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The Semantics of the Inner and Outer Local Cases of Finnish

Helvi Temisevä

In 1936 Roman Jakobson published an extensive study on the Russian case system. In this study he presented a new approach in analyzing case. Looking for the invariant in the Russian case system lead him to the discovery of the semantic conceptual features which are the means to the end of language-communication. The pioneering work of Jakobson has inspired others to do similar studies in Russian and other languages as well.

Also the paper to be presented is the result of such an attempt to apply this approach to a language, specifically to the Finnish case system. The study was begun with the idea of finding the invariant meaning of the different case endings in the Finnish case system in order to discover their semantic conceptual features. Behind this immediate objective was, of course, a hope of finding the semantic structure of the Finnish case system.

The purpose of this paper is to show some of the results of this study by a) pointing out that the semantic conceptual features in the Finnish case system really forms a system that fits together into a perfectly functioning unity and b) particularly dealing with one specific part of the case system since the scope of this paper excludes a thorough presentation of the whole case system.

The Finnish Cases

Most grammarians agree that the Finnish case system consists of fifteen cases, but some consider the accusative case to be the same as the nominative and the genitive. The complementary distribution shown in the usage of these cases supports this latter stand, which also was accepted as basic to this study. To this merger, yielding 14 cases, is added the prolatative, which some grammarians consider to be a particle rather than an independent case.

In the following is presented a list of the Finnish cases in the order they usually are given in the grammar books; immediately after the case name is mentioned the semantic conceptual feature of each case. Following that, a diagram which shows how the cases with their semantic conceptual features form a functioning system will be presented. After that follows definitions of the four conceptual features that are found in the group of six cases which together form the so called inner and outer local cases: the inner cases, inessive, elative, illative and the outer cases, adessive, ablative, allative. These cases have been chosen to exemplify the system in this presentation. Finally I present minimal
pairs that give a binary comparison between the inner and outer local cases.

The cases and their semantic conceptual features:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Type</th>
<th>Semantic Conceptual Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominative</td>
<td>unmarked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitive</td>
<td>extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusative</td>
<td>same as genitive and nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partitive</td>
<td>objectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essive</td>
<td>objectiveness and extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translative</td>
<td>restrictedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inessive</td>
<td>dimensionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elative</td>
<td>dimensionality and restrictedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illative</td>
<td>dimensionality and extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adessive</td>
<td>transitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ablative</td>
<td>transitivity and restrictedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allative</td>
<td>transitivity and extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abessive</td>
<td>objectiveness and restrictedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comitative</td>
<td>duplication and extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructive</td>
<td>duplication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolative</td>
<td>duplication and restrictedness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let us now look at the diagram suggested to me by Dr. John S. Robertson. This diagram illustrates the function and distribution of the semantic conceptual features in the Finnish case system in a similar manner as the cube form used by Jakobson and others illustrate these factors in other languages. The diagram has three-dimensions with two flat intersecting planes. Each square plane is divided in four. The cases that show only one semantic conceptual feature are in the middle axis of the planes and the other cases that share the same feature are respectively on the corners of the planes.

From the above list and this diagram one can see that some cases share some conceptual features. Thus the outer local cases, adessive, ablative and allative, have transitivity as their common feature. The feature of objectiveness is shared by three cases, partitive, abessive and essive, and three other cases, instructive, comitative and prolate, share duplication. The inner local cases, inessive, elative and illative have dimensionality as their common feature. Restrictedness and extension are the most widely distributed semantic conceptual features in the Finnish case system. Both of them appear in five cases. Restrictedness is found in translative, elative, ablative, abessive and prolate. Extension is in accusative-genitive, illative, allative, essive and comitative.

The inner and outer local cases to which we now restrict our attention are situated on the vertical extreme axes of the diagram. The inner cases are on the right hand and the outer cases on the left hand vertical axis. As these cases show the semantic conceptual features of transitivity, dimensionality, extension and restrictedness, short definitions of these features follow below.
The Distribution of the Features

ABESSIVE
- objectiveness
- restrictedness
-tta

ABLATIVE
- transitivity
- restrictedness
-lta

TRANSLATIVE
- restrictedness
- ksi

ELATIVE
- dimensionality
- restrictedness
- sta

PARTITIVE
- objectiveness
- a
- ta

PROLATIVE
- duplication
- restrictedness
- itse

INSTRUCTIVE
- duplication
- n

ILLATIVE
- dimensionality
- extension
- length. vow.
+ n
- h + vow. + n
- seen
- siin

COMITATIVE
- duplication
- extension
- ine + poss. suff.

ADESSIVE
- transitivity
- lla

ESSIVE
- objectiveness
- extension
- na

ALLATIVE
- transitivity
- extension
- lle

ACCUSATIVE & GENITIVE
- extension
- n
Transitivity is the feature that gives one the least amount of information. It gives the notion of contact, manifestation, contrast or effect. The Finnish outer local case, adessive--with the case ending of -lla, -llä--has transitivity. Consider the following example: "Kirja on pöydällä.--The book is on the table." The book is lying on the table, in the surface of it. The book is not part of the table itself, but it is in touch, in contact with it. From this contact comes the notion of transitivity.

The feature of dimensionality gives what its name already indicates, the notion of dimensions. With dimensionality something is contained within something or within something's range. The inner local case inessive--case ending -ssa, -ssä--has dimensionality. "Kirja on laatikossa.--The book is in the box." Here one has the dimensions of the box. It is contained within the box.

The feature of extension (or goal or directionality as Jakobson calls it) requires a dual perception with an established relationship between the two and where one of the two entities is the goal or the point of focus. Allative, an outer local case--with the case ending -lle--has extension together with the feature of transitivity which is the feature that all the outer local cases share. Also illative--an inner local case with the case ending lengthened vowel plus -n; -h + vow. + n; -seen, -siin--has the feature of extension together with dimensionality which is the feature that is common to all the inner local cases. The following will exemplify the notion of this feature, extension: "Pane kirja pöydälle.--Put the book 'onto' the table." "Pane kirja laatikkoon.--Put the book into the box." In the first, the allative example, there is the dual perception of a book and a table. The table is the entity which is the point of focus. There is the book and the table, the notion of extension and transitivity. In the illustrative example the book and the box are the two objects that have a relationship established between them, the box being the goal or point of focus. The book is asked to be placed so that it will be contained by the dimensions of the box, and thus is given the notion of extension and dimensionality.

The feature of restrictedness which Jakobson calls marginality also requires a dual perception, where one of the perceptual entities is a "narrowed, cancelled, modified, exceptional, restricted, faded, peripheral, or an otherwise marginal version of the other." In this abridged form of the study, restrictedness appears only as the second feature of ablative, an outer local case with the case ending of -lta, -ltä, and of elative, an inner local case with the case ending of -sta, -stä. "Ota kirja pöydältä.--Take the book from the table." "Ota kirja laatikosta.--Take the book from the box." In the ablative example there is the dual perception of the book and the table, the book being in touch with the table, whereas in the elative example the book is contained by the dimensions of the box, but in either case the situation is not constant, the notion of restrictedness implies a change, an alteration of the state of being. The book will no longer remain where it was, the contact and the containment respectively will be cancelled.
Minimal Pairs in Inessive and Adessive

In the following I will present some minimal and near minimal pairs that will contrast the inner local cases with the corresponding outer local cases. Consider first this example:

Inessive: Tyttö kävi lähteessä, kaivossa, haudassa.--The girl visited "in" the spring, well, grave.
Adessive: Tyttö kävi lähteellä, kaivolla, haudalla.--The girl visited the spring, well, grave.

The inessive example really indicates that the girl was inside these places, in the spring surrounded by the water, in the well and in the grave, but the adessive example conveys the message that she went to the respective places and was in contact with them, for instance, by getting water from the spring or well, or by taking flowers to the grave.

Consider now an another example, a minimal pair which also shows dimensions and contact:

Inessive: Lapsi lepää maan povessa.--The child rests in the bosom of the earth.
Adessive: Lapsi lepää äitinsä povella.--The child rests on his mother's bosom.

In the inessive example the child is dead and buried, and is thus surrounded by the earth. This gives the feature of dimensionality, whereas in the adessive example there is the feature of transitivity. The child is in touch with his mother's bosom.

Here is another minimal pair where the features of dimensionality and transitivity are displayed.

Inessive: Isä on saunassa.--Father is in the sauna.
Adessive: Isä on saunalla.--Father is at the sauna.

In the inessive example the message is clearly this: Father is in the sauna taking a saunabath; he is inside in the building doing what the express purpose of the building indicates: taking a saunabath. Thus he is not only surrounded by the saunabuilding but he is contained by the 'ritual', the concept of sauna.

In the adessive example the message is less specific. Here father is not enclosed in any specific act. We know only that he is somewhere in the sauna surroundings, most likely doing something related to the saunabath--cutting wood for the heating of sauna, carrying water there, or maybe preparing the birchbundles. In the process of doing these things he might even shortly step in, but other than that he is only in contact with the building and the concept connected to it, but not surrounded by it.
Consider now this near minimal pair that contrasts the notion of containment given in dimensionality and the notion of contact given in transitivity.

Inessive: Kirkonpenkissä on aina tilaa.--There is always room "in" the church bench.
Adessive: Puistonpenkilla on aina tilaa.--There is always room on the park bench.

In this near minimal pair it is question of two different kinds of benches. The church benches, which are close together in rows and squares, and which in olden times where even provided with a small gate that let one into the pew, form a structural unity different from a separate, single park bench. This conceptual difference between the two kinds of benches can be seen through the use of the cases. The inessive brings out the idea of containment, the enclosed church benches, and the adessive the idea of mere loose contact, the open park bench.

In the following example it is to be noted that the Finnish word taivas is translated into English both as heaven and as sky.

Inessive: Taivaassa on enkeli.--There is an angel in heaven.
Adessive: Taivaalla on enkeli.--There is an angel in the sky.

In using the inessive case ending the concept taivas gets the dimension of an abode, a place wherein someone, in this case the angel, can be contained. The adessive ending changes the concept of dimensions to kind of an open display area, the sky, which the angel could be in contact with.

Minimal Pairs in Elative and Ablative

The next set of examples will contrast the inner local case, elative, with the corresponding outer local case, ablative. The elative like all inner local cases shows the feature of dimensionality and likewise ablative shows transitivity, the common feature of all the outer local cases. Besides these distinctive features the elative and the ablative share the common feature of restrictedness. With this in mind consider the following minimal pair.

Elative: Siirtolaiset lähtevät laivasta.--The emigrants leave "out of" the ship.
Ablative: Siirtolaiset lähtevät laivalta.--The emigrants leave the ship (surroundings).

In the elative example, the emigrants have been inside, contained by the dimension of the ship, but now they are getting out from there and thus the containment is cancelled. In the ablative example the emigrants are also leaving the ship but this time there is no clear clue whether they have been inside the ship at all. They have been in contact with the boat one way or other, maybe only as people coming
to bid farewell to someone aboard the ship, but now this contact is cancelled.

Here is another minimal pair using the same cases and thus displaying the same notions as the previous example.

Elative:  Hän tuli katosta.--He came through the ceiling.
Ablative: Hän tuli katolta.--He came from the roof.

In Finnish there is only one word for ceiling and roof. Katto is used for both. (Sometimes a distinction is made by adding the prefix sisä- meaning 'inner'.) Thus in the elative example the word can really mean either roof or ceiling.--or most likely both since the person is coming through some sort of an opening up there. In passing through he is surrounded by the concept of katto, and when he is through, this containment is cancelled. In the ablative example there is only one possible interpretation: the roof, since only by being on the roof he can be in contact with the surface called katto. And the notion of restrictedness is seen in the fact that this contact is cancelled.

Consider now one more minimal pair using the elative and the ablative. Even in this example of more abstract nature the notions of dimensions, contact, and cancellation are evident.

Elative:  Hän pelasti lapsen varmasta kuolemasta.--He saved the child from a sure death.
Ablative: Hän pelasti lapsen varmalta kuolemalta.--He saved the child from sure death.

In the elative example the child is already seen in the grip of death, maybe severely injured in a state where only a doctor's skill can save it. In the ablative example the child is only in a danger that would become fatal if the situation would continue uninterrupted. Maybe the child would have been hit by a car unless someone had acted. Thus the features of dimensionality, containment, and transitivity, contact, are clearly brought forth in this example of internal and external danger of death.

Minimal Pairs in Illative and Allative

The following group of examples will contrast the inner local case, illative, with the corresponding outer local case, allative. Also these cases have the same features of dimensionality and transitivity that has been shown in the other inner and outer local cases, and in addition to the other features they share as a common feature the feature of extension. Consider now this minimal pair:

Illative: Levitä lannoite perunamaahan.--Put the fertilizer into the potato field.
Allative: Levitä lannoite perunamaalle.--Put the fertilizer onto the potato field.
In both examples one can see a relationship between the fertilizer and the potato field, where the potato field is the goal. The notion of goal is given by the shared feature—extension. The difference is given by the other semantic features—dimensionality (illative) and transitivity (allative). The illative example implies that the fertilizer is going to be surrounded by the ground; it has to be plowed into the field. In the allative example the fertilizer is supposed to be brought in contact with the ground; it is spread on the surface.

Here is another minimal pair in illative and allative.

Illative: Luther kiinnitti teesinsä Wittenbergin linnankirkon oveen.—Luther attached his theses "into" the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral.

Allative: Luther kiinniitti teesinsä Wittenbergin linnankirkon ovelle.—Luther attached his theses at the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral.

This example perhaps more clearly than any of the previous ones presents the fact that the feature of dimensionality does not necessarily imply interiority. The notion of dimensions can be given by a finite area, for instance, as in this illative example, where the finite area of a door is the goal of the act of attaching. In the allative example the goal can as well be the door post or even the wall close by the door, i.e. some place that is in "touch" with the door.

Consider now two near minimal pairs which also convey the notions of dimension, contact and goal.

Illative: Orava hyppeli puusta puuhun.—The squirrel jumped from tree to tree.

Allative: Koiru juoksenteli puulta puulle.—The dog ran from tree to tree.

The squirrel is surrounded by the tree, its branches and foliage, whereas the dog is only in contact with the tree, its trunk; and both of them has a tree as the goal of their movement.

Illative: Meille laitettiin seinästä seinään ulottuva kokolattiamatto.—We got a whole carpet installed from wall to wall.

Allative: Meidän tauluja muutettiin seinältä seinälle.—Our pictures were moved from wall to wall.

In the illative example one sees the dimensions of a finite area whereas the allative gives the notion of contact. With one wall as the starting point the other wall was the goal, whether it then was for the carpet or the pictures.

A Few More Examples

To conclude the series of examples a minimal pair and a near minimal pair will be presented. The examples are given in nominative-allative and elative-illative cases.
Nominative-Ablative: Hän kulki talo talolta etsien poikaansa.--He went house by house looking for his son.

Elative-Illative: Hän kulki talosta taloon etsien poikaansa.--He went from house to house looking for his son.

In the first example the person searching is going from one house to another. He is in contact with the house by looking at it and perhaps walking in its surroundings but he does not enter in. This reflects the feature of transitivity. Then he cancels this contact by moving to the next house--feature of restrictedness. In the other example which uses the inner local cases the person also goes from one house to another but this time he enters into the house--dimensionality and extension--and steps out of it again--dimensionality and restrictedness.

This near minimal pair demonstrates the same idea:

Nominative-Ablative: Helmي helmeltä hän sormell rukousnauhaansa.--Bead by bead she fingered her rosary.

Elative-Illative: Hän siirtyi helmestä helmeen rukousnauhassaan.--She moved from bead to bead in her rosary.

In the first example there is smooth movement from bead to bead when a contact is established and cancelled, but in the other one each individual bead is "entered into" so to say as the fingers move around its dimensions, feeling it, and then move to the next bead.

Summary

This study, and particularly the wider study of the Finnish case system on which this presentation is based, has brought forth substantial evidence that the concept of the semantic conceptual features is a functioning fact even in a non Indo-European language. A systematic semantic structure is found in the Finnish case system.

Because of the delimitations necessarily required from a presentation of this nature the subject cannot be covered in greater detail or depth. However, even from such a limited scope of data it is evident that the Finnish case endings are signs that each in their own range carry the same conceptual meaning; they convey messages reasonably expressed in the terms of the semantic conceptual features.

Footnotes


4. As an interesting aspect which confirms the exactness of Dr. Robertson's presumption of this format for the Finnish case system, it has to be mentioned that while he was drawing the diagram he found that there was an empty corner left in the duplication-restrictedness level. He assumed that there was a lost case in the language, which assumption was confirmed by the former existence of a prolative case, and what more, the semantic conceptual features of this missing link—the prolative case—were found to be exactly what could be expected, namely, duplication and restrictedness.

5. Definition given by Dr. John S. Robertson, Fall Semester, 1976, at B.Y.U.

6. If any interest has been awakened towards the subject, reference can be made to the writer's recent Master's Thesis entitled: *The Semantic Conceptual Features in the Finnish Case System: the Inner and the Outer Local Cases.*