

Never-ending sentences in Finnish everyday conversation: prosody, embodiment and grammar as indexes of turn continuation and completion

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Our presentation concerns multi-unit turns (MUT; e.g., Houtkoop-Steenstra & Mazeland 1985; Marian et al. 2021), also known as never-ending sentences (Auer 1992; Laury & Ono 2014), in Finnish everyday conversation. These are long, complex turns by one speaker – narratives as well as other types of long turns – consisting of sentences, clauses, and other units of talk often combined in ways not commonly described in standard grammars. Such long turns flout the conversational constraint allowing speakers only one turn-constructual unit (TCU; a clause, sentence, phrase) at a time. Our methodologies are Interactional Linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018) and Usage-based Grammar (Laury & Ono 2019) and our data come from the Arkisyn corpus of audio- and video-recorded Finnish conversations. Our research questions are the following: How are MUTs projected at the outset? What prosodic, bodily-visual and grammatical means are used by speakers in our data in order to show that they intend to continue their lengthy turn, or that they are done, so someone else can take a turn?

Our study is part of a larger research project comparing Finnish MUTs with those in a number of other languages. Existing studies on the role of prosody and bodily-visual conduct in turn holding and turn yielding in general, and on MUTs in particular, have almost exclusively been based on data from languages in the Indo-European family, especially Germanic, and it is unclear whether findings from those languages apply to languages outside that family (see, e.g; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018: 69).

The following is a slightly simplified excerpt of a MUT from our data (SG 441, Arkisyn). The speaker continues her long turn much longer than what is shown here.

- 1 >nii mutta < tiekssä Jorma että;
 PTC but know-Q-2SG NAME COMP
 yes but you know Jorma that
- 2 (0.6) sä <feidaat silleen>;
 2SG fake-2SG DEM.ADV
 you fake it so

- 3 et sä syöt nyt pienen annoksen
COMP 2SG eat-2SG now small-ACC portion-ACC
that you eat a small portion now
- 4 ku oll#aa# yhteises ruokapöy#däs#
when be-PASS shared-INE dinner.table-INE
when (we) are at the dinner table together
- 5 ja sit sulla on tuolla joku ↑salamakkara,
and then 2SG-ADE be-3sg DEM.LOC-ADE some secret.sausage
and then you have some secret sausage over there
- 6 (0.2) .hhh [ja sit ku sä tuut saunasta=
and then when 2SG come-2SG sauna-ELA
and then when you come (in) from the sauna