

Cases in Finnish

The Finnish language has about fourteen or fifteen cases for nouns. They correspond to English prepositions *roughly* as follows:

#	case	suffix	English prep.	sample word form	translation of the sample
1	nominatiivi	- : t	-	talo : talot	house
2	genetiivi	-n : -jen ...	of	talon : talojen	of (a) house
3	essiivi	-na : -ina	as	talona : taloina	as a house
4	partitiivi	-(t)a : -ja ...	-	taloa : taloja	house (as an object)
5	translatiivi	-ksi : -iksi	to (role of)	taloksi : taloiksi	to a house
6	inessiivi	-ssa : -ssa	in	talossa : taloissa	in (a) house
7	elatiivi	-sta : -ista	from (inside)	talosta : taloista	from (a) house
8	illatiivi	-an, -en ... : -ihin, -isiin	into	taloon : taloihin	into (a) house
9	adessiivi	-lla : -illa	at, on	talolla : taloilla	at (a) house
10	ablatiivi	-lta : -ilta	from	talolta : taloilta	from (a) house
11	allatiivi	-lle : -ille	to	talolle : taloille	to (a) house
12	abessiivi	-tta : -itta	without	talotta : taloitta	without (a) house
13	komitatiivi	-ine-	together with	taloine(ni)	with my house(s)
14	instruktiivi	-n : -in	with (the aid of)	taloin	with (a) house

The translation given is for the singular, except for the last two cases, which are normally used in plural only. The notation "... " indicates that there are other variants of the suffix.

Notes

- Nominatiivi** (nominative) is the case of a subject and has no ending in the singular. In plural it has the ending *-t*, whereas in most other cases, the plural suffix is *-i-* which appears before the case suffix (e.g.: *taloissa*).
- Genetiivi** (genitive) indicates mainly relations similar to those expressed using the genitive or the "of" preposition in English. It is also one of the cases of a grammatical object. In plural, it has several possible suffixes, partly depending on the stem, partly in free variation, as in *omena* : *omenien* ~ *omenoiden* ~ *omenoitten* ~ *omenain*,
- Essiivi** usually indicates some sort of role.
- Partitiivi** indicates, among other things, the partiality of a grammatical object. E.g., the sentence *söin omena* has such an object and it would normally be translated as 'I was eating an apple'. In contrast, *söin omenan* contains a so-called total object (with the object in genitive), meaning that the entire apple was eaten, and it could be translated as 'I ate an apple' or 'I ate the apple', depending on the context. However, in many situations, partitiivi is simply the grammatical form "required" by the verb, as in *rakastan sinua* 'I love you'. It is also used (in singular!) with numerals, e.g. *kolme taloa* 'three houses'.
- Translatiivi** may indicate the result of a state or role transition, e.g. *tulla opettajaksi* 'become a teacher'. It has many other uses as well, e.g. *suomeksi* 'in Finnish'.
- Inessiivi** usually refers to being within or in close contact with something.
- Elatiivi** typically indicates movement from within (or from close contact with) something. It is also used in more abstract meanings, as in *minusta* 'in my opinion'.
- Illatiivi** normally indicates movement into (or to close contact with) something.
- Adessiivi** can refer to being near or on the surface of something. It has several other uses as well, including the indication of instrument or method or manner, as well as idiomatic expressions like *minulla on* 'I have' (literally, 'at me there is').
- Ablatiivi** indicates movement from the neighborhood (or from the surface of) something.
- Allatiivi** indicates movement to the neighborhood (or to the surface of) something, or indicates the recipient (of giving something, for example).
- Abessiivi** corresponds to English preposition "without". It is used rarely, except in sayings and in nominal forms of verbs.
- Komitatiivi** indicates company. The ending is followed by a possessive suffix (except in adjective attributes). It is used rarely and always grammatically in plural.
- Instruktiivi** indicates in principle an instrument, but see below for literary uses of the instruktiivi. The singular forms, identical with the genitive form, are almost exclusively adverb-like (e.g. *jalan* 'by foot'). Normally, an instrument is expressed using adessiivi or other cases.

15. **Akkusatiivi** (accusative, objective, the case of a grammatical object) is often listed as a case, too. However its form coincides with the form of the nominative or the form of the genitive, except for the personal pronouns that have specific accusative forms (*minut, sinut*, etc.) and the interrogatory pronoun *kuka ~ ken* (akkusatiivi: *kenet*).

Among the cases, the six cases inessiivi, elatiivi, illatiivi, adessiivi, ablatiivi, allatiivi form a rather orthogonal system of *locative* cases, with the first three referring to inner relations (in, from, into) and the rest to corresponding outer relations. In practise, the rules for selecting inner or outer locative case are complicated and have a lot of exceptions. For instance, we say *Helsingissä* 'in Helsinki' but *Tampereella* 'in Tampere' with no easily explainable reason. (Even Finns have problems in selecting the correct case when using a less common municipality name. A list of municipality names and their cases has been composed for such purposes.)

Moreover, the cases essiivi and partitiivi originally had locative meanings, too, and this is still preserved in some adverbs and sayings (e.g. *ulkona* 'outside'). Translatiivi can be regarded as an abstract locative case. Thus, in total nine of the fourteen cases can be explained as referring to locality of some sort!

Frequency of usage

The cases can be roughly divided into three categories by frequency:

1. the common cases nominatiivi, genetiivi and partitiivi, which cover about 76 % of all occurrences
2. the nine locative cases in the broad sense, as explained above
3. the rare cases abessiivi, komitatiivi and instruktiivi, which mostly live in special phrases only.

Frequency of usage of cases in Finnish

35.24 %	nominatiivi
15.69 %	genetiivi
9.89 %	nominatiivi pl.
7.65 %	partitiivi
3.85 %	genetiivi pl.
3.79 %	illatiivi
3.50 %	partitiivi pl.
3.31 %	inessiivi
2.55 %	elatiivi
2.30 %	adessiivi
2.25 %	instruktiivi pl.
1.73 %	essiivi
1.40 %	elatiivi pl.
1.23 %	translatiivi
0.95 %	allatiivi
0.93 %	inessiivi pl.
0.74 %	illatiivi pl.
0.73 %	adessiivi pl.
0.58 %	allatiivi pl.
0.51 %	essiivi pl.
0.47 %	ablatiivi
0.31 %	abessiivi
0.17 %	ablatiivi pl.
0.14 %	translatiivi pl.
0.04 %	komitatiivi pl.
0.04 %	akkusatiivi
0.01 %	akkusatiivi pl.
0.01 %	abessiivi pl.

The table gives the distribution of cases in the texts of the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper during the first half of 1997 ($N = 2,515,113$). The entries with the text "pl." indicate the frequency of plural forms, while the entries without such text are for singular. Thus, for example, nominatiivi alone accounts for about 45 % of all occurrences.

The table is based on automated analysis, which is known to produce some incorrect results, due to the impossibility of disambiguating some word forms without semantic analysis. For example, the singular forms of instruktiivi coincide with those of genetiivi and are counted under it; this however does not cause much distortion, since instruktiivi is very rare in singular.

In the table, "akkusatiivi" refers to those forms of personal pronouns that are morphologically distinguishable as akkusatiivi, e.g. "minut".

Notes on suggested cases

The variation in the number of cases in different sources of information about Finnish is mostly explained by the inclusion or exclusion of **akkusatiivi** as a separate case. Otherwise there is little disagreement about the matter, but for completeness I mention a few issues:

- One might regard **instruktiivi** as vanished, remaining only in sayings and adverbs. However, it has some

modern literary use (often regarded as artificial style) where it means 'together with' or 'including' rather 'with the aid of'.

- Sometimes a case called **prolatiivi**, with ending *-tse* and corresponding to English prepositions 'through' or 'via', is suggested, but most linguists regard *-tse* simply as an adverbial suffix. See *Kirjeitse annettu määräys. Suomen kielen prolatiiveista*.
- Sometimes a case, **eksessiivi**, with ending *-nta* (combined from the *-na* of *essiivi* and *-ta* of *partitiivi*) is suggested, meaning 'from the role of', thus making the system of "pseudo-locative" cases more orthogonal. It has been reported to have been used in a few dialects, but many references to occurrences of *eksessiivi* in dialects seem to be based on misinterpretations. In some dialects, adverbs like *luonta* occur, but just as dialectal variants of *luota* (which is morphologically a *partitiivi* form and is purely locative in meaning).
- A case ending with *-nkaa*, with a meaning corresponding to *komitatiivi*, i.e. 'together with', actually exists in some dialects, possibly due to influence of Estonian *-ga* case. However it is explainable as simple contraction: *talon kanssa* > *talonkaa*.
- In composite words the first word often undergoes changes: *hevonen* 'horse' + *voima* 'power' > *hevosvoima*. One might argue that this means that there is a separate case, **kompositiivi**. See *Suomen kielen yhdyssanamuodot (kompositiivit)*.
- A case called **latiivi**, with endings such as *-s* and a generic locative meaning 'to', has actually existed in the language but only survives in some adverbs (e.g. *ulos*) and in peculiar derivations which are between adverbs and cases of nouns (!) in the comparative form, e.g. *rannemmas* (from *ranta* 'beach, coast' + comparative suffix + ending *-s*), indicating movement to nearer a beach or coast and synonymous with *rannemmaksi* (with the *translatiivi* ending). Note that similar forms, e.g. *rannempana* and *rannempaa*, are used, with clearly locative meanings for *essiivi* and *partitiivi*.
- There are several very productive suffixes for deriving adverbs, such as *-sti*. It is sometimes suggested that some of them might be interpreted as case endings. Panu Mäkinen has included such cases into his list of Finnish cases. He regards e.g. *-sti* as a suffix for **multiplikatiivi**, obviously due its use with numbers, e.g. *kolme* 'three' - *kolmesti* 'three times, thrice'. However, a much more common use for that suffix is to derive adverbs from adjectives, with the generic meaning 'in a ... manner', or corresponding to the English suffix *-ly*. For example, *iloinen* (stem: *iloise-*) 'happy, joyful' - *iloisesti* 'happily, with joy'. Often the *adessiivi* of a noun is used in a similar meaning, e.g. *ilolla* (from *ilo* 'happiness, joy') though purists may not regard this as fully correct, since it reflects the influence of other languages (mainly Swedish). Since the *-sti* ending often has the same function as the *-lla* suffix, which is undeniably a case ending, and since it can be formed from all numerals and most adjectives, it looks like a good candidate for a case suffix. However no grammar seems to take such a position.

Confused? That's understandable. Please notice that none of the suggested cases in the list above passes the following **congruence test**: in Finnish, an adjective attribute (almost always) complies in its form with the noun, e.g. *isossa talossa*, *isoilla taloilla* etc. That is, the case (and number) is expressed both in a noun and in an attached adjective attribute. And none of the proposed cases can take such an attribute, so they are more adequately regarded as classes of adverbs or as other constructs than cases.

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