

Remarks on the coding of R arguments (Goals/Recipients) in Finnish

Seppo Kittilä – University of Helsinki

My paper deals with the coding of R arguments in Finnish (examples will occasionally be provided also from other Uralic languages). The notion will be discussed in light of semantic roles, verbal semantics, animacy and definiteness. The formal mechanisms considered include case marking (allative vs. illative in Finnish and also dative, lative and approximative cases in other Uralic languages), linear order of R and T and also postpositions used for coding typical Goals (e.g. *sisään* ‘into’, *päälle* ‘onto’, and *luo* ‘to the vicinity of’). However, postpositions expressing more specific meanings (such as *alle* ‘to under’ and *taakse* ‘to behind’) lie outside the scope of this paper.

The semantic roles examined in this paper include recipient and goal. Beneficiaries are not taken into consideration. Recipients are here defined as animate endpoints of transfer whose sphere of control or domain of possession the theme enters. Goals, in turn, are mere endpoints of transfer (as in ‘the child went to the house’). Goals are typically, yet not necessarily, inanimate participants.

The examined verbs have been divided into 4 major types based on the notions of caused motion and caused possession, as they are defined, e.g. by Rappaport Hovav & Levin (2008). Verbs like ‘give’ and ‘donate’ necessarily involve caused possession, while caused motion is an optional part of their semantics. Verbs like ‘send’, for their part, necessarily involve caused motion, while caused possession constitutes an important, but not entailed, part of their semantics. Verbs like ‘throw’, ‘kick’ and ‘put’ may be characterized solely by caused motion. However, these verbs can be divided into two based on whether a recipient participant can be present or not. Verbs like ‘throw’ and ‘kick’ may involve a recipient if the Goal is animate, as in cases like ‘the teacher threw the ball to the student’. This is not possible with verbs like ‘put’, which only involve caused motion.

Animacy and definiteness are in this paper understood as binary features; participants are either animate (e.g., ‘child’) or inanimate (e.g. ‘table’) or definite (the table) or indefinite (a table). As regards animacy, the focus lies on participants high on the animacy scale (i.e. humans).

The paper will show that Finnish (along with most other Uralic languages) uses case marking and postpositions for coding semantic roles, animacy and differences in verbal semantics (the discussed verbs most naturally take certain kinds of semantic roles). On the other hand, changes in linear order of R and T are more directly related to definiteness (even though they limitedly also express differences in semantic roles, but never animacy). The discussed semantic roles in turn differ from each other in that Recipient is exclusively coded by the allative case, while the coding of Goals is more heterogeneous and includes illative and allative cases and a variety of postpositions. Verbs, expectedly, display similar variation according to the semantic role they most naturally govern.

Reference

Rappaport Hovav, M. and B. Levin (2008). The English Dative Alternation: The Case for Verb Sensitivity. *Journal of Linguistics* 44: 129-167.