

Object case and the syntax of impersonals

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Finnish has two constructions for the first person plural. In written Finnish, the nominative pronoun *me* triggers first person plural agreement on the verb; the object is marked with accusative case. In spoken Finnish in (1b), the impersonal passive form of the verb is used, the first person plural pronoun is again nominative but the object also appears in the nominative case.

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|-----|----|----------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| (1) | a. | Written Finnish | | b. | Spoken Finnish | | |
| | | Me | ost- imme | talo- n . | Me | oste- ttiin | talo. |
| | | 1PL.NOM | buy-PST.1PL | house-ACC | 1PL.NOM | buy-IMP.PASS | house.NOM |
| | | ‘We bought a house.’ | | | ‘We bought a house.’ | | |
| | | | | | | | Spoken Finnish |

Differing only in register, the sentences are semantically the same: both transitive verb constructions. My aim for this talk is how to derive the double nominative in (1b) with cross-linguistic implications on the morphosyntax of impersonal structures. I build on previous accounts of dependent case in Finnish (Maling 1993; Anttila & Kim 2017 and especially Poole (2022)). Following these accounts, dependent case is assigned when two DPs with unvalued case features are in a c-command relationship: *talo* gets dependent (accusative) case in (2a) since it is c-commanded by the subject *me*. If case is still unvalued at Spell Out then whatever unvalued cases are thus assigned unmarked (nominative) case. The question is how we get both nominatives in (2b).

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|-----|----|----------------------|------------------|------------------|----|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| (2) | a. | Me | ost- imme | talo- n . | b. | Me | oste- ttiin | talo. |
| | | 1PL.NOM | buy-PST.1PL | house-ACC | | 1PL.NOM | buy-IMP.PASS | house.NOM |
| | | ‘We bought a house.’ | | | | ‘We bought a house.’ | | |

I argue that the facts in (2b) can be accounted for if we i) posit that case is assigned as early as possible—in the case of transitive clauses when the external argument is merged in Spec,vP—and ii) a syntax of impersonals that allows for a deficient impersonal pronoun such as discussed in Fenger (2018) and Legate et al. (2020). The impersonal pronoun merged in Spec,vP in cases like (2b) is deficient and does not trigger dependent case on the theme.

I build on work by Cinque (1988); Egerland (2003) and Hoekstra (2010) on how impersonals become referential. I argue that the development of (2b) comes from the semantics of impersonal statements as they apply to everyone—speaker, hearer and others. The pronoun that this set of features corresponds to is the first person plural.

I extend the discussion to impersonal structures in other languages. Take the Lithuanian data in (3) where the theme ‘letter’ gets accusative case, different from Finnish above.

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|-----|-------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| (3) | (Yra) | rašo-m-a | | laišk-a. | |
| | | be.PRS.3 | write-PRS.PASS.PTCP-[-AGR] | letter-ACC.SG | |
| | | ‘One writes a letter.’ | | | |
| | | | | | Lithuanian (Šereikaitė 2022: 189) |

Notably, both Finnish and Lithuanian impersonals do not allow a by-phrase and lack agreement. How are impersonal constructions different across languages? I explore an analysis where impersonal pronouns can differ in their structure, such as variation discussed in Germanic by Fenger (2018). This in turn, connects to Theme 2 of the workshop: the nature of syntactic structure. Points of discussion in this talk will be about how case is computed with respect to what is required in the narrow syntax and the featural composition of impersonal pronouns.

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