

INTRODUCTION

Issues of case have run incessantly through linguistics from its dawn up to modern times, in relation to both the relatively thoroughly investigated Indo-European languages, and less studied families such as Finno-Ugric, which includes the Finnish language. This constant interest in case results from its significant role in lingual communication; case encodes a complex of relations binding the objects of reality, be it extra- or intralingual. I would not hesitate to assert that case is omnipresent. Every sentence in any human language, lingually manifesting a human thought, refers to certain objects and relations between them.

The immensity and diversity of works devoted to case may give the impression that all or at least enough has been said; that any further investigation will be confined to fruitless hair-splitting. Nevertheless, the linguistic literature on the subject may cause a more demanding reader to conclude that, in general, research on case in Finnish has got stuck, if not literally at the level of pure factography, then at the level of a largely atomized perception of phenomena with quite a feeble theoretical foundation. The fact that descriptive practice (apart from a few isolated expositions) usually consists in the mechanical enumeration of case forms, their syntactic functions and contextual meanings effectively obscures the systemic nature of this component of the Finnish language. The present *Case Grammar* is envisaged as an attempt to make good these shortcomings. It brings to light, by means of explicitly formulated case theory, the formal, syntactic and semantic regularities of the Finnish case system in its entirety.

The subject of study of the present work is the systemic – syntactic and semantic – properties of the morphological nominal formations marked by means of the most grammaticalized modes of expression – namely endings – making up the Finnish case system. Such lingual phenomena as lexis, voice, number, person etc. are addressed only as auxiliary issues.

The empirical material on which the research is based was not obtained from any specific corpus. It was rather formed through trial and error from the nebula of data furnished by literature, television, radio, the press, and conversations. The con-

cept of case emerging from these many years of experience has allowed me to construct extensive case paradigms *sui generis*, which were subsequently verified in terms of their lingual correctness and discussed with Finnish native speakers with regard to their various semantic nuances.

While the cases (case forms) are excerpted from larger units (texts, sentences, syntagms), not all of these units deserve the same attention when the category of case is being considered. The analysis concerns only the relevant fragments of those units – the minimal case syntagms conceived of as valency, case government schemes comprising the appropriate case form(s) and the governing word. The case oppositions resulting from comparison of the appropriate minimal case syntagms make it possible to determine the size of the signicator of the case meaning(s). In order to bring to light the formal, syntactic and semantic regularities within the Finnish case system, the search should be directed primarily toward the detection of such signicators of case meanings whose size coincides with the size of the case (form). Such uses of cases constitute the pillars of case oppositions and – as it turns out – in many instances govern the appearance of appropriate cases in contexts in which they do not actually possess the status of autosignicators. The laborious procedure of extracting the autosignicators of case meanings has one more advantage: it enables the researcher to deal in ordered fashion with the problems of (at least the major part of) the polysemy of cases, to fix such semantic constants which, being the relatively least dependent on the context, characterize a given case as such. The notion of ‘constitutive meaning’ – in opposition to the ‘general meaning’ (*differential minimum of signification*, *Grundbedeutung*, *signification générale*) known from the literature – seems to crown these efforts without the need to resort to barely verifiable divagations. The way in which the abstract constitutive meaning is actualized (obligatorily) and the way in which other meanings are combined (ascribed) with the actualized meaning (facultatively) are verified non-metalingually by means of so-called case-conditional sentences.

The work is organized along the following lines. The first chapter contains an overview of the most influential approaches to the category of case, from antiquity up to modern times. In the history of investigation, there is seen to have been a gradual move away from atomistic descriptions in favor of systemic approaches. Since the form of cases seems to be much more easy to grasp than their meaning (for example, the speech sounds that are the building blocks of the form can be heard even by those who do not speak the language in question), particular efforts are made to bring to light the semantic unity of particular cases. There is also a visible tendency towards the elaboration of a theory of case which is not bound to any language-specific expression and content – a general case theory. The second chapter presents the case theory adopted here. On the basis of listed primitive terms, it is possible to define different kinds of case oppositions, morphological variation and

phonetic neutralization. A description is given of the regularities concerning the morphology, syntax and semantics of cases. The following five chapters (3–7) deal with the complexities of morphological marking, syntax and semantics of cases belonging to particular subsystems of the Finnish case system. Chapter 3 is devoted to the cases of the direct object – the accusative and partitive. It discusses the puzzling accusative split – the parallel occurrence of two accusative forms, of which one is homophonic with the nominative. Much space is devoted to the intricate way in which aspectual meanings combine with quantitative meanings to govern the choice of appropriate case for the direct object. Chapter 4 considers the cases of the subject – the nominative and absolutive. The problem of the puzzling apparent merger of subject and direct object in relation to intransitive verbs in so-called existential sentences is resolved by proposing the coexistence of two systems in Finnish – accusative and ergative. Some manifestations of the partitive and nominative (accusative II) are reinterpreted as the absolutive – the case of the subject in the ergative (sub)system. As it turns out, there is no point in considering the opposition between nominative and absolutive from a quantitative point of view. The two subject cases have different constitutive meanings only in the dimension of individuality. Chapter 5 deals with the cases of the predicative – the nominative and partitive. The choice of appropriate case for the predicative is governed first of all by quantification. Other meanings characteristic of these cases (e.g. the distributive meaning of the partitive-predicative in opposition to the collective meaning of the nominative-predicative) can be considered at most to be ascribed meanings. Chapter 6 deals with the exceptional case of the genitive, which is the only case having both attributive and adverbial uses. The difficulties in identifying formal, syntactic and semantic regularities in the case of the adnominal genitive result from the irreducible mixed grammatical-lexical character of the signifier of the target meaning(s). In turn, the adverbial genitive enters into oppositions of quite regular character with the cases of the subject and direct object. Chapter 7 is devoted to the cases of adverbial. These are classified as: (i) local cases: the inessive, illative, elative, adessive, allative, ablative, essive, translative (and conditionally the partitive) and (ii) marginal cases: the comitative, abessive and instructive. The local cases constitute a compact system of semantic oppositions only in as much as they are considered from the point of view of their spatial meanings. When other meanings are considered, the oppositions between them seem to undergo a significant blurring. The oppositions between the local cases in spatial meaning can be captured by referring to the dimensions of staticity, direction and proximity. Other meanings are only ascribed meanings. The marginal cases do not ever constitute a bound verb complement. As they approach the category of adverb, the meaning of the marginal cases is not subject to accommodation to the meaning of the head of the syntagm, as is characteristic of all other Finnish cases.

The findings of this work make it possible to fix the role of each Finnish case in the system, ascribing to it a discretely different bundle of morphological, syntactic and semantic properties. Emphasis is placed on phenomena of the most general, grammaticalized nature. More individual phenomena, bordering on lexicalization, are addressed only tentatively by means of the notion of 'reinterpretation of meaning'. The reinterpreted meanings seem to occur in certain lexical contexts as combinatory variants of the actualized constitutive and/or ascribed meanings. Nevertheless, the issue of the reinterpreted meanings certainly requires a more profound investigation than has been possible here. Unless some other conceptual framework can be formulated, this aspect of the functioning of case seems to be describable only by pure enumeration of forms and their syntactic functions and meanings.