 3. Example of a TikTok comment illustrating difficulty in finding appropriate Estonian expressions in real-time communication. The user admits that they often struggle to find correct Estonian words when speaking (“to be honest, I often can’t find the right Estonian words”).

English borrowings are employed not solely out of necessity. In numerous situations, speakers opt for these terms even when Estonian equivalents are available. Analysis of user comments provides

insight into this trend: individuals often claim that English words are simply “faster” or state they use them “because the correct word doesn’t come to mind”. Such observations imply that convenience significantly influences language choice. In rapid, informal settings like TikTok, users do not meticulously plan their language but instead employ whatever terms come to mind first; due to their consistent exposure to English content, these terms frequently turn out to be English rather than Estonian.

Another important factor is the expressive function of these borrowings. Many examples, such as *ma olen täiesti cooked* or *on aeg lock in’ida*, are used not just to communicate meaning, but to create a certain tone or feeling. These expressions are strongly connected to internet culture and often carry meanings that are difficult to reproduce in Estonian without losing their effect. In this sense, English is used as a resource for expressing identity, emotions, and belonging to a particular online community.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the use of English borrowings among young Estonians is influenced by a combination of factors: constant exposure to English through digital media, the speed and spontaneity of online communication, and the need for expressive and culturally relevant language. The rising prevalence of such borrowings implies a growing normalisation of English elements within informal Estonian discourse. This does not inherently signify an erosion of the Estonian language; however, it does indicate an evolution in its vocabulary - especially within casual contexts. As previous studies have highlighted, vocabulary represents one of the most adaptable components of language and typically reflects social and cultural shifts first. In this instance, it appears that English influences are shaping how young speakers communicate, particularly in digital contexts, while simultaneously raising considerations about future developments and preservation efforts concerning the Estonian language.

CONCLUSION

The growing influence of English on other languages is a notable trend in our globalised society, largely due to international communication, digital media, and social networks. English serves as a tool for global interaction and drives lexical innovation in various languages, especially in informal contexts where language is more adaptable. In Estonia, this impact is particularly evident among youth, whose conversations are shaped by platforms like TikTok. The integration of English terms raises questions about the reasons behind this trend, its communicative roles, and its potential effects on the Estonian language's future. Therefore, this study explored how and why English borrowings appear in Estonian online interactions and what these insights reveal about broader linguistic changes.

English, as a global lingua franca, plays an important role in communication, media, education, and digital environments. It is also deeply embedded in everyday interactions, especially among young people in Estonia, where high English proficiency and media exposure amplify this influence. Lexical borrowings are a common linguistic phenomenon and, with language contact, occur naturally and can be mixed and matched in a way that doesn't change grammatical structures. Social media, particularly TikTok, is highlighted as a platform that accelerates language change through repetition, imitation, and high interaction, promoting informal and expressive communication that facilitates the spread of English terms.

English borrowings are a salient part of Estonian TikTok communications. The present research findings show that English borrowings appear in various forms, such as direct insertions into Estonian sentences and hybrid constructions, suggesting they are actively adapted rather than merely repeated. These borrowings often express emotions or emphasize trends, and they are sometimes preferred for their familiarity and ease of use in online contexts. The findings also reveal differing attitudes towards English borrowings: many users embrace them, while others express concerns about their impact on the integrity of the Estonian language, leading to a tension between linguistic innovation and the preservation of traditional structures.

This study enhances the understanding of linguistic changes in Estonia, showing that English borrowings are systematic elements of modern communication shaped by social identity and globalization. The results show that Estonian youth often use English words due to several factors,

such as social identity, exposure to global media, and the need for effective communication. However, the findings also highlight that this situation is complex and cannot be linked to just one cause. Rather than confirming or rejecting the hypothesis, the study expands on it, demonstrating that English borrowings are a complicated sociolinguistic issue shaped by personal experiences and broader cultural influences.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Inglise keele mõju teistele keeltele on tänapäeva globaliseerunud maailmas üha selgemini märgatav. Seda soodustavad eelkõige rahvusvaheline suhtlus, digikeskkonnad ja sotsiaalmeedia, kus inglise keel toimib nii suhtlusvahendina kui ka uute väljendite allikana. Eriti tugevasti avaldub see mitteametlikus keelekasutuses, kus keel on paindlikum ja muutustele vastuvõtlikum. Eesti kontekstis on see nähtus kõige nähtavam noorte seas, kelle igapäevast suhtlust kujundavad platvormid nagu TikTok. Inglisekeelsete sõnade ja väljendite sagenemine tekitab küsimusi selle põhjuste, kasutusviiside ning võimaliku mõju kohta eesti keele arengule. Seetõttu keskendub käesolev uurimus „INGLISE KEELE LEVIK DIGITAALSUHTLUSES: INGLISE LAENSÕNAD EESTI NOORTE TIKTOKI DUSKURIS“ sellele, kuidas ja miks inglise laensõnad eesti noorte veebisuhtluses esinevad ning mida see laiemate keelemuutuste kohta näitab.

Esimeses peatükis antakse teoreetiline ülevaade inglise keele mõjust ja laenamise protsessidest. Käsitletakse inglise keelt kui globaalset lingua franca't ning selgitatakse selle rolli rahvusvahelises suhtluses, meedias, hariduses ja digikeskkondades. Samuti tuuakse esile, et inglise keel on tugevalt seotud igapäevase suhtlusega, eriti noorte seas, kelle keelekasutust mõjutab pidev kokkupuude ingliskeelse sisuga. Leksikaalne laenamine esitatakse kui loomulik ja laialt levinud nähtus keeltevahelises kontaktis, kus sõnu saab hõlpsasti üle võtta ja kohandada ilma, et see oluliselt muudaks keele struktuuri. Eraldi rõhutatakse sotsiaalmeedia rolli, eriti TikToki, kui keskkonda, kus keel muutub kiiresti korduse, jäljendamise ja aktiivse suhtluse kaudu ning kus levivad uued väljendid ja hübriidvormid.

Teises peatükis analüüsitakse inglise laensõnade kasutust eesti TikToki suhtluses empiirilise materjali põhjal. Uuring tugineb reaalsele keelekasutusele ning vaatleb, kuidas ingliskeelsed väljendid toimivad veebikeskkonnas, arvestades nende tüüpi, kohandumist ja kasutuse eesmärki. Tulemused näitavad, et inglise laensõnad esinevad mitmesugustes vormides - nii otseste sisestustena kui ka eesti keele grammatikaga kohandatud hübriididena. See viitab sellele, et tegemist ei ole pelgalt kordamisega, vaid aktiivse ja loova keelekasutusega. Sageli kasutatakse ingliskeelseid väljendeid emotsioonide väljendamiseks, trendidega kaasas käimiseks või suhtluse elavdamiseks. Samuti mängivad rolli praktilised põhjused - ingliskeelsed sõnad võivad olla lihtsamad, kiiremini meelde tulevad või harjumuspärasemad just veebisuhtluses.

Lisaks ilmnes, et suhtumine inglise laensõnadesse ei ole ühtne. Ühelt poolt kasutatakse neid loomuliku osana igapäevasest suhtlusest, teisalt väljendatakse muret nende mõju üle eesti keelele. See näitab, et keeleline muutus tekitab tasakaaluotsingut uuenduslikkuse ja keele säilitamise vahel.

Kokkuvõttes aitab käesolev uurimus paremini mõista tänapäevaseid keelemuutusi Eesti kontekstis. Inglise laensõnad ei ole juhuslik nähtus, vaid osa laiematest sotsiaalsetest ja kultuurilistest protsessidest, mida mõjutavad globaliseerumine, meediakeskkond ja identiteedi väljendamine. Tulemused viitavad sellele, et noored kasutavad ingliskeelseid väljendeid erinevatel põhjustel, sealhulgas eneseväljenduseks, meediast tuleneva mõju tõttu ning suhtluse kiiruse ja mugavuse pärast. Samas on selge, et tegemist on mitmetahulise nähtusega, mida ei saa seletada üheainsa teguriga. Uurimus ei anna hüpoteesile ühest vastust, vaid täpsustab seda, näidates, et inglise laensõnade kasutus on keeruline ja dünaamiline protsess, mida kujundavad nii individuaalsed valikud kui ka laiemad ühiskondlikud mõjud.

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