

**The “bizarre” valency behaviour of Finnish verbs:
How a specific context gives rise to valency alternation patterns¹**

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Abstract

The paper discusses two cases of valency alternations in Modern Finnish that to our knowledge have not attracted much attention. We discuss sentences (a) in which a verb which is normally used intransitively, i.e. without an object, is used transitively, i.e. with an object, and (b) in which a transitive verb appears with a new type of object. Examples (1) and (2) show what kind of phenomena is of interest:

Effected objects:

- (1a) Edwards *loikki* kauden *kärkituloksen*.
Edwards jumped season.GEN top.result.ACC

‘Edwards made the current season’s top result (in the triple jump).’

(HS 2.7.2001, p. D5)

- (1b) Menendez *heitti* *maailmanennätyksen*.
Menendez threw world.record.ACC

‘Menendez broke the world record (in the javelin).’

(HS 2.7.2001, p. D5)

(2) Objects participating in a possessive transfer:

- (2a) Panu Kylliäinen *golfäsi* *EM-hopeaa*.
Panu Kylliäinen golfed European.Championship-silver.PARTV

‘Panu Kylliäinen won a silver medal in the European golf championships.’

(headline, HS 13.8.2000, p. C9)

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- (2b) Laakkonen *ohjasti* *EM-pronssia.*
 Laakkonen steered European.Championship-bronze.PARTV
 ‘Laakkonen won a bronze medal in the European trotting championships.’
 (trotting; headline, HS 19.8.2001, p. C5)

The valency of the verbs – defined as the actant scheme in which the verbs appear, combining semantic and syntactic properties – in these sentences differs from their conventional valency. What the sentences have in common is that the activity performed by the agent participant results in achieving the entity expressed in the object: the described results or the prizes mentioned. The verb merely specifies the means of achieving them.

The paper provides a description of sentences such as (1) and (2) as well as the verbs and the nominal constituents occurring in them. To account for these sentences we propose a constructional approach: the effected object construction and the possessive transfer construction enable Finnish speakers to deviate from the conventional valency properties of verbs and use conventionally intransitive verbs transitively, or transitive verbs with objects that are not selected in the basic valency entries of the verbs. Furthermore, there is a particular circumstance under which the two valency alternation patterns preferentially take place. The two constructions conspicuously often occur in the language of the sports press in which they have reached an established status. The particular context and the corresponding genre give rise to two specific constructions, which might seem odd in another context.

It seems to us that instead of treating valency alternations in one context by considering them to be properties concerning a verb or a verb class defined by semantic features, it may prove useful to take into account the specific genre and the corresponding extralinguistic contextual variables. According to this study, such factors can be crucial for understanding valency changes.

1 Introduction

In Modern Finnish the possible valency alternations of verbs are said to be numerous. Several valency alternations have been discussed by P. Leino (1991; 1999) and Pajunen (1999; 2001). Especially P. Leino (1991: 34, 39; 1999: 137; 2001a: 19-21) argues that varying valency is not exceptional in Finnish. The interesting question is, of course, whether the particular valency alternation possibilities are regular options concerning a wider group

of verb lexemes and do not merely constitute an idiosyncratic property of a single verb. It can be asked, furthermore, whether some specific reoccurring valency alternation types can be identified so that a comprehensive analysis can be provided. Finally, for the understanding of valency alternations yet another question is crucial: what are the conditions of the alternations – are there particular circumstances under which a specific valency alternation can take place?

In the research literature, several regular reoccurring valency alternation possibilities have been identified. The most discussed cases are probably the resultative construction (cf. 1), locative alternation (cf. 2), labile verbs (cf. 3), so-called psych-verbs (cf. 4) and the ditransitive construction (cf. 5). In the following examples we illustrate these types with examples from Germanic and Romance languages. With the exception of labile alternation and the ditransitive construction, all other possibilities occur productively in Finnish, too. (For Finnish resultative constructions cf. Pälsi 2000, for psych-verbs Siirainen 2001 and for locative alternation Pajunen 1999; 2001.)

(1) He cried himself asleep.

(cf. e.g. Goldberg 1995: 180)

(2a) They loaded hay on the truck.

(cf. e.g. Olsen 1994)

(2b) They loaded the truck with hay.

(3a) Jules a cuit le poulet.

Jules has cooked the chicken

‘Jules has cooked the chicken.’

(French; cf. Larjavaara 2000: 212)

(3b) Le poulet a cuit.

the chicken has cooked

‘The chicken has been cooked.’

- (4a) Ich wundere mich über sein Verhalten.
I wonder myself over his behavior

‘I am amazed at his behaviour.’

(German; cf. Eroms 2000: 432)

- (4b) Sein Verhalten wundert mich.
his behaviour wonders me

‘His behaviour amazes me.’

- (5) Sally baked her sister a cake.

(cf. Goldberg 1995: 141)

Our aim in this paper is to discuss two further cases of valency alternations that to our knowledge have not attracted as much attention as the above-mentioned possibilities.² We shall discuss Finnish sentences (a) in which a verb which is normally used intransitively, *i.e.* without an object, is used transitively, *i.e.* with an object, and (b) in which a transitive verb appears with a semantically new type of object. Examples (6) and (7) show what kind of phenomena will be of interest:³

- (6) Effected objects:

- (6a) Edwards *loikki* kauden *kärkituloksen*.
Edwards jumped season.GEN top.result.ACC

‘Edwards made the current season’s top result (in the triple jump).’

(HS 2.7.2001, p. D5)

² For effected objects in French, see Larjavaara (2000: 144-154).

³ The grammatical abbreviations are explained in the appendix. The glosses given are not detailed when not needed: we prefer not to give complete glosses which would be unnecessarily long due to the complexity of Finnish morphology.

(6b) Menendez *heitti* *maailmanennätyksen.*

Menendez threw world.record.ACC

‘Menendez broke the world record (in the javelin).’

(HS 2.7.2001, p. D5)

(7) Objects participating in a possessive transfer:

(7a) Panu Kylliäinen *golfasi* *EM-hopeaa.*

Panu Kylliäinen golfed European.Championship-silver.PARTV

‘Panu Kylliäinen won a silver medal in the European golf championships.’

(headline, HS 13.8.2000, p. C9)

(7b) Laakkonen *ohjasti* *EM-pronssia.*

Laakkonen steered European.Championship-bronze.PARTV

‘Laakkonen won a bronze medal in the European trotting championships.’

(trotting; headline, HS 19.8.2001, p. C5)

The verbs *loikkia* ‘jump’ in (6a) and *golfata* ‘play golf’ in (7a) conventionally have no object. The verb *heittää* ‘throw’ in (6b) normally has as its object referent the thing thrown, and the verb *ohjastaa* ‘steer/drive’ in (7b) usually occurs with an object that expresses an animal whose movements are controlled by the agent and the activity. The valency of the verbs – defined as the actant scheme in which the verbs appear, combining semantic and syntactic properties – differs from their conventional valency in these sentences. What the sentences have in common is that the activity performed by the agent results in achieving the entity expressed in the object: the described results or the prizes mentioned. The verb merely specifies the means of achieving them.

The sentences in (6) include an effected object – an object whose referent is created by the activity in question. Neither the top result nor the world record exists before the activity

is performed: they are created by Edwards jumping or Menendez throwing. The object referents in the sentences in (7), on the other hand, cannot be considered to be created as a result of the activity. Instead, they describe the entities that are subject to a possessive transfer. The referents are moved to the agent's possession. (Readers not familiar with Finnish: As the examples show, the case of the Finnish object alters between accusative and partitive. Roughly characterized, the case choice depends on telicity properties. The accusative is used to describe bounded events, the partitive unbounded. Cf. e.g. Heinämäki 1984.)

We will refer to the examples such as (6a) and (6b) as “effected object constructions”. Examples such as (7a) and (7b) will be referred to as “possessive transfer constructions”. The word “construction” is here used in a theory-neutral sense. In chapter 6 we will return to the definition of the term.

Similar valency alternations in Finnish have previously been discussed in works by Jaakko Leino (2001) and Pentti Leino (1991: 41; 1999: 137; 2001a: 57; 2001b: 415-419). Jaakko Leino's study concerns the use of verbs in the first Finnish bible (1642). Pentti Leino, on the other hand, mainly concentrates on individual verbs and their alternation possibilities. Our aim is to discuss data from Modern Finnish to show that the phenomena occur recurrently and concern a wide class of verbs.

2 Materials

The study is based on an analysis of “bizarre” uses of verbs collected mainly from Modern Finnish newspaper texts. The collection has no statistical ambition, and it is supplemented by occasional findings in other sources. The current sample consists of approximately 200 “bizarre” verb uses with about 80 different verb lexemes. The examples represent mostly the genre of sports news where it is easy to find examples of the valency change in question.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, we want to emphasize that the uses are not limited to sports texts but can sometimes be found in other kinds of contexts, too. We give two such examples – the conventionally intransitive verb *puhua* is here used transitively:

(8a) No ei *puhuta* tässä *laskua* sulle.
 well not.3SG talk.PASS here bill.PARTV you.ALL

‘Let’s not talk so that you get a big bill.’

(example from a telephone conversation; 2001)

(8b) Sulavine supliikkeineen Lisette *puhuu* itselleen
 fluent.COM style.COM.3PX Lisette talks oneself.ALL.3PX
työpaikan levy-yhtiössä [...].
 working.place.ACC record.company.INE

‘With her fluent talking style Lisette manages to obtain for herself a job in a record company.’

(Kielipankki: Aamulehti 1999)

3 Properties of the constructions

3.1 On the subjects – and other animate participants

3.1.1 Agent

Firstly, the most distinctive feature of all the constructions in our corpus, almost without exception, is that they have an agentive – volitional – subject referent. The high degree of agentivity may in many cases be due more to the competitive context than to the verb itself, because sporting activities and competing clearly imply agentivity. The need for an agentive subject referent restricts the productivity of the construction. In other words, the transitive use of intransitive verbs with subjects whose referents have a patient proto-role (Dowty 1991; that is, so-called “unaccusative verbs” or “ergative verbs”) is not allowed.

There are, however, exceptions to the agentivity requirement. In (9), the subject referent is non-agentive. We want to emphasize that the example is unusual and it does not represent a typical case:

- (9) Hannawald *kaatui* Hautamäelle *pronssia*.
 Hannawald fell Hautamäki.ALL bronze.PARTV

‘Because Hannawald fell, Hautamäki won the bronze medal.’

(ski jumping; headline, HS 14.2.2002, p. C1)

3.1.2 The dual role of the subject referent: agent and recipient

The role of the subject referent is twofold. In most examples, the constructions describe situations in which the subject referent performs an action in order to acquire the object referent (cf. P. Leino 1999: 137). In other words, the subject referent is at the same time both agent and recipient:

- (10) Lehtonen *lentopalloili* *pronssia* Ranskassa.
 Lehtonen played volleyball bronze.PARTV France.INE

‘Lehtonen won a bronze medal in volleyball in France.’

(headline, HS 8.5.2000, p. D4)

This duality holds for possessive transfer constructions as well as for effected object ones.

3.1.3 Are there other animate participants?

The default interpretation is that the subject referent is the recipient. If, however, the recipient is another participant, this must be stated explicitly (see ex. (9)). In such cases, the subject referent causes the possessive transfer, but the object referent does not necessarily remain in the possession of the subject referent (P. Leino 2001b: 416). Typically, when there is no correspondence between the subject referent and the recipient, the recipient is expressed with an allative phrase. The allative ‘to’ case is used to indicate the inception of possession.⁴

⁴ In addition, the allative phrase can be a reflexive pronoun coreferential with the subject, cf. (8b).

The subject referent may also be included in the recipient entity:

- (11) Hossein Tavakoli *nosti* Iranille ensimmäisen *kultamitalin*.
 Hossein Tavakoli lifted Iran.ALL first.ACC gold.medal.ACC
 ‘Hossein Tavakoli won the first gold medal for Iran in weightlifting.’
 (weightlifting; headline, HS 26.9.2000, p. B4)

The possessive transfer constructions cited so far are interesting because they do not give rise to the interpretation that some participant would lose the object referent in the transfer. On the contrary, the object referent is equally available for all participants present before the transfer. The original possessor can, however, be expressed. Typically, an ablative phrase indicates the previous owner; the ablative ‘from’ case signals the cessation of possession.

In (12), the ablative phrase expresses to whom the joy should belong:

- (12) Hämäläisen ryhmä pelasi sunnuntaina ensimmäistä kertaa täysin vapautuneesti.
 ‘Hämäläinen’s team played its first totally relaxed match on Sunday.’
 Suomi *rymisteli* Tshekiltä terävimmän *pele-ilon*
 Finland rumbled Czech.Republic.ABL sharpest.ACC play.joy.ACC
 jo avauserässä.
 already opening.period.INE
 ‘Through their energetic game, Finland robbed the Czech Republic of any joy they might have had in playing already in the opening period.’
 (Context: Ice hockey match: Finland won 2–1.)
 (HS 23.4.2001, p. D7)

3.2 Objects

3.2.1 Effected objects

As to objects, let us begin with the cases where the effected object status is clear: the referents of effected objects come into existence while the action denoted by the verb is performed. These cases are the most frequent in our corpus, roughly more than twice as frequent as the possessive transfer constructions. We have already seen the first two standard examples (6a) and (6b). As shown in these examples, the object referent is frequently some kind of a record or another result. It may also represent another type of a result achieved, like the hat trick in example (13):

(13) Shefki Kuqi *puski* *hattutempun.*

Shefki Kuqi headed hat.trick.ACC

‘By heading, Shefki Kuqi made a hat trick. / Shefki Kuqi headed a hat trick.’

(football; headline, HS 24.9.2000, p. B14)

The effected object referents are ready to get a linguistic representation, being by definition salient participants. The referent of the object being created during the action, it is certainly present on the scene.

3.2.2 Objects participating in a possessive transfer

The object referents in possessive transfer constructions are not created during the activity. On the contrary, the objects refer to concrete things or other entities that can be considered to exist independently of the activity. The two object types are not, however, completely different, because in the context of competitive sports both object types express an entity that usually benefits the subject referent.

Most typically, the objects participating in a possessive transfer refer to medals or prizes the subject referent wins as a consequence of successful performance of the activity, as in

example (7). Further possible objects refer, for instance, to rankings or positions that are considered to be worth reaching for or beneficial to the animate participant:

- (14) Pihlava *ui* *finaalipaikan*, Hård välieriin.
 Pihlava swam final.place.ACC Hård semifinal.ILL
 ‘Pihlava qualified for the final, Hård for the semifinal.’

(swimming; headline, Warkauden lehti 10.10.2004, p. 16)

What kind of a relation is there between objects and verbs in possessive transfer constructions? The object referents are not in such close connection to the activity as in the effected object case. Evidently, the possessor of the object referents in the possessive transfer constructions change, but interestingly, there is no direct or immediate contact or manipulation between the agent and the object referent. The agent does not direct the action to the object referent – although the activity can be considered to be motivated by the possibility of attaining it.

3.2.3 Objects vs. measure adverbials in object cases

Every study dealing with Finnish objects unavoidably meets the question of the borderline between objects and measure adverbials (*OSMA* in Finnish literature: see Tuomikoski 1978). In Finnish, certain measure adverbials appear in the object cases. These adverbials express temporal duration (15a), measure or amount (15b), repetition or iteration (15c) or amount of a traversed journey (15d):

- (15a) Sini tanssi *päivän*.
 Sini danced day.ACC
 ‘Sini danced all day.’

- (15b) Hauki painaa *kilon*.
 pike weighs kilo.ACC
 ‘The pike weighs one kilo.’

- (15c) Sini kävi *kaksi kertaa* hänen luonaan.
 Sini visited two time.PARTV s/he.GEN at.3PX
 ‘Sini visited him/her twice.’

- (15d) Sini käveli *kilometrini*.
 Sini walked kilometre.ACC
 ‘Sini walked one kilometre.’

Because measure adverbials in object cases can quite freely be combined with both intransitive and transitive verbs, they raise questions about the status of the effected objects and objects participating in possessive transfers discussed in this paper. Do these objects in fact constitute objects at all? Would it be more elegant to consider them adverbials of measure?

In Finnish research literature, several properties have been identified that are said to be able to distinguish between “real” objects and measure adverbials in object cases (cf. e.g. Tuomikoski 1978; Hakulinen/Karlsson [1979] 1995: 216-217). However, in more recent accounts authors are sceptical about the status of the properties and their test value. P. Leino (1991: 53), for instance, states that syntactic criteria cannot unambiguously distinguish between the two notions. Instead, he stresses the semantic differences between objects and adverbials.⁵

⁵ If only one dared, the borderline between Finnish objects and adverbials in object cases would provide an interesting topic for a comprehensive analysis that would receive a wide and grateful audience of linguist readers.

We will not discuss the problem more thoroughly here, but we are convinced that the objects in our corpus are real objects and do not constitute adverbials of measure. Our view is motivated by semantic properties. Effected objects refer to things or phenomena that are created in the course of the action. Alternatively, in the constructions that indicate possessive transfer the object referents are concrete things or phenomena that are transferred into the possession of the subject referent. Thus, semantically they cannot be adverbials of measure, which express other contents.

3.2.4 Two objects?

In the introduction we discussed two examples with transitive verbs and changed selectional properties. In (6b) and (7b), the transitive verbs are combined with semantically new types of objects that are not primarily selected in the basic valency entries of the verbs. In addition, the conventional objects are not present.

Interestingly, there are also some intriguing cases in our data where conventional objects do not disappear. Instead, the conventional object occurs at the same time as the new object is introduced, and the sentences include two NPs in object cases (ex. (16), (17)). These cases are not as frequent as the previous ones.

- (16) Avauspäivän jälkeen hän [...] heitti keihästä
 first.day.GEN after s/he threw javelin.PARTV
 ennätöksensä 73,32.
 record.ACC.3PX 73,32

After the first day he broke his javelin record by reaching 73.32.’

‘(Kielipankki: Aamulehti 1999)

- (17) 24-vuotias kaavilainen paiskasi Keihästä
 the 24-year-old (wo/)man from Kaavi flung javelin.PARTV

oman ennätöksensä 85 [...].

own.ACC record.ACC.3PX 85

‘The 24-year-old (wo/)man from Kaavi threw the javelin to break his/her own record and attained 85.’

(Kielipankki: Karjalainen 1994)

As a matter of fact, the same phenomenon can occur with a conventionally intransitive verb (ex. (18); the partitive noun *korkeutta* ‘height’ merely specifies the sport in question).

(18) Stefan Holm *ponnisti* *korkeutta* *Euroopan* *kärkituloksen* 233.

Stefan Holm jumped height.PARTV Europe.GEN top.result.ACC 233

‘Stefan Holm reached the European top result 233 in the high jump.’

(Kielipankki: Turun sanomat 1998)

In the examples above, there are two NPs in object cases. The first one is in the partitive, the second one in the accusative. The two NPs are obligatorily in different cases.

Because sentences with two objects are highly exceptional, one might consider other analytical possibilities. In works discussing other languages similar expressions are often analysed as complex verb structures in which one NP is regarded as a part of the verb and the other as the actual object. There are two major processes that create such complex verb structures.

One such process is incorporation. It is a morphological technique that integrates a noun into the verb. The result is a structurally complex verb in which the incorporated noun has lost its referential properties. The verbs usually denote more or less habitual and institutionalized activities. In addition, the valency properties of the new complex verb often differ from the valency of the base verb. (Mithun 2000; Lazard 1994: 17; 1998: 15-16.)

Alternatively, there is a process which reminds one of incorporation but differs from it due to the fact that the noun is not incorporated morphologically. Lazard (1994: 93-94; 1998: 90) characterizes this strategy as a formation of lexical verb phrases and in his

opinion, it is a strategy that enriches the verb vocabulary. The structure of the lexical verb phrase is syntactic, but the status lexical. (Lazard’s terminology is vague, but apparently he refers to the process that in other accounts is known as light verb construction, cf. e.g. Brugman 2001; Doostan 2001.)

Because there is no morphological incorporation, the first alternative is obviously not appropriate to explain the Finnish examples. Instead, the lexical verb phrase analysis could provide an elegant answer for the intriguing Finnish examples. The key words to this solution are the above cited semantic features: the non-referentiality of the noun and the institutionalized nature of the activity are properties that are compatible with the Finnish examples. The first noun in the partitive case is clearly non-referential. It does not pick up a specific referent in the extralinguistic context. Furthermore, there is a close connection between the noun in the partitive case and the verb. Together, they denote the activity in question. This analysis is supported by the findings of Vilkuna (1992: 115-117) who, with regard to Hungarian, observes that non-referential Hungarian nouns together with verbs can function as names for specific activities.

The solution provided by lexical verb phrase analysis is attractive especially because it draws back the highly marked alternative with two objects. It treats one noun as part of the verb; as to the other one, it constitutes the object of the complex predicate.

Although we have argued in favour of lexical verb phrase analysis, we do not feel that we are in a position to take a final stand on the issue. Our data is too restricted, and the few examples in the sample seem to represent rather a peripheral possibility than a regular option: they do not yet allow definitive conclusions or generalizations.

Furthermore, the complex predicate analysis and the assumption of complex lexical verb phrases is complicated by the fact that there are other processes, too, that allow two objects in one sentence. P. Leino (1991: 54-57) and Pälsi (2000: 223-225) discuss Finnish resultative constructions which sometimes – but more rarely – include as well the

conventional object as the new object introduced by the resultative template. Cf. the following attested example from a film review in a newspaper article:

- (19) Ei ihme, että Hugh Grant *tuijottaa häntä silmät*
 no wonder that Hugh Grant stares s/he.PART eyes.ACC
 kipeäksi [...].
 sore.TRANSL

(The context is that the heroine Julia Roberts has been described as very pretty.) ‘No wonder that Hugh Grant stares at her so long/intensively that his eyes become sore.’

(HS 19.4.2004, p. D9)

Obviously, there is a need for a comprehensive corpus with similar possibilities in other construction types to clarify the circumstances and optional analyses.

4 About the verb

In the introduction, we stated that both conventionally intransitive and transitive verbs are allowed in the constructions. The intransitive verbs are used transitively and the transitive ones can appear with a semantically new type of object. In addition, we noted that intransitive verbs with a patient subject referent are typically excluded. With the exception of these “unaccusative” or “ergative” verbs the conventional valency properties are thus not crucial for the possible use of a specific verb in the constructions. Instead, other semantic properties seem to be more important. On the whole, the fact that the verb denotes an activity that can plausibly be interpreted as a means to create or acquire a specific result is essential.

Typically, the verb describes the kind of sporting activity, cf. (20). In some cases, it does not directly indicate the specific sporting activity. Instead, the verb expresses gestures, movements, or other activities that are characteristic for the specific sporting event, cf. (21).

- (20a) Kari ja Argillander *hiihtivät* *kultaa*.
 Kari and Argillander ski.PAST.3PL gold.PARTV

‘Kari and Argillander won gold in cross-country skiing.’

(headline, HS 13.3.2002, p. C10)

- (20b) Kononen käveli ennätöksensä.
 Kononen walked record.ACC.3PX

‘Kononen made his record in walking.’

(headline, HS 8.5.2000, p. D2)

- (20c) Pekka Koskela *luisteli nuorten ME:n*.
 Pekka Koskela skated youth.GEN world.record.ACC

‘Pekka Koskela made the junior world record in speed skating.’

(headline, HS 3.12.2001, p. D2)

- (20d) Palander löysi oikeat linjat.

‘Palander found the right lines.’

Mestari *pujotteli* uransa parhaan
 master slalom.ski.PAST.3SG career.GEN.3PX best.ACC
 maailmancupin *tuloksen*.
 world.cup.GEN result.ACC

‘The master made the best result in his world cup career in slalom skiing.’

(headline, HS 28.2.2000, p. D2)

- (21a) Robert Helenius *iski* *EM-pronssia.*
 Robert Helenius hit European.Championship-bronze.PARTV
 ‘Robert Helenius won a bronze medal in the European boxing championships.’

(headline, HS 30.9.2001, p. C4)

- (21b) Timo Juutilainen *jännitti* *SM-pronssia.*
 Timo Juutilainen strained Finnish.Championship-bronze.PARTV
 ‘Timo Juutilainen won a bronze medal in the Finnish archery championships.’

(headline, Warkauden lehti 17.7.2001, p. 9)

- (21c) Khadzibekov *tähtäsi* *ME:n.*
 Khadzibekov pointed world.record.ACC
 ‘Khadzibekov broke the world record in shooting.’

(headline, HS 20.11.2001, p. D3)

Some of the verbs are more or less expressive. Journalists seem to seek for alternative expressions, trying at the same time to add flavour to the description and to awake the readers’ interest. Especially the most innovative examples can be considered to represent journalists’ attempts to meet the entertainment needs expected of the sports press. For instance, Finnish monolingual dictionaries do not lemmatize the verb *kolmiloikata* ‘do a triple jump’ in (22). It is a novel suffix derivation from the compound noun *kolmiloikka* ‘triple jump’.

- (22) Stig Bäcklund *kolmiloikkasi* *veteraani-ME:n.*
 Stig Bäcklund triple.jump.VSUFF.PAST.3SG veteran-world.record.ACC
 ‘Stig Bäcklund broke the world record in the triple jump for veterans.’

(HS 8.6.2000, p. C7)

5 Characteristic features of sports articles?

As we have noted, the unusual valency behaviour of Finnish verbs discussed is easiest to find in newspaper articles reporting sports events. The uses we have been describing are certainly felt as somehow pertaining to media discourse. They are very common particularly in sports texts in which the construction is so prominent that it allows semantically peculiar combinations:

(23) Tom Draper *torjui* Bluesille *pisteen*.

Tom Draper prevented Blues.ALL point.ACC

‘Tom Draper made a save and won a point for his team the Blues.’

(ice hockey; headline, HS 1.10.2000, p. B7)

The example (23) shows that the default interpretation of a sentence can be overridden when a verb is used in a specific construction. The verb *torjua* ‘prevent, (in sports context) make a save’ occurs normally with an object referring to an event or entity prevented. In (23), however, this conventional interpretation is superseded by the meaning the possessive transfer construction introduces. When the word *piste* ‘point’ is used in a sports context like in (23) – where the referent of the object is in fact obtained by means of the action in question – it does not seem at all odd: the reader readily understands that the verb refers to the means of acquiring points.

The specific nature of the sentences is reflected in the fact that many of the sentences seem to be unfamiliar to the spoken language. Consequently, the sentences offer an interesting contrast to resultative constructions. According to Pälsi (2000: 244-245), resultative constructions are also expressive in their nature but are nevertheless common in colloquial speech.

Despite their peculiar and more or less expressive nature the constructions seem to have attained an established position in the language of the press. A clear signal of this is that the constructions can be heard on the TV news of the most conservative Finnish TV channel *TV1*, whose language has a fairly normatively refined reputation:

- (24) Maaailmanmestaruuden Maa [= Brasilia] on potkinut jo
 World.Championship.acc country (= Brazil) is kicked already
 viisi kertaa.
 five times

‘The country has won the World Championship five times already (in football).’

(TV-news 30.10.2003, TV 1) [The Finnish auxiliary verb in periphrastic tenses is *olla* ‘be’]

To our knowledge, the characteristic linguistic features of sports articles in Finnish newspaper texts have so far not been studied (Tiina Sorvali, pers. comm.). In studies on other languages (English and German: Kroppach 1970, Schaefer 1989, Knobbe 1997), the language of the sports press has been described as syntactically simple. The sports press aims at a linguistically economical expression, authors pointing out that syntactic simplicity can be interpreted as a stylistic resource, a strategy that creates a dramatic effect.

This seems to apply to our Finnish examples, too. Besides – and most importantly – it is worth noticing that very many of the examples cited above are headlines. The constructions constitute a linguistic structure that enables the writer to express the three most important aspects of a sporting news item in one single sentence: Who? What? With what result? The subject expresses the who-part indicating the agent. The verb, for its part, gives the answer to the what-question. It conflates the expressions of the causation (‘to cause an entity to come into existence/to the subject referent’s possession’) and the manner of activity (‘how the result is effected / how the subject referent attains the prize etc.’), often signalling at the

same time the specific sporting event. And finally, the object expresses the effected or achieved result.

6 Constructions on their own

Adele Goldberg (cf. e.g. Goldberg 1995) and several other authors following her example (for Finnish, cf. Leino et al. 2001 and Pälsi 2000) have accounted for valency alternations with the help of the notion of construction. Argument structure constructions are assumed to be skeletal entities constituting sentence patterns with which particular meanings are associated. Such sentence patterns that exist independently of particular verb lexemes are readily available for the speakers of a language.

For the understanding of the Finnish valency alternation patterns discussed in this paper the idea of argument structure constructions is attractive. The fact that the syntactic frames the verbs can occur in can vary systematically, and that different verb lexemes can recurrently show similar valency alternation patterns, means that the clause structure cannot be predicted solely from the verb's lexical semantic properties. Both the production and the reception perspective seem to suggest that Finnish speakers have a construction at their disposal that enables them to use and interpret verbs in a syntactic frame that is not predictable from the basic valency properties of the verbs.

As to the production of the sentences, the construction grammar approach is able to explain how the “bizarre” argument structure of the verbs arises. Furthermore, it accounts for the understanding of how the new meaning component, that is, ‘creation’ or ‘possessive transfer’, comes into being in the sentences.

As to the reception perspective, the idea of argument structure constructions helps us to understand how the users are able to interpret the combinations and the relation between the verb and the object correctly. For instance, were there no effected object construction in the sports context, the following example (25) would be quite hard to understand. In this

example, heading ‘creates a party’ for the winning team. The conventional object (‘ball’) and the idea of directed motion (‘the fact that the ball is successfully headed into the goal’) are downgraded. Instead, the fact that this successful performance has a party as its result is highlighted. Being familiar with the effected object constructions, the reader is capable of interpreting even this trickier case.

- (25) Iversen *puski* Norjalle *juhlat*.
 Iversen headed Norway.ALL party.ACC
 ‘By heading Iversen gained a party to Norway.’
 (football; HS 14.6.2000, p. C11)

The use of such constructions is not, however, exclusively limited to sports news. Indeed, the constructions seem to have become more widespread so that they are compatible when reporting on competitions in general. For instance, *laulaa* ‘sing’ is an activity that in the context of singing competitions can be in the same way result orientated as activities in competitive sports, and, as can be expected, the corresponding “bizarre” valency behaviour can then be possible:

- (26) Tammelan ala-aste *lauloi* huutosakkikisan
 Tammela.GEN school sang cheering.competition.GEN
 ylivoimaisen *voiton* [...].
 overwhelming.ACC victory.ACC
 ‘Tammela school won first prize in the cheering section of the singing competition.’
 (Kielipankki: Aamulehti 1999)

In (27), the competition concerns welding, and correspondingly, the verb *hitsata* ‘weld’ expresses the means to achieve the prize mentioned in the object.

- (27) Esa Pietiläinen hitsasi hopeaa.

Esa Pietiläinen welded silver.PART

‘Esa Pietiläinen won a silver medal in the welding competition.’

Text beginning:

[...] Esa Pietiläinen sijoittui toiseksi [...] peruskoululaisten hitsauskilpailussa.

‘Esa Pietiläinen gained second place in the welding competition for comprehensive school pupils.’

(headline, Soisalon Seutu 20.1.2004, p. 1)

7 Summary

In this paper, we have discussed two Finnish argument structure constructions that are semantically closely related to each other. The effected object construction and the possessive transfer construction enable Finnish speakers to deviate from the conventional valency properties of verbs and use conventionally intransitive verbs transitively or transitive verbs with objects that are not selected in the basic valency entries of the verbs. In order to explain the recurrently occurring valency alternation patterns displayed by different verb lexemes we adopted a constructional approach.

We showed that there is a particular circumstance under which the two valency alternation patterns preferentially take place: the two constructions conspicuously often occur in the language of the sports press in which they have gained an established status. Having their own demands and needs, the particular sporting context and the corresponding newspaper genre give rise to two specific constructions, which might seem odd in another context. In addition, the examples cited showed how the same constructional model can spread from one particular context into another. The similar properties between competitive sports and competitions in general enable constructions typical for the sports press to widen their domain so that they can be used in descriptions of other activities as well.

It seems to us that instead of treating valency alternations in one context by considering them to be properties concerning a verb or a verb class defined by semantic features, it may prove useful to take into account the specific genre and the corresponding extralinguistic contextual variables. According to this study, such factors can be crucial for understanding valency changes.

8 Secondary Sources

Corpora

HS = Helsingin Sanomat.

Kielipankki = Electronic Corpus of Modern Finnish. Compiled by: CSC – The Finnish IT Center for Science / Research Institute for the Languages of Finland / Department of General Linguistics, University of Helsinki / Department of General Linguistics, University of Joensuu. Available via CSC – The Finnish IT Center for Science, < www.csc.fi >.

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Appendix: List of abbreviations

ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ALL	allative
COM	comitative
ELA	elative
GEN	genitive
ILL	illative
INE	inessive
PARTV	partitive
PASS	passive
PAST	past tense
PL	plural
PX	possessive suffix
SG	singular
TRANSL	translative
VSUFF	verbalizing suffix

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