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Some remarks on Finnish compounds

1 The aims and topic of the paper

In this paper I would like to deal with one interesting feature of Finnish nominal compounds, namely the words which can have an anterior constituent either in the nominative or the genitive. The question was studied as early as 1942 by Matti Sadeniemi in his article „Nominatiivi vai genetiivi”¹. Since then, some features have changed but even now the result is the same: apart from some exceptions, there is no rule for deciding whether to use the nominative or the genitive.

Besides derivation, the most productive ways for creating new words in Finnish is composition. In addition to compounds and derivations, other types of creating new words can be found in most languages but it is the Finno-Ugric languages, which, according to their agglutinative character, prefer the usage of suffixes and compounds. The ways for this in different languages can vary, but the basic principle is the same: adding a new element to a stem results in a new lexical item with a new meaning and, sometimes, new form.

2 Outlines of a new approach?

At first sight, it seems to be an easy task to put different words together and thus create a new lexical item. What causes the main difficulty in Finnish is that the anterior constituent of a compound can have at least two forms, either the nominative or the genitive. Besides these two cases, of course, almost all other cases, especially the partitive, are possible but these kinds of compounds are not very frequent.

My investigation focuses on the structure of Finnish nominal compounds, comparing them with their Hungarian equivalents. Numerous researchers, both Finns and foreigners, have already studied this topic, i.e. whether the anterior part takes the nominative or the genitive, with no result, or, to be more precise, with the result that there is no rule that could show us how to create a new

¹ Sadeniemi (1942, 1970), *Nominatiivi vai genetiivi*. In: *Kielenkäytön kysmyksiä*. Tietolipas 18. 49–57. SKS. Helsinki.

Finnish compound.

I have tried to find a new approach by comparing Finnish nominal compounds to their Hungarian equivalents. I considered this kind of comparison useful because of the different systems used for analysing compounds in Hungarian and Finnish. Hungarian linguists prefer syntax as the base for analysis, while Fennists mainly do that with the help of semantics. Jukka Mäkisalo in his study *Compounds in Finnish: on the Morpho-syntactic and Semantic Criteria* says: „In the tradition of Finnish studies, the study of compounds has primarily concentrated on the analysis of standard speech word-construction, and only a minimal attention has been paid to colloquial compounds or examining the compounding systematically as a part of grammar, i.e. as the interface between the morphological, syntactic and lexical rules. ... Even in traditional grammars, the concept of compound has usually been presented as intuitive, i.e. it has not been defined explicitly.”² In spite of this, Mäkisalo deals with the question of the case of the first constituents of compounds only briefly.

Putting the two systems, i.e. the syntax-based and semantic-based ones, together might have given new results. On the other hand, the semantic classifying of the whole database consisting of about 6000 items would be almost impossible. That is why I decided to analyse my data only on the basis of their syntactic structure. It concerns the parts of speech the compounds consist of, and the syntactic relationship between the two constituents. Here I would like to present only a part of my wider research, particularly the so-called alternative compounds.

3 Collecting data

3.1 The sources

The database was collected from CD-Perussanakirja³ and then checked in *Nykysuomen sanakirja*⁴. Compound verbs were left out of consideration because their number is smaller and the phenomenon to be investigated can rarely be observed in them. In addition, as in Hungarian many verbs have prefixes called often preverbs (*igekötő*), their function as parts of compounds is doubtful. (This problem will be discussed in further details.) Thus, I examined those two-part

² Mäkisalo, 2000: 64

³ CD-Perussanakirja. Uusin tieto nyky-suomen sanoista. Päätoimittajat RISTO HAARALA, MARJA LEHTINEN. Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 94. Oy Edita Ab, Helsinki. 1996.

⁴ *Nykysuomen sanakirja* 1–6. Päätoimittaja MATTI SADENIEMI. Lyhentämätön kansanpainos. Neljästoista painos. WSOY, Porvoo–Helsinki–Juva, 1996.

nominal compounds the Hungarian equivalents of which consist of the same (or more or less the same) constituents.

3.2 The principles of collecting data

First I collected all those two-part nominal compounds (i.e. nouns, adjectives, and – more rarely – adverbs), which have a straight equivalent in Hungarian. It means that the stems they are created from have more or less the same meaning (nevertheless, the constituent does not necessarily belong to the same part of speech) in both languages and the meaning of the compound is also the same. Of course, synonyms and quasi-synonyms are allowed, e.g. Finnish *huone* ~ Hung. *szoba, terem, hall, helyiség* etc.

Three- and more-part compounds were left out of consideration as their structure can often hardly be analysed. It does not concern Hungarian deverbal nouns and adjectives having a preverb (igekötő) before either the anterior or the posterior constituent. This principle has its stems in the system of Hungarian orthography. According to the rules developed and approved by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, multiple-part compounds containing more than six syllables are written with a hyphen. When counting the number of constituents a compound consists of, one-syllable preverbs do not figure as independent parts, i.e. e.g. *befogadóképesség* ‘receptivity, measurement capacity’ is among the two-part compounds, and only words like *előadó-művészet* ‘performing art’ or *kölcsön-visszafizetés* ‘credit refund’ belong to the group of multiple-part compounds, since their verbal prefix consists of two syllables. Following this rule, I decided not to get rid of those compounds which, in Hungarian, contain one-syllable preverbs as a third constituent.

As an exception, here I have to mention those compounds the first components of which are *-nen* words. If they have only *-s* before the posterior constituent, I left them out from the database. The reason for this is that there are some words having the whole genitive not only the stem, e.g. *pääskysenpesä* ‘swallow’s nest’, *ammattilaisennimi* ‘name of a profession’ and these duplicate forms could have created a confusing ambiguity. On the other hand, the pure *-s* stem is not a real stem for genitive as in the genitive there is an *-e-* before the ending *-n*.

Compounds with synonymous posterior parts and having the same meaning and structure were taken to the database only once. Thus, e.g. *hirvenmetsästys* and *hirvenajo* ‘deer-hunting’ count as one item in the database. At the same time, compounds with synonymous last parts but with different structures are parts of the database. Cleaving to the above example, the word *hirvijahti* with the same meaning was taken to the corpus as in the anterior part there is the nominative and not the genitive.

4. Alternative compounds

4.1 Definition of „alternative compounds”

Thus, while collecting material, I faced the question of the so-called alternative forms. Alternative compounds are those with an anterior constituent either in the nominative or the genitive.

4.2 The amount of alternative compounds

In the dictionary, there were altogether 274 words to be investigated here. It does not mean there were 137 pairs of words as in some cases more than two words belong to the same group. This phenomenon can easily be understood if we have a look at such words like *hammashoito* ~ *hammashuolto* ~ *hampaanhoito* ‘tooth care’, the Hungarian equivalents of which are the same: *fogápolás* but the difference between them is so significant that I decided to take all the three words to the database.

4.3 Types of alternative compounds

4.3.1 There were some word pairs in the case of which either the meaning or the form, or even both were different. In spite of this fact, I compare them here as the same entries because the components origin from the same stems. These are e.g. *kortinpeluu* ~ *korttipeli* ‘card-playing, card game’ or *kirkkorakennus* ‘church building’ ~ *kirkonrakentaja* ‘church builder’, *lasihiomo* ‘glass-engraver’s workshop’ ~ *lasiinhioja* ‘glass-engraver’, *lapsivuode* ‘childbearing’ ~ *lastensänky* ‘cot’. In this last case, even the Hungarian equivalents differ from each other in the forms of their anterior components: the medical term can be translated as *gyermekágy*, while the resting place is more often called *gyerekágy*. The structures of *lasihiomo* ~ *lasiinhioja* and *kirkkorakennus* ~ *kirkonrakentaja* differ from each other because of their semantic categories: the first ones refer to a place, while the second ones to a profession and this occurs as a rule in other examples as well. Sadeniemi explains this phenomenon with the fact that the posterior constituents of these words are deverbal nominal forms, where, in the case of professions the agent and the object are put together⁵.

4.3.2 In most of these alternative compounds there is no significant difference between the meanings of a compound with an anterior constituent in the

⁵ Sadeniemi, 1970: 51.

nominative or the genitive, e.g. *aaltopituus* ~ *aallonpituus* 'wave-length', *hintaero* ~ *hinnanero* 'price difference', *lammaspaiisti* ~ *lampaanpaiisti* 'roast of lamb', *saapasvarsi* ~ *saappaanvarsi* 'bootleg', etc. These forms live collaterally and even native speakers can not make any difference between them. According to Sadeniemi, word pairs like *lammaspaiisti* ~ *lampaanpaiisti* slightly differ from each other: *lammaspaiisti* means 'roast made of lamb', while the first component in *lampaanpaiisti* is partial or objective⁶. He also adds that both forms are correct, and even CD-Perussanakirja does not give any advice which one to use.

In some cases, it is the posterior constituent which defines the form of the anterior one. Thus, e.g. compounds ending with *-jahti* take an anterior in the nominative, like *susijahti* 'wolf hunting', *sorsajahti* 'duck hunting', while those ending with *-metsästys* or *-ajo* the genitive, like *sudenajo* 'wolf hunting', *sorsanmetsästys* 'duck hunting'. Both *jahti*, *ajo* and *metsästys* mean 'hunting', thus there is no formal explanation of why this rule has come into existence. Another similar word pair is *puute ja pula* 'lack (of sg.)'. Where figuring as a posterior constituent, *-puute* takes the genitive, and *-pula* as a rule stands with the nominative, e.g. *vedenpuute* ~ *vesipula* 'lack of water', *ajanpuute* ~ *aikapula* 'lack of time'. Here the meaning can vary slightly, e.g. *aikapula* is explained as 'ajan vähyys, kiire; i.e. shortage of time, hurry', while the entry *ajanpuute* gives only an example 'Työ jäi ajanpuutteen vuoksi tekemättä, e.g. The work remained incomplete because of the lack/shortage of time'. In this sentence, *lack of time* can not be substituted with the other meaning of *aikapula*, 'hurry'. Checking the two words in Nykysuomen sanakirja, the same distinction can be found. The reason for this can be the second meaning of *pula* 'trouble'. This conception is reinforced by Sadeniemi as well, who, when investigating alternative compounds with a posterior constituent derived from a verb, says that other words, e.g. loanwords take the same forms for a first part as their Finnish equivalents. He mentions the examples of *keitto* and *soppa* 'soup'⁷.

4.3.3 Sometimes, there is a difference but is almost negligible, and concerns only the stylistic value of the word, or the situation it is used in. Thus, e.g. in the case of the word pairs *kaavamuutos* ~ *kaavanmuutos* 'pattern modification', at the entry *kaavamuutos* CD-Perussanakirja says „paremmin: *kaavanmuutos*”, i.e. 'better' or *lakimuutos*: *paremmin: lainmuutos*" 'amendment'. Why in these cases the dictionary prefers one form to the other one is not explained but it is rather conspicuous that it is always the genitive form which is considered to be more correct or precise. In 1942 and 1970, Sadeniemi claimed that in most of these words it is the nominative which strives for becoming the dominant

⁶ Sadeniemi, 1970: 50.

⁷ Sadeniemi, 1970: 51.

version⁸. As we have already seen, the recently published sources say the opposite, they prefer the genitive to the nominative.

Another expression used for these alternative forms is „tavallisemmin”, i.e. ‘more commonly’, e.g. „*todellisuustaju*: tavallisemmin *todellisuudentaju*” ‘sense of reality’, or „*valonherkkä*: tavallisemmin *valoherkkä*” ‘light-sensitive’. In this group, as we have just seen, both the nominative and the genitive can be considered better to use. Taking the syntactic analysis into consideration, we can see the, almost in all these cases, the connection between the two constituents of the compound is either the government of a verb or an adjective (i.e. the case they require to be used), or can not be analysed at all, i.e. they are the so-called semantically condensed compounds.

4.3.4 Another type is when the constituents are synonyms but the meaning of the compound is different. Here I can mention e.g. *liikkeenjohto* and *yrittysjohto*, the Hungarian equivalents of which is or can be *cégvezetés* in both cases. At the same time, *liikkeenjohto* means ‘1. liikeyrityksen johtaminen, hallinto; 2. liikeyrityksen johtajisto; 1. the direction of an enterprise, business administration; 2. board of directors of an enterprise’, while *yrittysjohto* means ‘yrityksen johtohenkilöt; the managing persons of an enterprise’. Thus, in Hungarian in the first case we could also say *a cég irányítása/vezetése*, while in the second one *a cég vezetősége*.

4.3.5 The next group of alternative nominal compounds consists of those differing significantly. Here we can draw up two sub-categories. In the first one there are synonymous constructions, while in the second one there is no other difference between the two alternatives just the form of the first constituent.

a) In the firstly mentioned sub-category, either the second or the first constituents of the compounds, or, sometimes both of them, are only synonyms of each other. Perhaps the most interesting example is a group of three words: *ihomaali* ‘bőrfesték’ ~ *nahkaväri* ‘bőrfesték’ ~ *ihonväri* ‘bőrszín’. In spite of the fact that both *maali* and *väri* can mean ‘paint’ the latter one also ‘colour’, and both *iho* and *nahka* can mean ‘skin’, the latter one also ‘leather’, the meanings of the three compounds formed with the help of these words are totally different. *Ihomaali* is explained as „varsinkin teatterisminkkiin käytettävästä värivoiteesta”, i.e. ‘mainly about colour cream used for theatre make-up’. *Nahkaväri* means „nahanvärykseen käytettävä väri”, i.e. ‘paint used for colouring leather’, and *ihonväri* is ‘colour of skin’.

b) Word pairs like *yksisuuntainen* ~ *yhdensuuntainen*, *hiilimusta* ~ *hiilenmusta* ‘szénfekete’, *veripisara* ~ *verenpisara* form the last group. As for their forms, the only difference is the genitive or nominative of the

⁸ Sadeniemi, 1970: 50–51.

first component but semantically the compounds are far from each other. *Yksisuuntainen* is an expression used mainly for traffic rules ‘one-way’ ~ *yhdensuuntainen* means ‘parallel’. In the case of the last two word pairs even the Hungarian equivalents differ: *hiilimusta* ‘rajzszen; charcoal’ ~ *hiilenmusta* ‘szénfekete; coal-black’, *veripisara* ‘vércsepp; drop of blood’ ~ while, according to CD-Perussanakirja *verenpisara* ‘huonekasveja joilla on tavallisesti punaiset riippuvat kukinnot; indoor plants having usually red lopping flowers’ but Nykysuomen sanakirja adds the meaning ‘veripisara’ to the same compound.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the comparison to Hungarian in some cases gives an explanation of why an anterior constituent of Finnish compounds takes the genitive and not the nominative but the whole question needs further investigation. After the analysis of the parts of speech these compounds consist of is ready, we can, hopefully find some rules describing the secret of Finnish genitive or nominative anterior constituents. At the same time, I am almost sure that a prescribing rule will never be discovered.

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