Abstract
Grammar of the non-standard varieties in the East of the Circum-Baltic area
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IMPERSONAL SECOND PERSON SINGULAR IN FINNISH DIALECTS

This paper explores the impersonal usage of 2nd person singular constructions in Finnish dialects. Referentially open or impersonal constructions imply a human experience in a given situation without referring to any human individual particularly (e.g. Malchukov & Siewierska 2011; Laitinen 2006). It is well known that 2nd person can be used to create an impersonal reference in numerous European languages such as English, German, and Russian (Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990; Leinonen 1983 and many others). The impersonal usage of 2SG is reported also in written Estonian (Jokela 2012), and in non-standard Finnic varieties: Karelian (Uusitupa, forthcoming), Vepsian (Kettunen 1943), and conversational Finnish (Suomalainen 2015). In addition, its existence in Finnish South-Eastern dialects has been remarked already in the 1800’s (Sirelius 1894). A detailed survey of Finnish dialects, however, has been missing so far.

Our data, collected from the Finnish Syntax Archive and from the wide selection of dialect samples, contains approximately 500 occurrences of 2SG sentences. The data shows that the impersonal 2nd person singular is applied most frequently and most productively in Eastern dialects, i.e. in Savo and in South-Eastern dialects, but it is not totally unknown elsewhere either. Yet, compared with the zero construction (third person singular verb form without an overt subject), second person singular is much more rarely exploited to construe an open reference in dialectal speech.

A closer look at the data indicates that 2SG sentences can be divided into several types according to their morphosyntactic structure and discourse function. The most notable difference lies between non-imperative and imperative sentences, which also differ in respect of their geographical distributions: non-imperative sentences are mainly used in South-Eastern dialects (1) while the imperative sentences are the most frequent in Savo (2). All types seem to favor complex sentences. When it comes to person marking, a subject pronoun almost never exists in dialectal speech.

(1) [In children’s play, a player wearing a blindfold tried to recognize the others:] No ko e-t tunte-nt ni sa-i-t istuu well when NEG-2SG recognize-PST then have.to-PST-2SG sit-INF
vaik koko päivä siin tuolil. (Johannes, South-Eastern dialects)
even whole day on that chair

"When you didn’t recognize (the other children) you had to sit (and wear the scarf) all day long."

(2) [An informant is telling about her migrain:] (When the headache came) ei muuta kum pysyk kotona ja oksennap nothing but stay.IMP.2SG at home and vomit.IMP.2SG
par vuorokaotta (Kiuruvesi, Savo dialects)
couple of days

"There was nothing to be done but stay at home and vomit a couple of days."

In our presentation, we will demonstrate how the morphosyntactic structure and the indexical meaning of second person singular are interwoven in referentially open 2SG constructions. Furthermore, we will discuss the borderline between open and specific interpretations. The boundary is not a clear cut, and often both interpretations are possible simultaneously. All things considered, it seems reasonable to assume that – to some extent – second person singular has been used openly in Finnish for a long time. However, the usage in contemporary language seems to be due to the influence of English as much as the legacy of dialects and cognate languages.
Keywords: person reference, second person, Finnish dialects

References


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