

The Finnish generic ‘zero person’: The consequences of referring to speech-act participants
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This work argues that seemingly puzzling word-order properties of the Finnish generic zero-person construction (Fin. *nollapersoona*) can be explained if we acknowledge the previously-overlooked relevance of speech-act participants (speaker/addressee) for the Finnish EPP. Extending the analysis proposed by Malamud (2012) for English and German, I suggest that the Finnish zero person is built from the features [arb], [gn] and [se/1st]/[2nd], and show how these featural properties can be used to explain otherwise unexpected word order patterns.

Background: Finnish has flexible word order, influenced by information structure. To capture the word order properties of Finnish, Holmberg & Nikanne 2002 (also Holmberg 2005, 2010, Vilkuna 1989) propose that the (i) Finnish spec-TP is a **topic position** (i.e., not only for subjects), and (ii) topical elements carry a [-focus] feature, checked by the EPP feature of T. In other words, a [-focus] element (a topic) needs to occupy the spec-TP position in Finnish.

Finnish uses third-person singular verbs with null subjects (ex.1a, Holmberg 2010) for generic human reference. It is standardly agreed, on the basis of data from case-marking and reflexive and possessive binding, that subject-position zeros are syntactically realized, despite being phonologically null (see e.g. Hakulinen & Karttunen 1973, Vainikka 1989).

Crucially, Holmberg 2010 argues that these **generic zeros cannot satisfy the Finnish (topicality-oriented) EPP**. In other words, the requirement that spec-TP be filled by a topical element cannot be fulfilled by a generic zero. Instead, Holmberg claims that in generic zero-subject sentences, spec-TP must be filled overtly with a [-focus] element (ex.1a; for details, including behavior of conditionals, see Holmberg 2010), or by a ‘last-resort’ expletive *sitä*. The verb-initial (1b) is unacceptable. Phonologically null *definite* subjects – such as the *pro*-dropped first-person pronoun in (1d) – can satisfy the EPP. Thus, phonologically implicitness is not the defining factor (Finnish lacks third-person referential *pro*-drop.)

- (1a) Suomessa joutuu usein saunaan. (adapted from Laitinen 2006)
Finland-INE end-up-3SG often sauna-ILL *In Finland you/one/I often end up in sauna*
- (1b) *joutuu usein saunaan Suomessa
- (1c) **Sitä** joutuu usein saunaan Suomessa.
It-PARTITIVE end-up-3SG often sauna-ILL Finland-INE
- (1d) Joudun usein saunaan Suomessa [referential 1st-person *pro*-drop]
(I) end-up-1SG often sauna-ILL Finland-INE

Puzzle: Holmberg’s observations are challenged by naturally-occurring examples like (2a,b). These are verb-initial, yet grammatical, zero-subject sentences (also Laitinen 2006)? Why is the EPP satisfied in (2), not (1b)? (Note: zeros trigger 3r-person verb and possessive agreement, 2b.)

- (2a) Saa ottaa mukaan omat makkarat
may-3SG bring along own sausages
‘You can bring along your own sausages’ [addressee-oriented] (facebook announcement)
- (2b) Saa kai tässä maassa keskustella omilla silmillään näkemistään ja kokemistaan asioista
may-3SG maybe this-INESS country-INESS converse-about own-ADESS eye-ADESS-Px3 seen-Px3 and experienced-Px3 things-ELA
‘In this country one is (~ I am) hopefully permitted to discuss things that one has seen with one’s own eyes and experienced’ [speaker-oriented] (www discussion forum)

The first part of my answer to this puzzle builds on Moltmann (2006, 2010), who argues that English generic *one* is can be licensed by **Inference from First Person** (Strategy #1) or Inference to First Person (Strategy #2). These are exemplified in (3).

- (3a) One can see the picture from the entrance. [Moltmann 2006, *inference from first person*]
(3b) One should not lie. [Moltmann 2006, *inference to first person*]

According to Moltmann, Strategy#1 uses first-person experience to *establish a generalization that goes beyond the speaker/addressee*. Strategy#2 involves an “already-established generalization, a law, general requirement or general recommendation” (e.g. deontic modals) *being applied to speaker*

and/or addressee. For **Finnish**, the crucial observation is that Strategy#1 captures examples like (1a), while Strategy#2 is relevant precisely for the verb-initial zero-subject sentences (ex.2a,b)—usually with deontic modals: The utterance is **intended to be applied to speaker (ex.2b) and/or addressee (ex.2a)**, also Laitinen 2006). But why is the EPP satisfied with Strategy#2, but not Strategy#1? Intuitively, I suggest this stems from speech-act participants (speaker/addressee) being strongly associated with the zero’s interpretation in Strategy#2—making it topical and definite—whereas the zero is generic and non-referential in Strategy#1.

To formalize this, I build on Malamud (2012)’s analysis of English *you/one* and German *man* which addresses the tension that these forms exhibit in being both generic (and indefinite) as well as speaker/hearer-associated (indexical). I assume that in contexts involving **Strategy #2**, the Finnish zero subject is built out of the features [arb], uninterpretable [gn] and, crucially, that speaker-oriented zeros (ex.2b) have a logophoric speaker-anchored [se] feature (‘de se’) while addressee-oriented zeros (ex.2a) have an addressee-anchored [2nd] feature. Let us call these *type 2 zeros*. This approach is in line with Malamud’s analysis of *you* and *one*, which posits that *one* is built out of [se], [arb], [human] and [gn], and impersonal *you* out of [2nd], [arb] and [gn].)

Furthermore, I posit that in **Strategy #1** contexts, the zero is built out of [gn] and [arb], but no [se] or [2nd]. (Speaker/addressee-orientation may be *pragmatically inferred* but, under this view, is not part of the semantics of these zeros.) Let us call these *type 1 zeros*. My proposal thus posits 2 types of zeros with overlapping features (cf. Kratzer 1997 on two kinds of German *man*.)

Let us further assume that the **Finnish topicality-oriented EPP** (the need for something topical in spec-TP) is satisfied by [-focus] elements (ex.1a) or by elements with [se] or [2nd] features, e.g. *type 2 zeros*. This successfully derives the word-order patterns in (1a,b) vs (2).

However, what about the ‘last resort’ expletive *sitä* (it-PARTITIVE)? This form satisfies the EPP (1c,4b) – why? Importantly, variants with and without *sitä* (4a,4b) differ pragmatically in meaning, which is unexpected if *sitä* were ‘purely’ expletive as assumed by Holmberg 2010 and Greco et al. 2018. Instead, I argue, following Hakulinen 1975, that *sitä* in sentence-initial position in zero-subject sentences signals to the addressee that **the zero is associated with the speaker**. Hakulinen 1975 says *sitä* indicates “the speaker has [relevant] personal experience (...or...) is referring to himself” (also Greco et al. 2018, Dominican Spanish). More specifically, I assume that *sitä* expresses *speaker-oriented affective meaning* and can carry the logophoric speaker-oriented [se] feature – and is thereby able to satisfy the EPP.

(4a) No expletive: Kaikkeen kyllästyy. (Hakulinen 1975)

Everything-ILLAT get-bored-3SG ‘One gets bored of everything.’

(4b) With expletive: Sitä kyllästyy kaikkeen. (Hakulinen 1975)

It-PARTITIVE get-bored-3SG everything-ILLAT

Possible paraphrase: ‘(In my personal experience,) one gets bored of everything (and I am bored of everything)’

Additional evidence that elements other than zero person can carry speaker-related features comes from the **locative particle tässä** (here-INESS), which also satisfies the EPP in zero-subject sentences. Crucially, (5) shows that *tässä* does not necessarily refer to the speaker’s location (for (5), that would require *täällä*, here-ADESS). Instead, as Hakulinen et al. 2004 note, it signals that the utterance **applies especially to the speaker**—like *sitä* (also Jokela 2012). This is another case of an affective element satisfying the EPP, with a [se] feature, I hypothesize.

(5) *tässä unohtaa koko pahuksen sauhuttelun.* (from a *www* discussion board about quitting smoking)

Here-INE forget-3SG whole darn-ACC smoking-ACC ‘One forgets (~I forget) about smoking’

In sum, if the topic slot in generic zero-subject sentences is not filled by a referential topic (1a), it can be filled—overtly (4,5) or covertly (2)—by *an element linked to the speech-act participants*. I propose an analysis where, in addition to the [-focus] feature, the EPP can be satisfied by elements with the speaker-oriented [se] or the addressee-oriented [2nd] feature, features already proposed by Malamud (2012). This captures the word order patterns while allowing us to maintain a view of the Finnish EPP as discourse-oriented and sensitive to topicality/definiteness.