



# The Finnish Case System

*Cognitive Linguistic Perspectives*

Edited by

Minna Jaakola and Tiina Onikki-Rantajääskö

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# Glossary of symbols and abbreviations

ABE	abessive
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ADE	adessive
ADJ	adjective
AP	adjective phrase
ADJZ	adjectivizing suffix
AdpP	adpositional phrase
AdvP	adverbial phrase
ADVZ	adverbializing suffix
ALL	allative
CAR	caritive
CL	clitic
CMPR	comparative
CNG	connegative
COM	comitative
COND	conditional mood
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
DEM	demonstrative
e-np	the sole argument of the existential clause
ELA	elative
ESS	essive
EXESS	exessive
FREQ	frequentative
GEN	genitive
ILL	illative
IMP	imperative
INE	inessive
INF	infinitive
INSTR	instructive
LM	landmark
MAN	manner suffix
NEG	negation

NMLZ	nominalizing suffix
NP	noun phrase
NOM	nominative
obj	object
PAR	partitive
PASS	passive voice
PL	plural
PoP	postposition phrase
POT	potential mood
pp	postposition
PRS	present tense
PST	past tense
PTCP	participle
POSS	possessive suffix
RP	reference point
subj	subject
SG	singular
SUP	superlative
T	target
TR	trajector
TRA	translative
VZ	verbalizing suffix
Q	question clitic
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person

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# Introduction

## A Cognitive Linguistic account of the Finnish cases

### *1 Introduction*

The Finnish language is perhaps best known for its rich case system. Depending on the analyst and on the definition of a case in use, Finnish has at least fourteen, possibly fifteen or even more cases. Following the usual linguistic practice, the Finnish cases have been divided into 1) grammatical cases, which mark core arguments (subjects, objects, predicate nominals) and have a highly abstract meaning, and 2) semantic cases, which mark different types of adverbials and have a relatively concrete meaning, such as location, instrument, or manner. The understanding that even grammatical cases have a (schematic) meaning has been prevalent in traditional accounts of the Finnish cases. These accounts have never treated the grammatical cases as semantically empty markers, as is customary in some formalist traditions. As for Finnish, this is the more natural, as the grammatical cases that mark each core argument alternate on a semantic basis – the choice of the case depends on factors such as quantificational and aspectual boundedness versus unboundedness, definiteness versus indefiniteness, or affirmative versus negative polarity.

The Finnish case system has been extensively studied throughout modern history and from a wide range of theoretical perspectives. These include the grammaticalisation and language-historical points of view (for example, see Laitinen 1992; Grünthal 2003 and the literature cited, Inaba 2015), traditional-grammar based accounts (for example, see Penttilä 2002 [1963]; Särkkä 1969; Leskinen 1990), case grammar (Siro 1977), generative grammar (Hakulinen & Karlsson 1979; Vainikka 1989; 1993; Kiparsky 2001), functional-typological approaches (Hynönen 2016; Ylikoski 2018; Larjavaara 2019), conceptual semantics (Leino et al. 1990; Nikanne 1993), systemic-functional grammar (Shore 2020), and, last but not least, approaches based on cognitive linguistics. During the last few decades, in fact, it is the cognitive-linguistic approach that has become the mainstream approach in the study of Finnish grammar in general and of its case system

in particular. The most influential cognitive-linguistic frameworks in use have been those by Langacker (1987, 1991a, 2008) for Cognitive Grammar, Talmy (2000a, 2000b) for Cognitive Semantics, and more recently, different versions of Construction Grammar (for example, see Goldberg 2006; Croft 2001; Kay and Fillmore 1999). Among the early scholars who first introduced cognitive linguistic models to the study of Finnish, the most notable linguist undoubtedly is Pentti Leino (1983, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1993, 1994, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). These pioneers discovered the models to be ideally suitable for the analysis of a language such as Finnish, as well as compatible with the Finnish linguistic tradition, which had avoided a formalist revolution and instead had maintained the insights of traditional grammar, which are often compatible with the central assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics. Of course, the Finnish linguistics tradition is diverse, but most importantly, earlier approaches did not draw a strict distinction between grammar and semantics. Finnish linguistics also has a deep-rooted tradition in data-based analysis. The advantage of the Cognitive Linguistic orientation, however, was that it offered more systematic methods and accurate concepts than traditional notional descriptions.

The present volume continues and brings together cognitive-linguistic perspectives on the Finnish cases. These articles also consider the extensive work by earlier scholars from different theoretical backgrounds. While the research tradition of Finnish cases is diverse in terms of theoretical background, and whereas a majority of the relevant works have been published in miscellaneous fora and mostly in Finnish, the present volume also attempts to summarise the main achievements of past research. Our aim is thus to present an up-to-date cognitive-linguistic account of the Finnish cases that would also serve the interests of an international reader. We present an overview of the case system, analyse some central subsystems within it (most importantly, the system of local cases), and provide accounts of the functions of individual cases. As a consequence, we discuss the concept of case from the perspective of a morphology-rich language. However, the volume consists of individual studies that apply cognitive linguistics in slightly different ways by following the analytical models closely or more loosely. Thus this volume is by no means an exhaustive description of the Finnish cases. The individual articles in this volume therefore approach Finnish cases from different perspectives and are heterogeneous in their research objectives, the imposition of research questions, and the data in use. While some strive towards an ambitious application of a specific cognitive-linguistic framework (such as Cognitive Grammar or Construction Grammar), others are more eclectic, and still others are inclined to adopt a functional-typological approach. This volume also aims to offer relevant knowledge on the Finnish case system for those readers who are not familiar with cognitive linguistics or will not commit themselves to its theoretical framework. To facilitate the task of the reader, this introduction presents a brief overview of the main tenets and central terminology of cognitive linguistics, with an emphasis on the elements that are central in the analysis of cases (Sections 2 and 3). We subsequently introduce the system of Finnish cases (Sections 4, 5 and 6), and the articles of this volume (Section 7).

## 2 *Central tenets of Cognitive Linguistics*

Over the last few decades, Cognitive Linguistics has established itself as one of the mainstream schools of thought in linguistics, including the study of languages other than English (and other extensively analysed Western European languages). What began as a small group of rebels in the 1970s has since grown into a global movement that comprises a broad range of theoretical frameworks and diverse methodological approaches, all loosely connected by a number of fundamental underlying assumptions concerning the nature of language (Evans 2019 is a recent, comprehensive introduction to Cognitive Linguistics). The Cognitive Linguistics enterprise is constantly expanding into the study of new languages, as well into novel areas of research such as language typology, comparative linguistics, historical linguistics, and second-language acquisition, among others. The analytical toolkit of Cognitive Linguistics, with its fundamental assumptions is that a) all grammar is meaningful and b) meaning is based on conceptualisation, has demonstrated itself to be preeminent in the analysis of languages with flexible word order, rich morphology, and thus complex morpho-syntax, such as Finnish. We have discovered that a significant advantage of Cognitive Linguistics is that it provides thorough and holistic methods to describe how meaning is organised by grammatical choices.

Cognitive Linguistics argues that language is a primarily semantic, symbolic system for the expression of meaning. This means that not only lexical items but also grammatical elements, including abstract (syntactic) structures, are analysed as meaningful. Lexicon and grammar are not discrete subsystems but form a continuum of symbolic, meaningful structures. This means that even a clause-level structure, such as the transitive clause, is considered to be a syntactic schema, which has an abstract, relational meaning, and serves as a schema (or template) for the formulation of novel expressions that instantiate the schema. These more or less complex schemata are often referred to as *constructions*, especially in frameworks known as *construction grammars* (for example, see Goldberg 2006; Croft 2001, 2022; Kay and Fillmore 1999). Construction grammars are currently used extensively in the cognitive-linguistic study of grammar. There are several definitions for a construction in the literature, but they share the common insight that constructions are grammatical (morphological and syntactic) schemata, that is, pairings of meaning and form, and comprise elements from a single morpheme up to a whole sentence that instantiate such schemata (see also Langacker 2005, 158). As the central concept for generalisation at any level in Cognitive Grammar is schema, schemas equate constructions and both notions will be adopted in the analyses of this volume.

In Cognitive Linguistics, meaning is equated with *conceptualisation*. When conceptualisation is analysed by linguistic means, we describe meaning organisation that is intersubjectively shared, conventionalised, and conveyed by constructions and lexemes. This is referred to as *construal* in Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008, 55). The notion of construal illustrates how different constructions and lexical choices can impose different meaning organisations even when referring ostensibly to the

same or comparable state-of-affairs. Thus, linguistic meaning consists not only of *what* the language-user chooses to express but also *how* to express the content selected for expression. Cognitive Grammar discerns a few dimensions of construal to facilitate the contextual analysis (ibid. 55–89). For the analyses of this volume, the most important dimension is prominence. For example, prominence is displayed in the Figure/Ground alignment and its manifestations (see below). In general, the method adopted to analyse conventionalised linguistic meaning is in general a traditional contextual analysis in which a difference of form expresses a difference in meaning. Meaning differences are also extracted by comparing minimal pairs that differ only by one symbolic unit. The analysis of meaning also relies on the linguistic intuition of speakers as members of the speech community and the knowledge of actors who are members of the (sub)culture shared by the speech community (on the intersubjective approach to construal in the frame of CG, see Möttönen 2016).

A well-known example of the centrality of conceptualisation for linguistic expression is the phenomenon known as *fictive motion* (Talmy 2000a: Ch.2). Language users commonly rely on semantically dynamic elements when they express scenarios in which no actual change takes place; consider, for instance, *This highway goes from Helsinki to Turku*, *The tree threw its shadow down into the valley*, or *The scenery rushed past us as we drove along*. These expressions utilise verbs that express motion or other types of change as well as other dynamic elements such as directional locative expressions (*to*, *from*). According to Talmy, the common use of such expressions reflects our cognitive bias towards dynamism. In short, fictive motion and related phenomena serve as a prime example of the importance of conceptualisation in linguistic meaning.

Some cognitive linguists and some articles in this volume also adopt the notion of *image-schema* to describe conceptualisations. An image schema illustrates a skeletal generalisation of the meaning organisation construed by a linguistic expression. Common examples are the landmark of an 'in'-type adposition or case construed as a container. For instance, let us consider AdpP phrases such as *in the house* and *in the forest* that share the same image-schematic construal of the landmark ('house', 'forest') as a container, or different expression types related to change that share the construal of a path (see Onikki-Rantajääskö; Voutilainen, in this volume). The status of image schemas is controversial. Some scholars such as Mark Johnson (1987) maintain that image schemas are a crossroad of linguistic meaning and sensory information such as vision. Thus, we not only speak about containers, we see and feel them as well. Johnson also describes image-schemas as a habit of action, opening a processual viewpoint to linguistic meaning. However, there is little evidence on the psychological reality of image schemas (for example, see Gibbs and Colston 1995). For this reason, it is better to understand image-schemas as analytical tools for a linguistic analysis to describe the generalisations over similar linguistic expressions as well as the intersubjectively shared skeletal meaning organisation of the symbolic units in language.

Different languages commonly utilise different types of conceptualisations to talk about the same extralinguistic entities and relations between them. This is a manifestation of the insight commonly attributed to Roman Jakobson: Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey. For example, the grammar of some languages (such as Romance and Slavic) pays significant attention to the gender of the people talked about (and of the interlocutors), while others, such as Finnish, have a gender-neutral system. Some languages also rely on absolute coordinate systems in the expression of spatial relations, even between minor entities ('The spoon is to the north of the plate', see Levinson 2003), while others use a relative system ('The spoon is to the right of the plate'). In short, speakers of different languages need to pay attention to and be aware of different matters. Slobin (1996) has referred to this awareness as 'thinking for speaking', involving selecting those characteristics of objects and events that (a) fit some conceptualisation of the event, and (b) are readily encodable in the language being used. As regards the Finnish case system in particular, one such feature is the explicit expression of directionality by the subsystem of local cases: different cases are used for GOAL, SOURCE, and (stationary) LOCATION. The metaphorical uses of the local-case system for the expression of non-spatial relations – time, possession, and state – expand and conventionalise these oppositions into those domains as well (see Onikki-Rantajääskö, this volume). Thus, our articles contribute to the discussion of whether and how linguistic meaning (semantics) is language-specific. However, more typological research is needed to compare the meaning structure of languages. Similarly, research is needed on how cognition sets limits for linguistic variation before a firm position can be formulated as to the extent to which semantics is language-specific.

Another fundamental tenet of Cognitive Linguistics is what is known as its *cognitive commitment*. This refers to the principle that linguistic description must not be in conflict with what is known of general human cognition. The ideal is that knowledge about the general human cognitive systems would be systematically taken into account in explaining how language represents and structures meaning. Indeed, the conception that general cognitive capacities motivate the structure and semantic organisation of language plays a vital role in the framework of Cognitive Grammar (for example, see Langacker 1991a, 2008) and Cognitive Semantics (see Talmy 2000a, 2000b, 2017). Perhaps the most widely known manifestation of this is the phenomenon referred to as Figure/Ground alignment – humans tend to perceive situations so that something (the Figure) "stands out" from its surroundings (the Ground), which remains in the background. In perception of space, the Figure is typically relatively small, has clear boundaries, may be an animate entity, is capable of motion, or is otherwise active in the situation. By contrast, the Ground is a relatively large and stationary entity, that is, potentially mass-like. According to Langacker and Talmy, the Figure/Ground alignment manifests itself in innumerable ways in language. The difference between Figure and Ground is rooted in classic Gestalt Psychology, and its use as a central organising principle of language in Cognitive Semantics illustrates that cognitive linguistics can accord with studies of cognition. However,

the main focus of cognitive linguistics is in the semantic and grammatical organisation of language, while the relation between language and cognition needs to be studied in multidisciplinary collaboration.

To summarise, this volume focuses on meaning organisation construed by the case system of the Finnish language but does not make claims as to its relation to cognition. Furthermore, this volume will not endeavour to compare the Finnish case system to that of other languages because that would require more comprehensive comparative typological studies between languages.

### 3 *The treatment of cases in Cognitive Linguistics*

As Cognitive Grammar (CG) provides thorough analytical tools for the study of meaning, it is particularly accurate for the analysis of cases. According to CG, the Figure-Ground alignment has a number of pivotal roles in case systems as well. One of them is the distinction between a profile and a base in the semantic structure of a linguistic expression. *Profile* refers to what a linguistic expression actually designates, whereas *base* is a wider portion of the active cognitive domain(s) that provides a background for the profile (Langacker 1991a, 544). For example, *Monday* profiles one element in the seven-day cycle of a week, and the concept of ‘week’ serves as the base against which ‘Monday’ (the profile) stands out.

In CG, different linguistic expressions profile diverse types of entities. For instance, nouns, or more precisely, full *nominals* (the CG term for noun phrases), profile *things*, whereas most other word classes profile *relations*. Relations may also prevail between things or other relations. Thus, the phrase *the book on the table* has two nominals (*the book* and *the table*) that profile two things, while the preposition *on* profiles a relation between them. The phrase locates a Figure (the book) with respect to a Ground (the table). According to CG terminology, the primary focal participant of a relation (the Figure) is referred to as the *trajector*, while the secondary focal participant (the Ground) is a *landmark* (Langacker 1987, 217–220, 231–243; 2008, 70–73). The trajector/landmark alignment often coincides with the categories of traditional syntax. For example, in transitive clauses, subjects are analysed as trajectors and objects as landmarks (for a detailed account, see Langacker 2008: 72–73, 381–382). This is another manifestation of the leading principle that grammatical structure is meaningful in that categories such as subject and object have a semantic basis.

From the viewpoint of conceptualisation, a *thing* is defined as a product of grouping and reification (Langacker 2008, 105). In *grouping*, a set of connected entities are conceived of as a single entity for higher-level purposes (Langacker 2016, 63). For instance, the components of a car (its body, wheels, engine, battery, seats, etc.) together constitute the car, and are conceived of as a single entity (for details, see Langacker 2008, 2016). Nouns form a word class that specialises in the expression of things, while other word classes, including adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and adpositions (pre- or postpositions) designate *relations*.

Relations are defined as sets of interconnections between entities, and these can be things or other relations. Relations are divided into two main types: *temporal* ones (also called *processes*), which are expressed by finite verb forms, and *atemporal* ones, which are expressed by other relational elements, such as infinitives, adjectives, adverbs, and adpositions. The difference between processes and atemporal relations lies in the manner that the relation is conceptualised. According to CG, a process is tracked through time, in a phase-by-phase manner, by utilising the conceptualisation strategy referred to as *sequential scanning*. Atemporal relations, by contrast, are conceptualised holistically by using the conceptualisation strategy known as *summary scanning* (see Langacker 1991a, 1991b, 2008). An illustrative analogy for this difference is the one between watching a film (sequential scanning) versus watching a picture (summary scanning). The picture-watching analogy is intuitively clearest for those atemporal relations that can be based on a single mental image, such as the meaning of the preposition *in*, which designates an unchanging relation. Nevertheless, some atemporal relations are complex and involve a change, such as the one expressed by the preposition *into*, which means (roughly) that the trajector (Figure) is first situated outside the landmark (Ground) and then enters it (as in *He ran into the room*). The crucial matter is therefore how *into* differs from, say, the verb *enter*. The difference, according to CG, lies again in how the relation is conceptualised. The verb *enter* uses sequential scanning and tracks the event through time. The preposition *into* presents a (roughly) similar change with summary scanning and profiles all phases of the change at once. Thus, Cognitive Grammar treats (English) adpositions as expressions of atemporal relations, either simple or complex, and this characterisation concerns the class as a whole.

The description of cases is not uniform in Cognitive Grammar. This is because cases do not behave syntactically uniformly, and moreover, languages differ greatly in terms of their case systems (Langacker 1991b, 234, 235). A general description for a case marker is that its function “is to specify the type of role that a nominal entity plays with respect to some relation” (ibid. 235). The main divisive factor lies in how the concept of relationship is organised, that is, what the case profiles. Roughly speaking, a grammatical case profiles a thing (as nominals do), while a semantic case profiles a relation (as adpositions do).

Grammatical cases mark the main participants of the verb process (the subject and the object). According to CG description, this means that they do not have their own trajector/landmark relation but instead unify with the relation expressed by the verb. More precisely, grammatical cases specify and describe the role of an NP in the verb process (Langacker 1991a, 404, 1991b, 235, 2000, 36, 2008, 350). For example, Langacker (2008) analyses the Luiseño object marking *-i* as an example of a thing-profiling case. Langacker argues that it does not posit its own trajector/landmark asymmetry, but instead it specifies the case-marked noun as the landmark in the verb process (ibid. 349–350).

The treatment of semantic cases in CG, by comparison, resembles that of adpositional constructions (Langacker 1991a, 404, 1991b, 235; Leino 1989,

The Finnish language is perhaps best known for its rich case system. Depending on the definition of a case, Finnish has at least fourteen, possibly fifteen or even more cases. This volume is the first comprehensive English-language account of the Finnish case system, focusing primarily on its semantic functions. This collection of articles presents an up-to-date overview of the Finnish case system, analyses central subsystems within it, and offers data-based analyses of the functions of individual cases. The authors approach Finnish cases from different perspectives within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. The volume also addresses more general topics, such as the notion of case, questions of polysemy, the traditional division of cases into grammatical and semantic, the relationship between inflection and derivation as well as the role of inflection in the structuring of the categories of adpositions and adverbs. The book will be of interest to linguists and students as well as to those readers who are not familiar with cognitive linguistics. The analyses presented here will be relevant to anyone investigating the essence of case and the emergence of linguistic meaning.



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