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Finnish Nominal Ideophones as Evaluatives

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FINNISH NOMINAL IDEOPHONES AS EVALUATIVES

**DATA** Consider Finnish noun-noun constructions in (1)-(3) that share a visually descriptive ideophone *kanttura*:

(1) **Puu-n kanttura**
    tree-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a tree bent by wind, weight of snow, etc.’

(2) a. **Uko-n kanttura**
    (old.)man-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a decrepit (old) man’

            b. **Aka-n kanttura**
       (old.)woman-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a decrepit (old) woman’

(3) a. **Lehmä-n kanttura**
    cow-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a large, bony, old cow’

            b. **Hirve-n kanttura**
       moose-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a large, bony moose’

**QUESTION** How to account for these sound symbolic expressions?

**PROPOSAL**

→ \([N_{Genitive} N_{ideophoneNominative}]\) is an evaluative
   formed at phonology-syntax-semantics interface

**ROADMAP**
2. Phonological properties of \([N_{Gen} N_{ideom}N_{om}]\)
3. Morphosyntactic properties of \([N_{Gen} N_{ideom}N_{om}]\)
4. Semantic properties of \([N_{Gen} N_{ideom}N_{om}]\)
5. Proposal: \([N_{Gen} N_{ideom}N_{om}]\) is evaluative
6. Further questions
2. Phonological properties of [N_{Gen} N_{ideo}]

Q What identifies the [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}] construction within Finnish sound system?

A It is a prosodic unit with particular sound properties.

→ There is no absolute division between ideophones & non-ideophones
   cf. e.g. Mikone 2001, Jarva 2003, 2008

→ However, some strong tendencies are observed, such as:
   • Prevalence of certain phonemes in ideophones: e.g. /ø/ & /æ/
     Kiviniemi 1971, Sivula 1989, Leskinen 1993, among others
   • Atypical word-initial, medial and –final consonant clusters
   • Change of phoneme causes no (shade of) meaning change
     Ruoppila 1934, 1935, Rytkönen 1940, among others
   • Such variation is not normally permitted in Finnish
     Compare the ideophonic (4) with non-ideophonic (5)

(4) viuhka-n löyhötys / löhystys / leyhtys / leuhutus / leuhotus
    fan-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘movement, by a fan, that makes a stream of air or a breeze’

(5) Minimal pairs:
   a. löytöä ‘of the find’ vs. löytää ‘to be found’
   b. kuva ‘picture’ vs. kova ‘hard’

For a more thorough discussion, see e.g. Mikone (2001) or Jääskeläinen (2013)

3. Morphosyntactic properties of [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}]

Q What identifies the [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}] construction within Finnish morphosyntax?

A It behaves as a syntactic atom

Table 1. Properties of Finnish [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Argument: subj, obj</th>
<th>Adjunct: modifier</th>
<th>Moves as unit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}]</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
→ \([\text{N}_\text{Gen} \ \text{N}_\text{ideoNom}]\) string behaves as a noun

It may function as a subject (6a), an object (6b), or a modifier (6c)

(6) a. [Hatu-n reuhka] roikku-u naula-ssa. \(\text{SUBJECT}\)
    hat-GEN IdPh.NOM hang-PRES.3SG hook-INE
    ‘The floppy, worn-out hat is hanging on a hook’

b. Minä tykkäään [siitä hatu-n reuhka-sta]. \(\text{OBJECT}\)
    I like-PRES.1SG that.ELA hat-GEN IdPh-ELA
    ‘I like that floppy, worn-out hat’

c. [Hatu-n reuhka-n] reuna repes-i. \(\text{MODIFIER}\)
    hat-GEN IdPh-GEN edge.NOM rip-PAST.3SG
    ‘The edge of the floppy, worn-out hat ripped’

→ Movement test shows that \([\text{N}_\text{Gen} \ \text{N}_\text{ideoNom}]\) behaves as a syntactic atom (7a)

One cannot front only \(N_i\) (7b) or \(N_{ii}\) (7c)

(7) a. [Siitää hatu-n reuhka-sta] minä tykkäään
    that.ELA hat-GEN IdPh-ELA I like-PRES.1SG
    ‘It is that floppy, worn-out hat that I like’

b. *Siitää hatu-\(n_i\) minä tykkäään [\(t_j\) reuhka-sta]
    that.ELA hat-GEN I like-PRES.1SG IdPh-ELA
    Intended: ‘It is hat that that I like that floppy, worn-out’

c. *Reuhka-sta\(j\) minä tykkäään [siitä hatu-\(n_i\) \(t_j\)]
    IdPh-ELA I like-PRES.1SG that.ELA hat-GEN
    Intended: ‘It is that floppy, worn-out that I like hat’

→ When \([\text{N}_\text{Gen} \ \text{N}_\text{ideoNom}]\) inflects for Num, only one suffix is allowed, on \(N_{ii}\)

(8) a. Hatu-n reuhka-t b. *Hattu-\(je\)-n reuhka-t c. *hattu-\(je\)-n reuhka
    hat-GEN IdPh-PL hat-PL-GEN IdPh-PL hat-PL-GEN IdPh
    ‘floppy, worn-out hats’

→ One can modify the entire \([\text{N}_\text{Gen} \ \text{N}_\text{ideoNom}]\) string, but not each individual \(N\)

→ The modifier precedes \(N_i\), but agrees with \(N_{ii}\) in number and/or case (here NOMINATIVE SINGULAR, zero marked)

(9) a. suuri hatu-n reuhka
    large.NOM hat-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a large, floppy, worn-out hat’
b. *punaise-n hatu-n reuhka
   red-GEN hat-GEN IdPh.NOM
Intended: ‘a red, floppy, really worn-out hat’

→ If a quantifier is used, it precedes [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}], yet it agrees in case with N_{ii}

(10) a. Kaiki-lle hatu-n reuhko-i-lle
    all-ALL hat-GEN IdPh-PL-ALL
    ‘to all the floppy, worn-out hats’

→ Nothing can be inserted between the two elements

(11) a. hatu-n reuhka
    hat-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a floppy, worn-out hat’

b. *hatu-n suuri reuhka
    hat-GEN large.NOM IdPh.NOM
    ‘a large, floppy, worn-out hat’

→ There is no pause between the two elements.
→ Stress falls on the first syllable of N, or both N_{i} and N_{ii} may be stressed.

→ Native speakers prefer derivational suffixes on N_{ii} (12a).
   The suffixes can surface on N_{i} too (12b).
   They can also attach to both nouns, albeit with a stylistic overkill (12c).

(12) a. Hatu-n reuhka-{nen}
    hat-GEN IdPh-DIM.NOM
    ‘a small floppy, worn-out hat’

b. Hattu-se-n reuhka
    hat-DIM-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a small floppy, worn-out hat’

c. ?? Hattu-se-n reuhka-{nen}
    hat-DIM-GEN IdPh-DIM.NOM
    ‘a really small, floppy, worn-out hat’

4. Semantic properties of [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}]

Q What identifies the [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}] construction within Finnish semantics?

A it provides speaker perspective on the entity at hand

→ Normally, the [N_{Gen} N_{ideoNom}] string refers to an entity that is viewed pejoratively
   so (13) can refer to (14b) but not to (14a)

(13) hatu-n reuhka
    hat-GEN IdPh.NOM
    ‘a floppy, worn-out hat’
(14) a. ![Image of a hat]

b. ![Image of a hat]

→ Can one use $[\text{N}_{\text{Gen}} \text{N}_{\text{ideoNom}}]$ in a positive context?

(i) **Yes**, when the beauty standards set by the speech community are at odds with the beauty standard of the speaker:

(15) Minä rakastan tätä **hatu-n reuhka-a** en-kä ikinä hei-tä si-tä pois.
I love-PRES.1SG this-PAR hat-GEN IdPh-PAR NEG.1SG.and never throw-TA.INF it-PAR away

'I love this floppy, worn-out hat and I'll never throw it away'

(ii) **Yes**, when the beauty standards set by the speech community are at odds with the beauty standard of the addressee:

(16) Sinulla on taas tuo rakas vanha **hatu-n reuhka** päi-ssä-i.
You-ADE be-PRES.3SG again that dear old hat-GEN IdPh.NOM head-INE-1SG.POSS

'You have that dear, old, floppy, worn-out hat on your head'

→ Crucially, the standard of evaluation may shift depending on the perspective(s) of the interlocuters

→ $[\text{N}_{\text{Gen}} \text{N}_{\text{ideoNom}}]$ encodes the type of the entity combined with a property

- The burden of highlighting a particular property: the ideophonic $N_i$
- The non-ideophonic $N_i$ encodes the entity, already marked in some way
- The more neutral and formal $N_i$ is, the more awkward the expression and the less it is accepted by the native speakers as natural

see also Leinonen 2010:208

E.g., the ideophone **käppänä** refers to a small, light, shrivelled entity

→ In its $[\text{N}_{\text{Gen}} \text{N}_{\text{ideoNom}}]$ use, there is a continuum of acceptability based on formality

- 'old fart' & 'bloke' in (18) or 'cop' in (19) >
  the neutral 'man' in (20) or 'police officer' in (22)
- 'grampa/gramma' in (19) >
  the formal 'grandfather /grandmother' in (22)
- the gender of $N_i$ ('uncle' in (20) > 'aunt' in (22)
- but 'Mrs' in (22) > 'Mr' in (23)
The position of each term on the continuum depends on a speaker’s relationship

Best
(18)  a. Äijä-n/Ämmä-n käppänä
       (old.)man/woman-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken (old) fart/bag’
      b. Jätkä-n käppänä
          bloke-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken bloke (of a man)’

Good
(19)  a. Vaari-n / Mummo-n käppänä
       grampa/granny-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken grampa’
      b. Kytä-n käppänä
          cop-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken cop’

Not so good
(20)  a. Miehe-n/Naise-n käppänä
       man/woman-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken man/woman’
      b. Eno-n/Sedä-n käppänä
          uncle-GEN IdPh.NOM (maternal/paternal) ‘a small, shrunken uncle

Passable
(21)  Poja-n/Tytö-n käppänä
       boy/girl-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken young man/woman’

Barely acceptable
(22)  a. Tädi-n käppänä
       aunt-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken aunt’
      b. Isoisä-n / Isoäidi-n käppänä
          grandfather/mother-GEN IdPh.NOM grandfather/grandmother
      c. Rouva-n käppänä
          Mrs-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken married woman,
          or simply any adult woman’
      d. Poliisi-n käppänä
          police-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken police officer’

Not acceptable
(23)  a. #Ihmise-n käppänä
       human-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken human being’
      b. #Herra-n käppänä
         Mr-GEN IdPh.NOM ‘a small, shrunken mister’
The acceptability of the more neutral and formal nouns in (22) depends on the attitude of the speaker towards Nₚ. The inherently positive examples in (24) are unacceptable under normal circumstances, but possible, e.g., in a scenario where a brawny but non-heroic person derisively refers to a scrawny hero as sankarin käppänä 'a small, shrunken hero'. A listener without background knowledge of the relationship between the non-hero and hero would find such a statement highly contradictory and confusing.

(24)  a. #Enkeli-n käppänä  
      angel-GEN IdPh.NOM  'a small, shrunken angel'

      b. #Sankari-n käppänä  
      hero-GEN IdPh.NOM  'a small, shrunken hero'

5. Proposal: [N<sup>Gen</sup> N<sub>ideoNom</sub>] is an evaluative

GENERALIZATIONS

[N<sup>Gen</sup> N<sub>ideoNom</sub>] is a constituent in terms of sound, form and meaning:
- It is a prosodic unit with particular sound properties.
- It behaves like a syntactic atom.
- It provides speaker perspective.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Syntax mediates between sound~meaning relation in generative grammar  
  Chomsky 1995, among many others

- Syntactically, sound-symbolic [N<sup>Gen</sup> N<sub>ideoNom</sub>] is a possessive construction

- Grammatical possession is semantically heterogeneous, it covers, e.g.:
  - my colour (property)  
  - my book (property/possession/authorship)  
  - my father (kinship)  
  - my leg (part-whole relationship)  
  - my train (temporal relationship)  
  - Jo has a lot of anger (emotional state)  
  - Jo has the answer (knowledge state)  
  - Jo has nothing (absence of ownership)  
  Postma 1997:275  
  Francis 2000:87

- Genitive-Nominaive structure may be an instance of modification

- In the case of adjectival modification (a white wall), the variable provided by the modifier to the nominal has the relevant features such as size, color, etc.
In the case of nominal modifier, there is no semantics to provide the parameters of the variable (*Hilary’s wall*).

The *interpretation of modification is undefined and is open to any number of possible relations* which will be fixed in an extra-grammatical component. (Massam 1993:123)

- Semantically, genitives vary cross-linguistically as to whether they are determining/non-determining, definite/indefinite/generic (Alexiadou 2007, Willemse 2007, among others)

- Pragmatic features are enter syntax, as e.g., Evaluative Mood Phrase (Cinque 1999, Speas 2004, among others)

**PROPOSAL**

→ \([N_{\text{Gen}} \ N_{\text{ideoNom}}]\) is an evaluative formed at phonology-syntax-semantics interface

**Structure**

Genitive-Nominative structure allows for a loosely defined property relationship between possessor ~ possessee.

(25) a. Schematic blueprint of possessive relationship

```
/\   (possessor)
|   |   |
D  `s  NP
      /\   |
      |   |
DP    DP  N
       |
  ti   possessee
```

**Sound**

Phonotactics specific to Finnish ideophones mark the constructions as salient

b.

```
/\   (unmarked sound string)
|   |   |
D  `s  NP
      /\   |
      |   |
DP    DP  N
       |
  ti   marked sound string
```
### Meaning

Possessor content: entity type, possessee content: pejorative property (visual)

\[
c. \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\text{entity type}_i \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{D} \\
\text{'s} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{N} \\
\text{ti} \\
\text{pejorative property}
\end{array}
\]

### Pragmatics

Evaluative Mood content is context-dependent and may override the default pejorative interpretation

\[
d. \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{Operator} \\
\text{...DP} \\
[\pm \text{positive}] \\
\text{entity type}_i \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{D} \\
\text{'s} \\
\text{NP} \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{N} \\
\text{ti} \\
\text{pejorative property}
\end{array}
\]

---

1 Note that the nominalized form of the verbal serial verb construction has *the same structure* as the examples that we look at:

a. Laulu-n lurit-us
   song-gen IdPh-nominalizer 'the warble of song'

b. Hauku-n luskut-us
   bark-gen IdPh-nominalizer 'the (deep) yelping of barking'

Semantically, however, it is not the same as the one we’re looking at, i.e., no pejorativity is involved. It is in line with the proposal that the genitive structure is semantically heterogeneous.
6. Further questions

Table 1 (repeated). Properties of Finnish [N[Gen NideoNom]]

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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>¥</td>
<td>¥</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ [N[Gen NideoNom]] string behaves as a N atom
   provides speaker evaluation of an entity

Table 2. Properties of Finnish [Vinf VideoTense]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One subject</th>
<th>One object</th>
<th>One tense</th>
<th>One aspect</th>
<th>One negator</th>
<th>Co-ordination</th>
<th>Sub-ordination</th>
<th>Pause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Vinf VideoTense]</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>¥</td>
<td>¥</td>
<td>¥</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ [Vinf VideoTense] string behaves as a V atom
   provides Aktionsart of an event see Armoskaite & Koskinen 2014 for more detail

(26) Minä sinne lume-en kaatu-a **tupsahd-i-n**
    I there snow-ILL fall-INF IdPh-PAST-1SG
    ‘I tumbled into the snow with a soft, sudden, unexpected thud.’
    Armoskaite & Koskinen, 2014

→ What, if any, is a unified account of [N[Gen NideoNom]] and [Vinf VideoTense]?
What if Pesetsky (2013) is right, and all nouns are born Genitive?
If, as have been argued, Nom is Tense on N (Pesetsky & Torrego 2004), is Genitive the Infinitive on N? What does this entail?

→ What is the relationship that holds between a simplex N and [N[Gen NideoNom]]?

e.g., for Päivi, reuhka without Ni means ‘hat’, but based on web forums, blogs & other youth hangouts, for the average 17-year-old now it means ‘messy hair’.

As for something like käppänä ‘small shrunken entity’, if Päivi hears you say ‘some KÄPPÄNÄ is standing in the back yard’, she will assume that this will be a male, slightly built, undesirable person, rather than the small twisted fir tree that stands
there all the time. In order to make käppänä be a tree, house anything other than human, or to make a human be female, cop, etc., you need N-N.

Current hypothesis: the ideophone is used on its own either:

(i) when it has been codified to a default referent
(ii) or when your previous conversation has set the context of what refers to

So ‘I lost my REUHKA’ actually sounds quite weird to Päivi, without the N, ‘hat’, UNLESS we have already established that you are looking for some hat, and are just specifying that it is your dear old floppy one you are after.

→ How predict the relationship that holds between \([N_{\text{Gen}} N_{\text{ideon}}]}\) and context? Speaker intent? How to integrate this relationship into the unified account?

(27) Tytö-n typykä
girl-GEN IdPh.NOM

For Päivi’s generation, the term is a mild endearment for a little girl

Apparently not so for the younger one, as Google images for the term brings up scantily clad young women, and Wiktionary translates the term as ‘babe’.

So for Päivi the connotation is a mildly positive, but she is not sure which way it goes for the younger – negative for women who don’t want to be sex objects? Or positive for guys who desire them, but at the same time view women negatively?

(28) Poja-n pallero/pullero
boy-GEN IdPh.NOM
’a plump male baby/toddler’

Positive in the sense that you’re admiring a cute tot; negative in that you’re insinuating that the baby is too fat.

REFERENCES
http://linguistic-discovery.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/xmlpage/1/issue


