

Finnish possessive suffixes or lack thereof: What imposters and person agreement tell us

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Language often draws a sharp distinction between speaker (1st person), addressee (2nd person) and others (3rd person). The present work focuses on cases where this neat division breaks down, in particular cases where 3p expressions refer to the speaker. Consider (1a), a father speaking to his young child, or (1b), said by news anchor Dan Rather about himself (from Collins/Postal'12):

(1a) *Daddy* needs to rest! (1b) CBS News and *this reporter* fully believed the documents were genuine.

Here, *Daddy* and *this reporter* are **imposters**. They look like 3p expressions and occur with 3p verb agreement, but the intended interpretation is 1p *I* (speaker). Collins/Postal (2012:5, emphasis added) define an imposter as “a **notionally** 1st or 2nd person DP that is **grammatically** 3rd person.” **Languages differ** in whether pronominal agreement is with the notional (1p/2p) or grammatical (3p) component of imposters. English plural imposters antecede 3p and 1p pronouns/reflexives (2), but singular imposters require 3p agreement (Collins/Postal'12). In Mandarin pronominal agreement with imposters is always with the notional (1/2p) component (Wang'14); in Bangla with the grammatical (3p) one (Das'14).

(2) Mommy and Daddy need to take {their/our} shoes off first! (*father to child*)

Puzzle: The Finnish imposter *meikäläinen* is grammatically 3p, with 3p verb agreement, but notionally 1p singular and refers to “I”, the speaker (*roughly* translated as ‘yours truly’). (*Meikäläinen* also has a *non-imposter use*, ‘one of us’, cf. adjectival suffix -*Ainen*.) This imposter shows a **surprising split** in agreement patterns: On the one hand, with reflexives (3a-b) and possessive constructions (3c-d), both of which have possessive suffixes (**Px**, show person agreement, analyzed as agreement marker by Brattico/Huhmarniemi'15), *the imposter allows both 1p (notional) and 3p (grammatical) agreement on the Px*. Corpus data confirms this. (I focus on locally c-commanded possessives, which occur *without* overt genitive pronouns. I follow Brattico/Huhmarniemi in assuming these structures probably contain *pro*. See Vilkuna'96, Toivonen'00, Nelson'98, i.a. I leave *hänen autonsa*-type structures for future work).

(3a) Nyt oli *meikäläinen*_i; iskenyt *itseni*_i; jälleen mielenkiintoiseen paikkaan (www) [✓ reflexive, 1p]

Now *imposter*_i had gotten *self-Px1st*_i; into an interesting situation

Now yours truly_i had gotten myself_i into an interesting situation'

(3b) *Meikäläinen*_i; sai *itsensä*_i; taas takaisin bloggerin ääreen (www) [✓ reflexive, 3p]

*imposter*_i; got *self-Px3rd*_i; back to using blogger 'Yours truly_i; got herself_i back to using blogger'

(3c) *Meikäläinen*_i; on ollut *ikäni*_i; huono teroittamaan veitsiä (www) [✓ poss w/ Px, 1p]

*imposter*_i; had been *whole-life-[Px1st]*_i; bad-at sharpening knives

Yours truly_i has been bad at sharpening knives my_i; whole life'

(3d) *Meikäläinen*_i; jättää *autonsa*_i; orkkikseksi (www) [✓ poss w/ Px, 3p]

*imposter*_i; leaves *car-[Px3rd]*_i; original 'Yours truly_i; will leave his_i/her_i; car in its original state'

On the other hand, colloquial Finnish also exhibits another possessive variant with an *overt genitive pronoun* and, crucially, *no* possessive suffix (no Px) on the possessed noun (4a), e.g. Paunonen'95. Surprisingly, with *meikäläinen*, this Px-less possessive construction *only occurs with 1p (notional) pronominal agreement on the genitive pronoun* (4a). 3p pronoun agreement is unacceptable with imposters (4b) in this construction – unlike (3b,d) – though it is fine with a regular antecedent (4c). (4b-c use the pronoun *se*, the default human pronoun in the colloquial register where the Px-less possessive is used.)

(4a) *Meikäläinen*_i; on niin ylpeä *mun*_i; asiakkaista! (www) [✓ gen poss, no Px, 1p]

*meikäläinen*_i; is so proud-of *I-GEN*_i; clients 'Yours truly_i; is so proud of *my*_i; clients'

(4b) **Meikäläinen*_i; on niin ylpeä *sen*_i; asiakkaista! [*gen poss, no Px, 3p]

*meikäläinen*_i; is so proud-of *s/he-GEN*_i; clients 'Yours truly_i; is so proud of *his_i/her_i*; clients'

(4c) *Liisa*_i; on niin ylpeä *sen*_i; asiakkaista! [✓ non-imposter, gen poss, no Px, 3p]

*Liisa*_i; is so proud-of *she-GEN*_i; clients 'Liisa_i; is so proud of *her*_i; clients'

Thus, the puzzle is why the Finnish imposter *meikäläinen* only allows 1p pronoun agreement in the Px-less possessive construction, when it allows both 1p and 3p pronoun agreement with Px-containing possessives and reflexives. **My claim:** I show how this seemingly odd behavior can be explained once we extend the analysis of Collins & Postal'12 to capture the semantic and syntactic properties of Finnish possessive constructions with and without Pxs. In doing so, I shed light on differences between the Px-less and Px-containing possessive constructions that have not received a thorough treatment in prior work.

According to Collins & Postal'12, the left periphery contains null DPs for AUTHOR (Speaker, 1p) and ADDRESSEE (2p), represented in an expanded left periphery (Rizzi'97) or as arguments of a covert performative clause (Collins'14). Thus, in sentences like (2), the pronoun can agree with (i) the immediate antecedent *Mommy and Daddy*, yielding 3p *their*, or (ii) with the ultimate antecedent AUTHOR, yielding 1p *our*. (See Collins & Postal'12 for details). (The same holds for reflexives.)

(5) [[_{DP} **AUTHOR**] **Mommy and Daddy** need to take {their/our} shoes off first.]

Collins'14 notes that in the case of AUTHOR-antecedence, we are *not* dealing with variable binding, since AUTHOR refers to the specific person who utters the sentence. Thus, I assume that AUTHOR-reference (realized as *our*) can only involve *coreference*, whereas reference to the immediate antecedent (e.g. *Mommy and Daddy...their*) can involve *variable binding or coreference* (cf. Reinhart'83).

Let us now consider why the Finnish imposter allows *both 1p and 3p pronominal agreement* in Px-structures but *only 1p pronominal agreement* in genitive, Px-less possessives. Crucially, I claim that this is *because standard possessive structures with Pxs (and no overt genitive pronouns) allow both variable binding and coreference, whereas Px-less possessive structures with overt genitive pronouns only allow coreference*. Evidence for this claim comes from possessive constructions with **quantified antecedents** (ex.6) and **ellipsis** (ex.7):

(6a) {✓Joka iikka_i/✓Liisa_i/✓meikäläinen_i} hermostuu joskus **naapurilleen**.
 {✓Every person_i/✓Liisa_i/✓meikäläinen_i} gets-annoyed-at sometimes **neighbor-[Px3rd]_i**
 '✓Everyone_i/✓Liisa_i/✓yours truly_i} occasionally gets annoyed at his_i/her_i neighbor.'
 (6b) {*?Joka iikka_i/✓Liisa_i/*meikäläinen_i} hermostuu joskus **sen_i naapurille**.
 {*?Every person_i/✓Liisa_i/*meikäläinen_i} gets-annoyed-at sometimes **he_i/she_r-GEN neighbor**
 '*?Everyone_i/✓Liisa_i/*yours truly_i} occasionally gets annoyed at his/her neighbor.'

Px possessives allow *both* imposters and quantified antecedents (6a), but Px-less possessives (6b) allow *neither*. Both allow referential antecedents. This asymmetry recurs in *comparative ellipsis* (7): Px-less possessives with genitive pronouns yield a strong bias for *strict interpretations*, but Px possessives allow *both strict and sloppy*. Thus, this is not specific to imposters but a general property of these two structures.

(7) Liisa_i puolusti {**kaveriaan_i** / **sen_i kaveria**} paremmin ku Anna.
 L_i defended {**friend-[Px3rd]_i** / **he/she-GEN_i friend**} better than Anna.
 Liisa_i defended her_i friend better than Anna (did). (Finnish does not mark gender)

(Colloquial *iikka* 'chap' is used in (6) and colloquial morphology in (6-7) to ensure the px-less form is not blocked by register clash.) We now return to why *meikäläinen* allows only 1p agreement in px-less possessives with genitive pronouns – which I suggest are interpreted via *coreference* – while allowing 1p and 3p agreement in px possessives – which I suggest can be interpreted via *variable binding or coreference*. Once we combine this with the idea (based on Collins'14) that reference to the ultimate AUTHOR antecedent is via coreference, not variable binding, whereas reference to the immediate antecedent (imposter DP) can be accomplished via variable binding or coreference, the agreement patterns exhibited by *meikäläinen* follow: It exhibits 1p agreement in px-less possessives, because those can only be interpreted as involving coreference with the AUTHOR, and agreement with the AUTHOR triggers 1p agreement. In contrast, Px possessives allow *both* 1p agr (to AUTHOR, coreference) and 3p agr (to imposter DP, coreference or variable binding). **In sum**, I provide novel evidence for a crosslinguistically unexpected split in the agreement properties of the imposter *meikäläinen*, and show this split can be attributed to independent differences between Px-less and Px-containing possessives.