Fixed expressions with the verb *ajatella* ‘think’ in Finnish
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Our paper concerns the use of the verb *ajatella* ‘to think’ in certain fixed expressions in Finnish. We show that in conversational interaction, there are clear formulaic patterns of usage that emerge from the data for the verb *ajatella*. We explore these patterns and compare them with the use of *ajatella* ‘to think’ in older data from Finnish dialects.

Prior studies have shown that cognition verbs tend to crystallize into fixed units in a range of languages (e.g. Östman 1981, Thompson & Mulac 1991, Tao 2003 and Kärkkäinen 2003, 2012 on English, Endo 2010, 2013 and Tao 2013 on Mandarin, Laury & Okamoto 2011 on English and Japanese, Kevallik 2003 on Estonian, Helasvuo 2014 on Finnish). A general observation has been that in frequent use, as the expressions become phonetically eroded and their use becomes crystallized and morphosyntactically fixed, they lose their status as complement-taking constructions, becoming what Thompson (2002) has called ‘epistemic fragments’. They eventually form units which can be considered particles, appearing freely in a range of syntactic positions (cf. e.g. Kevallik 2016 on the Estonian junction marker *maitea*).

To explore the development of fixed expressions with the verb *ajatella* ‘to think’, we use two datasets. Firstly, we have analyzed data from the Arkisyn database of everyday Finnish conversations. In these data, *ajatella* ‘to think’ overwhelmingly occurs in past tense and is combined with 1st person subjects. There is also a clear preference for affirmative polarity. Secondly, we compare the present-day conversational data with data from the Corpus of Finnish Dialects (Syntax Archives, University of Turku) which consists of dialectological interviews recorded in the 1960’s and 1970’s with informants who were born in the late 1800’s or early 1900’s. We have extracted all instances of the verb *ajatella* in the dialect corpus. The same skewing detected in the modern data towards 1st person singular subjects and past tense forms can also be found in the older data.

The clearest pattern of usage that emerges from both datasets is *mä ajatteli-n* where the regional variant of the 1st person singular pronoun (e.g. *mä/mää/mie*) is combined with the verb *ajatella* in its past tense form (marker *i*) carrying the 1st person singular person marker -*n*. The present-day data show considerable phonetic erosion in the instantiations of this pattern: the first two syllables of the verb (*a* and *ja*) are often merged into one, and the pronoun is cliticized to the verb, resulting in instantiations such as *m’aattelin*. In its use as a framing clause, the expression may become further eroded and may include in one prosodic word also a reduced form of the complementizer *että* ‘that’, resulting in a fragment where the expression *mä ajattelin että* ‘I thought that’ is reduced to *m’aatet* (on prosodic words, see Aho 2010: 42–43; Bruce 1998: 80, 124 –126). We compare the phonetic and morphological erosion found in the modern data to the older dialect data to trace the development of these forms as fixed expressions. We also explore the syntactic characteristics of the fixed expressions in the two datasets focusing on the syntactic position of the fixed expression and the presence or absence of complements.

Data sources

Arkisyn: A morphosyntactically coded database of conversational Finnish. Database compiled at the University of Turku, with material from the Conversation Analysis Archive at the
 References