Zero person and open second person singular in Finnish everyday conversation

Karita Suomalainen (University of Turku)  Mikael Varjo (University of Turku)

This paper deals with two Finnish personal constructions that can be used to create generic, or, as we call it, open reference. These two constructions are 1) the so-called zero-person construction and 2) the open 2nd person singular construction. Both constructions can be used to create indexically open reference; the clauses that include either the zero person or the open 2nd person singular construction refer to shared human experiences and find their referents in whoever who can recognize and relate to the content of the clause. Following Helasvuo and Laitinen (2006), both the zero person and the (open) 2nd person singular can be placed in the paradigm of Finnish person marking system. In this paradigm, the open 2nd person singular, from a grammatical point of view, seems to fall into the same category with the deictically specific 2nd person singular, while the zero person can be understood as a personal category of its own. This is due to the fact that zero person has a specific grammatical marking: in the zero-person construction, the predicate is on the 3rd person singular form and there is no overt subject (Laitinen 2006: 10).

In this paper, our primary focus will be on the use and distribution of the zero person and open 2nd person singular constructions in Finnish everyday face-to-face conversations. Based on a large database of conversational Finnish, our aim is to analyze the grammatical and interactional tendencies in the distribution of zero person and open 2nd person singular.

In order to trace the semantico-grammatical tendencies of zero person and open 2nd person singular clauses, we employed a binary logistic regression with both fixed and random effects. All of our fixed effect variables were categorical, and they were chosen based on previous studies regarding zero-person clauses and open 2nd person singular clauses in Finnish. Speaker was used as the only random effect variable. In our presentation, we will show how our statistical model reveals many interesting grammatical tendencies between the two Finnish personal constructions in the focus of our paper.

Our paper will also discuss the ways in which the conversational participants employ the zero person and the open 2nd person singular as an interactional resource. The co-occurrence of the zero person and open 2nd person singular has been noted in previous literature (see e.g. Laitinen 2006; Lappalainen 2015), and this observation also holds true in our data. We will show that in such sequences of our data, where the zero person and open second person singular co-occur, there is a distribution of tasks between the two personal constructions: the zero person is used to give a general characterization or to introduce a topic, whereas the the open 2nd person singular is used to illustrate state of affairs or to exemplify a claim (cf. Nielsen, Fosgerau & Jensen 2009 on the distribution and use of the Danish generic pronoun *man* and the generically used 2nd person pronoun *du*).
Our data consist of 26 hours of everyday face-to-face conversations, drawn from the Arkisyn corpus of conversational Finnish (see Arkisyn). The data we are using have been recorded between the years 1996 and 2015 and include 21 different face-to-face conversations with altogether 66 speakers. We have both dyadic and multi-party conversations. The conversations in our data have been morphosyntactically coded in the Arkisyn database. In our approach, we will combine quantitative, statistical methods with a qualitative, interactional linguistic approach.

References

Arkisyn: A morphosyntactically coded database of conversational Finnish. Database compiled at the University of Turku, with material from the Conversation Analysis Archive at the University of Helsinki and the Syntax Archives at the University of Turku. Department of Finnish and Finno-Ugric Languages, University of Turku.


