



# SEARCHING FOR **CONSTRUCTIONAL** SYNONYMY: PARAPHRASING AS EVIDENCE AGAINST ELLIPSIS

Re-thinking synonymy

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# STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION

1. The starting points.
  - a. The constructions under investigation.
  - b. The idea.
  - c. Comparable finite constructions.
2. Defining constructional synonymy.
3. Data.
4. Paraphrases.
5. Conclusions.

# THE CONSTRUCTIONS UNDER INVESTIGATION

- Finnish verbless constructions with an initial **ablative** (1) or **allative** (2) element: ABL/ALL + NOM/PTV.  
= Not elliptic structures but rather independent constructions.

(1) *Venäjä-ltä*                      *myönnytyks-i-ä*  
 Russia-ABL                      concession-PL-PTV  
 lit. 'From Russia concessions.'

(2) *Suome-lle*                      *voitollinen*                      *tulos*  
 Finland-ALL                      profitable[NOM.SG]                      result[NOM.SG]  
 lit. 'To Finland a profitable result.'

- Both constructions are polysemous (but the total range of their senses is not relevant here).

# THE IDEA

- Essentially a construction grammar approach (Goldberg 1995, 2006).
- Besides lexical items, it is useful to talk about synonymy in context of **clausal** constructions.
  - = In relation with **event types**.
- I investigate verbless constructions.
  - They can be paraphrased with finite clauses, because both refer to events.
  - Paraphrasing shows that they are not elliptic structures.



# COMPARABLE FINITE CONSTRUCTIONS (1)

**ABLATIVE-INITIAL:** the ablative element as a **SOURCE**.

## 1. The passive transitive construction /

the necessive zero subject construction.

a) *tutkija-lta*                      *varaste-ttiin*                      *aineisto-a*

researcher-ABL      steal-PASS.PST      data-PTV

‘Data were stolen from a/the researcher.’

b) *tutkija-lta*                      *pitä-isi*                      *pyytä-ä lupa*

researcher-ABL      shall-COND.3SG      ask-INF      permission[NOM.SG]

‘A permission should be asked from a/the researcher.’



# COMPARABLE FINITE CONSTRUCTIONS (2)

**ABLATIVE-INITIAL**: the ablative element as a **SOURCE**.

2. The possessive construction (as defined in Finnish linguistics).

*tutkija-lta*

researcher-ABL

adessive/**ablative**/allative

*ilmesty-y*

appear-3SG

verb in 3SG

*artikkele-i-ta*

article-PL-PTV

nominative/**partitive**

‘Articles appear from a/the researcher.’

(lit. ‘From a/the researcher appears articles.’)



# COMPARABLE FINITE CONSTRUCTIONS (3)

ABLATIVE-INITIAL: the ablative element as a SOURCE.

## 3. The involuntary agent construction.

- Syntactically the possessive construction.

a) *tutkija-lta*                      *putos-i*                      *kirja-t*  
researcher-ABL    drop-PST.3SG            book-NOM.PL  
'A/the researcher accidentally dropped the books.'  
(lit. 'From a/the researcher dropped the books.')

b) *tutkija-lta*                      *lipsaht-i*                      *vale-i-ta*  
researcher-ABL    let.slip-PST.3SG            lie-PL-PTV  
'A/the researcher let lies slip.'  
(lit. 'From a/the researcher slipped lies.')



# COMPARABLE FINITE CONSTRUCTIONS (4)

ALLATIVE-INITIAL: the allative element as a **RECIPIENT** or **BENEFACTIVE**.

1. The passive transitive construction (a) /  
the necessive zero subject construction (b).

a) *tutkija-lle*            *anne-ttiin*            *lahjuks-i-a*  
researcher-ALL    give-PASS.PST    bribe-PL-PTV  
'A/the researcher was given bribes.'

b) *tutkija-lle*            *pitä-isi*            *anta-a*    *raha-a*  
researcher-ALL    shall-COND.3SG    give-INF    money-PTV  
'A/the researcher should be given money.'





# COMPARABLE FINITE CONSTRUCTIONS (5)

ALLATIVE-INITIAL: the allative element as a **RECIPIENT**.

## 2. The possessive construction.

*tutkija-lle*                      *tul-i*                      *raha-a*  
researcher-ALL      come-PST.3SG      money-PTV  
'A/the researcher got money.'  
(lit. 'To a/the researcher came money.')



# DEFINING CONSTRUCTIONAL SYNONYMY (1)

- = Separate clausal constructions denoting semantically equivalent event types.
  - The events contain the same **profiled participants**.
  - The **participant roles** of the profiled participants are similar.
- Argument roles vs. participant roles:

	<i>the goblin</i>	<i>eats</i>	<i>the fairy</i>
argument role	AGENT		PATIENT
participant role	EATER		EATEE



# DEFINING CONSTRUCTIONAL SYNONYMY (2)

## Constructional synonymy between finite clauses

### The transitive construction

<i>tyttö</i>	<i>menett-i</i>	<i>taju-n</i>
girl[NOM.SG]	lose-3SG.PST	consciousness-ACC
LOSER		LOST

'A/the girl lost [her] consciousness.'

### The possessive construction

<i>tyttö-ltä</i>	<i>men-i</i>	<i>taju</i>
girl-ABL	go-3SG.PST	consciousness[NOM.SG]
LOSER		LOST

'A/the girl lost [her] consciousness.'

(Lit. 'From a/the girl went consciousness.')



# DATA

- **The original data:** 500 instances of both constructions.
  - Headlines.
- **Test data:** 2 paraphrase tests with mostly undergraduate students.
  - **Ablative**-initial construction: 209 participants.
    - 15 headlines.
  - **Allative**-initial construction: 163 participants.
    - 20 headlines.
  - ▶ Finite paraphrases – i.e. constructional synonyms for verbless clause-like structures.



# PARAPHRASES – THE **ABLATIVE-INITIAL** CONSTRUCTION (1)

- 169–215 paraphrases per headline.
- Syntactic structure:
  - The vast majority of the headlines was paraphrased as **active transitive** clauses.
    - The relative proportion of the transitive paraphrases depends on the case: I have found 4 subconstructions.
  - The ablative element of the original structure was mostly reformulated as **a nominative subject**.
    - In almost every case, the nominative subject functions as an **AGENT**.
    - In the other paraphrase types, the most common argument role of the original headline's ablative element is (animate) **SOURCE**.

## PARAPHRASES – THE ABLATIVE-INITIAL CONSTRUCTION (2)

*Australia-Ita*

Australia-ABL

*pahoittelu*

regret[NOM.SG]

*alkuperäisväestö-lle*

aboriginal.people-ALL

Lit. 'From Australia regret to aboriginal people.'

- ▶ In 87.4 % of the paraphrases, *Australiaita* was coded as the nominative subject (of an active transitive clause) functioning as an AGENT.
- ▶ There is a lot of variation in choices of verbs, but the most popular one is *esittää* 'to express' (32.2 % of the active transitive clauses).

*Australia*

Australia[NOM.SG]

*esittä-ä*

express-3SG

*pahoittelu-n*

regret-ACC

*alkuperäisväestö-lle*

aboriginal.people-ALL

'Australia expresses regret to aboriginal people.'

## PARAPHRASES – THE **ABLATIVE-INITIAL** CONSTRUCTION (3)

- It is possible to denote an actor participant by the ablative in finite constructions, but they cannot be seen as fully agentive.
  - a) *tutkija-lta*                      *ilmesty-y*                      *artikkele-i-ta*  
     researcher-ABL                  appear-3SG                      article-PL-PTV  
     ‘Articles appear from a/the researcher.’
  - b) *tutkija-lta*                      *putos-i*                      *kirja-t*  
     researcher-ABL                  drop-PST.3SG                      book-NOM.PL  
     ‘A/the researcher accidentally dropped the books.’
  - ▶ The possessive construction conceptualizes the event as spontaneous.
- However, this construction was not widely used in the paraphrases.
- Instead, the agentivity of the ablative element of the original construction was highlighted by its re-coding as the nominative subject of a transitive clause.

# PARAPHRASES – THE ALLATIVE-INITIAL CONSTRUCTION (1)

- 133–165 paraphrases per headline.
- Syntactic structure:
  - The clear majority of the headlines was paraphrased as **active transitive** clauses.
    - However, the proportion of the transitive clauses depends on the case: I have found 8 subconstructions.
  - The allative element of the original structure was reformulated as a **nominative subject**.
    - In three cases, the nominative subject functions almost always as an **AGENT**.
    - Usually, it functions as a **RECIPIENT**.



## PARAPHRASES – THE ALLATIVE-INITIAL CONSTRUCTION (2)

*Lapsiperhe-i-lle*

family.with.children-PL-ALL

Lit. 'To families with children a won round.'

*erävoitto*

won.round[NOM.SG]

- ▶ In 92.5 % of the paraphrases, *lapsiperheille* was coded as the nominative subject (of an active transitive clause) functioning as an AGENT.
- ▶ There is a lot of variation in choices of verbs, but one common is *voittaa* 'to win' (18.3 % of the active transitive clauses).

*Lapsiperhee-t*

family.with.children-NOM.PL

'Families with children won [a round/game etc.]'

*voitt-i-vat*

win-PST-3PL

*[object argument]*

[ACC]

# PARAPHRASES – THE ALLATIVE-INITIAL CONSTRUCTION (3)

- There are no finite allative-initial constructions with an agentive participant coded with the allative.
  - In general, the allative case codes different kinds of **endpoints** and **targets** of transfer or change – not any kinds of sources.
- When the original construction's allative participant functions as a RECIPIENT or BENEFACTIVE, the active transitive construction is still preferred.
- The set of suitable verbs is in any case highly limited.
  - They would yield possessive or passive transitive clauses.
  - The allative element would not refer to an AGENT-like participant but to a RECIPIENT or BENEFACTIVE.

# CONCLUSIONS

- Exploiting the notion of constructional synonymy through experimental semantics supports intuitive description of the verbless structures that I argue to be independent constructions.
  - ▶ The found constructional synonyms speak against ellipsis.
- It is useful to extend the notion of synonymy to cover broader domains than only individual lexical items.
  - ▶ Like the notion of constructions, the notion of synonymy can be seen as existing at different levels of linguistically coded information.

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