

## On the Pseud-object in the Finnish Language

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Verbs can be divided into two subgroups. One is transitive and the other is intransitive ones. However, the distinction between these two subgroups is not necessarily clear-cut. As a matter of fact, some intransitive verbs of the Finnish language can optionally take an object-like argument. This additional element cannot be counted as one of the arguments required by the matrix predicate. Then, it should be treated as a pseud-object. It is indeed true that a pseud-object has some semantic relations to its matrix predicate, but the semantic relations between them are not so direct that one should infer the correlation between them from their lexical meanings. Transitive sentences describe rather a causal action than a resultant state. On the other hand, intransitive sentences can only represent a resultant state, since they have only one argument. What is characteristic of a pseud-object is that it is formally a second argument but it is substantially not. Thus, sentences containing a pseud-object are results-oriented, but some additional informations can also be expressed together with a resultant state.

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### 1. Introduction

Verbs are generally divided into two subgroups: transitive and intransitive ones. However, the distinction between these two subgroups is not necessarily clear-cut, since the transitivity each verb has is not 'all or nothing' in nature. Rather to say, it is a matter of degree. In other words, verbs can be put in the hierarchy which shows a gradual decrease in the transitivity from the top-most transitive verbs to the bottom-most intransitive ones. This is also true for the Finnish language<sup>1</sup>.

A Finnish verb *kiistellä* is regarded as an intransitive predicate, since the second argument of this verb is marked not in one of the objective cases but in the elative case. That is:

- (1) Eduskunta                      kiistel-i                      {budjeti-sta / \*budjetti-a}.  
parliament-NOM.SG dispute-3.SG.PST budget-ELA.SG budget-PART.SG  
The parliament disputed the budget.

In the Finnish language a past participle passive of an intransitive predicate cannot function as an adjectival modifier. This is reasonable because intransitive predicates do not have an object to be modified. Compare the following two examples:

- (2a) Joku                                      kaato-i                      puu-n.  
someone-NOM.SG fell-3.SG.PST tree-GEN.SG<sup>2</sup>

Someone felled a tree.

(2b) kaade-ttu puu  
 fell-PST.PTCP.PASS-NOM.SG tree-NOM.SG  
 a felled tree

(3a) Puu kaatu-i.  
 tree-NOM.SG fall-3.SG.PST  
 A tree fell.

(3b) \*kaadu-ttu puu  
 fall-PST.PTCP.PASS-NOM.SG tree-NOM.SG  
 a fallen tree (intended meaning)<sup>3</sup>

However, this does not hold true for the verb *kiistellä*. Take the following for example:

(4) kiistel-ty budjetti  
 dispute-PST.PTCP.PASS-NOM.SG budget-NOM.SG  
 the disputed budget

This example shows that the verb *kiistellä* has some transitive properties and it is not a genuine intransitive predicate. The same is also true for some other intransitive predicates<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the question is what the differences between transitive and intransitive predicates are.

What is more problematic is that some intransitive verbs can optionally take an object-like argument. Take the following for example:

(5) Suome-n nuor-ten joukkue ratsast-i  
 Finnish-GEN.SG youth-GEN.PL team-NOM.SG ride-3SG.PST  
 EM-pronssi-a.  
 European Championship bronze medal-PART.SG  
 The Finnish youth team rode to get the European Championship bronze medal.  
 (Hakulinen et al.: 457)

The verb *ratsastaa* 'to ride' is intransitive indeed, but in the sentence (5) it takes a noun phrase *EM-pronssia* as its pseud-object<sup>5</sup>. Another example is:

(6) Koko ruumii-ni sykki odotusta ja kaipausta.  
 whole body-NOM.SG-1SG beat-3SG.PST expectation-PART.SG and longing-  
 PART.SG  
 My whole body beat with expectation and longing. (ibid.)

The verb *sykkiä* 'to beat' is followed by a noun phrase in the partitive case, *odotusta ja kaipausta*.<sup>6</sup> Since the partitive is one of the objective cases, the verb *sykkiä* in this sentence functions apparently as a transitive predicate. This noun phrase is, however, a pseud-object, since the verb is intransitive by nature.

What should be noticed here is that a pseud-object in these sentences cannot be counted as one of the arguments required by the matrix predicate. It is indeed true that the pseud-

objects have some semantic relations to their matrix predicate, but the semantic relations between them are not so direct that one should infer the correlation between them from their lexical meanings. This amounts to say that what is described in these sentences is not necessarily a single event.

The purpose of this paper is to reconsider the distinction between transitive and intransitive predicates. What matters to the distinction will be the structure of the described event in each sentence, since the difference in the number of the participants is the most basic distinction by definition.

## 2. Transitivity hierarchy

The semantic relationship between two arguments of a transitive predicate can vary according to the degree of affectedness. When a verb denotes a physical contact between two arguments, one of the arguments is highly affected by the other one. This is because a physical contact may cause an irreversible change to one of the two participants, at least. In this case, the semantic role one argument carries on is an agent and that the other argument does is a patient. On the other hand, when a contact between two participants is indirect, their semantic roles may be something other than an agent or a patient. Take the following for example:

- (7) Joku                    hakka-si      puu-n.  
 someone-NOM.SG cut-3SG.PST tree-GEN.SG  
 Someone cut a tree.
- (8) Joku                    katso-o            televisio-ta.  
 someone-NOM.SG watch-3SG.PRES. television-PART.SG  
 Someone is watching television.

In (7) the contact between the two participants is direct, while that in (8) is indirect.

Another type of semantic relation does not entail a contact between two arguments, since the referent of one argument does not exist at all before some action has been executed by the referent of the other argument. In other words, the referent of the former is brought into existence through the action designated by an accompanying predicate. This kind of argument is sometimes called an incremental theme and the semantic relation described in sentences containing it is rather results-oriented than action-oriented. For example:

- (9) Joku                    raken-si            sauna-n.  
 someone-NOM.SG build-3SG.PST sauna-GEN.SG  
 Someone built a sauna.

In this sentence a causal action 'to build a sauna' is described indeed, but a resultant state of the causal action is also represented by the object.

### 3. Pseud-object: case #1

Let us now consider the sentences (5)–(6) again. The semantic structure of the verb *ratsastaa* and the verb *sykkiä* can be satisfied by a single argument. Because of this, introducing an additional argument causes a change in the semantic structure. Although the added argument bears a semantic relationship with the existing argument, a particular setting, e.g. riding on a horse in the European Championship games, is required for these sentences to be properly interpreted. This requirement makes the pseud-object be kept apart from the rest of the sentence. Then, it is reasonable to state that in the sentence (5) the pseud-object ‘a bronze (medal)’ should be regarded as a subsidiary consequence of the performed action ‘to ride on a horse (excellently)’. The same observation applies to the pseud-object of the sentence (6). This means that the transitivity of the predicates of these sentences is not high enough for them to be regarded as genuine transitive predicates.

### 4. Pseud-object: case #2

The followings show another type of examples where an intransitive predicate takes an additional argument. That is:

(10) Polku            kuhise-e            muurahais-i-a.  
 path-NOM.SG swarm-3SG.PRES ant-PART.PL  
 The path is swarmed with ants. (Hakulinen et al: 458)

(11) Puutarha        surise-e            mehiläis-i-ä.  
 garden-NOM.SG buzz-3SG.PRES bee-PART.PL  
 The garden buzzes with bees. (ibid.)

(12) Haava            vuota-a            ver-ta.  
 wound-NOM.SG seep-3SG.PRES blood-PART.SG  
 Blood seeps from a wound. (ibid.)

The predicates *kuhista* ‘to swarm’, *subista* ‘to buzz’ and *vuotaa* ‘to seep’ are intransitive verbs indeed, but all of the instances in (10)–(12) have two arguments. What should be noticed here is that it is not an object but a subject that is added to these sentences. This can be proved by comparing these sentences with the following ones. That is:

(10') Muurahaise-t    kuhise-vat.  
 ant-NOM.PL    swarm-3PL.PRES  
 Ants swarm.

(11') Mehiläise-t    surise-vat.  
 bee-NOM.PL    buzz-3PL.PRES  
 Bees buzz.

- (12') Veri vuota-a.  
 blood-NOM.SG seep-3SG.PRES  
 Blood seeps.

The added argument of the sentences (10)–(11) indicates where the event described by the sentences (10')–(11') can be located. On the other hand, the added argument of the sentence (12) represents the source from which blood seeps. This means that the added arguments can be regarded neither as an actor participant nor as an undergoer participant.

It is important to note that what is described in the sentences (10)–(12) can be paraphrased respectively as in (10''), (11'') and (12''). That is:

- (10'') Polu-lla kuhise-e muurahais-i-a.  
 path-ADE.SG swarm-3SG.PRES ant-PART.PL  
 Ants swarm on the path. (Hakulinen et al: 458)
- (11'') Puutarha-ssa surise-e mehiläis-i-ä.  
 garden-INE.SG buzz-3SG.PRES bee-PART.PL  
 Bees buzz in the park. (ibid.)
- (12'') Haava-sta vuota-a ver-ta.  
 wound-ELA.SG seep-3SG.PRES blood-PART.SG  
 Blood seeps from a wound. (ibid.)

The predicates of these sentences (10'')–(12'') do not convey a transitive but an existential meaning. It is indeed true that there are some differences in meaning between (10)–(12) and (10'')–(12''). A causal relation can be more readily inferred from the former sentences than from the latter ones. Thus, what is described in (10)–(12) is not a spontaneous emergence of the referent of the object. Rather, the emergence of the referent of the object should be interpreted as a result of some causal event. However, the transitivity of the predicates cannot be high, since the referent of their subject is always inanimate and cannot function as a real causer. In other words, what is designated by the predicates is not a volitional action intending to change the state of the referent of the objects. Thus, the object of these sentences should be regarded rather as a pseud-object.

### 5. Pseud-object: case #3

In the Finnish language there is a sentence type called resultative construction. The following serves as an example. That is:

- (13) Hän maala-si seinä-t vihre-i-ksi.  
 she-3NOM paint-3SG.PST wall-NOM.PL green-TRA.PL  
 She painted the walls green.

In this sentence the complement 'vihreiksi' describes a resultant state of the referent of the object. In other words, the object has a predicative relation with the complement. Since the

predicate is transitive, not only a resultant state but also a causal action is described in this sentence. The referent of the object is a target the designated action 'to paint' is directed to.

On the other hand, the predicate of the following sentence is intransitive, although it is followed by two nominals marked in the same case as those of the sentence (13). That is:

- (14) Hän            kävel-i            kengä-t            kelvottom-i-ksi.  
 she-3NOM walk-3SG.PST shoe-NOM.PL. miserable-TRA.PL  
 She walked until she wore her shoes out.

In this sentence the complement *kelvottomiksi* describes a resultant state of the preceding nominal *kengät*, but the latter is not a target of the designated action. Thus, it should be treated as a pseud-object, although it is marked in one of the cases available for the object. Needless to say, the transitivity this predicate has is almost as low as intransitive predicates in general.

## 6. Pseud-object: case #4

Let us now compare the following two sentences. That is:

- (15a) Joku                    ahta-a                    kärry-n                    pu-i-lla  
 someone-NOM.SG load-3SG.PRES pushcart-GEN.SG log-ADE.PL  
 Someone load a pushcart with logs.
- (15b) Joku                    ahta-a                    puu-t                    kärry-yn  
 someone-NOM.SG load-3SG.PRES log-NOM.PL pushcart-ILL.SG  
 Someone load logs into a pushcart.

The verb *ahdata* 'to load' is a transitive predicate. This verb can take either a container or its content as its object. A container should be regarded as a primary object, however, since the verb means literally 'to get some place crowded'. Then, 'logs' are not immediate targets of this predicate. If this is the case, the argument structure of the sentence (15b) is less regular than that of the sentence (15a). What should be noticed here is that the object 'puut' and the complement 'kärryyn' constitutes a predicative relation in (15b). This means that a resultant state is described separately in this sentence from a causal action 'to load some place with something'.

The same is also true for the following sentences. That is:

- (16a) Joku                    hakka-a                    nyrki-llä                    lasiove-a.  
 someone-NOM.SG hit-3SG.PRES fist-ADE.SG glass\_door-PART.SG  
 Someone hits a glass door with his fist.
- (16b) Joku                    hakka-a                    nyrkki-ä-än                    lasiove-en  
 someone-NOM.SG hit-3SG.PRES fist-PART.SG-3SG glass\_door-ILL.SG  
 Someone hits his fist against a glass door.

(17a) Joku                      tyhjentä-ä              pullo-n              vede-stä.  
 someone-NOM.SG empty-3SG.PRES bottle-GEN.SG water-ELA.SG  
 Someone empties a bottle of water.

(17b) Joku                      tyhjentä-ä              vede-n              pullo-sta.  
 someone-NOM.SG empty-3SG.PRES water-GEN.SG bottle-ELA.SG  
 Someone empties the water out of a bottle.

The verb *hakata* means ‘to hit something by using some instrument’. Then, (16a) is a more basic realization of the argument structure. Also, the sentence (17a) is a more neutral representation of the described event, since the verb *tyhjentää* means ‘to get some place empty’.

The predicates of (15)–(17) are transitive indeed, but the transitivity those of the (b)-sentences have is lower than that of the transitive predicates in general. This means that the predicates of the (b)-sentences are downgraded in the hierarchy of transitivity.

### 7. Pseud-object: intermediate between genuine object and theme argument

From what has been said above, it becomes clear that predicates can be upgraded or downgraded in the transitivity hierarchy by changing their argument structure. However, it is not the case that an intransitive predicate changes into a full-fledged transitive predicate and vice versa. What is common to all the instances mentioned above is that a resultant state caused by a designated action is described. A resultant state can be represented solely by a pseud-object as in (5)–(6) and (10)–(12), but a combination of a pseud-object and a complement is also available to represent a resultant state as in (14)–(17). In the latter case, a pseud-object can be interpreted as a semantic subject of the following complement. In the former, on the other hand, a pseud-object cannot constitute a subject-predicate relation. Instead, mere existence of a pseud-object entails some result. To put it in another way, what is represented by a pseud-object is an entity newly introduced through some causal event. What should be noticed here is that a post-verbal theme argument of existential sentences represents an entity newly introduced to a discourse. This means that there are some similarities between a pseud-object in question and a post-verbal theme argument of existential sentences.

As a matter of fact, morphological cases available for a post-verbal theme argument of existential sentences are also available for an object and a pseud-object. To indicate a post-verbal theme argument of existential sentences, there are two alternatives. They are the partitive case and the nominative case and the former is a more unmarked alternative. The nominative case is chosen on condition that the sentence containing the argument in question is affirmative and that the referent of the argument itself is quantitatively definite. As for an object and a pseud-object, the genitive case is also available in addition to the nominative and the partitive case. This is indeed a difference between a post-verbal theme argument of existential sentences and an object, but the alternation of cases can be explained mostly in the same way. First, the most unmarked alternative for an object is the partitive case. The genitive case is available only when the two conditions mentioned above and an additional condition is fulfilled<sup>7</sup>. The additional condition is that the aspectual meaning of the sentence containing the object in

question should be bounded. This additional condition does not deserve to be counted as a difference, however, since it is irrelevant to aspectless existential sentences in the first place. Then, one can safely state that the conditions concerning the case alternation are substantially the same between objects and post-verbal theme arguments of existential sentences.

The question is why objects of transitive sentences and post-verbal theme arguments of existential sentences are treated alike as for the case marking. Needless to say, these two types of sentence are different from each other in many respects. First of all, existential sentences are not transitive in the least. Existential predicates are located at farthest away from typical transitive predicates in the hierarchy of transitivity.

The difference between the two extremes seems to be very large and cannot be filled up by anything. However, a sentence containing a pseud-object may serve as a bridge between them. In typical transitive sentences what is described is primarily a causal action triggered by a direct contact between an agent and a patient indeed, but a resultant state of the referent of a patient is also implied in these sentences. A resultant state caused by some causal action can be indicated more explicitly by employing an objective complement. In fact, both a causal action and a resultant state are described in the resultative construction. On the contrary, it is not always the case that both a causal action and a resultant state are represented in one and the same sentence. In the sentences (14) and (15b)–(17b), a pseud-object does not bear a direct semantic relationship with the preceding predicate. This means that a causal action is described only implicitly in these sentences.

By the way, if an objective complement is essential to indicate a resultant state, it becomes that it is rather difficult to refer to a resultant state without utilizing an objective complement. However, a pseud-object can indicate it solely by itself, because of the very fact that it is separated from the preceding predicate indicating a causal action, as the sentences (5)–(6) show.

On the other hand, the sentences (10)–(12) do not represent a causal action any more. Since a causal action is a prerequisite for a resultant state, these sentences do not describe a resultant state, either. What is described in these sentences is a transient situation. It is indeed a state that is indicated in existential sentences, but they do not require that any causal action should precede, either. Moreover, some existential predicates can be characterized rather as a verb of transient situation than as a verb of static state. Thus, one can safely state that the sentences (10)–(12) are only apparently similar to transitive sentences and they substantially convey the same kind of meaning as existential sentences. This means that the pseud-object of the sentences (10)–(12) is an intermediate between a transitive object and a theme argument of existential sentences.

## 8. Concluding remarks

From what has been said above it becomes clear that sentences containing a pseud-object are results-oriented and the pseud-object is semantically separated from the matrix predicate describing a causal action. This means that predicates taking a pseud-object are transitive only formally.



Transitive sentences describe rather a causal action than a resultant state. On the other hand, intransitive sentences can be results-oriented indeed, but they can only represent a resultant state, since they have only one argument<sup>8</sup>. What is characteristic of a pseud-object is that it is formally a second argument but it is substantially not. Thus, sentences containing a pseud-object can mainly express a resultant state together with some additional informations.

### Notes

- 1 For the relationship between transitive and intransitive predicates, see Haspelmath (1993), for example.
- 2 In the Finnish grammar, the morphological case ending in *-n* is traditionally called the accusative, when it functions as an object. In this paper, however, I treat it as the genitive case, irrespective of its syntactic function. For further details of the case marking pattern of the Finnish language, see Sakuma (2011) and Sakuma (2014), for example.
- 3 The equivalent expression for ‘a fallen tree’ is *kaatumut puu*. In this phrase *kaatunut* is not a past participle passive but a past participle active.
- 4 There are other verbs which take an elative argument and the past participle passive of which can modify a following noun. They are, for example, *keskustella* ‘to talk’, *vaieta* ‘to keep silent’ and *puhua* (*paljon*) ‘to talk (much)’. For further details, see Hakulinen et al. (2004: 523–524).
- 5 In English the verb ‘to ride’ is both intransitive and transitive. In Finnish, however, the verb *ratsastaa* is intransitive and the object of ‘to ride a horse’ is marked not in one of the objective cases but in the adessive case.
- 6 In English the verb ‘to beat’ can take an object. But the Finnish verb *sykkiä* cannot. To express ‘to beat a drum’, for example, another verb *lyödä* is utilized.
- 7 As for the objects, the genitive case is an alternative preferred to the nominative case. This is because transitive sentences usually have a subject marked in the nominative case. The nominative case is available for objects only when there is not a subject marked in the nominative case.
- 8 Intransitive predicates can be divided into two subgroups. One is unaccusative ones and the other is unergative ones. As for the latter predicates, what is described is not a resultant state but a volitional action.

### Abbreviations

|                |                 |              |                 |              |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| ADE—adessive   | ELA—elative     | GEN—genitive | ILL—illative    | INE—inessive |
| NOM—nominative | PART—partitive  | PASS—passive | PL—plural       | PRES—present |
| PST—past       | PTCP—participle | SG—singular  | TRA—translative |              |

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