

Causative Psych-Predicates in the Finnish Language

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0. Introduction

In the Finnish language there is a type of sentence whose predicate is a so-called causative psych verb. For example:

(1) *Pimeys pelottaa minua.*

darkness-nom.sg. frighten-3.sg.pr. I-part.

I am afraid of darkness.

Since the predicate is a causative verb, the sentence (1) means literally 'Darkness frightens me.' Then, the subject of this sentence is *pimeys*, a preverbal argument marked in the nominative case and the object is *minua*, a postverbal argument marked in the partitive case. Now, let us consider the following sentence. That is:

(2) *Minua nukuttaa.*

I-part. feel sleepy-3.sg.pr.

I am sleepy.

What grammatical function does the first person pronoun carry out in this sentence? Since the predicate *nukuttaa* is also a causative verb, it is indeed possible to consider the first person pronoun marked in the partitive case to be the object of this sentence. In this sentence, however, there is not a nominative marked causer corresponding to *pimeys* in the sentence (1). Then, some grammarians regard the first person pronoun as the subject of the sentence (2). Grammatical treatment of a sentence containing a causative psych-predicate has long been controversial among researches of the Finnish language¹⁾. The purpose of this paper is to present a plausible grammatical analysis of a sentence like (2).

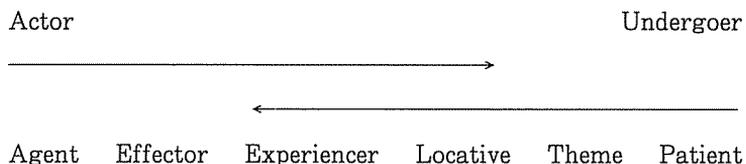
1. Semantic macroroles and case assignment in the Finnish language

Before turning to a closer examination of causative sentences, I shall outline here the way morphological cases are assigned to core arguments in the Finnish language. In many languages the case used to indicate a subject is different from that used to

indicate an object. In this respect, it seems peculiar that the same set of cases, i.e. the nominative, the genitive and the partitive, is available to indicate both a subject and an object in the Finnish language. However, the difference in the case marking between the Finnish language and many other languages is not so large as it looks.

In my previous papers (2003a, 2003b, 2003c), I argued that the case marking of core arguments in the Finnish language can be suitably explained by utilizing the concept 'semantic macrorole'. This concept comprises two macroroles: the actor and the undergoer. They correspond to the two primary arguments of a transitive predicate. They are 'macro' roles because each subsumes a number of specific thematic roles. It is difficult to determine how many thematic roles should be posited for the linguistic theory, but it is certain that there is a cline among the thematic roles. Van Valin(1993:44) proposed the following Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy. That is:

(3) Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy



This hierarchy says simply that "the argument bearing the thematic relation that appears leftmost on the cline will be the actor and that the argument bearing the thematic relation that appears rightmost on it will be the undergoer (ibid)." In many languages actor arguments are uniformly indicated in the nominative case, while undergoer arguments are equally marked in the accusative case.

This is not the case in the Finnish language indeed, but it is also true of the Finnish language that the nominative case is typically assigned to actor arguments. The difference between the Finnish language and many other languages is that the nominative case can be assigned not only to actor arguments functioning as a subject but also non-actor arguments including an object. What should be noticed here is that typical undergoer participants cannot be marked in the nominative case. This means that the nominative in the Finnish language is the case available for core arguments except typical undergoer participants. It must also be noted that a typical actor argument of a non-finite predicate is always marked in the genitive case. The nominative case is not available for it.

On the other hand, in the Finnish language, undergoer arguments functioning as an object are marked either in the genitive case or in the partitive case²⁾. Although the genitive is the case available only for typical undergoer participants, the partitive can be used to indicate arguments other than typical undergoer participants. Typical actor participants, however, cannot be marked in the partitive case. Then, the distribution of the partitive case is a mirror image of that of the nominative case. That is, the partitive is the case available for core arguments except typical actor participants. Thus the case marking of core arguments in the Finnish language can be schematized as follows:

(4)

Actor	→	←	Undergoer
GENITIVE			GENITIVE
NOMINATIVE		NOMINATIVE	
		PARTITIVE	PARTITIVE
Subject	→	Non-Subject	←
		Non-Object	Object

The following examples will suffice to show that this schema would apply in principle to any core argument in the Finnish language. That is:

(5) *Pekka kirjoittaa kirjeen.*

P-nom. write-3.sg.pr. letter-gen.sg.

Pekka is going to write a letter.

(6) *Pekka kirjoittaa kirjettä.*

P-nom. write-3.sg.pr. letter-part.sg.

Pekka is writing a letter.

(7) *Kirje kirjoitettiin.*

letter-nom.sg. write-pass.p.

A letter was written.

(8) *Sinun täytyy kirjoittaa kirje.*

you-gen.sg. must-3.sg.pr. write-inf. letter-nom.sg.

You have to write a letter.

(9) *Lapset leikkivät pihalla.*

child-nom.pl. play-3.pl.pr. yard-adess.sg.

Children are playing in the yard.

- (10) *Pihalla leikkii lapsia.*
yard-adess.sg. play-3.sg.pr. child-part.pl.

In the yard children are playing.

- (11) *Pihalla on lapsia.*
yard-adess.sg. is-3.sg.pr. child-part.pl.

In the yard there are some children.

The core arguments in these sentences can be plotted on the Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy. In the following diagrams the asterisks roughly indicate each core argument's relative position on the hierarchy.

Typical actor ←————— → Typical undergoer

(5) Pekka(nom)		kirjeen(gen)
*		*
(6) Pekka(nom)		kirjettä(part)
*		*
(7)	kirje(nom)	
		*
(8) sinun(gen)		kirje(nom)
*		*
(9) lapset(nom)		
*		
(10)	lapsia(part)	
	*	
(11)	lapsia(part)	
	*	

2. Three-place causative predicates

Let us now look at causative predicates in the Finnish language in detail. If there is considerable validity to the argument above, case assignment in causative sentences could be explained in the same way.

A causative predicate is derived from a verbal stem by adding to it a causative suffix *-ttaa/-ttää*. Causative predicates can be categorized into two subgroups. That is, three-place predicates on the one hand and two- or one- place psych-predicates on the other hand.

The arguments that a three-place causative predicate takes are the causer, the

Attacks by terrorists are still frightening European tourists.

In this sentence the verb *pelottaa* is in the third person plural form, since the causer *terrori-iskut* is in the plural. The causee argument, on the other hand, is indicated in the partitive case in both of the sentences (14) and (15). Then, it is indeed possible to regard the causee argument as the object.

Two-place causative psych-predicates can sometimes take an animate causer as their argument⁴⁾. The following serves as an example:

- (16) *Pelotan häkissä asustavat kanit.*
 frighten-1.sg.pr. cage-iness.sg. live-pr.p.-nom.pl. rabbit-nom.pl.

I frighten the rabbits in the cage.

In this sentence the causer is the first person singular and frightens the rabbits deliberately⁵⁾. Another example is:

- (17) *Pekka ärsyttää minua.*
 P-nom. irritate-3.sg.pr. I-part.

Pekka irritates me.

This sentence has two readings. In one reading what irritates the speaker is *Pekka's* behavior or his mere existence. The other reading is that *Pekka* does something deliberately to irritate the speaker. In the sentence (16), the causer is clearly the subject, and accordingly the causee is clearly the object. The same observation applies to the sentence (17) in the latter reading.

By the way, for the sentence (14) there is an equivalent. That is:

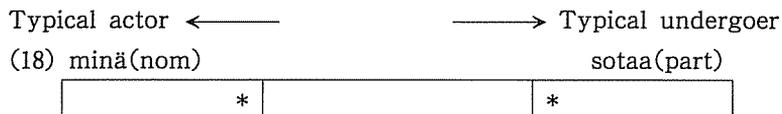
- (18) *Minä pelään sotaa.*
 I-nom. fear-1.sg.pr. war-part.sg.

I am afraid of war.

The predicate of this sentence *pelätä* is a root verb corresponding to the causative psych-predicate *pelottaa* in (14) and (15). In this sentence the first person singular is marked in the nominative case. Since this nominative marked argument triggers a personal agreement, it serves as the subject of this sentence. Being marked in the partitive case, the other argument 'war' functions as the object.

The meanings conveyed by these two sentences (14) and (18) are somewhat different from each other⁶⁾. The sentence (14) only means that a war has already broken out and this war causes fear in the speaker. The sentence (18), on the other hand, can have another meaning, too. A possible meaning of the sentence (18) is that relations between two nations, for example, have become very tense and the speaker is

afraid that a war between these two nations will break out in the near future. Considering the meaning conveyed, we can assume that 'war' in (18) is a theme argument. Since the first person singular can be considered to be an experiencer argument, what functions as an actor participant in this sentence is the first person singular. We can represent the relative position of each argument on the Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy as follows:



Being an actor participant, the first person singular should be marked in the nominative case. The partitive case is unavailable, since it should be kept for an undergoer participant, *sotaa*.

4. One-place causative psych-predicate

Let us now consider the sentence (2), which is repeated here as (19) for convenience. That is:

(19) *Minua nukuttaa*.

I-part. feel sleepy-3.sg.pr.

I am sleepy(=(2)).

Another example is:

(20) *Minua oksettaa*.

I-part. feel sick-3.sg.pr.

I feel sick.

In both of the sentences the first person singular is marked in the partitive case. Being in the partitive, it does not agree in person with the predicate. Because of this, the first person singular cannot be the subject of these sentences. We should not overlook that it is marked in the same way as the causee of a two-place causative predicate. Then, it is possible to consider it to be the object of these sentences.

The point to observe is, however, that the causer cannot appear in these sentences. The causer argument is not omitted from the surface structure but the causer cannot be assumed in the first place because of the lexical meaning of the predicate. This means that the verbs, *nukuttaa* and *oksettaa*, are not real causative predicates, although

Generally speaking, sentences like (19) and (20) whose predicate is a one-place causative describe an ongoing change of state. Then, the situation described in these sentences is not bounded, nor is their sole argument totally involved in the situation. This is the reason the nominative case cannot be used to indicate the sole argument of sentences like (19) and (20).

It is interesting to note that the nominative case is available in sentences describing a temporary state. For example:

(21) *Minulla on nälkä.*

I-adess. is-3.sg.pr. hungry-nom.sg.

I am hungry.

In this sentence, the post-verbal argument *nälkä* is marked in the nominative case. This is because this sentence describes a bounded situation.

5. Concluding remarks

From what has been said above it follows that the case marking of the sole argument of a one-place causative psych-predicate does not count as a counter example to the general case marking pattern schematized as in (4). Even if the experiencer argument in question can be regarded neither as the subject nor as the object, its partitive marking can be suitably explained by referring to semantic macroroles.

It is worth noting that in the Finnish language there are various ways to indicate experiencer arguments. They are sometimes indicated in the adessive case. The first person singular marked in the adessive case in (21) is an example of this. The adessive in this sentence can be altered into the genitive. That is:

(22) *Minun on nälkä.*

I-gen. is-3.sg.pr. hungry-nom.sg.

I am hungry.

Sometimes experiencer arguments are marked in the elative case. Take the following for example:

(23) *Minusta tuntuu nyt hyvältä.*

I-elat. feel-3.sg.pr. now good-ablat.sg.

I feel better now.

Another alternative is the nominative case, as can be seen from the following example. That is:

(24) *Minä tunnen nälkää.*

I-nom. feel-1.sg.pr. hungry-part.sg.

I feel hungry.

Unlike in the sentences (19)-(23), the predicate in this sentence agrees in person with the experiencer argument, i.e. the first person singular. This is because the first person singular in this sentence functions as the subject.

These examples make it clear that the cases available for experiencer arguments are diverse. As we have seen before, experiencer arguments appear in the middle of the Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy. This means that an experiencer argument can be regarded neither as a typical actor participant nor as a typical undergoer participant. Perhaps it is right to say that this is the reason of the diversity of cases available for experiencer arguments.

Notes

- 1) See, for example, Ackerman & Moore(2001:55-58), Sands & Campbell (2001:253-255) and Vilkuna(1996:134-138).
- 2) According to the traditional grammar, the morphological 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.
- 3) Two-place causative psych-predicates like *pelottaa* can also be used without the causer argument. For example:
 - i) *Minua pelottaa.*
I-part. frighten-3.sg.pr.
I feel afraid.

Also in this sentence the predicate *pelottaa* entails a causer indeed. But it is not overtly expressed, since it is unspecific.
- 4) On this point, see Vilkuna(1989:46).
- 5) In the sentence (16) the plural object 'rabbits' is marked in the nominative case. In the Finnish language the genitive that indicates an object alternates with the nominative when the object refers to a plural entity. However, the nominative marking of a plural object is highly exceptional. Since the referent of a plural object

is usually indefinite in quantity, a plural object is marked in the partitive case in principle. It can be marked in the nominative case only when its referent is extremely definite.

6) On this point, see Leino(1977:146).

7) It is possible to use *nukuttaa* as a two-place causative predicate. For example:

i) *Lääkäri nukutti potilaan ennen leikkausta.*
 doctor-nom.sg. anesthetize-3.sg.p. patient-gen.sg. before operation-part.sg.

The doctor anesthetized the patient before the operation.

In this sentence 'doctor' clearly functions as the causer argument. The meaning of the predicate in this sentence is, however, obviously different from that of the same predicate in the sentence (19).

8) On the notion of boundedness, see Leino(1991) and Heinämäki(1984).

Abbreviations

sg. - singular	pl. - plural
pr. - present	p. - past
nom. - nominative	gen. - genitive
part. - partitive	iness. - inessive
elat. - elative	adess. - adessive
ablat. - ablative	pass. - passive
inf. - infinitive	pr.p. - present participle

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