

VUOKKO HEIKURA

# Finnish Grammar Lessons

OPPITUNTEJA  
SUOMEN KIELIOPISTA



# **Finnish grammar lessons**

**'oppitunteja suomen kieliopista'**



Vuokko Heikura

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**'oppitunteja suomen kieliopista'**

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The Finnish case system with help  
of 5 triangles. See also page 145.

3. partitiivi -a, -ä, -ta, -tä  
taloa, taloja  
metsää, metsiä

1. nominatiivi -, pl. **-t**  
talo, talot  
metsä, metsät

2. genetiivi **-n** (study more closely!)  
talon, talojen  
metsän, metsien

5. abessiivi -tta, -ttä  
talotta, taloitta  
metsättä, metsittä

4. essiivi -na, -nä  
talona, taloina  
metsänä, metsinä

6. translatiivi -ksi  
taloksi, taloiksi  
metsäksi, metsiksi

8. elatiivi -sta, -stä  
talosta, taloista  
metsästä, metsistä

7. inessiivi -ssa, -ssä  
talossa, taloissa  
metsässä, metsissä

9. illatiivi **-n** (study more closely!)  
taloon, taloihin  
metsään, metsiin

11. ablatiivi -lta, -ltä  
talolta, taloilta  
metsältä, metsiltä

10. adessiivi -lla, -llä  
talolla, taloilla  
metsällä, metsillä

12. allatiivi -lle  
talolle, taloille  
metsälle, metsille

13. komitatiivi -ine  
kaksine käsineen

14. instruktiivi **-n**, pl. **-in**  
kaksin käsin, toisin sanoen

## Preface about my background and ideas

This book is based on all of my earlier works on the same topic, the Finnish grammar, or put in other words, the principles of this language. The basic plan of my way in describing the Finnish grammar system in English, has remained same all the time that has passed since the very beginning in 2001.

When I started to write a presentation of the Finnish language in English, I pretended that I had to write a long letter to a foreign friend who might be interested in my language. In fact, however, I wrote more to my own amusement, but also hoping that I possibly could contribute to the ways in which we Finns teach Finnish to foreigners, and to Finnish schoolchildren as well. Therefore my way of presenting and explaining the Finnish grammar may differ from the traditional way of teaching Finnish, but the basic facts are presented as they are in Finnish grammar books and school books to native Finns themselves.

I was worried about trainees and exchange students who come to Finland for a short time, and return to their home countries, being disappointed since they did not learn Finnish at all, or learned a lot of words and sayings only. In November 2000, I met two foreign students, from Turkey, and from China, who willingly accepted the task to act as proofreaders of my manuscript for a while. Their eager to learn Finnish fortified my belief that some kind of a narrative and conversational overview on the Finnish grammar system would be needed in English.

Further, I had in mind those "well" or "high" educated immigrants who have a job in Finland, do it well and continue without speaking Finnish at all. So do also many immigrant housewives. Many of them would like to learn Finnish because their children are learning, but they themselves cannot find time (nor money, perhaps) for attending Finnish language courses regularly. They certainly would feel their living here more comfortable if they could at least understand the language they hear and see around.

In the very beginning of my efforts to become a writer, there were two Finnish societies, namely *Suomen 4H-liitto ry* and *Suomi-Seura ry*, which promised to start buying my book because of its idea of narrative style for self-studies. In October 2001, *Suomen tietokirjailijat ry* – *The Finnish Association of Nonfiction Writers*, accepted my application for membership on grounds of the very first book that I had issued in July 2001. Thus my early work was really then already called a Finnish grammar.

In February 2002, I managed to find a Finnish teacher who volunteered to help me as a commentator. So I got a new English version as well as a Finnish translation done and issued that summer. In the autumn we already had together ordered a Russian translation. She could use my books in her work. Our fruitful cooperation lasted a couple of years.

Foreigners are used to complain that all Finns they meet speak English to them. Some Finns themselves even say to them that it is not necessary to try to learn Finnish because it is "so difficult" and it goes well to speak English in Finland. That's a wrong attitude, and I am in disagreement with the enormous difficulties. It's only a myth.

Finnish is a logical language, and not more difficult than languages in general. In some respects, this is an easy language. Finnish may be difficult to beginners and especially to translators. Later when learning more, learners will certainly think that Finnish possibly is difficult in theory but not necessarily in everyday life.

First of all, the rules of writing and pronouncing, once you have assumed them, are easier to understand than in many other languages, such as English, French and Russian. In addition, we don't need any articles nor any grouping of words into masculine, feminine and neuter. We use word order and our case endings with skill to compensate the lack of articles. The more you will know about the surprising regularity of elements that repeat themselves, the more you learn to guess the meanings and even produce understandable words and thoughts yourself.

You can read this book in your own way, and skip some sections but then you may miss a part that contained an important principle or rule. If you did not understand something, even if you read carefully, you must glance at traditional grammars, textbooks and dictionaries, and ask a native Finn.

I cannot promise that a foreigner will learn to speak Finnish just by reading my grammar books because it is another skill to produce speech than to read or listen and understand. I only promise that readers, Finns as well as foreigners, will get a good overview and a sound basis on which it is easier to continue Finnish studies later in a group, alone or even on university level.

The generally spoken form of Finnish (*yleiskieli*) is understood everywhere in the country. It does not differ much from the written standard (*kirjakieli*). The school education, and the press, radio and TV, have given us a model how to write and speak Finnish in a form that does not sound like a regional dialect or a city slang.

I will present you some features of the standard language (*kirjakieli*) and also of the more freely spoken language (*puhekieli*). You must work hard in the beginning when learning to read, pronounce and remember words in their basic forms first, and to recognize the words also in their different (case) forms in use.

At the end of this book, there are two Enclosures. No. 1 contains some press cuttings for your reading and understanding exercises, with a dictionary in hand, of course. The stories are authentic. I did not simplify them. It was my idea that learners will search and find suitable texts in real life. Therefore you will need a bilingual dictionary between Finnish and English. I found a good one just recently at this address: **redfoxsanakirja.fi/sanakirja**. Their Basic product is loadable free of charge. It gives written and recorded translations between several languages.

First you may think that Finns have words of their own for almost everything, but gradually the learning will become easier for you because Finnish words are "transparent" and they build "families". You can state it when turning pages of your dictionary, if it is a book. That's what I recommend to you, to browse through dictionaries and make observations about the Finnish vocabulary.

I believe that the Finnish language system will fascinate you. Short words get a new meaning when some certain syllables are added either in the middle or at the end of shorter words. First you note the dissimilarities between Finnish and other languages, but when you learn more, you will see that many features in the system and the wordings resemble the European way of thinking and speaking after all.

The hidden similarities in languages prove that the ancient peoples in Northern and East Europe have been neighbours during thousands (6000!) of years. Many scientists do believe that the Indo-European and the Finno-Ugric languages have a common root. You can find information on the Finno-Ugric languages and peoples on the Net, for instance at the address *ugri.net*. These two are also informative addresses: *finland.fi*, and *suomi-seura.fi*.

You may have thought that the comic strips (*sarjakuvat*) would be readable straight away, with the help of a dictionary, without much knowledge about the grammar, but no! – you will be faced with the whole grammar system, including the use of commas in the Finnish way, there, too. In Finland visitors and immigrants have the opportunity to study Finnish also by comparing the multilingual texts in all kind of brochures. You can compare the Finnish texts and the translations that are offered to foreigners that way. Watching the Finnish TV "Yle" is also useful.

Foreign languages are not dubbed by the "Yle". Finns do not desire dubbing. Dubbing would amuse us. We cannot imagine that Finnish is spoken in any country like English is. We also wish to learn foreign languages when we are allowed to hear the original speech. The TV company can assume that all adult Finns can read the translations in subtitles quickly enough. Children's programmes are spoken in Finnish. Many TV programmes can be seen also at [yle.fi/uutiset](http://yle.fi/uutiset) and [yle.fi/areena](http://yle.fi/areena).

Online book stores, for instance [elisa.kirja.fi](http://elisa.kirja.fi), [ellibs.com/fi](http://ellibs.com/fi) and [elibris.fi](http://elibris.fi) offer even free ebooks (*sähkökirja* 'ebook'). If you don't have access to the Internet, you can listen to the Finnish pop music sent also by radio and also found in Youtube. In libraries and bookshops you can find Finnish books recorded on DWD or CD (*äänikirja* 'talking book'). I recommend them to you for your further studies.

The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland – *Kotimaisten kielten keskus*, [www.kotus.fi](http://www.kotus.fi) – offers a lot of knowledge about the Finnish language. In 2004 the institute issued a really big Finnish grammar, *Iso suomen kielioppi*, in red covers. We need not buy it, because it is available free of charge, at <http://scripta.kotus.fi/visk/>. It is written in Finnish. The work's aim is to present authentic samples, and with the help of them to show how Finnish is written in normal use. So it is not a normative grammar book, but descriptive.

The so called *kirjakieli*, the written standard language, is normative, used according to the agreed norms since about the year 1900 until today. *Yleiskieli*, the spoken everyday language, has not gone too far from *kirjakieli*.

### Abbreviations and symbols in this book

Ch. = Chapter. On page 9 there was a short list of the 7 main Chapters I–VII.

[ŋ] *Äng-äänne* in Finnish, a sound that occurs instead of the consonant **n** in consonant pairs **nk**, **ng** and **nkk** which occur only in the middle of Finnish words.

['] The apostrophe, *heittomerkki* ('), is in this book used instead of a small x. It demands a light stop in the breath or alternatively, assimilation with the first sound of the following word. In fact it represents a real consonant, a plosive (*klusiili*), that is not shown in writing. The stop sound ['] has different names. It occurs in certain grammatical places in speech. We come to it in Chapter I, 1.6.

- > or <    An arrow forward (>) says "from this follows this or we get this". An arrow back (<) means "this originates from that, this is based on that".
- kk ~ k    Wavy lines refer to the consonant gradation, (Chapter II, 2.).
- C =        Any consonant, (Chapter I, 1.5).
- V =        Any vowel. One single V represents any vowel that may occur in words, syllables and suffixes. The letter V as a symbol represents one vowel in writing, and it is a short sound in speech.
- VV =       Double vowels (for instance **aa** and **ää**) are pronounced long together, (Chapter I, 1.2). Here the **V** stays for any vowel. A double VV means two similar vowels in writing, and a long vowel sound in speech.
- VP =       Verbal phrase (*verbilauseke*). VPs consist of verbs. Here the **V** stays for a verb (*verbi*), and the **P** comes from phrase (*fraasi, lauseke*).
- N =        Any noun word or *nomini*. They are substantives, adjectives, pronouns and numerals, all of which can be inflected in cases. Names of things belong to nouns and are in Finnish called *substantiivi*. Most of them are general names, *yleisnimi*. Proper names are called *erisnimi*.
- NP =       Noun phrase (*nominaalilauseke, -fraasi*). NPs contain one or more Ns.

## A, O, U

When these block letters occur within case endings and suffixes, they represent two alternative endings to be chosen on grounds of the word's nature in the Finnish vowel harmony system. The block letters are needed to let us make a choice between back and frontal vowels (Chapter I, 1.4). The big **A** stays for **a** and **ä**. The big **O** represents both **o** and **ö**. For **U** the alternatives are **u** and **y**.

*talo* 'house'

Finnish model words, phrases and sentences written in italics (*kursiivilla*) like *talo* here. Translations follow within simple quotation marks or without.

*onpa* [ompa]

Square brackets. The Finnish way to pronounce a word is given this way within square brackets, mostly only to show, if there is something unusual.



*(minä) olen* 'I am'

The normal brackets are used to show that some unnecessary words or parts can be dropped away. Brackets can also contain explanations and translations.

*se / sitä*

A slash is used to show alternative cases for pronouns, e.g. **se** (nominative) or **sitä** (partitive). Slash is used also between alternative words in a sentence.

### Case endings

Case endings like **"-n"**, **"-lle"**, **"-ssa"**, as well as other suffixes and meaningful markers that in principle always occur in the same form, are shown within quotation marks this way.

Note: Nouns are inflected in cases, in singular and plural forms. Verbs are conjugated in personal forms, separately in active and passive.

poss. = Possessive. Poss. suffixes and poss. pronouns refer to ownership.

sg. = Singular, the form of a word naming one person or a thing.

pl. = Plural, the form of a word naming two or several persons or things.

p.sg. = "person singular", a verbal form for one person.

p.pl. = "person plural", several persons, a verbal form for at least two persons.

i.e. = id est (Latin), it is, that is. In Finnish *se on* 'it is', *toisin sanoen* = *t.s.* 'put in other words'.

etc. = et cetera (Latin), and so on. In Finnish *ja niin edelleen* = *jne.*

e.g. = exempli gratia (Latin), for instance. In Finnish *esimerkiksi* = *esim.*

## OPPITUNTEJA SUOMEN KIELIOPISTA

In the year 2000, when I started writing a presentation of the Finnish language in English, I pretended that I was writing a long letter to a foreign friend, and I did not know that the result would be recognized as a Finnish grammar book.

In fact, because I was not a trained teacher, but primarily had been a Finnish translator, I wrote for my own amusement and in the hope that I could contribute to the ways in which we Finns teach Finnish to foreigners, and to Finnish schoolchildren as well.



Readers of my text will get the impression that they have a private teacher who is speaking and gradually leading them, with the help of model phrases, to understand the inner construction of this language. I think that this is just the approach to a new foreign language that adults desire before deciding that they want to learn this language. Even many native Finns have been fond of my style of writing „lessons“ about our mother tongue.

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