Finnish Numeral-Noun Constructions: Plural Marking Gone Haywire?

PIETRO BAGGIO DSB 3.10 - 16:50

Finnish Numeral-Noun Constructions (NNCs), typically, consist of an unmarked numeral followed by a singular noun (1-a)[1]. However, as noted by Brattico (2010), it is sometimes possible for both the numeral itself and the noun to appear with plural marking (1-b). The aim of this paper will be to provide an analysis of these cases, with particular attention to the semantic effects that arise.

(1) a. kaksi sukkaa
two.SG sock.SG
'two socks'

b. kahde-t suka-t
two-PL sock-PL
'two pairs of socks'

Firstly, I will focus on the morphosyntactic properties of "pluralised" NNCs as in (1-b). I suggest that, whenever a plural feature is introduced in the structure, the whole NNC receives plural marking via concord, which I formalise with the operation Agree (cf. Carstens 2000, Toosarvandani & van Urk 2014, Bayırlı 2017, a.o.). My analysis will revolve around the following claims:

(2) **Plurality should be represented morphosyntactically via a binary feature [± PL], where plural=[+PL].**

(3) ***Singular* morphology is a morphosyntactic default in the absence of a [+PL] feature** (*pace* Harbour 2014).

Nouns, numerals, adjectives, and demonstratives all have a feature [PL:_], triggering concord. In the standard NNC (1-a), this feature will remain unvalued. At PF, it will not

[1] I set aside the issue of case marking (cf. Brattico 2010).

cause a crash, but receive a default value as [–PL] (cf. Preminger 2014): the noun and its modifiers will remain "singular", i.e. unmarked for plurality. If [+PL] is introduced somewhere in the structure, it will value all the [PL:_] features in the noun phrase, resulting in a pluralised NNC as in (1-b).

In the main part of the talk, I will concentrate on the semantics of pluralised NNCs. I will defend the following proposals (cf. Borer 2005, Sauerland 2003, Zweig 2009):

(4) **The interpretable feature [+PL] marks a nominal as count, creating a lattice out of an unordered set.**

(5) **[+PL] has a strictly inclusive semantics, with exclusive readings resulting from Gricean implicatures.**

I will proceed to analyse four different cases of pluralised NNCs, showing how in each case the feature [+PL] originates in a different structural position, making a different semantic contribution.

- When [+PL] originates and is interpreted on the numeral itself, the result is an approximate (or more precisely multiplicative, as I will show) reading for the numeral:

  (6) sada-t tähde-t
  hundred-PL star-PL
  'hundreds of stars'

- Originating on a noun that permits a competing "unpluralised" NNC, [+PL] results in a reading where the counting unit is not an atom, but rather a pair, a set or a kind (cf. (1-b), too):

  (7) neljä-t työ-kalu-t
  four-PL work-tool-PL
  'four sets/bunches/types of tools'

- Originating on a plurale tantum noun, [+PL] does not give rise to any special semantic effect. Pluralised NNCs are the only possibility with pluralia tantum:

  (8) kolme-t hää-t
  three-PL wedding-PL
  'two weddings'

- Originating on a silent distributive operator (cf. Choe 1987 and Oh 2006 for Korean), [+PL] results in a "pluractional" reading:

  (9) Ost-i-n kahde-t olue-t.
  buy-PST-1SG two-PL beer-PL
  'I bought beer twice.'

I devote the rest of my talk to demonstrating, case by case, how the assumptions in (4)-(5) are capable of deriving all the different semantic effects exemplified above.