Unifying Finnish aspectual case marking

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Background: The distribution of object case marking is a well-known problem in Finnic linguistics. Direct objects are marked with either accusative or partitive case: partitive case marking is associated with unboundedness or incompleteness. While this broad generalization is not difficult to argue, a more satisfying unified picture of the syntax behind Finnish case marking is still lacking.

The choice of object case in Finnish is associated with **nominal quantity**, **situation aspect**, **viewpoint aspect**, and **clause polarity**. Past accounts have usually discussed the correlation between case marking and one or two of these factors, setting the others aside as a separate problem (e.g., Belletti, 1988; Kratzer, 2004, *inter alia*). Even accounts that consider all of these factors (e.g., Kiparsky, 1998, 2005) still separate the appearances of the partitive case into distinct categories (nominal, verbal, negation).

Proposal: This paper unifies the various appearances of the partitive case in Finnish under a consistent and structurally-motivated system of aspectual representation. I argue that partitive case marking is the result of a single unboundedness feature [β], which may appear at any of four different syntactic levels and whose interpretation depends on its position. Semantically, [β] corresponds to Krifka's (1998) *cumulativity*.

Analysis: Following the aspectual literature, I situate viewpoint aspect just outside vP and situation aspect just inside, at EventP and SitAspP, and negation above TP in NegP (e.g., Zanuttini, 1997; Borer, 2005; Travis, 2010). Each of these projections may potentially be the locus of an interpretable unboundedness feature [β]. Nominal-level unboundedness is located within the DP, on the head of the number phrase #P (Ritter, 1992); this projection has been used to encode mass/count distinctions (e.g., Cowper and Hall, 2012) making it an appropriate locus for nominal [β]. This is illustrated in (1).

(1) [$_{CP}$ [$_{NegP}$ iβ [$_{TP}$ [$_{EventP}$ iβ [$_{vP}$ [$_{SitAspP}$ iβ [$_{KP}$ [$_{DP}$ [$_{\#P}$ iβ]]]]]]]]]]

Unboundedness at any or all of the levels in (1) is represented through the presence of a [β] feature at that level. The presence of any [β] in the derivation will result in partitive object case, while accusative case surfaces in the absence of all [β]. Since a number of [β] features may be present, Agreement is best implemented by making the features in (1) goals, and having a [uβ] feature probe for them.

Given the strong connection between unboundedness and Case, I argue that [uβ] is located in v, alongside the [ACC] case feature. This distributes case assignment across two features: the interaction of [ACC] and [β] determines the morphological realization of Case. If the [uβ] probe finds an [iβ], the combination of [ACC] and [β] is realized morphologically as partitive case; if it does not, [ACC] on its own is realized as accusative case. Lack of β-agreement is thus non-fatal (Preminger, 2014).

However, the encoding of situation aspect and nominal quantity below vP but viewpoint aspect and clause polarity above vP requires a bidirectional cyclic Agree system, where the search domain expands cyclically (in the spirit of Béjar and Rezac 2009) through a change in probe direction: [uβ] first probes down into the DP domain, and then upwards in a Reverse Agree relation (Zeijlstra, 2012; Wurmbrand, 2014) if it does not find an [iβ] there. The mechanism is illustrated below: in (2), [uβ] Agrees with a nominal [iβ]; in (3), it probes down and then up to find an outer-aspectual [iβ]. Note that other [iβ] features may be present but do not enter into Agree relations.

(2) [$_{CP}$ [$_{NegP}$ iβ [$_{TP}$ [$_{EventP}$ iβ [$_{vP}$ ACC, uβ [$_{SitAspP}$ uK [$_{DP}$ [$_{\#P}$ iβ [$_{NP}$]]]]]]]]]]

(3) [$_{CP}$ [$_{NegP}$ iβ [$_{TP}$ [$_{EventP}$ iβ [$_{vP}$ ACC, uβ [$_{SitAspP}$ uK [$_{DP}$ [$_{\#P}$ [$_{NP}$]]]]]]]]]]

Conclusions: The unification of aspectual levels into a single system provides a more complete and parsimonious account of Finnish case marking; it also provides evidence for a bidirectional cyclic Agree model of agreement. Finally, the presence of the same abstract [β] representing cumulativity at different levels further informs recent discussion about the effect of structural position on featural interpretation (Ritter and Wiltschko, 2014; Cowper and Hall, 2012).

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