

Scalarity and the seach domain: how degree modifiers combine with Finnish adpositions

Tuomas Huumo, University of Turku and University of Tartu

Keywords: adposition, degree modifier, scalarity, fictive motion, Finnish

Finnish adpositions are a semi-open class with both more and less grammaticalized items, many of which have a historical background as either case-inflected nouns (e.g., *pää-llä* [head/top-ADESSIVE] ‘on top of’) or verbs (e.g. *lähti-en* [leave-INF] ‘since [temp.]’); for a historical account, see Grünthal (2003). Adpositions generally designate a relation between a Figure F (the entity whose location is at issue) and a Ground G (the entity with respect to which F is located). Most Finnish adpositions are postpositions, but there are also prepositions, and a few bipositions. Most postpositions take a genitive G (e.g. *pöydä-n pää-llä* [table-GEN top-ADESS] ‘on top of the table’), while most prepositions take a partitive G (e.g., *ennen ilta-a* [before evening-PAR] ‘before evening’). Some allow both genitive and partitive Gs (e.g. *kirkko-n lähellä* [church-GEN near] vs. *lähellä kirkko-a* [near church-PAR] ‘near the church’).

It has been observed (e.g. in the grammar ISK 2004) that some Finnish adpositions allow **degree modifiers** (DMs), while others do not (for Dutch and English prepositions, see Zwarts 1997 and Svenonius 2008). DMs commonly relate with adjectives or adverbs and express scalar meanings such as ‘somewhat’, ‘very’, ‘extremely’ (open-scale DMs; cf. Paradis 2001; Kennedy & McNally 2005), or ‘almost’, ‘completely’, (closed-scale DMs). Talmy (2017: 315–316) analyzes English scalar prepositions modified by DMs (e.g. *very near* or *way above*) and draws the distinction between **centripetal** and **centrifugal** adpositions. With centripetal adpositions such as *near*, the degree increases the closer F is to G. The opposite is true of centrifugal adpositions such as *above*. One example of a centripetal scalar adposition in Finnish is *lähellä* ‘near’, which is compatible with both open-scale and closed-scale DMs. The conceived nature of the scale as open or closed depends on the case of G: open-scale DMs are only felicitous if G is in the partitive (e.g., *hyvin lähe-llä kirkko-a* [very near-ADESS church-PAR] ‘very near the church’) but not with a genitive G (**hyvin kirkko-n* [GEN] *lähe-llä*). The genitive G only allows closed-scale DMs such as *ihan* ‘quite’, which are also felicitous with the partitive G (*ihan kirkko-n* [GEN] *lähe-llä* and *ihan lähe-llä kirkko-a* [PAR], both meaning ‘quite near the church’). This demonstrates that (at least with some scalar adpositions) the case marking of G correlates with the conceptualization of the scale as open or closed.

In my presentation I analyze uses of open-scale and closed-scale DMs with three classes of spatial adpositions in Finnish: 1) topological (e.g. *lähellä* ‘near’ and *luona* ‘at’), 2) directional (*kohti* ‘towards’, *ohi* ‘past [F missing the G]’), and 3) projective (*edessä* ‘in front of’, *takana* ‘behind’, *yllä* ‘above’ and *alla* ‘below’). I argue that in Group 1) (see example 1), the scale relates primarily to the distance between F and G. In Group 2) (ex. 2), the scale relates primarily to the direction of a vector or of a path traversed by a moving F. The scale then measures how directly this vector or path points towards G. Group 3) is the most complicated case in point, since alternating frames of reference (FoR), i.e. field-based, relative or intrinsic (see Levinson 2003, Talmy 2000), contribute to the scalarity. In a field-based FoR (ex. 3) there is an encompassive Ground (see Talmy 2000: 213) with an inside displaying a FRONT–BACK asymmetry (consider the inside of an auditorium with its FRONT located where the platform is). In locating F, scalarity is then measured as a decreasing distance between F and one extremity of G. With the intrinsic FoR (ex. 4), projective adpositions commonly evoke a centripetal meaning with a scale of increasing closeness to G. In the relative FoR (example 5), projective adpositions behave more like directional ones (in Group 2), and the scale evoked by a DM relates to the alignment of F on a sagittal axis with G as its origo and the viewer situated on the FRONT segment of the axis at some distance from G.

Examples:

- (1) Talo-ni on hyvin lähellä kirkko-a.
house-1SG be.PRES.3SG very near church-PAR
‘My house is very near the church.’

- (2) Heit-i-n lumipallo-n melkein kohti opettaja-a.
 throw-PST-1SG snowball-ACC almost toward teacher-PAR
 ‘I threw the snowball almost toward the teacher.’
- (3) Teatteri-ssa Liisa istu-i ihan edessä.
 Theatre-INE name sit-PST.3SG quite in.front
 ‘In the theatre, Liisa was sitting at the very front.’
- (4) Liisa seiso-i ihan edessä-ni
 name stand-PST.3SG quite in.front-1SG
 ‘Liisa was standing right [‘near’] in front of me.’
- (5) Kirkko on ihan vuorenhuipu-n edessä.
 church be.PRES.3SG quite mountain.top-GEN in.front
 ‘The church is right [‘directly’] in front of the mountain top.’

References:

- Grünthal, Riho 2003. *Finnic adpositions and cases in change. Mémoires de la Société Finno-ougrienne* 244. Société Finno-ougrienne, Helsinki.
- Hagège, Claude 2010. *Adpositions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ISK = Hakulinen, Auli, Maria Vilkuna, Riitta Korhonen, Vesa Koivisto, Tarja Riitta Heinonen & Irja Alho. 2004. *Iso suomen kielioppi. [A comprehensive grammar of Finnish.]* Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura [The Finnish Literature Society].
- Kennedy, Chris and McNally, Louise 2005. Scale structure and the semantic typology of gradable predicates. *Language* 81: 345–381.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2003. *Space in language and cognition: explorations in cognitive diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paradis, Carita. 2001. Adjectives and boundedness. *Cognitive Linguistics* 12: 47–64.
- Svenonius, Peter 2008. Projections of *P*. In *Syntax and Semantics of Spatial P*, ed by Anna Asbury, Jakub Dotlacil, Berit Gehrke, and Rick Nouwen, pp. 63-84. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Talmy, Leonard. 2000. *Toward a cognitive semantics. Volume 1: Concept structuring systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Talmy, Leonard 2017. *The targeting system of language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Zwarts, Joost 1997. Vectors as relative positions: A compositional semantics of modified PPs. *Journal of Semantics* 14: 57–86.