In this paper, I examine nonfinite and "defective" finite modal constructions which contain a direct object whose case is nominative instead of the canonical accusative within the Finno-Ugric language family. I concentrate on the following languages: Finnish (Fi), Estonian (Est), Hungarian (H), Mari (Mar), and Moksha Mordvin (Md). The nonfinite constructions include infinitival sentences containing an invariant modal predicate and an infinitive whose direct object is nominative, illustrated in (1-3)\(^1\).

(1) Sinu-n täyty-y osta-a uusi talo.  
   you-gen must-3sg buy-inf new-nom house-nom
   'You have to buy a new house.'

(2) See raamat tuleb teil läbi lugeda.  
   this book-nom must you-dat through read-inf
   'You have to read through this book.'

(3) Kuyu-ʁ izā _CONTEXT sōmariːsta-š k̪e-š.  
   big brother-dat wedding-nom hold-inf must-3sg
   'The elder brother has to arrange a wedding.'

The sentences in (4-5) demonstrate the canonical situation, i.e., when the direct object is accusative\(^3\).

(4) Minä halua-n luke-a tämän/*tämä kirjan/*kirja.  
   I-nom want-1sg read-inf this-acc/*nom book-acc/*nom
   'I want to read this book.'

(5) Õpilane vöttis raamat-u ja luges.
   student-nom took book-acc and read
   'The student took the book and read.'

Older stages and some current dialects of Hungarian demonstrate objects unmarked by any suffix, therefore can equally be called nominative objects. Such objects occur predominantly in nonfinite environments as well: as complements of infinitives (6–7), as complements of verbal participles (gerunds) (8), and also as complements of adjectival participles (9–10).

(6) Egy kevet-et Duna lát-ni bocsátának.
   an ambassador Danube-nom see-inf sent3sg
   'They sent an ambassador to see the Danube.' (Klemm 1922: 157; Pann. Megv. 30)

(7) Jőjetek el … halott lát-ni.
   come-imp2pl VM dead-nom look-3sg
   'Come to see the dead' (Klemm 1922: 157; Arany: A varró leányok)

(8) aytov be rekeztuen
   door-nom VM having-closed

\(^1\) It is interesting to note that the same construction is observed in Old Russian (OR), illustrated in (i). This phenomenon in OR is claimed to be the result of geographic promixity and linguistic contact with Finnic languages.

(i) Ino dostoit' mužu žena svoja nakazyvati. (OR)
   for fit-3sg man-dat wife-nomF his-nomF punish-inf
   'For it is fitting for a man to punish his wife.'

\(^2\) The object is nominative in Estonian only if the infinitive of the modal construction is a \textit{da}-infinitive, such as the one in the example in (2): \textit{lugeda} 'to read'. This restriction does not exist in Finnish.

\(^3\) The same situation can be observed in OR, as (ii) exemplifies.

(ii) Ol'ga že pověl iskopati jamu*jama veliku*/velika. (OR)
   Olga-nom EMPH ordered dig-inf hole-accF/*nom large-accF/*nom
   'Olga ordered to dig a hole.'
‘having closed the door’ (Klemm 1922: 157; HorvC. 93)

(9a. fa vágó (H)
‘wood cutter’ (Klemm 1922: 158)

b. pu rošê (Mar)
‘wood cutter’ (Klemm 1922: 158; FgrF. XVI, 195)

(10a. egymás szeretők (H)
‘those who love each other’ (Klemm 1922: 157; Bal. 230)

b. hazá-ja vesztett (H)
‘somebody who lost his homeland’ (Klemm 1922: 158; Hall: HHist 1, 5)

The “defective” finite constructions include imperatives that take a direct object in the nominative case, as in (11-14).

(11) Lue (sinä) tämä kirja! (Fi)
‘Read this book.’

(12) Too raamat siia! (Est)
‘Bring the book here.’

(13) Eszem a lelk-e! (H)
‘I eat his soul.’ (Klemm 1922: 160; typical of folk language)

(14) Fogd ez a nyulfark! (H)
‘Hold this rabbit tail.’ (Klemm 1922: 160; Arany II, 252)

Another Finno-Ugric language, namely Mordvin, also possesses nominative objects. In this language, indefinite direct objects are always nominative\(^4\) regardless of the type of construction in which they occur, as in (15).

(15) Son šužäńńä poři. (Md)
‘He (the mouse) is chewing a piece of straw.’

On the basis of Finno-Ugric data such as (15), I propose that the notion of specificity is connected to the category of the direct object. Another example for this claim can be found in Finnish: when the direct object is a personal pronoun, a referential (specific) element, as in (16), the direct object's case is the canonical accusative in the same nonfinite (cf. (1–3) or “defective” (cf. 6–14) environments, that otherwise require the direct object to be nominative\(^5\).

(16)a. Sinu-n täyty-y kutsu-a minu-t/*minä. (Fi)
you-gen must-3sg invite-inf I-acc/*nom
‘You have to invite me.’

\(^4\) Indefinite direct objects are nominative also in Mari as well as in several Turkic languages.

\(^5\) It is interesting to note that in OR the issue of specificity manifests itself in terms of "animacy". Only direct objects of inanimate categories can be nominative; i.e., inanimate masculine and all feminine NPs (animate masculine NPs receive the canonical accusative case) (cf. Timberlake 1974).
b. Kutsu invite-impv,2sg 'Invite me.'
minu-t/*minä! I-acc/*nom

Assuming Di Sciullo’s (2000) framework, I propose that the difference in case follows from an asymmetrical relation between lexical and functional features. Consequently, case checking equals identification of case features under local asymmetry in either the lexical or the functional domain. Thus, in modal infinitivals (1–3), the NP direct objects are merged with nominative case in Spec-VP, and thus case checking (i.e., case identification) happens in situ in the lexical domain. On the other hand, direct object pronouns (16) are generated in the functional projection DP in the complement position of V with accusative case since pronouns are not lexical categories (i.e., they are not part of the lexical domain, and thus necessarily behave differently from full NPs. In this theory, only lexical categories (N and V) are part of the lexical domain. All others, including pronouns (D), belong to the functional domain. Hence the difference between the case realization of NP and pronominal direct objects boils down to the difference in their case identification, i.e., shifting (merge) or linking (movement), respectively.

Besides the major difference in the case of direct objects in Finnish (i.e., direct objects of imperatives and infinitives embedded in a modal context are nominative), there are several differences in the case of the direct objects even within these well-defined circumstances: the direct object of 1st and 2nd person imperatives is marked as the nominative case (cf. (6)), whereas the direct object of 3rd person imperatives is marked as accusative (cf. (17)).

read-impv,3sg 'May he/she read the book.'

b. Hän (s)he-nom luke-koon kirja-n. book-acce-acc
read-impv,3sg 'May he/she read the book.'

It will be shown that the difference in the feature specification of second and third person imperatives coincides with their pattern of subject omission. I propose that the nominative direct object NP of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person imperative verbs is generated in Spec-VP where it checks its nominative case in situ (also, there is no obligatory nominative subject present in such sentences). The optional occurrence of a nominative-cased subject thus does not cause a theoretical problem and it is structurally accounted for (without the proliferation of functional projections, as in Mitchell 1991), i.e., it checks its case in Spec-AgrSP. On the other hand, the direct object of 3<sup>rd</sup> person imperatives is generated in the complement position of V with accusative case. This assumption is supported by the obligatory presence of a nominative subject NP in the sentence.

The advantage of this proposal is that it ties together two distinct properties of second and third person Finnish imperatives in accounting for the case difference that their direct objects display. When the imperative has an obligatorily overt nominative subject, it takes a direct object in the accusative in the cross-linguistically canonical way. On the other hand, when the imperative’s subject (i.e., ImpNP) is not necessarily overt, the direct object’s case is nominative. Notice that even when the ImpNP is overt, it cannot occupy the regular sentence-initial subject position: it always follows the verb (in contrast with (10b)). The regular absence and the position of the ImpNP suggests that it has different properties from those of regular subjects (cf. Plat Zack & Rosengren 1998). Consequently, its case is a weaker nominative, which allows the presence of another nominative (the direct object) in the same clause. Platzack & Rosengren 1998 suggests that the ImpNP can be considered to be caseless since imperatives lack the case-checking TP position. While this suggestion might be correct, I suggest that the nominative case of ImpNPs is checked in AgrSP (there is an AgrS projection since the ImpNP agrees with its subject) (cf. Iatridou 1993).

The paper also shows that previous hypotheses (Timberlake 1974, the Case Tier Hypothesis (1985), or Mitchell 1991) cannot account for all the data, e.g., they fail to explain the possibility of two nominative NPs in the same clause. Furthermore, they do not provide a formal mechanism for the nominative object to check its [-interpretable] feature, and they do not indicate where and how the nominative object checks its nominative case, i.e., whether it differs from the way in which the nominative subject checks its case.

---

6 Finnish is a “mixed” pro-drop language, i.e., it allows an empty subject in first and second person, but the presence of the subject is obligatory in third person (cf. Vainikka & Levy 1999).
Finally, the Hungarian data will be explained by a diachronical syntactic process, namely, the reanalysis of certain syntactic functions.

SELECTED REFERENCES


EMONDS, J. 1989. Timberlake’s Nominative Objects in Finnish and Old Russian. Talk given at LSA.


