

***Jos kukaan on normaali* ‘if anyone is normal’**

**Impact of the conditional type on the distribution of Finnish NPIs**

According to Haspelmath (1997: 73, 293–294), Finnish NPI indefinites (a subgroup of negative polarity items, NPIs), such as *kukaan* ‘anyone,’ *mikään* ‘anything’ or *koskaan* ‘ever,’ appear ungrammatical in conditional clauses, and e. g. positive polarity items (PPIs; *joku* ‘someone’ in 2) should be used, instead. However, as (1) and (3) show, this is false (see also VISK § 1641), but rather than treating this claim as an accidental error in a typological study, I suggest that it is a symptom of Finnish NPIs’ biased distributions in conditionals. Let us compare the title quote, given in its sentential context in (1), and the allegedly ill-formed (2).

- (1) *Asia* — — *pala-si* *normaali-ksi*  
 issue return-PST.3SG normal-TRA  
*(jos kukaan on normaali mielenterveyspotilas).*  
 if anyone be.3SG normal mental health patient  
 ‘The issue was normalized (if anyone is a normal mental health patient, in the first place)’ (Suomi24, 2005)
- (2) *Jos joku* */?kukaan* *soitta-a,* *sano* *minu-lle.* (clause order: *p q*)  
 if someone anyone call-3SG say.IMP.2SG 1SG-ALL  
 ‘If anyone calls, tell me.’ (cf. Haspelmath 1997: 293)

Ex. (2) displays a regular *content conditional*, in which the antecedent (‘if anyone calls’) functions as a proper condition for the imperative in the consequent (‘if *p* then *q*’; Sweetser 1990: 113–116), while the conditional in (1) can be labelled as *metatextual*: the antecedent comments the felicitousness of the word choice *normaali*, and there is no real-world dependence between *p* and *q* (Dancygier 1998: 103–109). Hence, the distribution of Finnish NPIs seems to be affected by the type (or domain) of the conditional connection<sup>1</sup> (see e. g. Dancygier 1998; Sweetser 1990), and thus, also by the syntactic integration between the antecedent and the consequent (note the parenthesis in (1)). Indeed, according to VISK (§ 1641), Finnish NPIs are most frequent in conditionals used as nonrestrictive additions, which description fits to metatextual (or more widely *conversational*) conditionals (see Dancygier 1998: 106). However, syntactically more integrated content conditionals may also host NPIs in Finnish: see (3); cf. (2), whose ungrammaticality judgement one may challenge, too. Thus, the whole picture of the tendencies and variation behind the generalization, based on only sporadic data evidence in VISK (§ 1641, 1136), remain still insufficiently described.

---

<sup>1</sup> This should not be confused with the ‘reality’/‘unreality’ distinction in classifications of conditionals (see e. g. Thompson et al. 2007: 255–256).

- (3) *Vastaile, jos mikään tuntu-i tutu-lta.* (clause order: *q p*)  
reply.IMP.2SG if anything feel-PST.3SG familiar-ABL  
'Please reply, if anything felt familiar.' (Suomi24, 2010)

This study aims to uncover distributional patterns of Finnish NPIs in conditionals by analyzing the tokens of NPI indefinites (see above), further NPI adverbs (*ikinä* 'ever,' *enää* 'anymore') and minimizers (e. g. *yhtään, ollenkaan* 'at all') in affirmative conditionals in two corpora: Yle News Archive and Suomi24 discussions (see [corp.csc.fi](http://corp.csc.fi)). Besides the conditional type (and further subtypes), clause order (cf. 2 and 3), NPI class (e. g. indefinite vs. minimizer), and the register will be considered. In the preliminary news data (incl. NPI indefinites and adverbs; *n* = 598) both content and conversational conditionals are attested, but most strikingly, non-clausal emphasizing phrases (e. g. *nyt jos koskaan* 'now if ever'; esp. frequent in sports news) comprise ca. 30 % of the instances. The data specific and lexically semi-fixed nature of such attraction points motivates the comparison between different NPI classes, on the one hand, and the datasets, on the other. This study will focus on Finnish items but it invites cross-linguistic comparisons with parallel patterns in other Uralic languages.

Even if the various conditional types are not entirely ignored in NPI research (see e. g. Israel 2011: 250–254 for speech act conditionals: *if you want anything to eat*, [offer]), conditionals are still often only associated with content conditionals (cf. 2). Thus, in general, the current study contributes to a better understanding of the internal variation within NPI contexts: one problematic example (type) does not necessarily define the whole category.

## References

- Dancygier, Barbara 1998: *Conditionals and Prediction: Time, Knowledge and Causation in Conditional Constructions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haspelmath, Martin 1997: *Indefinite pronouns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Israel, Michael 2011: *The Grammar of Polarity. Pragmatics, sensitivity, and the logic of scales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sweetser, Eve 1990: *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson Sandra A., Longacre Robert E. & Hwang Shin Ja J. 2007: Adverbial clauses. In Shopen, T. (eds.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description (Volume II: Complex Constructions)*, 237–300. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VISK = A. Hakulinen, M. Vilkuna, R. Korhonen, V. Koivisto, T. R. Heinonen & I. Alho. 2004. *Iso suomen kieliooppi*. [*A Comprehensive Grammar of Finnish*] Helsinki: SKS. Online version, retrieved 24.9.2024. Available: <http://scripta.kotus.fi/visk>