

‘Free’ ablative NPs in Finnish: Non-selected arguments beyond experiencers and agents

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The syntactic phenomenon of free (non-selected) datives (ex.1) has been characterized in terms of affected *experiencers* and involuntary *agents*. To shed light on this tension, I consider Finnish, with no dative case, but free *ablative*-case-marked NPs. I propose that in Finnish, the involuntary agent and the affected experiencer uses are both derived from an abstract notion of *source*.

Many languages can add NPs that are not syntactically selected by the verb to a clause, to express meaning like possessor, benefactive, attitude holder, affected experiencer (e.g. Bosse et al. 2012, Fernández 2019). In many Indo-European languages, these elements are in dative case (1). On the affected experiencer use, the referent of the dative NP is affected by experiencing the event (e.g. *dativus (in)commodi*, Dirven & Radden 1987). Also, in contexts like (1), dative NPs can get an *involuntary agent construal*, lacking volition, such that they “participate in events without any intent to do so” (Kittilä 2005:384, Schäfer 2008, i.a., other readings also possible).

(1) Mir ist der Teller (unabsichtlich/*absichtlich) zerbrochen [German, Kittilä 2005]

I.DAT is the plate (by accident/*on purpose) broken ‘I broke (by accident/*on purpose) the plate’

In **Finnish**, unaccusative verbs with non-agentive nominative subjects (ex.2b) optionally co-occur with **animate NP in ablative case**. Finnish has no dative; ablative (abl) occurs on sources and roughly means ‘from’ (e.g. Pylkkänen 2008, *Sain lahjan Liisalta*. ‘I received a gift from Liisa-ABL’). If an abl NP is present in (2a), it is an **involuntary, unintentional agent** (Kittilä 2005, Hakulinen et al. 2004), ‘on purpose’ is infelicitous. This contrasts with the ‘regular’ nominative agent in (2c). (Data from native speaker judgments and corpus examples.)

(2a) *Ablative-marked NP: unintentional agent*

Minulta/sinulta/Liisalta rikkoutui (°k_{vahingossa}/*tahallaan) vesilasi.
I-ABL/you-ABL/L-ABL break-REFL-PST-3SG (°k_{accidentally}/*on purpose) wtr-glass.NOM
‘I / you / Liisa (°k_{accidentally}/*on purpose) broke a water glass.’

(2b) *Ablative-marked NP can be omitted*

Vesilasi rikkoutui.
Water-glass.NOM break-REFL-PST-3SG ‘A water glass broke.’

(2c) *Regular nominative subject (canonical agent)*

Minä rikoin (°k_{vahingossa}/°k_{tahallani}) vesilasin.
I.NOM break-PST-1SG (°k_{accidentally}/°k_{on purpose}) water-glass-ACC
‘I broke a water glass (°k_{accidentally}/°k_{on purpose}).’

Hyp1: Involuntary agents? (2) suggests that with verbs lacking agentive subjects, ablative signals the NP is *an involuntary agent of the verb*: I move my hand and accidentally break the glass. But ablative NPs occur with *impersonal passives* (3), revealing that the ‘ABL=involuntary agent’ generalization does not hold across the board. In (3a,b), the ablative NP is **not an agent** or a patient of the verb: the implicit agent is the one who broke the mirrors in (3a); and defaced the van in (3b). The ablative NP is *neither* of these. So, when a verb has an implicit agent (see Kaiser & Vihman 2006), ablative NPs can occur with no (in)voluntary agentive interpretation.

(3a) *Impersonal passive: Ablative-marked NP as negatively affected experiencer, not agent*

Liisalta rikottiin auton sivupeilit. (adapted from internet)
Liisa-ABL break-PASS-PST car-GEN side-mirrors.NOM

‘The car’s side mirrors got broken (and this impacted/affected Liisa negatively)’

(3b) *Impersonal passive: Ablative-marked NP as negatively affected experiencer, not agent*

Meiltä töhrittiin iso kuljetusauto. (from internet)

We-ABL deface-PASS-PST big.NOM transport-van.NOM
'The big transport van was defaced/graffitied (and this impacted/affected us negatively)'

(3c) *Impersonal passive: Implicit agent can be targeted by agent-oriented adverbials*

Auton sivupeilit rikottiin tahallaan. (adapted from internet)

Car-GEN side-mirrors.NOM broke-PASS-PST on purpose.

'The car's side mirrors were broken on purpose.'

Hyp2: Negatively-affected experiencers? What, then, is the role of the ablative in (3a,b)? Speaker judgments reveal it can be a **negatively affected, non-agentive experiencer**, adversely impacted by the event (e.g. Setälä 1952 *ablatus incommodi*; a similar English structure might be *The car broke down on me*, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997). More evidence comes from (4a,b), with unaccusative verbs. Furthermore, the ablative NP needs to be *sentient*. If a person has already died (4c), the ablative NP is infelicitous. What is crucial is not agentivity but an adverse psychological experience. The infelicity of the positive-experience ex.(4d) seems to support this.

(4a) *Unaccusative verb: Ablative-marked NP as negatively affected experiencer, not agent*

Matilta karkasi koira. Matti-ABL escape-PST-3SG dog.NOM

'A/the dog escaped (and this affected Matti negatively)' (approx. 'A/the dog ran out on Matti')

(4b) *Unaccusative verb: Ablative-marked NP as negatively affected experiencer, not agent*

Liisalta homehtui piparit. Liisa-ABL turn-moldy-PAST-3SG gingerbread-cookies.NOM

'The gingerbread cookies molded (& this affected L. negatively) ('...went moldy on her')

(4c) *Context: Matti passed away, his dog escapes during the funeral. Infelicitous*

Matilta karkasi koira. Matti-ABL escape-PST-3SG dog.NOM

'A/the dog escaped (and this affected Matti negatively)' (approx. 'A/the dog ran out on Matti')

(4d) *Unaccusative verb: Ablative-marked NP infelicitous with positive effect*

Matilta kasvoi hieno ruusupensas. Matti-ABL grow-PST-3S fancy.NOM rose-bush.NOM

'A fancy rosebush grew (and this affected Matti positively)'

(5a) *Ablative-marked NP felicitous with positive effect: Source (example from internet)*

Minulta parani kasvojen ihottuma, kun lopetin rasvattoman maidon juomisen
I-ABL heal-PST-3SG face-GEN rash, when stop-PST-1SG fat-free-GEN milk-GEN drinking

'The face rash healed (and this affected me positively), when I stopped drinking fat-free milk.'

(5b) *Ablative-marked NP felicitous with positive effect: Source*

Liisalta loppui päänsärky. / L-ABL end-PST-3SG head-ache.NOM.

'The headache ended (& this affected L. positively)'

But crucially (5a,b) show the 'ABL=adverse experiencer' claim is **not true across the board**. In (5), ablatives are **positively** affected, yet felicitous. What characterizes non-selected ablatives? I argue that non-selected **ablative NPs denote abstract sources**. Related to the spatial use of ablative on verbs' arguments (e.g. *Liisa received a gift from me-ABL*), I propose (6). With non-selected NPs, ablative still marks the source, but the transfer/loss can be highly abstract. Instead of a gift being physically 'lost' from my possession and given to someone, the loss can be abstract (loss of a headache, cookies, mirrors, a glass) – and positive *or* negative.

(6) **Hyp3: Non-selected ablative NPs denote sources from whom something is transferred away, sentient beings that lose something. The loss can be positive or negative.**

Hypothesis 3 captures the disparate uses of ablative NP non-selected arguments in Finnish. I also explore how it fits with involuntary agent readings (2), building on the intentionality bias in psychology (e.g. Rosset 2008). As a whole, these data point to new aspects of meaning that merit attention when we seek to understand the syntactic phenomenon of non-selected arguments.

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