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Relative Clauses in Finnish

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The basic characteristics of Finnish Relative Clauses

Formation are highly similar to those of English. Thus, the relative clause normally is postposed after the head noun (or head sentence), with the relative pronoun in initial position. One difference with regard to postposed relative clauses is worth noting, however. Reduced (restrictive) relative clauses cannot be formed in Finnish. Thus, sentence (2) below is ungrammatical:

- (1) Tyttö jonka tapasin oli kaunis.
'The girl whom I met was beautiful'.
(2) *Tyttö tapasin oli kaunis.
'The girl I met was beautiful'.

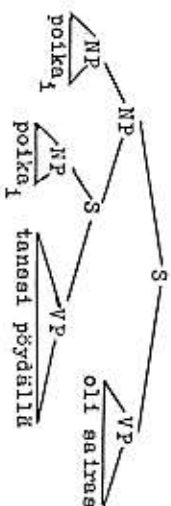
Finnish relative clauses also can occur in prenominal position. The rest of this paper will be devoted to an examination of some of the conditions under which preposing of relative clauses is possible in Finnish.

In the trees given below, postnominal relative clauses are described with the traditional [NP S] NP structure. We do not want to claim, however, that such configurations necessarily represent the "deepest" structure. Quite possibly, they have been derived from underlying sentential conjuncts. We leave open the question of what the ultimate source of relative clauses is.

Preposing of relative clauses is possible when either the subject or the direct object of the relative clause is coreferential with the head noun. Consider sentence (3), the structure of which is (4); by preposing the relative clause we derive (5) and (6):

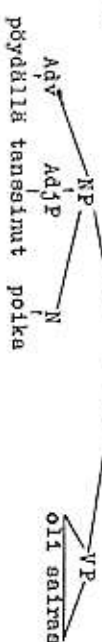
- (3) Polka joka tanssi pöydällä oli saira.
'The boy who danced on the table was sick'.

(4)



- (5) Pöydällä tanssinut polka oli saira.

(6)



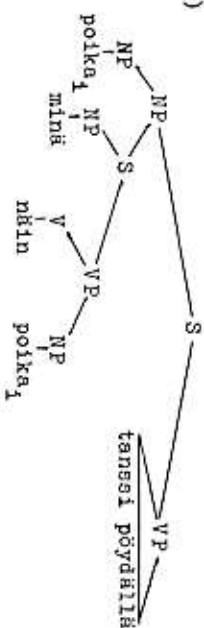
In (5), as well as in subsequent examples, a preposed relative clause is underlined. The verb of the relative clause is adjectivized by the past tense morpheme -nut. The verb has to be an adjective (phrase) in derived structure because it is subject to all agreement rules which the head noun triggers for normal prenominal adjectives (cf. kaunis tyttö (Gen.) 'the beautiful girl's' and tanssineen polkan (Gen.) 'the danced boy's'). (5) can be roughly paraphrased in English by "The one the table danced boy was sick". Thus, the preposing rule has to adjectivize the verb.

In addition, it must delete the coreferential part of the relative clause. Thirdly, the order of the relative clause constituents must be permuted: 1 2 3 = 3 2 1.

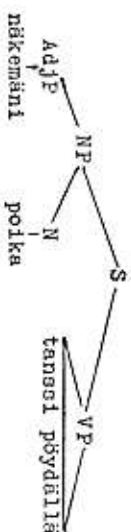
Now consider (7) which contains a relative clause with the direct object coreferential with the head noun. The preposing rule converts (8) into (9):

- (7) Polka jonka näin tanssi pöydällä.
'The boy whom I saw danced on the table'.

(8)



(9)



The same operations have been carried out for (9) as for (6). The coreferential noun in the relative clause is deleted, the verb is adjectivalized (this time by the marker *-mä-*), and the relative clause constituents are permuted. The subject pronoun *minä* 'I' is optionally deleted by a later rule but is still obligatorily represented by the suffix *-ni* in *näkemäni*.

In view of the fact that preposing triggers the same operations both when the relative clause contains a coreferential subject and a coreferential object, it might seem natural to posit a single rule to account for the derivation of both types of preposed structures. However, a closer examination reveals that there are different restrictions on preposing depending on whether it is the subject or the object of the relative clause which is coreferential with the head noun.

Thus, negative relative clauses can be preposed only provided the subject is coreferential. They cannot be preposed when containing a coreferential direct object. Consequently, (10) can give (11) but (12) cannot give (13):

(10) $[[\text{Polka}_1] \text{ NP } [\text{polka}_1 \text{ et tanssi pöydällä}] \text{ S}] \text{ NP}$

'The boy who does not dance on the table'.

(11) $\overline{\text{Pöydällä tanssimaton polka}}$.

(12) $[[\text{Polka}_1] \text{ NP } [\text{minä en nähnyt polka}_1] \text{ S}] \text{ NP}$

'The boy whom I did not see'.

(13) * $[[\text{Mannu}] \text{ näkemättömänä polka}]$.

The negative is represented by *-ton* in (11) and by *-ttä-* in (13).

Another difference between preposability of relative clause subjects and objects can be seen with regard to tenses. If the subject is coreferential, both present and non-present tenses allow preposing. However, if the object is coreferential, only non-present tenses allow preposing.

Finnish has three non-present tenses, namely simple past, perfect, and pluperfect. In preposed relative clauses the oppositions between these are neutralized and all are represented by the same marker, which is *-nut* with coreferential subjects and *-ma* with coreferential objects.

Thus, (14) gives (15), (16) gives (17), and (18) gives (19), but (20) cannot give (21):

(14) $[[\text{Polka}_1] \text{ NP } [\text{polka}_1 \text{ tanssi pöydällä}] \text{ S}] \text{ NP}$

'The boy who dances on the table'.

(15) $\overline{\text{Pöydällä tanssiva polka}}$.

(16) $[[\text{Polka}_1] \text{ NP } [\text{polka}_1 \text{ tanssi on tanssinut} \text{ on tanssinut} \text{ on tanssinut}]] \text{ S}] \text{ NP}$

'The boy who danced on the table'.

{ danced
has danced
had danced }

(17) $\overline{\text{Pöydällä tanssinut polka}}$.

(18) $[[\text{Polka}_1] \text{ NP } [\text{minä} \text{ näin} \text{ olen nähnyt} \text{ olen nähnyt}]] \text{ S}] \text{ NP}$

'The boy whom I saw have seen had seen'.

{ saw
have seen
had seen }

(19) $\overline{\text{Näkemäni polka}}$.

(20) $[[\text{Polka}_1] \text{ NP } [\text{minä katson polka}_1] \text{ S}] \text{ NP}$

'The boy whom I am looking at'.

(21) * $[[\text{Katsomani} \text{ Katsovani}]] \text{ polka}}$.

It seems hard to find a plausible explanation to offer for the unpreposability of relative clauses with present tense verbs in cases like (20, 21).

Notice that in addition to the differences with regard to negative and tense preposability between coreferential subjects and objects, the past tenses are represented by different markers in derived structure in the two cases, namely *-nut* in (17) and *-mä-* in (19). All these facts seem to indicate that relative clause preposing should be handled with two rules instead of one.

An interesting prerequisite for preposability seems to be that the coreferential subject/object has to be in the "first sentence down" from the head noun. This condition is met in e.g. (4) and (8). In (22), however, the coreferential noun in two sentences down from the head and therefore preposing cannot yield (23):

such an escape seems rather ad hoc. Thus, the "first sentence down" principle should be taken with a grain of salt. Numerous details remain to be worked out.

Let us next consider some effects of preposing upon the distinction between restrictive (R) and non-restrictive (NR) relative clauses.

(35) Näin pojan joka tanssi pöydällä.

'I saw a/the boy who danced on the table'.

(36) Polka jonka näin tanssi pöydällä.

'A/the boy whom I saw danced on the table'.

(35) and (36) are both three-ways ambiguous. First, the head noun *polka* can be interpreted as either definite or indefinite (Finnish has no articles). Secondly, in case the head noun is definite, the relative clause may be interpreted as either R or NR. An indefinite reading of the head noun always entails non-restrictivity of the relative clause. However, the corresponding preposed relative clauses seem to be disambiguated: the underlined parts of (37) and (38) can only be interpreted as restrictive:

(37) Näin pöydällä tanssivan pojan. (from 35)

(38) Näkemäni polka tanssi pöydällä. (from 36)

The disambiguation is especially clear when the head noun is generic:

(39) Koirat jotka purevat ovat vaarallisia.

'Dogs which bite are dangerous'.

(40) Purevat koirat ovat vaarallisia.

(40) only can refer to the set "dogs which bite". (39) refers to both "dogs" and "dogs which bite". It seems tempting to relate this property of preposed relative clauses to the suggestion made by Drubig (1968) of deriving restrictive relative clauses from underlying left sentential conjuncts. In (38) and (40) only restrictive relative clauses can occur to the left of the head noun, i.e. they have retained their deep structural position. However, we still need a preposing rule to account for those cases where the head noun is indefinite: in such cases also a NR clause may be preposed to the left of the head even though it (according to Drubig's suggestion) originated as a right conjunct.

Let us finally note that the preposing rules can be applied in cyclical fashion to a tree, starting from the most deeply embedded relative clause. A right-branching structure like (41) can be converted to (42) by repeated applications of the preposing rules:

(41) Näin koiran, joka söi kissan, joka tappoi hiiren, joka nieläisi junston.

'I saw the dog, which ate the cat, which killed the rat, which swallowed the cheese'.

(42) Näin junston nieläisseen hiiren tappaneen kissan syöneen koiran.

(42) seems slightly strange even though it undoubtedly is strictly grammatical. The reason for the strangeness apparently is that *hiiren* and *kissan* should belong to two different constituents simultaneously. Thus, *hiiren* should function as subject of *junston nieläisseen* and as object of *tappaneen kissan*. The Finnish stress rules would assign slightly different stresses to *hiiren* in these two functions and this fact seems to give rise to a vague feeling of discomfort with (42).

A left-branching multiple relative clause structure like (43) can be converted into (44), which is fully grammatical and not "strange" as (42):

(43) Tyttö, jonka tapasin, jota rakastat, joka oli myöhässä, oli kotona.

'The girl, whom I met, whom you love, who was late, was at home'.

(44) Tapamant rakastamel myöhästynyt tyttö oli kotona.

A self-embedding structure like (45) is probably grammatical in the strict sense defined by Chomsky in Aspects, but it is of course very low on a scale of acceptability. However, (46) with multiply preposed relative clauses is perfectly fine in Finnish:

(45) ?? Jelipä, jonka mies, jota nainen, jota tyttö, jota polka rakastaa, kunnioittaa, vihaa, söi, on homeessa.

'The bread, which the man, whom the woman, whom the girl, whom the boy loves, respects, hate, ate, is mouldy'.

(46) Poljan rukostaman tvion kunnioittaman isin vihaaman
gerkun syöma leipa oli homeessa.

Sentences like (42,44,46) are of course somewhat difficult to process in terms of actual performance and therefore it is no surprise that they are normally used only in written Finnish.

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