

“Deficient” Case Marking System of the Finnish Language*

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The Finnish language has three morphological cases that are available for core arguments. These three cases are the nominative, the genitive and the partitive. They do not have one-to-one relation to grammatical functions each core argument carries on. Although the Finnish language is abundant in morphological cases, the case marking system of core arguments seems to be partially deficient. However, the case assignment to core arguments can be straightforwardly explained by regarding the nominative as the default case for quantitatively definite arguments. The nominative case is assigned to all the core arguments that are quantitatively definite, irrespective of their grammatical function. Next, if there are both the subject and the object in one and the same clause, the nominative case of the object alternates with the genitive case. As for the syntactic interpretation, a nominative argument is interpreted as the subject by default. This is because the nominative is the case for the highest argument on the hierarchy of the grammatical functions. It can be regarded as the object only when the sentence in question does not have a subject. On the other hand, an argument marked in the genitive case is interpreted as the object except when it is followed by a non-finite predicate. This is because the genitive is the case available for dependents.

1. Introduction

In my previous papers (2006, 2009) I have argued the peculiarity of the case marking system of the Finnish language. What is peculiar is that the Finnish language has three morphological cases that are available for core arguments, i.e. the subject and the object. The first is the nominative case. This case is primarily employed to indicate the subject indeed, but the object can be sometimes indicated in the nominative case. The second is the genitive case. It is strange indeed that the Finnish language does not have the accusative case¹. But the object is marked in the genitive case anyway. Moreover, it is available not only for the object but for the subject. The third is the partitive case. This case is available for core arguments that are quantitatively indefinite, irrespective of their grammatical function².

All these things may suggest that the case marking system of core arguments of the Finnish language seems to be loose in spite of its rich case morphology. The grammatical functions conveyed by core arguments are very important to guarantee a proper interpretation of the sentence in question. Then, it would not be desirable that core arguments are marked in somewhat a loose manner. Then, we should clarify whether the case marking system of the Finnish language is really loose or not. If it is not loose at all, we should also clarify the principle according to which core arguments of the Finnish language are indicated.

2. Loose case marking system

The Finnish language is famous for its abundance of the morphological cases. In spite of this fact, the Finnish language is lacking in a straightforward way to determine the syntactic status of core arguments.

First of all, in the plural a core argument that is quantitatively definite is always marked in the nominative case irrespective of its grammatical function. Take the following for example:

- (1) *Kaikki oppilaat ovat lukeneet nämä kirjat.*
 all-nom. pupil-nom.pl. be-3.pl.pr. read-p.p. this-nom.pl. book-nom.pl.
 All the pupils have read these books.

In this sentence, both the plural arguments are in the nominative case. This nominative marking can be attributed to the modifiers *kaikki* and *nämä* which make the arguments quantitatively definite.

Secondly, when a possessive suffix is attached to a core argument, the distinction between the subject and the object is neutralized. For example:

- (2) *Kirjani on kadonnut jossain.*
 my book-nom.sg. be-3.sg.pr. lose-p.p. somewhere-iness.
 My book was lost somewhere.
- (3) *Unohdin kirjani kotiin.*
 forget-1.sg.p. my book-nom.sg. home-illat.sg.
 I left my book at home.

In these sentences, *kirjani*, the argument followed by a possessive suffix, keeps the same form, although it serves differently in each of the sentences.

Thirdly, when a core argument is a numerical phrase, it is marked in the same way irrespective of its grammatical function. Take the following for example:

- (4) *Kaksi karhua väeltää metsässä.*
 two-nom.sg. bear-part.sg. wander-3.sg.pr. forest-iness.sg.
 Two bears are wandering in the forest.
- (5) *Metsästäjät kaatoivat kaksi karhua.*
 hunter-nom.pl. knock down-3.pl.p. two-nom.sg. bear-part.sg.
 Hunters knocked down two bears.

The argument which consists of a numeral *kaksi* and a noun *karhu* has the same form in both of the sentences.

Moreover, when the subject is marked in the genitive case, also the object can sometimes be marked in the same case. Compare the following sentences.

- (6) *Metsästäjä kaatoi karhun.*
 hunter-nom.sg. knock down-3.sg.p. bear-gen.sg.
 The hunter knocked down the bear.
- (7) *Metsästäjän on pakko kaataa karhu.*
 hunter-gen.sg. have to-3.sg.pr. knock down-inf. bear-nom.sg.
 The hunter has to knock down the bear.
- (8) *Luulen metsästäjän kaataneen karhun.*
 think-1.sg.pr. hunter-gen.sg. knock down-p.p. bear-gen.sg.
 I think that the hunter has knocked down the bear.

In the sentence (6), both of the core arguments are marked as usual. That is, the subject is indicated in the nominative case and the object in the genitive case. In the sentence (7), however, what is marked in the nominative case is not the subject but the object. Since the subject is indicated in the genitive case, the cases seem to be reversed in this sentence. On the other hand, in the sentence (8), both the subject and the object are marked in the genitive case³.

All these things seem to indicate that the Finnish language has a somewhat loose case marking system. The choice between the nominative case and the genitive case is not necessarily prerequisite to distinguish the object from the subject.

3. Hypothesis

As for this loose system, it is possible to build up two hypotheses. One possibility is that the default case of the subject and the object is the nominative and the genitive respectively. The case marking of the grammatical functions changes only when some relevant condition is satisfied.

There is, however, an objection which can be raised against this hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, the nominative marking of the object is secondary, and it is necessary to clarify the reason the case marking changes from the genitive case to the nominative case. As a matter of fact, nominative objects can appear in various constructions. In the sentence (7) above, for example, the object *karhu* is marked in the nominative case. This is an example of the necessitative construction. The nominative case is employed to mark the object also in imperative sentences and impersonal passive sentences. For example:

- (9) *Kaataa karhu!*
 knock down-imp. bear-nom.sg.
 Knock down the bear!
- (10) *Karhu kaadettiin.*
 bear-nom.sg. knock down-pass.p.
 The bear was knocked down.

The sentence (9) is an imperative sentence and the sentence (10) is an impersonal passive sentence.

Moreover, the object of infinitives can be sometimes indicated in the nominative case. Take the following for example:

- (11) *Metsästäjällä on lupa kaataa karhu.*
 hunter-adess.sg. be-3.sg.pr. permission-nom.sg. knock down-inf. bear-nom.sg.
 The hunter has permission to knock down the bear.

In this sentence, *karhu*, the object of the first infinitive modifying the preceding noun, is marked in the nominative case.

From these examples it becomes clear that the syntactic environments in which the object can appear in the nominative case are diverse, and we cannot find anything common to these various kinds of nominative object. Then, it is difficult to explain the reason of the nominative marking of the object on the basis of the hypothesis stated above.

4. Another hypothesis

Another possibility is that the nominative is the default case not only for the subject but also for the object. This means that the nominative case has some other function than indicating a particular grammatical function, and the genitive case serves as the marked counterpart of the nominative case. If this is the case, at the first stage of the derivation, the nominative case is assigned to all the core arguments that are quantitatively definite, irrespective of their grammatical function. Next, if there are both the subject and the object in one and the same clause, the nominative case of the object alternates with the genitive case⁴. When the subject does not agree with the predicate, however, also the case marking of the subject itself changes from the nominative to the genitive case. This is the case where the predicate is non-finite. If there is only one argument in a clause, its case marking does not alter irrespective of its grammatical function. In other words, the sole argument is always indicated in the nominative case.

Needless to say, all these things do not apply to arguments which are quantitatively indefinite. Such arguments are invariably marked in the partitive case. This means that the primary distinction among core arguments is not between the subject and the object but between quantitatively definite and indefinite arguments. We should not overlook, however, that the subject has a stronger tendency to be quantitatively definite than the object. Then, it is a mistake to think that the distinction between the subject and the object is needless. As a matter of fact, it is only the nominative subject that can agree with the predicate. This fact will suffice to show that the subject has priority over the object. What has to be noticed, however, is that the precedence of the subject over the object is only relatively true in the Finnish language.

5. Analysis

The case marking pattern of various constructions can be successfully described by the approach stated in the last section. For example, in the subordinate clause of the sentence (8), the nominative case is first assigned both to the subject and to the object. The nominative case that is assigned to the object is, however, alternated with the genitive case, since it co-occurs with the subject. Moreover, the nominative marking of the subject is also changed into the genitive one, since the subordinate predicate is non-finite and the subject cannot agree with it. On the other hand, the nominative marking of the object in the sentences (9)–(10) is due to the fact that there is no overt subject. When the object does not co-occur with the subject, the nominative case assigned to the object remains unchanged.

The case marking pattern of the sentence (7) is somewhat problematic. The nominative marking of the object remains unchanged, although the object co-occurs with the subject in one and the same clause⁵. The point to observe is that the genitive-marked subject of the necessitative construction is optional. If such an optional subject is not counted as the co-occurred subject, the nominative marking of the object can be explained straightforwardly. That is, the object in question is originally marked in the nominative case and the case remains unchanged. On the other hand, the nominative marking of the optional subject changes, since the predicate corresponding to the subject is non-finite.

Moreover, this approach is also profitable for the explanation of the nominative marking of *karhu* in (11) above. The nominative marking can be straightforwardly explained by this approach, since the argument in question is the only argument in the clause whose head is the first infinitive *kaataa*. It may be possible to explain that the nominative marking of *karhu* is due to the preceding noun *lupa* which is also marked in the nominative case. Such explanation, however, is not available for the nominative object in the following sentence. That is:

- (12) *Metsästäjä tiesi suunnitelmasta kaataa karhu.*
 hunter-nom.sg. know-3.sg.p. plan-elat.sg. knock down-inf. bear-nom.sg.
 The hunter knew about the plan to knock down the bear⁶.

In this sentence, *karhu*, the object of the first infinitive, is marked in the nominative case, while the preceding noun *suunnitelma* is not in the nominative case but in the elative case⁷. The approach stated above, on the other hand, is still available to this case. The reason *karhu* is marked in the nominative case is that it is the only argument of the infinitival clause in question.

To sum up, according to this approach, the objects can be marked in the genitive case only when they have some property in common, that is to say, the co-occurrence with the essential subject in one and the same clause. Moreover, the nominative marking of the object in various syntactic constructions can be regarded as a natural consequence, since the nominative is the case assigned originally at the initial stage of derivation. The original nominative marking is maintained through the derivation unless otherwise specified.

6. Existential sentences

The question is, however, how we can distinguish between the subject and the object, when both are originally marked in the nominative case. What should be noticed here is that the nominative subject and the nominative object can be readily distinguished by checking whether the nominative argument in question agrees with the predicate. On the other hand, the distinction between the genitive subject and the genitive object depends on the existence of a non-finite predicate. That is, the genitive argument followed by a non-finite predicate serves as the subject, and otherwise it functions as the object.

Now let us consider the following sentence:

- (13) *Lapset leikkivät pihalla.*
 child-nom.pl. play-3.pl.pr. yard-adess.sg.
 The children are playing in the yard.

In this sentence the sole argument marked in the nominative case agrees in person and number with the intransitive predicate. Then, it can be regarded as the subject. In the following sentence, on the other hand, the noun 'children' follows the predicate. That is:

- (14) *Pihalla leikkii lapsia.*
 yard-adess.sg. play-3.sg.pr. child-part.pl.
 In the yard some children are playing.

The point to observe is that the noun 'children' is indicated in the partitive case and it does not agree with the predicate. As has been pointed out above, all the subjects are originally marked in the nominative case and the genitive case is the only alternative for the subject. Then, the noun marked in the partitive case cannot be regarded as the subject. Since the predicate *leikkiä* 'to play' is intransitive, it cannot serve as the object, either.

If this is the case, however, what function does the partitive argument of the sentence (14) carry on? To answer this question, it would be useful to compare the sentence (14) with the following existential sentence. That is:

- (15) *Pihalla on lapsia.*
 yard-adess.sg. be-3.sg.pr. child-part.pl.
 In the yard there are some children.

Also in this sentence the sole core argument *lapsia* is marked in the partitive case. It does not agree in person and number with the preceding intransitive predicate. Then, it is fair to say that the sentence (14) is a kind of existential sentence. Opinions are divided on the syntactic status of the sole argument of existential sentences. But it is possible to assume that the distinction between the subject and the object is neutralized⁸.

In existential sentences the argument after the predicate can also be marked in the nominative case. Take the following for example:

- (16) *Pihalla on lapsi.*
 yard-adess.sg. be-3.sg.pr. child-nom.sg.
 In the yard there is a child.

The argument after the predicate is indeed marked in the nominative case but it does not agree with the predicate, since the predicate of existential sentences is always in the third person singular. As is stated above, the nominative argument that does not agree with the predicate cannot be regarded as the subject. Needless to say, it cannot be considered to be the object, either. But, if the argument in question is neither the subject nor the object, why is it marked in the nominative case? This fact can be properly accommodated by slightly revising the approach stated above. That is, at the first stage of the derivation, the nominative case is assigned to all the subjects, and to all the other core arguments that are quantitatively definite as well⁹. Moreover, all the core arguments excepting the subject are invariably marked in the partitive case, if their referent is quantitatively indefinite.

7. Plural and numerical arguments

The question which we must consider next is why the syntactic object cannot be marked in the genitive case in the plural. The following serves as an example:

- (17) *Oppilas on lukenut nämä kirjat.*
 pupil-nom.sg. be-3.sg.pr. read-p.p. this-nom.pl. book-nom.pl.
 A pupil has read these books.

In this sentence what serves as the subject is the nominative singular argument *oppilas*, since it agrees with the predicate. Then, the other argument following the predicate should be considered to be the object. The point to observe is that the latter argument is marked in the nominative case. According to the approach stated above, the case marking of the object should be changed from the nominative case to the genitive case, if the object co-occurs with the subject in one and the same clause. Thus, we should clarify the reason the nominative marking of the object in question remains unchanged.

While the plural object in question is quantitatively definite indeed, plural objects are usually considered to be quantitatively indefinite. Then, the partitive marking is a default alternative for plural objects. This means that the nominative marking of plural objects is highly exceptional. On the other hand, the double nominative marking in one and the same clause is exceptional in itself. Then, it is possible to assume that the double nominative marking is a means to indicate a highly exceptional character of the plural object in question. To put it the other way round, the default indefinite interpretation of plural objects can be emphasized by abandoning the genitive marking. What is available for plural objects are the partitive and the nominative. If a plural object is marked in the nominative case, the case marking of the sentence ends up to the double nominative marking, which is highly exceptional. Then, in most cases plural objects are marked in the partitive case. This partitive marking leads to the default indefinite interpretation of plural objects.

Another question is why a numerical phrase functioning as the object cannot be marked in the genitive case. Take the following for example:

- (18) *Metsästäjät kaatoivat kaksi karhua.*
 hunter-nom.pl. knock down-3.pl.p. two-nom.sg. bear-part.sg.
 Hunters knocked down two bears. (=5)

In this sentence the numeral of the numerical phrase serving as the object is marked not in the genitive case but in the nominative case, although it co-occurs with the subject marked in the nominative case. To consider this question, we should not overlook that a numerical head is always in the singular, in spite of its plural meaning. In other words, a numerical head is in the singular in form but in the plural in meaning. Thus a numerical head can be regarded as a *de facto* plural object. If this is the case, one can explain the unavailability of the genitive case along the same line applied to the plural object of the sentence (17) above.

8. Word order and syntactic interpretation

We should admit, however, that the syntactic interpretation of core arguments cannot be determined by merely considering their morphological cases, if both the subject and the object are in the nominative plural or contain a numeral in the nominative case. Take the following for example:

- (19) *Kaikki oppilaat ovat lukeneet nämä kirjat.*
 all-nom. pupil-nom.pl. be-3.pl.pr. read-p.p. this-nom.pl. book-nom.pl.
 All the pupils have read these books. (=1)
- (20) *Kolme metsästäjää kaatoi kaksi karhua.*
 three-nom.sg. hunter-part.sg. knock down-3.sg.p. two-nom.sg. bear-part.sg.
 Three hunters knocked down two bears.

In both of the sentences, one can decide that the argument preceding the predicate is the subject, only on the basis of the meaning conveyed by each sentence. In other words, we should recourse to the meaning in order to determine the syntactic status of each argument in these sentences. The subject before the predicate and the object after the predicate are the preferred word order of the Finnish language indeed. But the subject and the object can often be inverted. Then, in these sentences the word order cannot serve as a decisive factor for the syntactic interpretation of the core arguments.

However, the word order can sometimes serve as a clue to the syntactic interpretation. As mentioned above, both the subject and the object can be marked in the genitive case in subordinate non-finite clauses. For example:

- (21) *Luulen metsästäjän kaataneen karhun.*
 think-1.sg.pr. hunter-gen.sg. knock down-p.p. bear-gen.sg.
 I think that the hunter has knocked down the bear. (=8)

Since the two arguments are identical in their case marking, the case marking alone cannot determine the syntactic interpretation. What should be noticed here is, however, that the word order of a genitive subject and a non-finite predicate is relatively fixed. This is because the relation between a genitive subject and a non-finite predicate corresponds to the relation between a genitive possessor and a noun in noun phrases. Just in the same way as a genitive possessor precedes a nominal head, a genitive subject precedes its verbal head, i.e. a non-finite predicate.

Moreover, if the nominative before the predicate and the genitive or the partitive after the predicate are the unmarked word order of the Finnish language, it follows that the nominative after the predicate shows an unusual character of the sentence in question. In fact, many constructions, including the necessitative construction and existential sentences, have a marked word order. This point deserves explicit emphasis.

In the necessitative construction, for example, the nominative argument never agrees with the predicate. This means that the nominative argument after the predicate cannot be regarded as the subject. The following serves as an example:

- (22) *Metsästäjän on pakko kaataa karhu.*
 hunter-gen.sg. have to-3.sg.pr. knock down-inf. bear-nom.sg.
 The hunter has to knock down the bear. (=7)

Considering the meaning conveyed by the sentence in question, it is clear indeed that the argument preceding the predicate is the subject. But it is theoretically possible that the syntactic subject does not coincide with the semantic one. If the linear order of the arguments can serve as a clue to the syntactic interpretation, however, one can reasonably conclude that the core argument preceding the predicate is the syntactic subject in spite of its genitive marking. The other core argument, on the other hand, would be interpreted as the syntactic object, even if it is marked in the nominative case.

By the way, the genitive argument of the necessitative construction can sometimes be omitted. For example:

- (23) *Karhu on pakko kaataa.*
 bear-nom.sg. have to-3.sg.pr. knock down-inf.
 The bear should be knocked down.

In this sentence the nominative argument preceding the predicate should be regarded as the object. This means that neither the nominative marking nor the word order is sufficient for interpreting the argument in question as the subject. Since *on pakko*, the predicate of the sentence (23), is impersonal, the nominative argument cannot agree with it. Then, it is the non-agreement with the predicate that serves as a clue for the syntactic interpretation of this sentence.

9. Concluding remarks

From what has been said above, the case assignment to core arguments can be

straightforwardly explained by adopting the second hypothesis stated in the section 4. It becomes also clear that the case marking system of the Finnish language is partially deficient, in that the case marking is not always sufficient to determine the syntactic interpretation. What is important is, however, the case marking is a primary factor for the syntactic interpretation all the same.

First of all, an argument marked in the nominative case is interpreted as the subject by default. It can be regarded as the object only when it does not agree with the predicate. On the other hand, an argument marked in the genitive case is interpreted as the object except when it is followed by a non-finite predicate. Moreover, an argument marked in the partitive case is interpreted as the object by default.

However, it remains an unsettled question what is the basic function of each case. Since the nominative case can indicate both the subject and the object, it must carry out some other function than indicating a particular grammatical function. The same is true of the genitive case. If the second hypothesis is valid, it can be said that the nominative is the default case for quantitatively definite arguments and the genitive is its marked counterpart. The question is how we can validate this claim on the safe and sound basis.

Since the nominative is the morphologically simplest case, it would be reasonable to assume that it marks the highest argument on the hierarchy of the grammatical functions. On the other hand, the genitive is the case available for dependents. It is employed to indicate not only a nominal modifier preceding a nominal head but also a nominal complement of a postposition. Then, we can safely expect that an argument, a dependent of a verbal head, will be marked in the genitive case¹⁰. That is:

- (24a) *talon katto*
 house-gen.sg. roof-nom.sg.
 the roof of the house
- (24b) *talon edessä*
 house-gen.sg. in front of-postp.
 in front of the house
- (24c) *He löysivät talon palaneen.*
 they-nom. find-3.pl.p. talo-gen.sg. burn down-p.p.gen.
 They found that the house had burnt down.
- (24d) *He purkivat talon.*
 they-nom. tear down-3.pl.p. house-gen.sg.
 They tore down the house.

In (24c), a dependent *talo* precedes its verbal head *palaneen*, while it follows the verbal head *purkivat* in (24d).

What is important to note is that the two cases are competing with each other as for the case marking of core arguments. In fact, in (24d) the argument following the predicate is marked in the genitive case, while another argument is marked in the nominative case. Since

the genitive is the case for dependents, the argument marked in the genitive case constitutes a verb phrase together with its verbal head. This means that the argument in question serves as the object. On the other hand, since the nominative is the case for the highest argument on the hierarchy of the grammatical functions, the argument marked in the nominative case can be interpreted as the subject.

When there is only one argument, however, the genitive case is not available. Take the following for example:

- (25) *Talo purettiin.*
 house-nom.sg. tear down-pass.p.
 The house was tore down.

This means that the nominative case has precedence over the genitive case. Even if the argument in question serves as the object, it is marked in the nominative case. This may be because the sole argument can be easily associated with the predicate and need not be marked overtly. Moreover, it is worth while noting that there is no agreement in this sentence. Then, it follows that this sentence lacks the subject. Thus, the nominative case here can be interpreted as indicating the second highest argument on the hierarchy of the grammatical functions, i.e. the object.

Notes

- * This research was supported by a grant-in-aid for scientific research (C): 2009–2012, No. 21520435, from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, Government of Japan.
- 1 At the earlier stage of the language nouns had a distinct accusative form indeed, but later the accusative and the genitive fused into the same form.
 - 2 The quantitative definiteness means that the referent in question is indivisible. We should not mix it up with the qualitative definiteness. For further details of the definiteness in the Finnish language, see Chesterman (1991) and Itkonen (1980), for example.
 - 3 If the matrix predicate of the sentence (8) is in the passive voice, the object of the subordinate clause is marked in the nominative case. That is:
 - i) *Luultiin metsästäjän kaataneen karhu.*
 think-pass.p. hunter-gen.sg. knock down-p.p. bear-gen.sg.
 It was thought that the hunter had knocked down the bear.
 This means that the case marking of arguments in subordinate clauses is sometimes determined under the influence of the matrix predicate. As a matter of fact, a matrix predicate can determine the case marking of a deeply embedded argument. For example:
 - ii) *Me uskottiin Pekan haluavan olla voittamassa kilpailu.*
 we-nom. believe-pass.p. P-gen. want-pr.p.gen. be-1.inf. win-3.inf.iness. competition-nom.sg.
 We believed that Pekka would want to be winning the competition. (Brattico (2010))
 In this sentence, *kilpailu*, the object of the third infinitive, is marked in the nominative case, since the matrix predicate *uskottiin* is in the passive voice. The matrix predicate is, however, located far away from the object in question across three non-finite predicates. See also the notes 5 and 6 below.
 - 4 In the Finnish language the pronominal subject can be omitted when it agrees with the predicate. Though it is not overtly expressed, the omitted subject counts as a co-occurred argument. This is the reason the object of the following sentence is marked in the genitive case. That is:
 - i) *Olen kaatanut karhun.*
 be-1.sg.pr. knock down-p.p. bear-gen.sg.
 I have knocked down the bear.
 - 5 According to the standard interpretation, *metsästäjän* and *karhu* in the sentence (7) are contained in one and the same clause, since *metsästäjän* can be interpreted as the subject of the first infinitive *kaataa*. However, there can be another interpretation where *metsästäjän* serves as the subject of the necessive predicate *on pakko*. If this is the case, *metsästäjän* is outside the infinitival clause and we can explain the nominative marking of the object *karhu* more

straightforwardly. That is, it is marked in the nominative case, since it is the only argument of the infinitival clause in question.

- 6 In (12), *karhu*, the object of the first infinitive, can be marked also in the genitive case, since it co-occurs with the matrix subject in the nominative case. This means that an infinitival clause modifying the preceding noun is not necessarily counted as an independent domain in which the case marking of arguments is determined.

- 7 Similar examples are abundant. Take the following for example:

- i) *Pekka hermostui jatkuvista pyynnöistä löytää avain.*
 P-nom.sg. get nervous-3.sg.p. continuous-clat.pl. request-elat.pl. find-1.inf. key-nom.sg.
 Pekka got nervous of continuous requests to find the key. (Brattico (2010))

In this sentence, *avain*, the object of the infinitive is indicated in the nominative case, even though the preceding noun *pyynnöistä* is marked in the elative case.

- 8 For a discussion of existential sentences in the Finnish language, see Tiainen (1997), for example.
 9 We should admit that there are some examples which are difficult to explain. For example:

- i) *Eilen satoi ensilumen.*
 yesterday rain-3.sg.p. first snow-gen.sg.
 Yesterday we had the first snowfall.

In this sentence there is not a nominative argument. Then, if the hypothesis discussed here is correct, we should expect *ensilumi* to be in the nominative case. It is worth while noting, however, that 'the first snow' can also be marked in the nominative case in a similar context. That is:

- ii) *Ensi lumi satoi Lappiin tavanomaiseen aikaan.*
 first snow-nom.sg. rain-3.sg.p. Lapland-illat.sg. usual-illat.sg. time-illat.sg.
 In Lapland the first snow fell as usual. (Hakulinen et al. (2004: 450))

- 10 A dependent of a nominal head is sometimes marked in the partitive case. For example:

- i) *kuppi kahvia*
 cup-nom.sg. coffee-part.sg.
 a cup of coffee

What should be noticed here is that the dependent does not precede but follows its head. Moreover, a nominal head followed by a dependent in the partitive case corresponds to a verbal head followed by a dependent in the partitive case. That is:

- ii) *Juon kahvia.*
 drink-1.sg.pr. coffee-part.sg.
 I drink some coffee.

Needless to say, this dependent counts as the partitive object.

Abbreviations

nom.—nominative	gen.—genitive	part.—partitive	iness.—inessive
illat.—illative	elat.—elative	adess.—adessive	sg.—singular
pl.—plural	pr.—present	p.—past	inf.—infinitive
pr.p.—present participle	p.p.—past participle	pass.—impersonal passive	imp.—imperative
postp.—postposition			

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