

Perspectival possessor agreement in Finnish spatial PPs



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In a nutshell

Novel experimental evidence from possessor agreement in Finnish spatial PPs showing that (spatial) perspective-holding is syntactically and morphologically realized.

1. Background

In Finnish, possession is represented by possessive pronouns (POSSRs) with possessive-suffixes (PXs) that index person & number of POSSR (ex.1).

(1) (Minun) kirja-ni / hänen kirja-nsa
(My) book-PX.1SG / {his/her} book-PX.3SG
'my book' / 'his/her book'

POSSRs can be optionally pro-dropped in 1st & 2nd person
In spatial PPs, the POSSR surfaces preminally with the PX being suffixed on spatial P (ex.2).

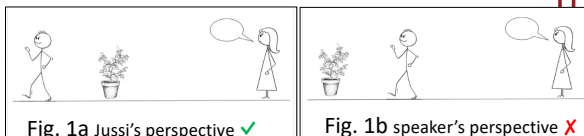
(2) (Sinun) takana-si oleva puu
Your behind-PX.2SG be.PTC.NOM tree.NOM
'behind of you being tree' (~ 'tree behind you, 'lauseenvastike' construction)

3rd person POSSR is pro-dropped in the presence of a local c-commanding subject (overt vs. *pro* = orthogonal for our claims)

Novel finding: Finnish POSSR constructions track the spatial perspective of the POSSR (more precisely, its antecedent, whoever POSSR refers to).

(3) Jussi pitää *pro*_i takana-an_{i,3} olevasta huonekasvista
J.NOM likes *pro* behind-PX.3SG being.ELA houseplant.ELA
'Jussi likes the houseplant behind him_{i/3}'

(4) (a) ✓ Perspective => *pro*/Jussi (b) ✗ Perspective => speaker

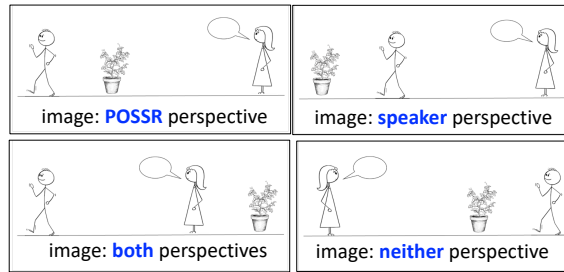


- In ex(3), the plant must be behind Jussi wrt. Jussi's spatial perspective (denoted by POSSR) (Fig.1a)
- Ex.(3) is inconsistent with a situation where the plant is behind Jussi from the speaker's perspective (Fig.1b)
- Same intuitions replicate with other verb types

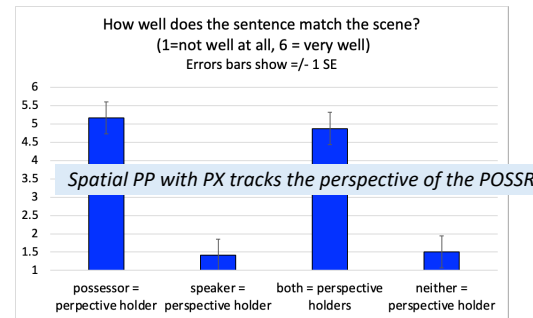
2. Experiment

- To test these intuitions experimentally, native speakers rated how well sentences match perspectival configurations [1=not at all, 6=very well]
- Image matches possessor's perspective, speaker's perspective, both, neither
- Each trial showed *one sentence* paired with *one image* (one config)
- 8 targets, 12 fillers, Latin Square, n=12, behind/in front, various verbs

"Jussi likes the houseplant behind him." (in Finnish, ex.3)
How well does the sentence match the image?



3. Results



✓ POSSR Perspective ✗ Speaker Perspective

- Images depicting [POSSR=perspective holder] are rated significantly higher (avg 5.17/6) than images depicting [speaker = perspective holder] (1.42/6), $t = 12.3, p < .001$
- In control conditions, where the sentence matches/mismatches the image regardless of who the perspective-holder is (both, neither images respectively) -- **speaker as perspective-holder is unavailable.**
- [speaker = perspective holder] is rated as bad as [neither = perspective holder] ($t = 0.51, p > 0.6$)

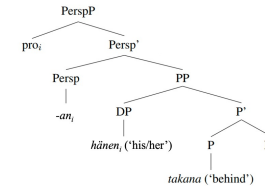
4. Proposal

What is the structure of (2), how does this capture that spatial perspective must be anchored to POSSR, unlike e.g. in English? The role of the accompanying PX?

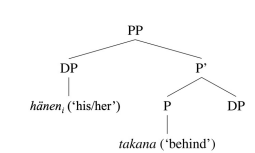
A spatial PP containing a perspectival anaphor must reflect the spatial perspective of this anaphor (specifically, of its antecedent) (Kuno, 1987; Sells, 1987; Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd, 2011; Sundaresan & Pearson, 2014, a.o.).

- Finnish spatial PPs invariably reflect the spatial perspective of (antecedent of) POSSR => **POSSR is a perspectival anaphor in spatial PPs** (unsurprisingly, *hän* 's/he' can be used logophorically in FID, Kaiser, 2018).

(7a) Spatial PX-PP in Finnish



(7b) Spatial PP (no PX)



- POSSR is bound by a perspectival *pro* merged as the specifier of a c-commanding Persp head, *pro* refers to a salient perspective-holder wrt. the spatial PP (Sundaresan (2018); Charnavel (2019)).
- POSSR occupies Spec, PP. PX occupies the head immediately above POSSR (Persp) and is a ϕ -probe that Agrees with POSSR (compatible with PX being an agreement-marker (cf. Anderson, 2005, 235-239), a ϕ -probing) anaphor (e.g. Trosterud, 1993) or a hybrid of both (Toivonen, 2000).
- This is consistent with an analysis where the PX exposes the Persp head.
- Subsequent operations (e.g. head movement) derive suffixal position of PX on P

5. Implications and predictions

- POSSR-PX ϕ -matching (1) is derived as a classic case of possessor ϕ -agreement.
- When POSSR is 3rd-person, the clausal subject typically denotes the most salient perspective-holder.
- The speaker, though also salient, is dispreferred, being 1SG. This explains (i) the subject-POSSR coreference in (3) and (ii) why spatial perspective must track POSSR, not the speaker.

Empirical predictions:

I. Unlike the anaphoric POSSR *hänen* in (7a), a *pronoun/R-expression* POSSR cannot be bound by *pro* (Binding Conditions B/C). Similarly, an *inanimate* POSSR cannot be bound by *pro*, since perspective-holding requires animacy (Charnavel, 2019; Sundaresan & Pearson, 2014).

Prediction: Such structures are incompatible with Persp, thus should lack PX. This is met:

- (8) Minä törmäsin lapsen_i /sen takana-(*an_i) olevaan puuhun
I.NOM crashed child.GEN / it.GEN behind-PX.3SG being.ILL tree.ILL
Intended: 'I crashed into the tree behind it/the child.'
- (9) Auto_i törmäsi pro_i takana-(*an_i) olevaan puuhun.
Car.NOM crashed pro behind-PX.3SG being.ILL tree.ILL
Intended: 'The car crashed into the tree behind it.'

II. We propose that the PX-less sentences in (8)-(9) expose the truncated structure in (7b).
Prediction: The spatial perspective expressed by (7b) must be underspecified. Also met.
(10) which lacks both a POSSR & PX is construed as being especially vague:

(10) takana oleva huonekasvi
behind be.PTC.NOM houseplant.NOM
'houseplant behind some(one/thing).'