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-constructional 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.

- 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# \underline{y} hteises $r\underline{uo}$ kapöy#däs# when be-PASS shared-INE dinner.table-INE when (we) are at the dinner table together
- 5 ja s<u>it</u> sulla on tuolla joku \uparrow 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

Initial results from our data indicate that, unlike what has been claimed earlier, narratives in conversation are not always projected in advance by a preface but rather emerge in the course of interaction in response to local contingencies, and that embodied behavior can be used to make room for a multi-unit turn. Signs of turn continuity typically include combinations of certain conjunctions or particles (e.g., *ja sit* 'and then', I. 5, 6) and prosodic features such as lengthenings, breathings (I. 6) and pauses (I. 2, 6); rush-throughs (lack of pause and increased speech rate; I. 6); words carrying an initial pitch upstep (I. 5); and utterance-final pitch rise or level pitch (I. 1, 2). A prominent stress can also imply continuity in some contexts. Certain demonstratives (e.g., *silleen* 'in such a way', I. 2) may also indicate that a lengthy turn is underway. Signs of completion, in turn, include features such as creaky voice (cf. Ogden 2004), and utterance-final steep pitch fall. Naturally, the prosodic signs of completion are typically combined with syntactic and semantic completion.

References

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