OPEN PERSON CONSTRUCTIONS IN BORDER DIALECTS OF FINNISH AND KARELIAN

This paper compares two different grammatical strategies for expressing impersonal reference in Border Karelian dialects—namely the zero person construction (1) and the open 2SG construction (2). These ‘open person constructions’ imply a human experience in particular situation without referring to any specific individual (e.g. Siewierska 2004; Laitinen 2006; Helasvuo 2008). The zero construction has no overt subject and its predicate verb always appears in 3rd person singular. In the dialects under examination, neither does the open 2SG construction contain a pronominal subject.

(1) [An interviewee advises how to make a soup from dried fish:]
   sii-tä šoa-pi oikei hyvä-n keito-n
   it-ELA can make-3SG real good-ACC soup-ACC
   ku šii-h pano-o kerma-a ja voi-ta
   when it-ILL put-3SG cream-PAR and butter-PAR

   ‘One can make a real good soup from dried fish when one uses cream and butter.’ (IOMANTSI 503:1)

(2) [An interviewee describes the life in the old days:]
   midä enemmär ruavo-i-t, se-n ol-i parempi
   what more work-PST-2SG it-GEN be-PST better.NOM

   ‘The harder you worked the better.’ (IMPILAHTI 5129:2)

The zero construction is the most common and well-studied way to construe an open reference in Finnish (e.g. Laitinen 1995, 2006). It is known both in dialects and in Standard language. The open 2SG constructions, instead, are frequently and productively used only in Eastern dialects—although they are not totally unknown in the West either (Sirelius 1984; Forsberg & Uusitupa, in process). When it comes to Karelian language, however, the situation is quite the opposite: in Karelian the 2nd person singular is the primary means for construing open reference, and the zero construction is practically only used with unipersonal verbs which appear always in 3rd person singular (Uusitupa, forthcoming).

My data consists of about 4400 open person constructions collected from the Corpus of Border Karelia. Border Karelian dialects constitute a transitional zone between Eastern Finnish dialects and their closest cognate, Karelian language (Uusitupa et. al 2017). In Border Karelian dialects, both the 2nd person singular and the zero construction are used, and the variation can be explained by several syntactic, contextual, idiolectal, and areal factors. In my presentation, I will focus on the syntactic features (e.g. predicate verbs, modality, and clause types) and the areal distributions of different patterns that also tell interestingly about the contacts between Finnish and Karelian speakers in the history.

Keywords: zero person, second person, reference, Border Karelian dialects

References


Uusitupa, Milla (forthcoming): *Rajakarjalaismurteiden avoimet persoonaviittaukset* [The open person constructions of Border Karelian dialects]. The manuscript of doctoral thesis.