

# **Finnish Morphology**

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## References

For this project, we used the papers “Variation in Allomorph Selection” by Anttila, “Exotic Word Formation” by Bobaljik, “Finnish Noun Inflection” by Kiparsky, and “Finite sentences in Finnish: Word order, morphology, and information structure” by Nikanne. We also consulted Wikipedia for some examples of Finnish words/sentences/phrases.

We also consulted with some Finnish speakers for this project. We communicated with a native Finnish speaker, Mette Laine for confirmation of some information we found online. Lastly, many pronunciation guides came from a C1 Finnish learner, August Blackham.

This presentation is based on the **Standard Finnish** dialect, spoken mostly in the Southern areas of Finland, and also used by professional speakers of Finnish.

# Table of Contents

- 1** Part 1 — Morphological Type
  - Morphological Type
  - Examples
- 2** Part 2 — Morphological Processes
  - Verb Conjugation
  - Derivational Affixes
  - Non-concatenative Process: the Illative Case
  - Allomorphs of the Nominalization Suffix
- 3** Sources

## Part 1 — Morphological Type

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Finnish is primarily a **synthetic language**, and more specifically an **agglutinating language**. Some example phrases that demonstrate this are listed below: (Laine 2022).

- (1) Puhutteko englanti?  
speak-2.SG-Q English  
'Do you speak English?'
- (2) Käytin tietokonetta.  
use-1.SG-PAST information-machine  
'I used a computer.'

# Agglutination Examples

Below is a table showing some typical finite verbs in Finnish:  
(Nikane 2017, p. 70)

Stem	(Passive)	Tense/Mood	Subject	Meaning
istu ['sit']		-i [PAST]	-mme [1PL SUBJ. AGR]	'we sat down'
istu ['sit']		-isi [COND]	-mme [1PL SUBJ. AGR]	'we would sit down'
istu ['sit']	-tt [passive]	-i [PAST]	-in [PASS SUBJ. AGR]	'it was sat down'
istu ['sit']	-tta [passive]	-isi [COND]	-in [PASS SUBJ. AGR]	'it would have been sat down'

## Agglutination Examples cont.

Consider the below Finnish words: (Note: some of these words are not typically used, and are merely an example of what is *theoretically* possible) (Blackham 2022)

- istua “to sit down” (istun “I sit down”)
- istahtaa “to sit down for a while”
- istahdan “I’ll sit down for a while”
- istahtaisin “I would sit down for a while”
- istahtaisinko “should I sit down for a while?”
- istahtaisinkohan “I wonder if I should sit down for a while”
- istahtaisinkohankaan “I wonder if I should sit down for a while after all”

Note the separable suffixes: /-ta/, /-dan/, /-isin/, /-ko/, /-han/, /-kaan/



## Part 2 — Morphological Processes

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# Finnish Verb Conjugation

Finnish has 6 classes of verbs that conjugate differently, but group 1 suffices to show agglutinative morphology:

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minä tiedän	I know
sinä tiedät	you (singular) know
hän/se tietää	(s)he/it knows
se tietää	(s)he/it knows (colloquial)
me tiedämme	we know
te tiedätte	you (plural/formal) know
he/ne tietävät	they know
ne tietää	they know (colloquial)

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From this table, we see that the basic endings for conjugations are -n, -t, -(final vowel), -mme, -tte, and -vat.

# Finnish Verb Conjugation — Past Tense

For the past tense, the infix -i- is inserted between the infinitive and the verb:

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puhun = 'I speak'	puhuin = 'I spoke'
puhut = 'you speak'	puhuit = 'you spoke'
puhuu = '(he) speaks'	puhui = '(he) spoke'
puhumme = 'we speak'	puhuimme = 'we spoke'

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## Finnish Verb Conjugation — Passive Mood

For the passive mood, there are 4 different endings for present, past, conditional, and potential that all follows the same general construction. The present passive will be used as an example, and its ending is -taan

puhua → puhu- → puhutaan.

If the root ends with a or ä, it is changed to e:

tietää → tiedä- → tiede- → tiedetään.

The endings and examples are listed below:

Mood	Ending	Example	Meaning
Present passive	-taan	puhutaan	'it is spoke'
Past passive	-ttiin	puhuttiin	'it was spoken'
Conditional passive	-ttaisiin	puhuttaisiin	'it would be spoken'
Potential passive	-ttaneen	puhuttaneen	'it may be spoken'

# Derivational Affixes

Finnish has a lot less free morphemes than English does, so lots of derivational affixes are used to create words: (Laine 2022)

Suffix	Meaning	Example
-ja / -jä	agents from verbs	lukea "to read" → lukija "reader"
-sto / -stö	collective nouns	kirja "a book" → kirjasto "a library" laiva "a ship" → laivasto "navy, fleet"
-in	instruments or tools	kirjata "to book, to file" → kirjain "a letter" (of the alphabet) vatkata "to whisk" → vatkain "a whisk, mixer"
-uri / -yri	agents or instruments	kaivaa "to dig" → kaivuri "an excavator" laiva "a ship" → laivuri "shipper, ship-master"

## Derivational Affixes cont.

Suffix	Meaning	Example
-uri / -yri	agents or instruments	kaivaa "to dig" → kaivuri "an excavator" laiva "a ship" → laivuri "shipper, ship-master"
-os / -ös	result nouns from verbs	tulla "to come" → tulos "result, outcome" tehdä "to do" → teos "a piece of work"
-ton / -tön	adjectives indicating the lack of something	onni "happiness" → onneton "unhappy" koti "home" → koditon "homeless"
-kas / -käs	adjectives from nouns	itse "self" → itsekäs "selfish" neuvo "advice" → neuvokas "resourceful"
-va / -vä	adjectives from verbs	taitaa "to be able" → taitava "skillful" johtaa "to lead" → johtava "leading"

## Derivational Affixes cont.

Suffix	Meaning	Example
-llinen	adjectives from nouns	lapsi "child" → lapsellinen "childish" kauppa "a shop, commerce" → kaupallinen "commercial"
-la / -lä	locations (places related to the stem)	kana "a hen" → kanala "a henhouse" pappi "a priest" → pappila "a parsonage"
-lainen / -läinen	inhabitants (of places), among others	Englanti "England" → englantilainen "English person/thing" Venäjä "Russia" → venäläinen "Russian person or thing".

**Note.** To choose which of the two suffixes is used, refer to the vowel harmony rules from our phonology project. For many Finnish suffixes involving vowels, there will be two such variations based on those rules.

## Non-concatenative Process: the Illative Case

The illative case in Finnish demonstrates root-and-pattern morphology. (Bobaljik 2002, p. 15)

Word	Illative Case
auto 'car'	autoon 'to the car'
koulu 'school'	kouluun 'to school'
päivä 'day'	päivään 'to the day'
kuva 'picture'	kuvaan 'to the picture'
bussi 'bus'	bussiin 'to the bus'

Note that given the root, the pattern to form the illative case is simply taking the last vowel of the root, then adding the /-n/ suffix.



# Finnish Nominalization

In Finnish, the nominalization suffix has three allomorphs: /-nti/, /-nta/, and /-nto/. Some uses are listed below: (Anttila 2000, p. 37)

júo-n.ti	'drink-nom'	'drinking'
sí.jai-n.ti	'locate-nom'	'location'
ár.vi.ði-n.ti	'estimate-nom'	'estimation'
fór.ma.li.sòì-n.ti	'formalize-nom'	'formalization'
lúo-n.to	'create-nom'	'nature'
pýy-n.tö	'request-nom'	'request'
lás.ke-n.to	'count-nom'	'elementary arithmetic'
lú.e-n.to	'read-nom'	'lecture'
á.su-n.to	'inhabit-nom'	'apartment'
ús.ko-n.to	'believe-nom'	'religion'
lú.e-n.ta	'read-nom'	'reading'
lís.ke-n.ta	'count-nom'	'counting'
án.saj-n.ta	'earn-nom'	'earning'
pá.hek.sù-n.ta	'disapprove-nom'	'disapproval'
é.leh.ði-n.'a	'gesture-nom'	'gesticulation'
vé.ti.téh.di-n.tä	'loiter-nom'	'loitering'

## Allophones of Nominalization Suffix: /-nta/, /-nti/

Out of the three suffixes, two are phonologically conditioned on stress (or prosodically conditioned): /-nti/ and /-nta/. /-nti/ follows light syllables, whereas /-nta/ follows heavy syllables. (Anttila 2000, p. 37)

júo-n.ti	'drink-nom'	'drinking'
sí.jai-n.ti	'locate-nom'	'location'
ár.vi.òi-n.ti	'estimate-nom'	'estimation'
fór.ma.li.sòi-n.ti	'formalize-nom'	'formalization'
lú.e-n.ta	'read-nom'	'reading'
lás.ke-n.ta	'count-nom'	'counting'
án.saj-n.ta	'earn-nom'	'earning'
pá.hek.sù-n.ta	'disapprove-nom'	'disapproval'
é.leh.dì-n-'a	'gesture-nom'	'gesticulation'
vé.ti.téh.di-n.tä	'loiter-nom'	'loitering'

## Allophones of Nominalization Suffix: /-nta/, /-nti/ cont.

Thus, the following rule describes the usage of the two phonologically conditioned suffixes:

$$/-NOM/ \rightarrow \begin{cases} [-nti] / & \text{light syllable } \_ \\ [-nta] / & \text{heavy syllable } \_ \end{cases}$$

## Allophones of Nominalization Suffix: /-nto/

“The suffix /-nto/ is different in two ways: it does not appear to have any prosodic limitations, but freely occurs after both heavies and lights, and it is clearly lexicalized: besides being unproductive, it is typically associated with unpredictable meanings.” (Anttila 2000, p. 37)

lúo-n.to	'create-nom'	'nature'
pýy-n.tõ	'request-nom'	'request'
lás.ke-n.to	'count-nom'	'elementary arithmetic'
lú.e-n.to	'read-nom'	'lecture'
á.su-n.to	'inhabit-nom'	'apartment'
ús.ko-n.to	'believe-nom'	'religion'

## Allophones of Nominalization Suffix: /-nto/

As a result of how /-nto/ is very different from the other two nominalization suffixes, many verbs take both one of /-nta/ or /-nti/ *and* /-nto/, creating two different words:

Transparent		Lexicalized	
lúo-n.ti	'creating'	lúo-n.to	'nature'
lúe-nta	'reading'	lúe-nto	'lecture'
láske-nta	'counting'	láske-nto	'elementary arithmetic'
hálli-nta	'governing'	hálli-nto	'government'
ístu-nta	'sitting'	ístu-nto	'session'
kúkj-nta	'flowering'	kúkj-nto	'blossom'
pálki-nta	'rewarding'	pálki-nto	'prize'

## Sources

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