

On the Diachronic Development of the Permissive Construction in the Finnish Language*

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In the Finnish language there is a type of sentence called the permissive construction. This construction conveys the meaning 'to permit someone to do something'. It contains a first infinitive as its verbal complement and the semantic subject of the infinitive is overtly expressed in the genitive case. The most characteristic feature of this construction is that the semantic subject of the verbal complement is controlled neither by the matrix subject nor by the matrix object. The meaning conveyed by the permissive construction is similar to that conveyed by the object control construction indeed. But they are morpho-syntactically distinct from each other. The diachronic development of the permissive construction has been largely influenced rather by the necessitative construction. This can be shown by the fact that the former construction has much in common with the latter one. Above all, the genitive case of the infinitival subject of the permissive construction goes back to the dative genitive case in old Finnish, and the same is true of the necessitative construction. This is one of the reasons the genitive marking of the permissive construction has remained unchanged.

1. Introduction

In the Finnish language, there are four types of infinitives. Among them, the short form of the first infinitive can be used as a verbal complement of a matrix predicate. For example:

- (1) *Aion mennä naimisiin.*
intend-1sg.pr. go-1inf. married
I am going to get married.

In principle the subject of the first infinitive is the same as that of the matrix predicate. On the other hand, the third infinitive used as a verbal complement takes the matrix object as its subject. The following serves as an example:

- (2) *Pyysin talonmiehen korjaamaan putken.*¹
ask-1sg.p. caretaker-gen.sg. repair-3inf.illat. pipe-gen.sg.
I asked the caretaker to repair the pipe.

In this sentence *talonmiehen*, the subject of the third infinitive in the illative case, functions at the same time as the object of the matrix predicate. These examples make it clear that the form of a verbal complement is determined, depending on whether its subject refers to the same entity as the matrix subject or not. If the referent of the subject of a verbal complement is the same as that of the matrix subject, the short form of the first infinitive is chosen, but otherwise

the third infinitive is a suitable form for the verbal complement.

The short form of the first infinitive, however, can sometimes take an overt subject whose referent is different from that of the matrix subject. Take the following for example:

- (3) *Äiti antoi lapsen valvoa tavallista pitempään.*
 mother-nom.sg. allow-3sg.p. child-gen.sg. sit up-1inf. later than usual
 Mother allowed the child to sit up later than usual.

The point to observe is that the subject of the first infinitive is overtly indicated in the genitive case. Even when the subject of the first infinitive refers to a plural entity, it is still marked in the genitive case. For example:

- (4) *Äiti antoi lasten valvoa tavallista pitempään.*
 mother-nom.sg. allow-3sg.p. child-gen.pl. sit up-1inf. later than usual
 Mother allowed the children to sit up later than usual.

In the Finnish language the object cannot be marked in the genitive plural case. Then, it is clear that this subject, *lasten*, cannot be regarded as the object of the matrix predicate. In addition, if it were the matrix object, it would be difficult to explain why the verbal complement in (4) is not a third infinitive but a first infinitive.

Sentences like (3) and (4) are called the permissive construction². This construction conveys the meaning 'to permit someone to do something'. The question is that the permissive construction seems to deviate in many respects from other constructions taking an infinitive as their verbal complement. The purpose of this paper is to investigate peculiarities of the permissive construction and to follow its diachronic development.

2. The *anna sen tehdä* construction

Matrix predicates available in the permissive construction are highly restricted. Possible candidates for a matrix predicate are *antaa*, *käskeä* *sallia*, *suoda* and marginally *luvata*³. This means that the permissive construction is not as common as other constructions containing an infinitive.

According to Leino (2003), the permissive construction has developed mainly from the *anna sen tehdä* construction. A course of the diachronic development can be summarized as follows. In the original construction the verb *antaa* had an ordinary meaning 'to give'. The object of the verb *antaa* served as that of the infinitive *tehdä* at the same time. In modern Finnish this infinitive, meaning the purpose of 'giving' denoted by the matrix predicate, corresponds to *tehdäkseen*, the long form of the same infinitive. Take the following for example:

- (5) **Anna minun ruokaa syödä.*⁴
 give-2sg.imper. I-gen. food-part.sg. eat-1inf.
 Give me some food to eat.

The following is a present-day Finnish version of this sentence. That is:

- (6) *Anna minulle ruokaa (minun) syödäkseni.*
 give-2sg.imper. I-allat. food-part.sg. I-gen.sg. eat-1 inf.transl.

Along the way of the diachronic development, however, the original construction was reanalyzed. After the reanalysis, *ruokaa* in (5) is no longer the matrix object, although it still functions as the object of the infinitive. As a result of the reanalysis the word order has also changed as can be seen from the following sentence. That is:

- (7) *Anna minun syödä ruokaa.*
 allow-2sg.imper. I-gen. eat-1inf. food-part.sg.
 Let me eat some food.

The matrix object *ruokaa* of the original sentence (5) was postposed to the infinitive *syödä*. This sentence has the same structure as the present-day permissive construction.

In the original construction the allative case was also available to indicate the semantic subject of the infinitive. This is reasonable since its referent is the recipient of the verb *antaa* at the same time and the allative case typically indicates a recipient. The question is rather why the recipient, *minun* for example, was marked in the genitive case. At an older stage of the Finnish language it was common that the genitive case was used in the meaning of the allative case to mark a so-called ‘dative adverbial’. The genitive case in this usage is called traditionally the dative genitive. Then, this is the reason the genitive case is used in the original sentence (5).

Being reanalyzed, however, the matrix predicate lost its literal meaning ‘to give’. This means that the semantic subject of the infinitive needs a new reason for the dative genitive marking. On the other hand, in present-day Finnish the dative genitive has already become extinct. Then, the form of *minun* in (7) cannot be regarded as the dative genitive case. If this is the case, what is the reason for the genitive marking of *minun* in (7)? We shall return to this question concerning the genitive marking of the permissive construction in Section 4.

3. The *anna se olla* construction

As Leino(2003) argues, the *anna se olla* construction is also relevant to the diachronic development of the permissive construction. One of the differences between this construction and the above-mentioned *anna sen tehdä* construction is in the transitivity of the infinitive. That is to say, the infinitive of the former construction is intransitive, while that of the latter construction is transitive. Moreover, the semantic subject of the infinitive of the *anna se olla* construction is not a volitional agent. In this respect this construction is different both from the *anna sen tehdä* construction and from the permissive construction. Not being a volitional agent, the semantic subject of the infinitive was often indicated in one of the objective cases. The following serves as an example:

- (8) **Alastomat andawat he maata pacaísesa peittämätä.*⁵
 naked-nom.pl. make-3pl.pr. they-nom. lay-1inf. frost-iness.sg. cover-3inf.abess.

They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. (Job 24: 7, Finnish translation of the Bible (1642) cf. Leino (2005: 90))

In this 17th century sentence the semantic subject of the infinitive, *alastomat*, is marked in the nominative plural case. Then, it is possible to consider it to function as the matrix object at the same time, since the nominative plural case can indicate not only the subject but also the object in the plural. If this is the case, the sentence (8) is parallel to the so-called object control construction. The nominative plural marking of the semantic subject of the infinitive is, however, ungrammatical in present-day Finnish. The permissive construction is not an exception. Take the following, a present-day Finnish version of the sentence (8), for example:

- (9) *He antavat alastomien maata pakkasessa peittämättä.*
 they-nom. make-3pl.pr. naked-gen.pl. lay-1inf. frost-iness.sg. cover-3inf.abess.

In this sentence the semantic subject of the infinitive is indicated in the genitive plural case. As we have seen above, the genitive plural case is not available for objects. This means that the semantic subject of the infinitive of the sentence (9) cannot be interpreted as the matrix object.

Now a question arises. What is the cause of this diachronic change? Due to this change, the permissive construction has no parallel to the object control construction anymore. Such a derivation is indeed possible, but what should be noticed is that the object control construction does exist in present-day Finnish. The sentence (2), repeated here for convenience as the sentence (10), serves as an example:

- (10) *Pyysin talonmiehen korjaamaan putken.*
 ask-1sg.p. caretaker-gen.sg. repair-3inf.illat. pipe-gen.sg.
 I asked the caretaker to repair the pipe.

This sentence has a third infinitive as its verbal complement. Its semantic subject also functions as the matrix object. Then, this sentence can be regarded as an instance of the object control construction.

The difference between this construction and the *anna se olla* construction like (8) lies only in the form of their verbal complement. Only if the first infinitive of the sentence (8) had changed into a third infinitive, the sentence would have remained parallel to the object control construction. In the actual development, however, not the verbal complement but its subject was altered in form. The nominative plural marking of (8), for example, has changed into the genitive plural marking. As is commonly known, in present-day Finnish the semantic subject of an infinitive is in principle marked in the genitive case. Then, this change is in accord with the regularity of present-day Finnish indeed. But it remains an unsettled question why in the first place the semantic subject of the infinitive has to be marked in the genitive case. Before moving on to this question, however, a few remarks should be made concerning the first question: The reason the first infinitive has remained unchanged.

It is generally agreed that the third infinitive is a later development, compared to the first infinitive. It has also been pointed out by many scholars that these two types of infinitive are

complementary to each other⁶. The third infinitive has developed from the first infinitive to indicate the active voice, while the passive voice has been left in charge of the first infinitive. What is relevant to the active and passive distinction mentioned here is whether or not the infinitive is accompanied by the overt semantic subject. In other words, the third infinitive is available when its semantic subject is overtly expressed. If this is the case, however, the first infinitive of the sentence (8) should have changed into the third infinitive, since it is preceded by the overt semantic subject.

Leino (2003: 294–295) argues that the active and passive distinction is not relevant to intransitive predicates, since they have only one argument. This means, however, that the third infinitive is an equally possible alternative for the verbal complement of the sentence (8). Moreover, as is commonly known, the subject of some intransitive predicates shows object-like properties. This type of subject is called unaccusative, as contrasted with unergative. Then, it is theoretically possible to distinguish these two types of intransitive subject. Concerning unaccusative predicates, the third infinitive is not available, since they have a passive-like meaning. But it is difficult to explain why not only unaccusative predicates but also unergative predicates did not undergo the alternation from the first infinitive to the third infinitive.

The same is true of the above-mentioned *anna sen tehdä* construction. In the sentence (7), for example, the verbal complement is in the active voice. As we noted before, at an older stage of the language, *minun* was regarded solely as a matrix argument. But it functions clearly as the semantic subject of the infinitive, after the reanalysis has happened. Then, it is impossible to say that the verbal complement of the sentence (7) is in the passive voice. In spite of this fact, however, the verbal complement of the sentence (7) is not the third infinitive but the first infinitive.

It is worth noting that the semantic subject of the infinitive is not always expressed overtly. Especially in old written Finnish, the semantic subject was always left out, when the meaning conveyed was ‘have someone do something’. For example:

- (11)**Herodes anda Johannexen caulan leicata.*
 Herod-nom. give-3sg.pr. John-gen. neck-gen.sg. cut-1inf.
 Herod has John beheaded. (Preface to Matt. 14, Finnish translation of the Bible (1642), cf. Leino (2005: 91))

This 17th century sentence is lacking for the overt semantic subject and the verbal complement can be considered to be in the passive voice. Then, this may be the reason the alternation from the first infinitive to the third infinitive was blocked in this sentence. However, as to the *anna sen tehdä* construction in general, this explanation is unavailable.

To sum up, the fact that the permissive construction has a first infinitive as its verbal complement is very problematic from a diachronic point of view at least. In addition, the fact that the verb *käskeä* can take both a first infinitive and a third infinitive as its complement is also confusing. Take the following for example:

- (12a) *Poliisi käski meidän poistua paikalta.*
 police-nom.sg. order-3sg.p. we-gen. go away-1inf. spot-ablat.sg.

- The police ordered us to go away from the spot.
 (12b) *Poliisi käski meitä poistumaan paikalta.*
 police-nom.sg. order-3sg.p. we-part. go away-3inf.illat. spot-ablat.sg.
 The police ordered us to go away from the spot.

There seems to be no essential difference between these two constructions. Among others, Leino (2003: 35–37) pointed out that the former construction with a first infinitive is preferred in a formal style of language. In other words, the latter construction makes an impression that it is more colloquial than the former one. This means that these two constructions are only stylistically different⁷.

4. The genitive marking of the permissive construction

Let us now return to the question of why the semantic subject of the infinitive of the permissive construction is marked in the genitive case. The genitive marking has become standard in present-day Finnish, but at older stages of the language there were several alternatives for the cases available to indicate the semantic subject. These alternatives included the genitive, the allative and the objective cases, while there were changes in the preferred alternative(s)⁸.

As we have seen before, in the *anna sen tehdä* construction the semantic subject was originally marked either in the dative genitive case or in the allative case. On the other hand, in the *anna se olla* construction it was indicated in one of the objective cases. What are referred to as the objective cases include the nominative, the genitive and the partitive case, but the genitive plural is an exception.

Let us begin with the dative genitive marking of the *anna sen tehdä* construction. Before the reanalysis happened, the semantic subject of the infinitive functioned as the recipient of the matrix predicate. The dative genitive is a suitable case for a recipient indeed, but after the reanalysis it was not a recipient anymore. The question is the reason the case marking did not change in spite of the reanalysis.

It is important to note that the dative genitive was identical in form to the genitive case. No doubt the dative genitive does not exist anymore in present-day Finnish, but it is difficult to identify the exact point when the dative genitive has become obsolete. Then, it is possible that for the time being the genitive case was in fact the dative genitive even after the reanalysis happened.

As a matter of fact, the dative genitive was used to indicate not only a recipient but also an experiencer argument. Let us consider the so-called necessitative construction. In this construction the semantic subject of the infinitive is indicated in the genitive case. For example:

- (13) *Sotilaiden täytyi tyhjentää palatsi.*
 soldier-gen.pl. must-3sg.p. evacuate-1inf. palace-nom.sg.
 The soldiers had to evacuate the palace.

In this sentence *sotilaiden*, the semantic subject of the infinitive, is marked in the genitive plural case. This genitive is in fact a remnant of the old dative genitive. It has been pointed out that the necessitative construction also underwent a reanalysis⁹. The following is the original construction of the sentence above. That is:

- (14) **Palatsi täytyi sotilaiden tyhjennettäväksi.*
 palace-nom.sg. be filled-3.sg.p. soldier-gen.pl. evacuate-pr.p.pass.transl.
 The palace was to be evacuated by the soldiers.

In the original construction the object of the infinitive functioned as the subject of the whole sentence and the semantic subject of the infinitive, on the other hand, served as an experiencer argument. This means that the dative genitive was available also for an experiencer argument.

There is another illustration of the dative genitive marking of an experiencer argument. Take the following for example:

- (15) *Minun on jano.*
 I-gen. be-3sg.pr. thirst-nom.sg.
 I am thirsty.

In this sentence *minun*, the first person singular pronoun in the genitive case, indicates an experiencer who feels thirsty, although in present-day Finnish the adessive case is a more usual alternative¹⁰. This genitive is also a relic of the old dative genitive case. Then, if the semantic subject of the infinitive of the permissive construction can be interpreted as an experiencer argument, its marking in the genitive case can be straightforwardly explained. It is difficult, however, to show that with a sound basis.

What should be noticed here is that the genitive marking of the necessitative construction is stable. While the genitive case in (15) has gradually given way to the adessive case, there is no indication that the genitive may be replaced by some other case in the necessitative construction. The reason of this stability may be that it is regular in present-day Finnish for the subject of a non-finite predicate to be marked in the genitive case. If this is the case, the reason of the genitive marking of the permissive construction may be explained in the same way.

This explanation applies not only to the descendant of the *anna sen tehdä* construction but also that of the *anna se olla* construction. Without considering this regularity, it is difficult to explain why the objective marking of the *anna se olla* construction has abandoned. Among the objective cases only the genitive singular has survived. On the other hand, although the genitive plural is not the objective case, it has become to indicate the semantic subject of the infinitive. This means that being genitive was a decisive factor in the case alternation of the *anna se olla* construction.

5. The necessitative construction

It is true that in present-day Finnish the subject of a non-finite predicate is regularly marked in the genitive case. However, it seems inappropriate to depend so much on this regularity. Generally speaking, it is desirable that the explanation be as definite as possible. The

explanation relying on this regularity is too vague to be sufficiently definite.

Let us now consider again the necessitative construction. The point to observe is that the necessitative construction and the permissive construction have much in common¹¹. First, we should not overlook that both of the constructions have a first infinitive as their verbal complement. Secondly, as we noted before, in both of the constructions the semantic subject of the infinitive is marked in the genitive case. This genitive is in fact a remnant of the dative genitive case, which has become obsolete in present-day Finnish. Thirdly, both of the constructions underwent a reanalysis. Fourthly, before reanalyzed, the first infinitive was interpretable as meaning a purposeful event in both of the constructions. This is evident from the fact that the first infinitive in the original constructions can be paraphrased with a present participle passive in the translative case. Let us compare a paraphrase of the sentence (5), repeated here as the sentence (16a), and the sentence (14) above. That is:

- (16a) **Anna minun ruokaa syödä.*
 give-2sg.imper. I-gen. food-part.sg. eat-1inf.
 Give me some food to eat.
- (16b) **Anna minun ruokaa syötäväksi.*
 give-2sg.imper. I-gen. food-part.sg. eat-pr.p.pass.transl.

Both in (14) and (16b) a present participle passive in the translative case is involved. This participle serves as an adverbial adjunct. This means that the first infinitive of both constructions was not originally a verbal complement. Finally, prior to the reanalysis, the object of the first infinitive was a matrix argument. In the necessitative construction it was the matrix subject that later developed into the object of the infinitive. In the permissive construction, on the other hand, it was the matrix object.

These observations have shown that the similarity found between the two constructions is by no means an accident. Since the necessitative construction has a much wider distribution than the permissive construction, it seems reasonable to suppose that the diachronic development of the latter construction was under the influence of the former construction.

We should not overlook that meanings conveyed by these two constructions partially, at least, overlap each other. Used as a matrix predicate of the permissive construction, *antaa* presupposes the realization of the content conveyed by its verbal complement. Take the following for example:

- (17)?*Kuningas antoi sotilaiden tyhjentää palatsin, mutta nämä eivät tyhjentäneetkään.*
 king-nom.sg. allow-3sg.p. soldier-gen.pl. evacuate-1inf. palace-gen.sg. but
 they-nom. not evacuate-p.p.
 The king let the soldiers evacuate the palace, but they did not evacuate. (Leino (2003: 36))

In the latter half of this sentence the presupposed content is cancelled. This is the reason the sentence is questionable at best¹². What is important is that the same is true of the necessitative construction. For example:

- (18)? *Sotilaiden täytyi tyhjentää palatsi, mutta nämä*
 soldier-gen.pl. must-3sg.p. evacuate-1inf. palace-nom.sg. but they-nom.pl.
eivät tyhjentäneekään.
 not evacuate-p.p.
 The soldiers had to evacuate the palace, but they did not evacuate.

This sentence too is questionable, since the presupposed content of the infinitival complement is also cancelled.

The correspondence of the permissive construction to the necessitative construction can be schematized as follows:

[The permissive construction]	
Anna minun ruokaa <i>syötäväksi</i> .	Anna minun <i>syödä</i> ruokaa.
dative genitive case	→ genitive case
<i>present participle passive</i>	→ <i>first infinitive</i>
Palatsi täytyi sotilaiden <i>tyhjennettäväksi</i> .	Sotilaiden täytyi <i>tyhjentää</i> palatsi.
[The necessitative construction]	

6. Concluding remarks

What is the most peculiar feature of the permissive construction is that it coexists with the object control construction that conveys a similar meaning. In present-day Finnish, the latter construction has a much wider distribution than the former one. The permissive construction has developed from several related constructions, including the *anna sen tehdä* construction and the *anna se olla* construction. As to the latter construction, the only difference from the object control construction is the form of the infinitive. Then, changing the infinitive is sufficient enough to convert the *anna se olla* construction into the object control construction. In the *anna sen tehdä* construction, on the other hand, not only the form of the infinitive but also the case marking of its semantic subject is different from the object control construction. But the operation changing the former to the latter is not so complicated. For all the similarities, however, neither the *anna sen tehdä* construction nor the *anna se olla* construction has developed into the object control construction. The question is what has prevented such a development. The fact that the permissive construction has much in common with the necessitative construction may be the answer to this question. The conversion from the first infinitive to the third infinitive was restrained, since the necessitative construction has a first infinitive as its verbal complement. Concerning the *anna sen tehdä* construction, the genitive marking of the semantic subject of the first infinitive was preserved, since in the necessitative construction the semantic subject of the infinitive is also marked in the genitive case. The reason the objective case has changed into the genitive case in the *anna se olla* construction, on the other hand, may also be explained by an analogical influence of the necessitative construction.

Notes

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- 1 According to the traditional grammar, the *-n* case assigned to the object in the singular is called the accusative. The so-called accusative case is, however, identical in form with the genitive case in the singular and with the nominative case in the plural. Only the personal pronouns have a distinct accusative form. Then, in this paper, I don't use the term 'accusative' as to nominals other than the personal pronouns.
 - 2 For a detailed discussion of the diachronic development of the permissive construction, see Leino (2003). On the permissive construction in general, see Hakulinen et al. (2004: 498–499), Ikola (1978: 30–32) and Siro (1964: 95–96), for example.
 - 3 The verbs are listed in the order of frequency in use. In the majority of instances it is *antaa* that is used as the matrix predicate. On the other hand, *suoda* is extremely low in frequency in present-day Finnish. This verb was mainly used in religious context at an earlier stage of the language.
 - 4 Here and henceforth an asterisk means obsolescence.
 - 5 The *-t* case assigned to the object in the plural is called the accusative in the traditional grammar. However, for the same reason mentioned in the note no. 2, I don't use the term 'accusative' in this paper as to nominals other than the personal pronouns.
 - 6 For a detailed discussion of the active and passive distinction mentioned here, see Leino (2003: 291–298).
 - 7 On this point, see also Sakuma (1997).
 - 8 For further details of the differences among the periods of the history of the language, see Leino (2003).
 - 9 On the diachronic development of the necessitative construction, see Hakulinen (1968: 443), for example.
 - 10 In the Finnish grammar sentences like (15) are called *kokijalause*. This term means 'experiencer sentence' in English.
 - 11 The fact that there are some correspondences between the permissive construction and the necessitative construction has been pointed out in literature. See, for example, Hakulinen et al. (2004: 878).
 - 12 If the matrix predicate is *käskää*, the sentence is grammatical. That is:
 - i) *Kuningas käski sotilaiden tyhjentää palatsin, mutta nämä eivät tyhjentäneetkään.*
king-nom.sg. order-3sg.p. soldier-gen.pl. evacuate-1inf. palace-gen.sg. but they-nom. not evacuate-p.p.
The king ordered the soldiers to evacuate the palace, but they did not evacuate. (Leino (2003: 36))
The difference in grammaticality can be attributed to the difference in meaning conveyed by *antaa* and *käskää*.

Abbreviations

nom.—nominative	gen.—genitive	part.—partitive	transl.—translative
iness.—inessive	illat.—illative	allat.—allative	ablat.—ablative
abess.—abessive	sg.—singular	pl.—plural	pr.—present
p.—past	inf.—infinitive	pr.p.—present participle	p.p.—past participle
pass.—passive	imper.—imperative		

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