

The Morphosyntax of Finno-Ugric Case-marking: a DM account

The Finno-Ugric languages are well known for their agglutinative morphology, and in particular for the size and complexity of their case systems. Somewhat less well known is the variation shown both across and within the languages in the ordering of case markers relative to other suffixes on the head noun. One group, represented by Finnish, shows the constant ordering N-Pl-K-Px (where Pl=plural, K=case and Px=possessive affix), while another, represented by Hungarian, shows the ordering N-Pl-Px-K. This in itself would present no serious difficulty for standard theories of morphology, but in addition we find languages like Mari (formerly known as Cheremis) and Mordvin, in which the ordering of the affixes depends on the particular case morpheme involved. In each language, one set of such markers (K1) appears to the left of Px, while another (K2) appears to the right, as demonstrated by the Mordvin examples in (1). In Mordvin we also find phenomena of fusion and conditioned allomorphy interacting with the variation in placement of case endings, so in the Moksa dialect, the Px suffix can normally encode both person and number of the possessor and number of the possessum (i.e. the possessed head noun). However, the presence of a K1 marker between the head noun and the Px blocks the expression of the head noun's number, and a default form is used. This is shown by the examples in (2). In the other main dialect, Erza, a definiteness marker, which occupies the same position as Px, also indicates the number of the head noun, but in distinction to Moksa, this is not blocked by a K1 suffix. Rather, the fusional definite plural marker keeps K1 from moving inside it, and K1 exceptionally must surface in the same position as K2, as shown in the examples in (3). In the four major Mari dialects the Pl affix remains distinct, but we find a complex array of orderings of K and Px with this Pl affix. Table 1 on the following page gives an overview of these patterns.

All of this can be accounted for straightforwardly within the theory of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993, 1994, etc.), as extended by Embick and Noyer (2001). Under the DM hypothesis that Vocabulary Insertion (VI) follows spellout, and their own proposal that linearization of the syntactic structure does not occur until VI, E & N propose a system of late (i.e. post-spellout) movement that serves to resolve morpho-phonological dependencies, consisting of two distinct processes which are defined by the point in the derivation where they operate. Following spellout, but before VI, comes Lowering, whereby a head can adjoin to the head of its complement. Then, after Vocabulary Insertion and linearization, comes Local Dislocation (LD), whereby a node can adjoin to a string-adjacent node. This constrains rather tightly the ways in which movements can co-occur. In addition it predicts that Lowering (and of course syntactic raising) can feed or bleed allomorphy, while LD cannot, since the insertion of allomorphs is determined at VI, and that Lowering, as defined over heads and complements, can skip over adjuncts, while LD, as defined by adjacency, cannot. Using this system, we can account quite nicely for the observed patterns in Finno-Ugric, under the hypothesis that case endings are dissociated morphemes, which are inserted directly above DP at spellout as determined by the structures derived at that point. I will show that this allows us to analyze the movement of K1 markers in Mordvin and Mari and of all case markers in Finnish as Lowering, with various differences in the dialects resulting from whether D remains in situ (Finnish, Moksa Mordvin, West Mari), Lowers to number (Erza Mordvin, Eastern Mari) or LDs to number (Eastern Literary Mari). This analysis not only gets the orderings right, but also accounts for the conditioned allomorphies in Mordvin and Finnish, and has interesting implications for the locality of allomorphy, for the status of dissociated morphemes and for the treatment of morphological case in general.

Examples

- (1) a. čora-čə-ń
son-your-gen
'of your son'

- b. *ćora-sə-t*
 son-iness-your
 ‘in your son’ (Paasonen 1909:4)
- (2) *-zä-ń*
 1sgPxsgPm-GEN
 ‘singular noun with 1st singular possessor, genitive’
- (3) *-nä-ń*
 1sgPxplPm-GEN
 ‘plural noun with 1st singular possessor, genitive’
- (4) *-dE-n*
 ABL-1sgPxplPm
 ‘singular OR plural noun with 1st singular possessor, ablative’ (K1 blocking allomorphy)
- (5) *nt-nen dE-nt*
 defsg-ALL ABL-defsg
- (6) *tne-nen tne-dE*
 defpl-ALL defpl-ABL

Affix ordering in the Mari dialects

West Mari	Northwest Mari	Eastern Mari	East Lit. Mari
K1 Px	K1 Px	K1 Px	K1 Px
Px K2	Px K2	Px K2	Px K2
P1 Px	Px P1	Px P1	P1 Px
P1 K1	K1 P1	P1 K1	P1 K1
P1 K2	K2 P1	P1 K2	P1 K2
P1 K1 Px	K1 Px P1	Px P1 K1	P1 K1 Px
P1 Px K2	Px K2 P1	Px P1 K2	Px P1 K2

References

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