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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Avertive constructions in Finnish: A collostructional analysis

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Abstract
Avertives refer to (mainly past) situations the outcome of which is interrupted, averted, or frustrated instead of completed, as in *Meinasin kaatua, mutta ihmeen kaupalla onnistuin pysymään jaloillani* 'I was about to fall, but miraculously managed to stay on my feet'. The aim of this paper is to describe and compare three verbal constructions in Finnish which are frequently used as avertives by means of collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003). We propose that these constructions, namely *olla* + *mAisillA* 'to be V-ing', *olla* + INF_A 'to be to V', and *meinata* + INF_A 'to mean, intend to V', which all correspond to 'be about to do something', constitute a family of related avertive constructions. We first describe them by means of collexeme analyses based on corpus data consisting of online written conversation extracted from the Suomi24 corpus. We then compare the constructions and situate them on Caudal's (2023) continuum for characterising different kinds of avertive markers. Finally, we offer a box chart characterisation of the constructions at two distinct levels of schematicity, the schematic AUX + INF_X construction and a specific usage instance of *olla* + INF_A, following Fried & Östman (2004).

Keywords: avertive constructions; Finnish; collostructional analysis; Construction Grammar

1. Introduction

ANA grams (for Action Narrowly Averted), avertives, and frustratives are notions referring to what can be seen as a family of semantically related constructions with the meaning 'Subject nearly/almost V-ed/Subject was on the verge of V-ing [but did not V]' (Kuteva 1998:115). The purpose of this paper is to describe in detail three verbal constructions in Finnish, which are frequently used to express a non-realised action with a meaning similar to 'was about to', as shown in (1)–(3):[1]

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(1) *Petteri Punakuono* ***oli nukahtaa***.
Petteri Punakuono ol-i nukahta-a.
Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer be-PST.3SG fall asleep-INF_A
'Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer was about to fall asleep.'

(2) *Petteri Punakuono* ***oli nukahtamaisillaan***.
Petteri Punakuono ol-i nukahta-maisi-lla-an.
Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer be-PST.3SG fall asleep-INF_{MAISI}[2]-ADE-3SG.POSS
'Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer was about to fall asleep.'

(3) *Petteri Punakuono* ***meinasi nukahtaa***.
Petteri Punakuono meinas-i nukahta-a.
Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer mean-PST.3SG fall asleep-INF_A
'Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer was about to fall asleep.'

In her seminal paper on avertive constructions, Kuteva (1998) considers the example *Olin kaatua*[3] *kadulla* 'I nearly fell (down) on the street' an avertive use of the verb *olla* 'to be' in combination with the A-infinitive *kaatua* 'to fall' (we gloss this form as INF_A). Within the Finnish grammatical tradition, the above constructions have been noticed since way back and described with terms such as propinquatives or proximatives (Penttilä 1963, Maamies 1997, Ylikoski 2003).

The constructions found in (1), (2), and (3) can be labeled *olla* + INF_A, *olla* + *mAisillA*[4] and *meinata* + INF_A, for short. We have, however, restricted the investigation to the past tense uses of the auxiliaries[5] *olla* 'to be' and *meinata* 'to mean, intend', due to the fact that avertives are usually restricted to the past tense (see e.g. Kuteva 1998, Hansen 2010, Arkadiev 2019).[6] This is, of course, a consequence of the meaning of the construction itself (see Section 2), since an unsuccessfully completed event can most naturally be observed in retrospect.

For Kuteva (1998:137), pastness is indeed a defining trait of avertivity (see also Hansen 2010, Arkadiev 2019, Zinner & Dowah 2020) along with imminence and counterfactuality. As the analysis will show, the three constructions under investigation are not unambiguously avertive in all their uses, but avertivity is a prominent meaning for all of them and the main meaning of, at least, *olla* + INF_A.

As stated above, the main purpose of this paper is to describe the three avertive constructions in Finnish in as much detail as possible. In order to achieve this, we use a quantitative method called collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003). As far as we are aware, there exists no systematic, corpus-based study of these constructions in Finnish as markers of avertivity.[7] In our analysis we also try to determine to what extent the three constructions, which share certain structural traits (the auxiliary *olla* and the INF_A form, respectively), coincide in terms of meaning nuances and collocational preferences. Secondly, we situate the three constructions within the Finnish construction inventory, or constructicon, as understood within the framework of Construction Grammar (see Fried & Östman 2004, Goldberg 2019,

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Hilpert 2019); we also provide a description of the constructions, at two different levels of schematicity, by means of the nested box notation presented by Fried & Östman (2004). Third and finally, we evaluate where on the avertive/frustrative continuum the three Finnish constructions are situated (see Overall 2017, Kuteva et al. 2019, Caudal 2023, and Section 2 for more details).

One of the advantages of collostructional analysis (CollA) is that it highlights the most important verbal collocates, or collexemes, of the construction under investigation. And collocates go a long toward determining the meaning of a construction, as indicated, among others, by Firth's (1968:179) famous statement 'You shall know a word by the company it keeps.' CollA is also profoundly empirical, and thus well suited to large corpus data (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003). Finally, the constructions we are interested in have not been investigated previously by means of CollA. We are thus confident that our analyses will bring new insights into the use and semantic profiles of the three constructions.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 we present, first, an overview of avertivity and avertive markers from a typological perspective (Section 2.1) before moving on to previous studies on the Finnish constructions under focus (Section 2.2). Section 3 presents the data and the methods used to analyse it, while the analysis itself is presented in Section 4. The results are discussed in Section 5, where we attempt to situate the constructions within the constructional hierarchy, or constructicon, of Finnish and offer traditional box notation characterisations of the constructions at two distinct levels of schematicity. Section 6 concludes.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Avertivity and the functions of avertive markers

The notions avertive and frustrative refer to a family of related constructions, morphemes, or grams, expressing the non-realisation of a past situation or, more precisely, a situation that almost happened but failed to materialise (cf. Kuteva 1998, Overall 2017, Kuteva et al. 2019, Caudal 2023). According to Caudal's (2023:§6.1) definition, the avertive indicates that a 'Subject nearly/almost V-ed/Subject was going to V [but didn't]'. These constructions, which are expressed by different means in different languages, have been subsumed under the cover term of 'non-realisation' by Kuteva et al. (2019). The terminology surrounding these forms is varied, as the following discussion will show.

In her seminal paper, Kuteva (1998) makes a first attempt to describe the family of 'almost V' constructions from a typological point of view, relying on data from African, Amazonian, Australian, and European languages. She introduces the notion of Action Narrowly Averted (ANA), which she analyses as a gram (in the sense of Bybee 1985 and Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994) bearing the meaning **was on the verge of V-ing, but did not V** (1998:115).

According to Kuteva (1998:119), there are three features which are considered 'essential characteristics' of ANA (Action Narrowly Averted) structures: imminence, pastness and counterfactuality, out of which 'pastness is an essential semantic characteristic'. Kuteva (1998:127–129) contrasts the ANA gram with what she calls the proximative, which, on her account, refers to an imminent action but can be

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used in both past and non-past contexts. ANA, on the other hand, involves counterfactuality (negation) and pastness, apart from imminence (1998:132). Similarly, Arkadiev (2019:71) distinguishes the avertive from the proximative by underlining that the 'avertive includes counterfactuality as part of its encoded meaning'; he also notes that the avertive is restricted to the past, while the proximative is not. This contrast is exemplified in (4) and (5):

(4) *Potilas oli kuolla.* (avertive; our example)
Potilas ol-i kuol-la.
Patient-NOM be-PST.3SG die-INF_A
'The patient was about to die [but didn't].'

(5) *Potilas on / oli kuolemaisillaan.* (proximative; Kuteva 1998:133)
Potilas on / ol-i kuole-maisi-lla-an
Patient-NOM be-PRS.3SG / be-PST.3SG die-INF_{MAISI}.ADE-POSS.3SG
'The patient is / was about to die.'

Kuteva (1998:145) also notes that 'in some languages one and the same form can have, depending on context, either the ANA or the proximative function'. As we will see (Section 4.1), this is the case of the Finnish *olla* + *mAisillA* construction.

Overall (2017) offers a typological perspective of the avertive–frustrative continuum, focusing on frustratives as an areal phenomenon of the Amazon region. For Overall (2017:479) '[f]rustrative is a grammatical marker that expresses the non-realisation of some expected outcome implied by the proposition expressed in the marked clause'. It 'implies two propositions', as exemplified by a sentence such as 'I arrived at the town (but I didn't accomplish what I went there for)'. For Overall (2017:480), then, the 'frustrative indicates that some expected subsequent state of affairs (proposition q) failed to manifest'.

Overall (2017:482) makes a point of distinguishing the frustrative from what he calls the avertive/incompletive. For Overall (2017:488–89), then, an expression such as *you nearly fell* is a case of avertivity, whereas a canonical frustrative is found in (6), involving a morphological frustrative marker. Canonical frustratives in Overall's sense seem to be rare in European languages, including Finnish.

(6) Matsés (Fleck, p.c. 2012, cited in Overall 2017:489)
Sadomon paëd-wid-onda-ṣh.
Salomon fall-FRUST-DIST.PST-3
'Salomon fell (from a tall tree, but survived).'

Similarly to Overall (2017), Kuteva et al. (2019) present a total of five different categories of non-realisation: avertivity, apprehensiveness, two types of frustrativity (initial and completion), and inconsequentiality. The features that distinguish the categories in Kuteva et al. (2019:§3) are partly aspectual and partly pragmatic. Avertivity is concerned with an imminent event described as a whole (with a perfective reading), which is not completed. Initial frustrativity focuses on the initial phase of a situation, and completional frustrativity on its completion. Apprehensionality is associated with the non-fulfilment of an undesirable situation

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and inconsequentiality with the non-achievement of an expected outcome. In the former type, apprehensionality, the undesirable situation is avoided, while in the latter, inconsequentiality, the situation described by the verb structure is in fact achieved, but the situation as a whole does not correspond to the expected outcome. Kuteva et al.'s notion of inconsequentiality thus corresponds closely to Overall's (2017) canonical frustrative.

Caudal's (2023) model resembles the classification of Kuteva et al. (2019) but only distinguishes four categories of non-realisation instead of five. Kuteva et al.'s (2019) notion of apprehensionality, in which the non-realised event is undesirable, is not included in Caudal's classification (see below). All of Caudal's categories are considered subtypes of avertivity and his classification is based primarily on event-structural characteristics. An event can be considered either in its entirety or from within: in the first type ((a) full event structure avertive reading) the expected or desired situation fails to materialise in its entirety; in the second type ((b) preparatory stage avertive reading) the situation is initiated but the core meaning expressed by the verb (structure) is not realised. In the third type ((c) inner stage avertive reading), a situation that has been initiated does not lead to completion. The fourth type ((d) result stage avertive reading) involves a situation which is itself carried out but which ends in some atypical, unpredictable, or undesirable outcome. The ultimate interpretation of the different subtypes of aversiveness is influenced by lexical aspect as well as by other factors such as the intentionality of the subject and other contextual cues.[8]

(a) **Full event structure avertive reading:** the expected or desired situation fails to materialise in its entirety.

Meinasin hukkua / ***Olin jäädä*** *auton alle.*

meinas-i-n	hukku-a	/	ol-i-n	jää-dä	auto-n	alle
was about to-PST-1SG	drown-INF	/	be-PST-1SG	stay-INF	car-GEN	under

'I **was on the verge of drowning** / **getting hit** by a car.' (own example)

(b) **Preparatory stage avertive reading:** the situation is initiated but the core meaning expressed by the verb (structure) is not realised.

Olin *jo* ***lähtemäisilläni****, kun peruutus tuli.* (Suomi24)[9]

ol-i-n	jo	lähte-mäisillä-ni	kun	peruutus	tul-i
be-PST-1SG	already	leave-$INF_{MAISILLA}$POSS.1SG	when	cancellation	come-PST.3SG

'**I was already leaving** when the cancellation (message) came.'

(c) **Inner stage avertive reading:** a situation that has been initiated does not lead to completion.

Tuulilasiin ***oli muodostumaisillaan*** *jäätä.*

tuulilasi-in	ol-i	muodostu-maisilla-an	jää-tä
car window-ILL	be-PST.3SG	form-$INF_{MAISILLA}$-POSS.3SG	ice-PAR

'Ice **was forming** on the car window.'

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*Kirkko **oli romahtamaisillaan**, seinien läpi kasvoi pensaita.*
kirkko ol-i romahta-maisilla-an sein-i-en läpi
church be-PST.3SG collapse-INF$_{MAISILLA}$-POSS.3SG wall-PL-GEN through
kasvo-i pensa-i-ta
grow-PST.3SG bush-PL-PAR
'The church **was about to collapse**, with bushes growing through the walls.'

(d) **Result stage avertive reading:** a situation which is itself carried out but which ends in some atypical, unpredictable or undesirable outcome.
No examples of this type were found in our data.[10]

As in the previous analyses of avertives, Caudal's model incorporates pragmatic features into the meaning carried by the constructions. This is the case of the first type ((a) full event structure) and fourth type of avertives ((d) result stage), where the non-realised event and the outcome of the realised event (fourth type) are associated with a certain attitude or set of expectations. The non-occurrence of an event and the occurrence of an event in a certain way involve negative affect (cf. Overall 2017:484-488), whereas Caudal's avertives of the second and third type can be characterised as affectively neutral for the speaker. We find Caudal's avertive continuum the most convincing, given its conceptual clarity and the presence of the aspectual dimension of the verb situations, and hence use it as the conceptual base onto which we situate the Finnish avertive constructions.

Conventionalised means of expressing avertivity can take many forms. Avertivity can be expressed by various periphrastic verb structures, i.e. sequences including a verbal element describing the event or, for example, by a copula or other grammatical element, or by lexical material (Kuteva et al. 2019:886). Periphrastic structures are found in many European languages.[11] In French, for example, the avertive consists of the verb *faillir* 'to fail', conjugated in the past tense, *a failli*, and the infinitive of the content verb, as in (7):

(7) French (Romance): *La route est glissante et **j'ai failli tomber***
La route est glissante et j' ai failli tomber.
DEF road be.3SG.PRS slippery and I have.1SG.PRS fail fall.INF
'The road is slippery and **I nearly fell**.' (Kuteva 1998:116)

Avertivity can also be expressed morphologically by various kinds of affixes. Morphological avertivity is found, for example, in languages spoken in the Amazon (Sparing-Chávez 2003, Overall 2017) and Australia (Kuteva et al. 2019, Caudal 2023). The typologically oriented study of avertives and frustratives actually originated in the analysis of indigenous languages (see Caudal 2023 for a review). For example, in the Tariana language, spoken in Brazil, avertivity/frustrativity is expressed by the affix *-tha-*, as in (8). In (8), the sense of immediacy is also reinforced by the form *tuki* 'little'.

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(8) Tariana (Arawak): *tuki nuwha**tha**mahka nua.*
tuki nu-wha-tha-mahka nu-a
little 1SG-fall.from.standing.position-FRUST-REC.PST.NVIS 1SG-go
'I **almost fell down** (but managed not to).' (Aikhenvald 2012:184)

According to Kuteva (1998:138), typical elements of structures expressing avertivity are verbs of the type 'be' or 'have', forms expressing volition or purpose or a verb such as 'fail' expressing a more specific meaning. Like aspectual structures, verb semantics and lexical aspect are also essential for the interpretation of different types of avertive expressions.

As we have already seen, avertive constructions can express several types of avertivity, in which case the meaning of the content verb and its aspectual features play an essential role (Kuteva et al. 2019:877–879, 887, Caudal 2023). In languages where the marking of perfective and imperfective is grammatically explicit, a perfective verb is used in avertive constructions, and, overall, the situation expressed by avertives is inherently perfective (Kuteva et al. 2019:858–859). Avertive structures can also differ in terms of the kind of subject: degree of animacy, volition, and intentionality vary from language to language and from structure to structure (Kuteva 1998:118–119).

Kuteva (1998:121) suggests that avertives typically are only loosely grammaticalised. Accordingly, the use of avertive markers is not obligatory but optional. The boundary between lexical and grammaticalised devices can also be fuzzy (Kuteva 1998:126). On Kuteva's account, in the early development of avertive constructions, the subject is often animate, and the meaning of being close to events can be derived from the context. A construction that expresses avertivity without the support of the co(n)text or the speech situation can thus be considered 'stronger' than one that requires context to support this reading. On the other hand, from a constructional point of view, avertives often occur in bi-clausal sequences (cf. Overall 2017:499–501, Kuteva et al. 2019:865, 873–874). For example, in constructions such as the Russian *bylo* + preterite perfect [+ *no* + V], the event expressed by the adversative *no* 'but' clause (in square brackets) in (9) makes it clear that the event expressed in the main clause is not realised:

(9) Russian (Slavic): *Ja **bylo pošol**, [no . . . ostanovilsja].*
Ja bylo pošol, no . . . ostanovilsja
I be.3SG.PST.NEUT go.PST.MASC but stop.PST.MASC
'I **was about to go**, [but I stopped].' (Kuteva 1998:116)

As we will see, in Finnish the presence of the adversative conjunction *mutta* 'but' often reinforces the avertive reading of an expression. On the other hand, especially with the *olla* + *mAisillA* construction, contextual cues are often needed for it to be interpreted as an avertive instead of a proximative.

2.2 Avertive constructions in Finnish

Within the tradition of Finnish grammar, the terms avertive or frustrative have not been used to characterise constructions such as *olla* + INF_A and *olla* + *mAisillA*. Instead, they are described as expressing an event whose realisation is near

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(e.g. Jahnsson 1871:112, 128, Setälä 1952, Penttilä 1963:482, 620, 416-417, Hakulinen 1978:254-256, Tommola 1992, ISK:§1521), i.e. proximative in Kuteva's terms. In the Finnish tradition, the meaning 'close to the event' has been called propinquity (*propinkvatiivisuus*). The meaning of the two structures mentioned above has been described in the literature precisely through the notion of propinquity, and few previous accounts address the question of what implications the structure carries with respect to the occurrence of the event, or whether it carries any such implications at all. For example, according to Ikola (1978:67), the structure in (10) leaves the realisation open to interpretation:

(10) *Tuulilasiin* ***oli muodostumaisillaan*** *jäätä*
Tuulilasi-in ol-i muodostu-maisi-lla-an jää-tä
windscreen-ILL be-PST.3SG form-INF_{MAISI}-POSS.3SG ice-PAR
'There was ice **about to form** on the windscreen' Ikola (1978:67)

Both Maamies (1997) and Ylikoski (2003:12) explicitly consider the structure *olla* + *mAisillA* to be propinquative, whereas Kuteva (2001:80, 97) considers it an avertive. Maamies (1997:37) and Ylikoski (2003:28) draw attention to the semantics carried by the content verb of the structure: the stem verb of the *-mAisillA* form in the propinquative sense often expresses a sudden change of state and is usually momentary in aspect and thus perfective. According to Ylikoski (2003), stem verbs are usually intransitive, typical examples being 'to die', 'to fall asleep', 'to fall down', and 'to crack'.

The structure *olla* + INF_A, on the other hand, appears more clearly as an avertive. Previous research on Finnish cites the construction as an example of the expression of non-realisation (see Ylikoski 2003:12, ISK:§1521). Although non-realisation is not always mentioned, the structure is often equated with the structure *olla vähällä* + INF_A 'to be close to V (i.e. almost V)' (Penttilä 1963:620, Hakulinen 1978:254, Tommola 2000:663). Because of this parallelism, the interpretation of the *olla* + INF_A construction is inevitably avertive, since the adverb *vähällä* 'nearly' implies that the situation is not realised.

Tommola (1992, 2000:663) draws attention to the temporal form of the constructions *olla* + INF_A and *olla* + *mAisillA*. According to Tommola, both structures imply non-realisation when *olla* is in the past tense, as in (11) and (12). In neither example does the situation (dying and being hit by a car) actually take place.

(11) ***Olin kuolemaisillani.***
ol-i-n kuole-maisilla-ni
be-PST-1SG die-INF_{MAISI}-POSS.1SG
'**I was** dying.' (Tommola 1992)

(12) *Eilen* ***olin (vähällä) jäädä*** *auton alle.*
eilen ol-i-n (vähällä) jää-dä auto-n al-le.
yesterday be-PST-1SG (near) remain-INF_A car-gen under-ILL
'Yesterday, **I was on the verge of being run over** by a car.' (Tommola 1992)

Kuteva (2001:97) also considers only the past tense use of the *olla* + INF_A construction as an avertive. Ylikoski (2003:12), however, notes that it is possible to

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interpret even the present tense structure shown in (13) as an avertive; it is clear from context that dying of laughter is not realised.

(13) ***Olen kuolla nauruun.***
Ole-n kuol-la nauru-un
be.PRS-1SG die-INF_A laughter-ILL
'**I'm almost dying** from laughter.' (Ylikoski 2003:12)

It might thus be possible to consider that *olla* + INF_A has become grammaticalised to express avertivity irrespective of tense.[12]

More generally, it should be noted that not only the tense of *olla*, but also the semantics of the main verb and the overall contextual meaning of the expression are essential factors in the avertive interpretation of the constructions *olla* + INF_A and *olla* + *mAisillA*. In example (13), the expression involves a first person subject and can thus hardly be interpreted as anything other than an avertive. The interpretation can also be influenced by the broader sentence context: the avertive reading is evident, for example, when a subordinate clause expresses the interruption of the situation. In (14), the cancellation of plans or something else causes the departure not to take place:

(14) ***Olin jo lähtemäisilläni**, kun peruutus tuli.*
Ol-i-n jo lähte-mäisillä-ni, kun peruutus tul-i
be-PST-1SG already leave-INF_{MAISI}-POSS.1SG when cancellation come-PST.3SG
'**I was just about to leave** when the cancellation announcement came.' (Penttilä 1963:416)

The structure *olla* + *mAisillA* further resembles a number of structures involving the *mA-* infinitive form (e.g. Penttilä 1963:620, Hakulinen 1978:256), which can acquire different degrees of proximativity/avertivity. A very common structure is *olla* + *mAssA*, which expresses, among other things, progressivity and, in the context of a momentary stem verb, propinquity (e.g. Tommola 2000). Similarly to *olla* + *mAisillA*, this structure can be used to invoke avertive readings (cf. Niva 2021:119), as in (15):

(15) *Kreps **oli jo hyväksymässä** tarjouksen, [kunnes Kärpät iski pöytään reilu 300k€ ja Kreps valitsi Kärpät].*
Kreps ol-i jo hyväksy-mä-ssä tarjoukse-n
Kreps be-PST.3SG already accept-INF_{MA}-INE offer-ACC
'Kreps **was already about to accept** the offer [when Kärpät came up with an offer of 300k and Kreps chose Kärpät].' (Niva 2021:119)

On the other hand, *olla* + *mAssA* probably involves the same type of overall meaning as *olla* + *mAisillA*, that is, the interpretation can involve the realisation of the situation. For example, the expression *Loppumetreillä näin, että olin voittamassa* 'In the final metres I saw that I was about to win' (ISK:§1520) most probably means that the subject actually won.

The meanings of the constructions *olla* + *mAssA* and *olla* + *mAisillA* are further connected by the fact that, when the stem is a punctual verb, both can ambivalently

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express both genuine propinquity, i.e. a situation that has not yet taken place, and progressivity, i.e. a situation in which an event is in progress, but in which the situation reaches its end point only after a delay, as in an expression such as *Lentokone on laskeutumassa/laskeutumaisillaan* 'The plane is about to land/landing' (see Markkanen 1979:69–70).

The structure *meinata* + INF_A, finally, differs from *olla* + INF_A and *olla* + *mAisillA* in a couple of ways. First, its auxiliary is the verb *meinata* 'to mean, intend' instead of 'to be'. The verb itself is often considered somewhat colloquial, partly due to its loan origin from the Swedish verb *mena* 'to mean' (e.g. Tommola 1992). Second, as can be inferred from the semantics of the verb, the construction with *meinata* can be used to express the intent of the subject. According to Tommola (1992), *meinata* + INF_A can express present intent not only in the present tense but also in the past tense, as shown in (16):

(16) [– *Mitä aiot tehdä tänä iltana?*]
– ***Meinasin mennä*** *elokuviin.*
Meinas-i-n men-nä elokuv-i-in
mean-PST-1SG go-INF_A movie-PL-ILL
'–What are you going to do tonight?'
'–I'm going to the movies.' (Tommola 1992)

The literature does not really take a position on whether the structure with *meinata* in the past tense implies the non-realisation of the event or not. However, it has been noted that *meinata* + INF_A can express that something is or was about to happen (Paunonen 2000:632; KS s.v. *meinata*), as in (17), which is ambiguous between avertive and proximative readings:

(17) ***Meinasin kaatua*** ['olin (vähällä) kaatua, olin kaatumaisillani']
Meinas-i-n kaatu-a
mean-PST-1SG fall-INF_A
'**I nearly fell**.' (KS s.v. meinata)

In the dictionary *Kielitoimiston sanakirja* (KS, s.v. *meinata*), the avertive meaning of *meinata* + INF_A is expressed through paraphrases such as *olla* (*vähällä*) + INF_A 'to be close to V' and *olla* + *mAisillA*. As with the structures *olla* + INF_A and *olla* + *mAisillA*, verb semantics and the overall interpretation of the expression in context have an effect on the interpretation of an expression as an avertive or not.

3. Methods and data

The analysis presented below is a classic case of collostructional analysis as introduced by Stefanowitsch & Gries (2003) with slight adaptations following the lines of Flach (2021). The term collostruction is a neologism coined by Stefanowitsch & Gries (2003) to capture the importance of collocates for capturing the meaning and usage of a construction, understood here in terms of Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2005, 2013, Fried & Östman 2004, Hilpert 2019). As Gries (2019) notes, collostructional analysis can actually be seen as a family of

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Table 1. Contingency table for *kuolla* in the *olla* + INF_A construction in the Suomi24 corpus

	INF_A	$\neg INF_A$	Sum
kuolla	579	118 084	118 663
¬*kuolla*	5675	88 502 816	88 508 491
Sum	6274	88 620 900	88 627 154
FYE p-value = 0; OR = 76.5.			

distinct analyses (see Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004a and 2004b for two elaborations). The original collexeme analysis, introduced in Stefanowitsch & Gries (2003), involves a mathematical test, the Fisher Yates Exact test (FYE), to calculate the probability of finding a given lexeme within the construction under focus in comparison to all other lexemes and all other constructions in the corpus. In Flach's version of the collexeme analysis, the log-likelihood test is used instead of FYE, but the main idea remains exactly the same: ranking the top collexemes according to the strength of their association to the construction.

Table 1 includes four frequency counts illustrating how the collexeme analysis works for the use of the verb *kuolla* 'to die' in the *olla* + INF_A construction, i.e. *olin kuolla* 'I was about to die'. As Table 1 indicates, *kuolla* appears a total of 579 times in the *olla* + INF_A construction, which in turn appears a total of 6254 times in the Suomi24 corpus (see below for details). On the other hand, in the $\neg INF_A$ column, the values indicate the frequency of *kuolla* in other constructions (118 084 cases) as well as the frequency of all other verbs in all other (verbal) constructions (~88.6 million cases).[13] The p-value of the Fisher Yates Exact test for this distribution is 0, indicating that it is very unlikely due to chance. Second, the OddsRatio value of 76.5, included in the calculation of the FYE in R, indicates that *kuolla* is used in the *olla* + INF_A construction significantly more often than what could be expected (with the odds of 76.5 to 1 compared to all other verbs) (see Schmid & Küchenhoff 2013 and Gries 2019 for discussion).

The data used for the collexeme analyses performed in this paper was retrieved from the large online database known as Kielipankki (The Language Bank of Finland), which, in turn, is accessed through the Korp interface (Borin et al. 2012). More specifically, we used the Suomi24 corpus, consisting of a large compilation of written texts retrieved from an online discussion forum called Suomi24 ('Finland24'). The Suomi24 version we used (the searches were performed in December 2022 and February 2023) encompasses the period from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2020 and includes a total of roughly 4.58 billion words. As the examples discussed below reveal, the language used on this platform is highly varied but can be characterised as informal and close to everyday language use. The Suomi24 corpus is thus well suited to analysing constructions which are typically used in everyday storytelling, where reference is often made to past events; see Niva, Silvennoinen & Wahlström (2025) for a critical evaluation of the data included in this subcorpus.

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Table 2 shows the usage frequencies of the three constructions found in the corpus. Note, however, that the data set is limited in several ways. First, following the definition of avertives as referring to past situations (Kuteva 1998), we only consider past tense forms of the verbs *olla* and *meinata* (i.e. 'was' and 'meant to').[14] Second, the searches involving the infinitive form (i.e. the *meinasi* + INF_A and *oli* + INF_A constructions) were limited to first and second person singular and plural, as well as the third person plural, i.e. *olin/meinasin*, *olit/meinasit*, *olimme/meinasimme*, *olitte/meinasitte*, and *olivat/meinasivat*. Third person singular subjects were excluded in order to avoid, as far as possible, the occurrence of inanimate subjects, which, especially in the *oli* + INF_A construction, yield a considerable amount of false positives.[15] The search queries used were the following: [word = 'oli(n|t|vat)?'] [word = '.*m.isill.*'] for *oli* + *mAisillA*, [sana = olin|olit|olimme|olitte|olivat + sanaluokka = verbi + morfologinen analyysi = NUM_Sg|CASE_Lat|VOICE_Act|INF_Inf1] for *oli* + INF_A and [sana = meinasin|meinasit|meinasimme|meinasitte|meinasivat + sanaluokka = verbi + morfologinen analyysi = NUM_Sg|CASE_Lat|VOICE_Act|INF_Inf1] for *meinasi* + INF_A.

We are of course aware that restricting the queries in this way affects the overall frequencies of the verbs occupying the infinitive slot of the constructions. In this sense, the results of our study should be treated with some caution. However, a small-scale evaluation of samples of 100 examples of *oli* + INF_A and *meinasi* + INF_A shows no differences in the verb lemmas occurring with third person subjects as compared to the first and second person subjects. Only the frequencies vary, given that the third person samples include a higher proportion of inanimate subjects. For example, highly general verbs such as *tulla* 'to come', *mennä* 'to go', *käydä* 'to visit' are more frequent with inanimate subjects, and their importance for the construction is thus downplayed when third person subjects are excluded.

Third and finally, given that we are dealing with a total of over 36 000 corpus cases across the three constructions, the raw data set used as input was not manually checked for avertive/proximative, or in the case of *meinata*, for avertive vs. intentional, readings or for doublets/repetitions. The input into the collexeme analysis thus includes some non-warranted cases. However, since the qualitative analysis only deals with the top rated verb collexemes of each construction (see below), most of the initial 'noise' automatically disappears from the output, and the remaining unwarranted cases can be manually checked post hoc as part of the qualitative analysis of the top verbs.

As the figures in Table 2 indicate, the three constructions are far from equally frequent in the corpus, with *meinata* + INF_A being over ten and four times as frequent as the two constructions with *olla*. However, as shown in the last column, which captures the type/token ratio of the constructions, insofar as the type/token frequency can be seen as an indication of construction productivity (see Hilpert 2013:463–465), the significantly lower frequency of *olla* + *mAisillA* does not mean that it is not productive in our dataset.

To carry out the collexeme analysis, we used the *collex* function of the *collostructions* package created for R by Flach (2021). This function takes as its input a table with three columns, one listing the verb lemmas of the construction to be analysed, another showing the frequency of each lemma in the construction, and the

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Table 2. Frequencies of the three Finnish frustrative constructions in the Suomi24 corpus

Construction	Frequency	Frequency/million	Verb lemmas	Type/token ratio
oli + *mAisillA*	2 256	0.49	214	0.095
oli + INF_A	6 254	1.37	586	0.094
meinasi + INF_A	27 511	10.27	1638	0.060
Corpus size 4 580 000 000 words				

third column including the overall frequency of each verb in the corpus. Table 3 shows a seven-verb sample of the input of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction.

Given that the three constructions are not equally frequent in the corpus (see Table 2), we restricted the number of verb lemmas to be included in the collostructional analysis in order for them to represent a similar portion of the whole (1 / 2256 ≈ 2 / 6254 ≈ 10 / 27 511). For the *olla* + *mAisillA* construction we included all 214 lemmas, for the *olla* + INF_A construction we included all verbs occurring at least twice ($n = 285$) and for the *meinata* + INF_A construction we included all verbs occurring at least ten times ($n = 264$).

The output of the collexeme analysis (as performed by the *collex()* function), on the other hand, is a seven-column table indicating, for each verb, first the frequencies used in the input, i.e. its overall frequency in the corpus (CORP.FREQ) and its observed (OBS) frequency in the construction (see Table 3), followed by (i) its expected (EXP) frequency in the construction, (ii) its degree of association (ASSOC) to the construction (attraction or repulsion), (iii) the strength (COLL.STR) of this association (according to different statistical measures, such as the FYE test or log likelihood), and (iv) the degree of significance (SIGNIF) of the association (ranging from 0 to five stars). This is shown in Table 4.

Given that the outcome of the collexeme analysis is a list of lexemes ranked according to the strength of the association, or attraction, to the construction (as shown in the COLL.STR.LOGL column in Table 4), in order to move beyond simply listing the top verbs used in each construction, we classified the top verbs semantically according to different parameters.[16]

First, we classified all the verb lemmas according to their telicity, distinguishing between telic and atelic verbs (see Vendler 1967, ISK:§1501). Second, we marked all the verbs according to agentivity (see Yamamoto 2006:12–19), i.e. whether they combine with agentive or non-agentive subjects. Thirdly, we also recorded differences in transitivity, separating transitive and intransitive verbs. Fourth and finally, we classified the verbs according to their semantic prosody (see Olguín Martínez & Gries 2024). We used two classes of semantic prosody, namely negative vs. neutral connotations, based on both verb meaning and the usage context. Thus, verbs such as *kuolla* 'to die' and *oksentaa* 'to throw up' inherently have negative connotations, whereas others, such as *täyttyä* 'become ful(filled)' and *lähteä* 'to leave', do not. On the other hand, although *revetä* 'to crack, burst' might inherently be seen as negatively charged, in context it is often combined with the noun *nauruun* 'into laughter', so it is classified as a having neutral connotations. It is

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Table 3. Table of verb frequencies with *meinasi* + INF_A used as input to the *collex* function in R

LEMMA	FREQ.CXN	CORP.FREQ
tehdä 'to do'	1249	3 090 861
mennä 'to go'	1062	1 658 663
saada 'to get, receive'	1059	2 222 639
ostaa 'to buy'	1045	967 265
laittaa 'to put'	960	1 181 622
kuolla 'to die'	928	118 663
pyörtyä 'to faint'	650	3 134

Table 4. Output of the collostruction analysis of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction

	COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	ASSOC	COLL.STR.LOGL	SIGNIF
1	*pyörtyä*	3 134	650	1.0	attr	7318.1	*****
2	*tukehtua*	7 365	636	2.3	attr	5962.7	*****
3	*kuolla*	18 663	928	36.8	attr	4242.2	*****
4	*oksentaa*	20 103	468	6.2	attr	3136.1	*****
5	*pudota*	23 979	301	7.4	attr	1646.9	*****
6	*nukahtaa*	26 327	270	8.2	attr	1370.2	*****

important to keep in mind, however, that the meaning of a verb can change when it is used idiomatically or metaphorically.

In addition, in the detailed analysis of the different constructions we also comment on the verbs' semantics in order to reach a more comprehensive picture of the top collexemes. These semantic characterisations arise from the corpus and are arrived at by taking into account the usage context; they constitute an attempt to capture and describe salient kinds of situations and events encoded by the verbs (e.g. detrimental verbs, verbs of communication, physical actions). In addition, we highlight the fact that a considerable proportion of the verbs make reference to punctual events.

The idea is to use the above criteria to characterise both commonalities and differences between the three constructions on a more general level as compared to the individual collexemes.

4. Analysis

In this section we report on the major findings of the collexeme analysis of the three constructions under study. In Sections 4.1–4.3 the focus lies on presenting the data and characterising each construction, including a semantic description of the main

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collexemes. In Section 4.4 we compare the constructions in terms of their collexemes and discuss the overall semantics of the Finnish avertive constructions. In Section 5, finally, we characterise the three constructions from the perspective of Construction Grammar, presenting a schematic illustration of the constructions as part of the Finnish constructicon. We also provide box notations based on Fried & Östman (2004) for two members of the construction network, the schematic AUX+INF_X construction and a specific usage instance of the *oli* + INF_A construction, *olin pyörtyä* 'I was about to faint'.

4.1 The oli + mAisillA *construction*

Out of the 215 verbs that are used in the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction in the corpus, 105 (49%) are significantly attracted to it. This means that, according to the statistical test performed within the collostructional analysis, they occur more frequently with *oli* in the *-mAisillA* form than could be expected based on their overall frequency in the corpus. On the contrary, 27 verbs (13%) are repelled, i.e. occur significantly less frequently than expected. In the ensuing analysis, we focus on the top 50 verbs (based on the collostructional strength) of the *oli +mAisillA* construction, which are shown in Table 5.

Based on Table 5, it is interesting to note that a large part of the top 50 verbs expresses either physical actions, as in *kaatua* 'to fall (over), to trip', or some kind of bodily reactions, such as *nukahtaa* 'to fall asleep'. In general, most of the verbs express punctual situations. The top collexeme, *kuolla* 'to die', makes up a group of verbs linked to the semantic field of death and ceasing to exist, together with others, such as *hukkua* 'to drown', which is also a top 10 collexeme, and *menehtyä* 'to pass away'. Overall, the top verb collexemes often have a negative semantic prosody, in the sense that they are associated with unpleasant, undesired situations such as dying, choking, starving, collapsing, etc. Many of these verbs could be classified as existential verbs in the field of ceasing to exist (see ISK:§459). Examples (18)–(23) illustrate the use of the most typical verbs found in the corpus.

(18) *Kuitenkin aivan viime metreillä voimani ehtyivät ja* ***olin uppoamaisillani.***[17]
'However, at the very last metres my strength gave out and **I was about to sink**.'

(19) *Kirkko* ***oli romahtamaisillaan****, seinien läpi kasvoi pensaita.*
'The church **was about to fall to pieces**, plants growing through the walls.'

(20) *Jenni* ***oli räjähtämäisillään*** *nautinnosta ja pian hän laukesi vikisten.*
'Jenni **was about to explode** out of pleasure and soon she came with a whimper.'

(21) *Esim minä näin viikko sitten unen, että* ***olin tukehtumaisillani*** *pillereihin jotka eivät edes olleet minun.*
'For example, a week ago I dreamt that **I was about to choke** on the pills that weren't even mine.'

(22) *Kun tunti* ***oli loppumaisillaan****, Essi alkoi kertoa esityksestä.*
'As the lesson **was about to end**, Essi started to talk about the show.'

(23) *Hän* ***oli kuolemaisillaan****, kun eräs sairaalan henkilökuntaan kuuluva korjasi hänet hoitoonsa.*
'He **was dying** when a hospital staff member took him in for treatment.'

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Table 5. The top 50 verbs of the *oli + mAisillA* construction in Finnish ranked according to collostruction strength.[a]

COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	COLL.STR.LOGL
kuolla 'to die'	118 663	435	3	3550.1
loppua 'to end'	30 773	110	0.8	875.2
räjähtää 'to explode'	28 547	75	0.7	549.6
nääntyä 'to starve'	904	40	0	519.4
nukahtaa 'to fall asleep'	26 327	66	0.7	477.3
upota 'to sink'	9 412	42	0.2	351.4
tukehtua 'to choke'	7 365	39	0.2	339.6
romahtaa 'to collapse'	41 681	52	1.1	304.1
laueta 'to ejaculate'	11 646	38	0.3	294.2
hukkua 'to drown'	7 895	33	0.2	271.7
teloittaa 'to execute'	5 478	30	0.1	263.1
käskeä 'to give an order'	10 877	33	0.3	250.7
puhjeta 'to burst (into bloom, etc.)'	5 062	28	0.1	246.1
pakahtua 'to burst (out of lust, etc.)'	1 359	20	0	214.9
päättyä 'to end'	9 019	27	0.2	204.3
saapua 'to arrive'	8 792	26	0.2	196.1
luhistua 'to fall apart'	694	15	0	172.8
kaatua 'to fall'	19 637	27	0.5	162.8
purskahtaa 'to burst (into laughter/tears)'	2 187	17	0.1	160.9
hajota 'to break'	17 465	26	0.4	160.8
haljeta 'to crack, break in two'	2 004	16	0.1	152.3
murtua 'to break'	2 768	16	0.1	142
alkaa 'to begin'	2 278 245	160	58	125.6
sanoa 'to say'	1 670 757	131	42.5	121.4
sammua 'to be turned off'	6 982	15	0.2	103.6
oksentaa 'to vomit'	20 103	19	0.5	100.5
pyörtyä 'to faint'	3 134	11	0.1	86.6
revetä 'to become torn, burst'	5 001	12	0.1	85.5
kavaltaa 'to embezzle'	2 164	10	0.1	84.2
pudota 'to fall (down)'	23 979	17	0.6	80.5
tippua 'to drop'	14 452	14	0.4	74.7
läkähtyä 'to become exhausted'	259	6	0	69.9
irrota 'to fall off, out'	15 747	13	0.4	65.3

(*Continued*)

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Table 5. (*Continued*)

COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	COLL.STR.LOGL
särkyä 'to break (into pieces)'	1 003	7	0	64.7
sortua 'to succumb'	11 264	11	0.3	58.9
täyttyä 'to fill up'	10 106	10	0.3	53.8
kukistua 'to be vanquished'	95	4	0	51.5
katketa 'to break (in two)'	6 496	8	0.2	46.4
laskea 'to go down; let go'	219 072	26	5.6	39.4
peittyä 'to become covered'	550	4	0	37.3
astua 'to step'	25 237	10	0.6	36.2
ehtyä 'to run dry'	727	4	0	35.1
tuhoutua 'to become destroyed'	4 785	6	0.1	35
menehtyä 'to pass away'	2 214	5	0.1	35
pökertyä 'to become dizzy'	152	3	0	34
vajota 'to sink'	9 565	7	0.2	33.5
musertua 'to become crushed'	169	3	0	33.3
paleltua 'to freeze'	1 097	4	0	31.8
kuihtua 'to fade, dry up'	2 083	4	0.1	26.7
uhrata 'to sacrifice'	27 302	8	0.7	24.5

[a]In comparison with the total output of the *collex()* algorithm, we have decided to leave out two columns in our presentation, namely ASSOC, indicating whether the collexeme is attracted or repelled by the construction, and SIGNIF, showing the strength of the association/repulsion on scale from five (*****) to one (*) asterisk. All the lexemes included in Tables 5, 7, and 9 are for obvious reasons attracted to the construction, and the top 50 verbs are all associated with the highest possible degree of significance, i.e. *****.

From the point of view of avertivity, note that not all of the examples above involve a truly averted situation, in the sense that it is not clear if it eventually occurred or not. For example, as the lesson was about to end in example (22), one must assume that it eventually ended rather than went on forever. The reading is thus more that of an imminent than an averted event, and thus rather corresponds to what Maamies (1997) and Ylikoski (2003) call the propinquative, or Kuteva (1998) the proximative. The imminent situation in (19), where a church is on the verge of collapsing, can also be seen as lying on the border between an avertive and a proximative reading. The probable outcome is that the church did not collapse, at least not in the immediate future. Instead, what is transmitted is the church's state of decay, and not the fact that the church was on the verge of collapsing.

The situation described in example (20) appears to be ambiguous: the verb *räjähtää* 'to explode' is used metaphorically to refer to physical pleasure. In the sexual act of this example, the subject, Jenni, is close to completion, but depending on how literally the explosion metaphor is interpreted, this either takes place or not.

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Table 6. Summary of the different classifications of the top 50 verbs of the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction

Telicity	telic	atelic
No. of verbs	48	2
Agentivity	agentive	non-agentive
No. of verbs	9	41
Transitivity	intransitive	transitive
No. of verbs	45	5
Semantic prosody	negative	neutral
No. of verbs	45	5

On the other hand, examples (18), (21), and (23) all involve avertive readings: in (18) the subject was on the verge of sinking, but clearly did not, given that s/he is telling the story now (see Arkadiev 2019:71); also, importantly, the sinking was about to take place only in the last metres of swimming. Similarly, in (23) the subject is about to die, a reading shared by both the avertive and the proximative, but the appearance of the hospital staff member explicitly averts the undesirable event from taking place.

What these examples show is how the uses of the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction are situated along a continuum of past proximativity and avertivity. Given that avertive readings are activated only in the sentential context, based on this evidence we consider *oli* + *mAisillA* to be mainly a proximative construction rather than an avertive. This is in accordance with the analyses by Maamies (1997) and Ylikoski (2003) on Finnish; see also Arkadiev's (2019) analysis of Lithuanian.

Table 6 presents the distribution of the top 50 verbs over the features we used in order to capture the semantics of the constructions. As the figures show, the distributions reveal quite clear tendencies. Firstly, over 95% of the verbs are telic, 90% are intransitive and have negative semantic prosody, and over 80% are used with non-agentive subjects. For example, all the verbs in examples (18)–(23), i.e. *upota* 'to sink', *romahtaa* 'to fall apart', *räjähtää* 'to explode', *tukehtua* 'to choke', *loppua* 'to end', and *kuolla* 'to die', express bounded situations. They are also intransitive and combined with non-agentive subjects, which are unable to control the situation described by the verb. This is congruent with the semantic prosody, since, with the exception *loppua*, the verbs express situations that can be considered undesirable for the undergoing subject. Note, however, that most of the verb actions involved in (18)–(23) appear to be construed as ongoing or immediate situations instead of as averted events.

All in all, the semantic characterisation of the top 50 verb collexemes of *oli* + *mAisillA* shows that this construction has a clear semantic profile: the imminent situations which are expressed by the *mAisillA* morpheme cluster tend to be telic events over which the undergoing subject has little or no control. This is, of course, perfectly in line with the meaning of the avertive, expressing past, imminent, yet unrealised actions. In addition, they typically have negative semantic prosody. As

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the discussion of the examples presented in this section show, the uses of the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction are situated somewhere between past proximatives and avertives. However, given that avertive readings are only activated in the sentential context, we propose that the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction is considered a proximative rather than an avertive (see Maamies 1997, Ylikoski 2003).

4.2 *The* oli + INF_A *construction*

Turning to the *oli* + INF_A construction, we find that 149 out of 285 (52%) different verbs are significantly attracted to this construction. This is a very similar proportion to the one observed for *oli* + *mAisillA*. On the other hand, 68 verbs are repelled (24%), i.e. used significantly less often than expected, and this figure is much higher than the corresponding proportion of *oli* + *mAisillA*. This is probably at least partly a question of the overall frequency of the two constructions; the more frequent the construction, the more often a verb needs to be inserted in it in order for the association to become significant. Another potential explanation is the existence of homophonous constructions, i.e. where the *oli* + INF_A combination is not an example of the avertive but of some other construction. This is what happens with the combination *olivat olla* 'were to be' in (24), where the infinitival clause functions as the subject.[18] Among the other top verbs which are repelled we find frequent verbs such as *pitää*, a highly polysemous verb with meanings such as 'to have to, need, must', 'to like', and 'to hold' (KS, s.v. *pitää*), *alkaa* 'to start', *antaa* 'to give', and *ottaa* 'to take'.

(24) *Miehen tärkeimmät ominaisuudet* ***olivat olla*** *joko rikas, älykäs/taitava tai vahva.*
'The main characteristics of a man **were to be** either rich, intelligent/skilled or strong.'

The top 50 verbs of the *oli* + INF_A construction are listed in Table 7, ordered according to collostructional strength, shown in the rightmost column.

As was the case with the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction, *kuolla* 'to die' is the top verb of the *oli* + INF_A construction. Other verbs related to dying among the top 50 collexemes are the intransitives *hukkua* 'to drown', *menehtyä* 'to pass away', and transitive *tappaa* 'to kill'. Among the top collexemes we also observe a number of verbs expressing bodily reactions, such as *pyörtyä* 'to faint', *tukehtua* 'to choke', *pakahtua* 'to burst (out of lust, happiness)', and *tikahtua* 'to succumb from thirst/heat, etc.'. Note that many of the bodily reaction verbs include both the detransitivising affix *-U-* and the momentaneousness affix *-AhtA-* (*tukehtua*, *pakahtua*, *tikahtua*, *läkähtyä*, *tukahtua*[19]), or one of them (*purskahtaa* 'to burst (into)', *nukahtaa* 'to fall asleep', *pillahtaa* 'to burst into tears', and *pyörtyä* 'to faint', *nääntyä* 'to starve', *jäätyä* 'to freeze', *pökertyä* 'to become dizzy'). A second group of verbs indicating some sort of downward movement can also be identified, as in *pudota* 'to fall', *kaatua* 'to trip, fall', *tippua* 'to drip, drop', *pudottaa* 'to drop', *kompastua* 'to stumble', and *tipahtaa* 'to drop, fall down'. Interestingly, this group of verbs includes two verb pairs, i.e. intransitive *pudota* 'to fall' and transitive *pudottaa*

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Table 7. The top 50 verbs of the *oli* + INF_A construction in Finnish ranked according to collostruction strength

COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	COLL.STR.LOGL
kuolla 'to die'	118 663	579	8.4	3820.9
pyörtyä 'to faint'	3 134	261	0.2	3204.1
tukehtua 'to choke'	7 365	252	0.5	2632.7
pakahtua 'to burst (out of lust, happiness etc.)	1 359	184	0.1	2445.6
pudota 'to fall (down)'	23 979	218	1.7	1695.2
revetä 'to become torn, burst'	5 001	105	0.4	990.7
lentää 'to fly'	132 013	221	9.3	983.8
menettää 'to lose'	143 631	193	10.1	777.3
hukkua 'to drown'	7 895	81	0.6	647.6
seota 'to go crazy'	5 790	75	0.4	634.6
tikahtua 'to choke out of laughter'	745	51	0.1	603.6
joutua 'to be forced to'	145 711	163	10.3	599.3
oksentaa 'to vomit'	20 103	86	1.4	538.4
törmätä 'to collide'	17 480	65	1.2	388.7
unohtaa 'to forget'	208 452	140	14.7	382.9
jäädä 'to stay, remain'	346 085	169	24.4	368.1
kaatua 'to fall'	19 637	57	1.4	313.1
tippua 'to drip, drop'	14 452	48	1	276.3
purskahtaa 'to burst (into laughter/tears)'	2 187	31	0.2	267.7
läkähtyä 'to become exhausted'	259	19	0	227.5
pudottaa 'to drop'	43 043	56	3	221
tulla 'to come'	1 442 356	281	101.8	217.6
kompastua 'to stumble'	2 273	25	0.2	203.1
saada 'to get, receive'	2 222 639	358	156.8	195.3
nukahtaa 'to fall asleep'	26 327	44	1.9	194.6
myöhästyä 'to be late'	2 423	22	0.2	170.3
pyörtyä 'to faint'	28 547	40	2	163.4
ajaa 'to drive'	736 278	160	52	145.8
nääntyä 'to starve'	904	16	0.1	145.2
menehtyä 'to pass away'	2 214	19	0.2	145
tipahtaa 'to drop, fall down'	18 339	32	1.3	144.1
vaipua 'to fall (asleep, etc.)'	5 257	18	0.4	104.6

(*Continued*)

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Table 7. (*Continued*)

COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	COLL.STR.LOGL
pillahtaa 'to burst (into tears)'	551	11	0	102.5
pullistua 'to become inflated'	561	11	0	102.1
jäätyä 'to freeze'	7 303	19	0.5	100.2
hajota 'to break'	17 465	23	1.2	91.2
pökertyä 'to become dizzy'	152	8	0	90.3
perua 'to cancel'	22 204	23	1.6	80.8
murtua 'to break'	2 768	11	0.2	67.1
laueta 'to ejaculate'	11 646	16	0.8	64.7
musertua 'to become crushed'	169	6	0	62.9
tappaa 'to kill'	254 313	60	17.9	61
tukahtua 'to become extinguished'	198	6	0	61
kuristua 'to be choked'	229	6	0	59.2
viedä 'to take'	313 938	67	22.2	58.9
ajautua 'to be driven'	6 745	12	0.5	54.4
pätkiä 'to cut into pieces'	9 496	13	0.7	52.5
yökätä 'to puke'	145	5	0	52.1
tuhota 'to destroy'	85 892	31	6.1	51.4
koitua 'to become'	6 587	11	0.5	48.6

'to drop', on the one hand, and *tippua* 'to drip, drop' and *tipahtaa* 'to drop, fall down', involving the momentaneous suffix *AhtA*.

All in all, typically averted actions in the *oli* + INF_A construction appear in contexts where some external force or condition influences the non-agentive (undergoer, experiencer) subject in a negative way, creating a sense of nearly going under, bursting, exploding, etc., as shown by examples (25)–(30).

(25) *Samainen poika oksensi kerran koulumatkalla bussiin ja* ***olin pyörtyä*** *siihen paikkaan, kun haistoin oksennuksen.*
'The same boy once threw up on the bus on the way to school and **I was about to faint** in that place when I smelled the vomit.'

(26) *Ihailin näkymää ja sitä kuinka poskesi paloivat ja* ***olit pakahtua*** *haluusi.*
'I admired the view and the way your cheeks burned, and **you were overcome** with desire.'

(27) *Puristelin itseäni kauhuissani ja* ***olin purskahtaa itkuun****.*
'I squeezed myself in horror and **was about to burst into tears**.'

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Table 8. Summary of the different classifications of the top 50 verbs of the *oli* + INF_A construction

Telicity	telic	atelic
No. of verbs	46	4
Agentivity	agentive	non-agentive
No. of verbs	12	38
Transitivity	intransitive	transitive
No. of verbs	40	10
Semantic prosody	negative	neutral
No. of verbs	45	5

(28) *Sinäkin kokeilit kepillä jäätä ja **olit hukkua**, mutta nykyään oli oppi mennyt perille sinulla, että pitää olla naskalit mukana kun menee jäälle . . .*

'You too tried the ice with a stick and **were about to drown**, but nowadays the lesson had been passed on to you that you have to have a hook with you when you go out on the ice.'

(29) *Silmäni **olivat pudota** päästä, kun luin viestisi.*
'My eyes were about to fall out of my head when I read your message.'

(30) *Minä tietenkin punastuin kaulaani myöten, **olin pudottaa** lautasen tärisevistä käsistäni.*
'I blushed up to my neck, of course, **about to drop the plate** from my trembling hands.'

Contrary to *oli* + *mAisillA*, examples (25)–(30) consistently involve averted events. The avertive reading thus seems to be an essential part of the construction. In (28) the avertive reading is strengthened by the adversative conjunction *mutta* 'but', showcasing how the avertive is often realised in bipartite structures. Something similar occurs in (29), where the presence of the temporal conjunction *kun* 'as, when' introduces a subordinate clause indicating the cause of the reaction. Finally, note that although *pudottaa* in (30) is a transitive verb, the subject can hardly be considered agentive; rather, an external force influences the subject to the point of almost losing its agentivity and control.

On the other hand, all the verb situations are construed as imminent, as was the case with *oli* + *mAisillA* in examples (18)–(23). Examples (25)–(30) also show that the usage context of the *oli* + INF_A construction coincides with *oli* + *mAisillA* in typically involving negative semantic prosody and non-agentive subjects (undergoers) lacking control over the event they experience; in addition, the verbs are intransitive and telic. These tendencies are presented in numerical format in Table 8.[20]

Furthermore, the data shows the presence of a couple of idioms, such as *silmät olivat pudota päästä* 'the eyes were about to fall out of her/his head' and *purskahtaa itkuun/nauruun* 'to burst into tears/laughter'. Another observation is that the

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examples showcase a vivid use of this construction in colloquial texts (see especially example (26), alluding to a situation involving sex). Finally, one can observe several examples of different kinds of metaphorical uses of concrete verbs used in a bodily or mental sense, as illustrated in (29). Two further examples are presented in (31) and (32). The first one involves the verb *revetä*, one of many verbs sharing the meaning 'to burst, break into pieces'. In (31) *revetä* is used metaphorically to express emotional overload, here, exceptionally, of a positive nature, whereby the human body cracks at its seams. Another telling example is the use of the verb *musertua* 'to be crushed' in (32), where this physical verb refers to a mental meltdown.

(31) *Itse **olin revetä liitoksissani** kun sain kutsun.*
'As for myself **I was about to burst** at the seams when I got the invitation.'

(32) *Onneksi en luovuttanut, vaikka välillä **olin musertua** kun sitä minulle oikeaa ei näkynyt eikä kukaan ollut lähellekään sitä mitä etsin.*
'Fortunately, I didn't give up, although sometimes I almost cracked when the right one for me didn't appear and no one was even close to what I was looking for.'

All in all, the analysed data draw a picture of the *oli* + INF_A construction as semantically very similar to *oli* + *mAisillA*, with the main difference that it is more frequent and also less ambiguous; there are few non-avertive uses, so *oli* + INF_A can clearly be seen as a conventionalised avertive marker in Finnish.

4.3 *The* meinasi + INF_A *construction*

With a total of 27 511 cases found in the corpus, *meinasi* + INF_A is by far the most frequent of the three constructions, with ten times more cases than *oli* + *mAisillA* and four times more than *oli* + INF_A. *Meinasi* is also combined with the greatest number of different verbs in the infinitive slot, a total of 1638. This is almost three times as many as the *oli* + INF_A and more than seven times as many as the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction (see Table 2). However, as indicated by the figures in Table 2, the type/token ratio of 0.06 is actually somewhat lower than for the two constructions with *oli*.

In light of the collostructional analysis, we find that 123 out of 264 (50%) different verbs are significantly 'attracted' to the *meinasi* + INF_A construction. This is a very similar figure as compared to both the *oli* + *mAisillA* and *oli* + INF_A constructions. On the other hand, as many as 90 (42%) of the co-occurring verbs are repelled. This is an increase of almost 20 percentage points as compared to *oli* + INF_A. This last figure is clearly the highest among the three constructions and supports the observation made above (Section 4.2). That is, since *meinasi* + INF_A is the most frequent of the three constructions, many verbs which do occur in it are not particularly attracted to it. The repelled verbs are highly frequent verbs, such as *olla* 'to be', *pitää* 'to have to, need, must; to like; to hold', *näyttää* 'to show', *lukea* 'to read', etc.

Table 9 lists the top 50 verbs of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction.

As Table 9 shows, the top collexeme is *pyörtyä* 'to faint', which makes up a group of verbs expressing bodily reactions, involving others such as *tukehtua* 'to choke', *oksentaa* 'to vomit', and *tikahtua* 'to choke out of laughter'. There are also, as was found with *oli* + INF_A, a series of verbs referring to downward motion, such as *pudota* 'to fall', *kaatua* 'to fall', *tippua* 'to drip, drop', *tipahtaa* 'to drop, fall down',

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Table 9. The top 50 verbs of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction in Finnish ranked according to collostruction strength

COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	COLL.STR.LOGL
pyörtyä 'to faint'	3 134	650	1	7318.1
tukehtua 'to choke'	7 365	636	2.3	5962.7
kuolla 'to die'	118 663	928	36.8	4242.2
oksentaa 'to vomit'	20 103	468	6.2	3136.1
pudota 'to fall (down)'	23 979	301	7.4	1646.9
nukahtaa 'to fall asleep'	26 327	270	8.2	1370.2
revetä 'to become torn, burst'	5 001	166	1.6	1228.7
ostaa 'to buy'	967 265	1045	300.3	1138.2
hukkua 'to drown'	7 895	151	2.5	951
aloittaa 'to start'	7 895	151	2.5	951
jäädä 'to stay, remain'	346 085	547	107.4	909.1
syödä 'to eat'	5 790	122	1.8	791.8
tikahtua 'to choke out of laughter'	745	80	0.2	785
unohtaa 'to forget'	208 452	397	64.7	780.4
kaatua 'to fall'	19 637	165	6.1	772.9
tippua 'to drip, drop'	14 452	142	4.5	708.2
laittaa 'to put'	1 181 622	960	366.8	674.3
mennä 'to go'	1 658 663	1062	514.9	454.9
myöhästyä 'to be late'	2 423	62	0.8	426.3
lentää 'to fly'	132 013	229	41	413.6
tilata 'to order'	118 388	195	36.7	335.5
purskahtaa 'to burst (into laughter/tears)'	2 187	50	0.7	332.5
tipahtaa 'to drop, fall down'	18 339	83	5.7	290.8
kirjoittaa 'to write'	730 227	522	226.7	283.5
pökertyä 'to faint'	152	24	0	255.2
jäätyä 'to freeze'	7 303	56	2.3	252.2
yrjötä 'to vomit'	386	28	0.1	251.8
ehdottaa 'to suggest'	75 256	134	23.4	247.5
hommata 'to get, acquire'	59 577	120	18.5	246.4
joutua 'to be forced to'	145 711	184	45.2	239.7
törmätä 'to collide'	17 480	72	5.4	239.6
ajaa 'to drive'	736 278	497	228.6	238
kompastua 'to stumble'	2 273	39	0.7	237.1

(*Continued*)

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Table 9. (*Continued*)

COLLEX	CORP.FREQ	OBS	EXP	COLL.STR.LOGL
sortua 'to succumb'	11 264	59	3.5	222.8
liukastua 'to slip'	826	27	0.3	198.9
saada 'to get, receive'	2 222 639	1059	689.9	174.6
lähteä 'to leave'	618 858	398	192.1	169.7
menehtyä 'to pass away'	2 214	30	0.7	168.4
eksyä 'to get lost'	9 495	45	2.9	161.5
hypätä 'to jump'	35 600	75	11.1	159.6
touhuilla 'to be engaged with something'	2 073	26	0.6	142
menettää 'to lose'	143 631	144	44.6	139.3
kysyä 'to ask'	476 364	308	147.9	132.7
läkähtyä 'to faint out of heat'	259	15	0.1	127.9
hermostua 'to become nervous'	8 649	36	2.7	120.4
heittää 'to throw'	224 099	179	69.6	120
pakahtua 'to burst (out of lust, etc.)'	1 359	20	0.4	115.5
repiä 'to tear'	33 842	58	10.5	103.4
hankkia 'to acquire'	283 460	191	88	90.5
luovuttaa 'to give up'	68 407	77	21.2	87

kompastua 'to stumble', *sortua* 'to succumb', and *liukastua* 'to slip'. All these verbs mainly show a negative semantic prosody, as is also the case with other top collocate verbs such as *unohtaa* 'to forget', *myöhästyä* 'to be late', and *menettää* 'to lose'.

Contrary to the previous two constructions, among the top collexemes of *meinasi* we find several transitive verbs which are used with agentive subjects. Among these are *ostaa* 'to buy', *tilata* 'to order', *hommata* 'to get, acquire', and *hankkia* 'to acquire', referring to the acquisition of something. Another group of verbs are *kirjoittaa* 'to write', *ehdottaa* 'to suggest', and *kysyä* 'to ask', belonging to the domain of interpersonal communication.

Examples (33)–(39) illustrate the use of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction with its most salient verb collexemes:

(33) *Voi hitsi kun luin ton **meinasin tukehtua** nauruun.*
'Oh my gosh when I read that **I almost choked** laughing.'

(34) *just söin ja **meinasin oksentaa** kun otin viimeisen haukun, söin tollaisen kaupan oksennus hampparin.*
'I just ate and **was about to throw up** when I took the last bite, I ate one of those supermarket vomit hamburgers.'

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(35) *Pakko myöntää, että aivan mahtavaa trollausta, nauroin niin että* ***meinasin pudota tuolilta****.*
'I have to admit, that's some great trolling, I laughed so hard **I almost fell off my chair**.'

(36) *ja yks gootti-tyttö tokas kerran mut nähdessään et 'vittu mua ärsyttää tollaset hoppari-muijat . . . ',* ***meinasin revetä*** *nimittäin ihan tavalliset verkkarit oli sillon jalassa . . .*
'and a goth girl once said to me when she saw me that "fuck I'm annoyed by that kind of hip-hop chicks . . . ", **I was about to tear up** because I was wearing regular sweatpants at the time . . . '

(37) *Itse lensin kerran Lontoon kautta ja* ***meinasin myöhästyä*** *jatkolennolta kun vaihtoaika oli vain 1 h.*
'I myself once flew via London and **almost missed** my connecting flight when the transfer time was only 1 hour.'

(38) *Pelailin aikoinaan pari vuotta Ongamella ja* ***meinasin menettää järkeni*** *lopullisesti.*
'I used to play Ongame for a couple of years and **I was about to lose my mind** for good.'

(39) *Uuden hiacen* ***meinasin ostaa****, mutta kyllä mieli muuttui kun tuli toi masteri ajettua.*
'**I was about to buy** a new hiace, but I changed my mind when I got to drive the master.'

(40) *Saman* ***meinasin kirjoittaa*** *kuin Liisakin.*
'**I was about to write** the same as Liisa.'

The presence of a number of acquisition and communication verbs, which are used with active, agentive subjects among the top collexemes of *meinasi* is probably due to the fact that its original meaning involves a sense of intention (*meinata* 'to mean, to intend, to have in mind'; see KS, s.v. *meinata*). Changing your mind when making a purchase is a frequent situation in everyday life, which might explain why the *meinasi* + INF_A construction is so frequently used with verbs like buying, ordering, acquiring (see (39)). The same applies to the example in (40), where the process of writing is interrupted by the subject.[21]

Importantly, from the perspective of the kind of avertivity of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction, examples (39) and (40) illustrate how the use of verbs such as *ostaa* and *kirjoittaa* involving an agentive subject gives rise to an avertive reading of type (b) according to Caudal's classification (see Section 2.1). In both examples, the meaning conveyed is that of an intention to buy and to write. In (39), the subordinate clause introduced by *mutta* 'but' makes it very explicit that the subject does not go on buying a Hiace. In (40), on the other hand, the non-realisation of the intended action is conveyed simply by the construction. Although *meinasi* + INF_A has a conventionalised use as a marker of avertivity (as in examples (33)–(38)), examples (39) and (40) show that, with agentive subjects, what is averted is, strictly speaking, the intention, whereby the situation itself is only averted by entailment.

The above contrasts with the remaining six examples (33)–(38), which all involve non- agentive subjects and are interpreted as type (a) avertives (according to Caudal

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Table 10. Summary of the different classifications of the top 50 verbs of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction

Telicity	telic	atelic
No. of verbs	43	7
Agentivity	agentive	non-agentive
No. of verbs	22	28
Transitivity	intransitive	transitive
No. of verbs	32	18
Semantic prosody	negative	neutral
No. of verbs	34	16

2023; see Section 2.1). The association of the avertive reading with intransitive verbs bearing negative semantic prosody and non-agentive subjects is due to the fact that the undesired situations which are averted, being late, losing, getting hit by a car, and so on, are something the subjects do not control but instead are probably happy to escape.

As Table 10 shows, it seems to be characteristic of the *meinasi* + INF_A construction as compared to the *oli* + INF_A and the *oli* + *mAisillA* constructions that a larger amount of the top collexemes have a neutral semantic prosody (e.g. acquisition and communication verbs). In addition, strongly associated acquisition verbs such as *ostaa* 'to buy', *hommata* 'to get, acquire', *tilata* 'to order', *saada* 'to get, receive' are mainly used as transitives and, with the exception of *saada*, have agentive subjects; other transitive verbs are *aloittaa* 'to begin' and *syödä* 'to eat'. Many of these verbs lack the negative semantic prosody which are typical of the averted situations (only 68% for *meinasi*). This can be related to the intentionality reading which is typical of *meinasi*.[22]

All in all, apart from the notable presence of verbs with neutral semantic prosody used with agentive subjects, the core of *meinasi* + INF_A is quite similar to the other two constructions: the majority of the top collexemes refer to telic, punctual events in which a non-agentive subject avoids experiencing an undesirable situation.

4.4 Overview and comparison of the three constructions

All in all, the analysis of the top 50 verbal collocates of the three constructions reveals a total of 100 different collexemes (100/150 = 67%). This means that there is a considerable amount of variation in the top collexemes of the three constructions. In fact, only 15 of the 100 collocate verbs occur among the top 50 of all three constructions. These 15 verbs, which occur in the top 50 of all three constructions, can be considered to constitute the lexical core of the family of Finnish avertive constructions. They are listed in (41):

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(41) *kuolla* 'to die', *nukahtaa* 'to fall asleep', *purskahtaa* 'to burst (into tears/laughter)', *pudota* 'to fall (down)', *revetä* 'to burst', *läkähtyä* 'to get exhausted', *pakahtua* 'to burst', *pökertyä* 'to faint', *pyörtyä* 'to faint', *tukehtua* 'to choke', *hukkua* 'to drown', *menehtyä* 'to pass away', *kaatua* 'to fall, trip', *tippua* 'to fall (down/out)', *oksentaa* 'to vomit, puke'

All these verbs are intransitive and have negative semantic prosody. Apart from one activity (*oksentaa* 'to vomit'), 14 refer to telic, punctual events and combine with non-agentive, undergoer-like subjects, and 9 have the detransitivising affix *-U-*. Three of them are verbs related to dying (*hukkua*, *kuolla*, *menehtyä*), three express downward motion (*pudota*, *kaatua*, *tippua*), and eight express bodily reactions (*nukahtaa, purskahtaa, läkähtyä, pakahtua, pökertyä, pyörtyä, tukehtua, oksentaa*). The common core of the three constructions thus seems quite clear: the Finnish avertive constructions express the non-realisation of undesired situations over which the undergoing human subject has little or no control. The core verbs thus situate the Finnish constructions in the top part of Caudal's (2023:12) avertivity/frustrativity continuum, corresponding to his full event structure avertive reading (type (a); see Section 2.1).[23]

On the other hand, when contrasting the three constructions there are also some notable differences. For example, apart from the shared 15 verbal collexemes there are 20 more verbs which are shared by two of the three constructions. Of these, 17 are punctual, bear negative semantic prosody and combine with non-agentive subjects; 16 are intransitive, and 9 have the morpheme *-U-*. Semantically they are highly similar to the core verbs. Comparing the three constructions, however, one can observe that only 1 of these 20 verbs is shared by *meinasi* and *oli* + *mAisillA*, 6 are shared by *oli* + INF_A and *oli* + *mAisillA*, and 13 are shared by *meinasi* + INF_A and *oli* + INF_A.

From this perspective, then, *oli* + *mAisillA* stands out as the most distinct of the three constructions, sharing 22 of its 50 top collexeme with the other two constructions, and having 28 verbs which are exclusive to its own top 50 (i.e. 56%). *Meinasi* + INF_A occupies the second position in this comparison, sharing 13 verbs with the *oli* + INF_A construction and 1 with *oli* + *mAisillA* (apart from the 15 common ones). This means that 21 (42%) of the top 50 verbs are exclusive to *meinasi* + INF_A. The *oli* + INF_A construction, finally, only has 16 exclusive verbs. The exclusive verbs of each construction are listed in (42)–(44):

(42) *oli* + *mAisillA* (28 exclusive verbs)[24]
Negative semantic prosody, non-agentive, intransitive: *loppua* 'to end', *upota* 'to sink', *romahtaa* 'to collapse', *puhjeta* 'to burst (into bloom, etc.)', *päättyä* 'to end', *luhistua* 'to fall apart', *haljeta* 'to crack. break in two', *sammua* 'to be turned off', *irrota* 'to fall off, out', *särkyä* 'to break (into pieces)', *kukistua* 'to be vanquished', *katketa* 'to break (in two)', *peittyä* 'to become covered', *ehtyä* 'to run dry', *tuhoutua* 'to become destroyed', *vajota* 'to sink', *paleltua* 'to freeze', *kuihtua* 'to fade, dry up' (18 verbs)
Negative semantic prosody, agentive: *teloittaa* 'execute', *käskeä* 'to give an order', *kavaltaa* 'to embezzle', *laskea* 'to go down; let go', *uhrata* 'to sacrifice' (5 verbs)
Neutral semantic prosody: *täyttyä* 'to fill up', *saapua* 'to arrive', *alkaa* 'to start', *astua* 'to step', *sanoa* 'to say' (5 verbs)

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(43) *meinasi* + INF_A (21 exclusive verbs)
Neutral semantic prosody, agentive, transitive: *ostaa* 'to buy', *aloittaa* 'to start', *syödä* 'to eat', *laittaa* 'to put', *tilata* 'to order', *kirjoittaa* 'to write', *ehdottaa* 'to suggest', *hommata* 'to get, acquire', *kysyä* 'to ask', *hankkia* 'to acquire' (10 verbs)
Negative semantic prosody, agentive, transitive: *touhuilla* 'to be encaged with something', *heittää* 'to throw', *repiä* 'to tear', *luovuttaa* 'to give up' (4 verbs)
Agentive, intransitive: *mennä* 'to go', *lähteä* 'to leave', *hypätä* 'to jump', *yrjötä* 'to vomit' (neg) (4 verbs)
Negative semantic prosody, non-agentive, intransitive: *liukastua* 'to slip', *eksyä* 'to get lost', *hermostua* 'to become nervous' (3 verbs)

(44) *oli* + INF_A (16 exclusive verbs)
Negative semantic prosody, non-agentive, intransitive: *seota* 'to go crazy', *vaipua* 'to fall (asleep, etc.)', *pillahtaa* 'to burst (into tears)', *pullistua* 'to become inflated', *tukahtua* 'to become extinguished', *kuristua* 'to be choked', *ajautua* 'to be driven', *koitua* 'to become' (8 verbs)
Negative semantic prosody, agentive: *yökätä* 'to puke', *pudottaa* 'to drop', *perua* 'to cancel', *tappaa* 'to kill', *pätkiä* 'to cut into pieces', *tuhota* 'to destroy' (6 verbs)
Neutral semantic prosody, agentive: *tulla* 'to come', *viedä* 'to take' (2 verbs)

The verbs listed in (42)–(44) are organised so that they reflect the figures presented in Tables 11–14, which illustrate their distribution across the different classifications (semantic prosody > agentivity > transitivity > and telicity). As the figures in Tables 11–14 show, three of the verb features contribute to distinguish the three constructions: semantic prosody, agentivity, transitivity. The distribution of telicity (Table 14) is not significantly distinct across the three constructions. As pointed out above, this is, of course, a natural consequence of the notion of avertivity, which shows a marked preference for telic verbs.

Starting with *oli* + *mAisillA*, Tables 11, 12, and 13 and the verbs listed in (42) show that its exclusive verb collexemes are predominantly non-agentive, intransitive verbs (68% and 79% in Tables 13 and 14, respectively) with negative semantic prosody (79% in Table 12). The preference for non-agentive, intransitive verbs is what sets *oli* + *mAisillA* apart from the other two constructions. Compared to the top 50 collexemes, the exclusive verbs confirm the overall characterisation of *oli* + *mAisillA* as the construction most clearly restricted to intransitive, non-agentive verbs carrying negative semantic prosody.

Examples (45)–(47) illustrate the use of three of the top ranked verbs which are exclusive to *oli* + *mAisillA*. As the translations reveal, the verbs *loppua* 'to end', *puhjeta* 'to burst', and *romahtaa* 'to collapse' are all intransitive, punctual verbs construed with non-agentive (patient) subjects and, with the exception of *loppua*, refer to negative situations.[25] On the other hand, the examples also indicate how the verb situations are mainly seen as imminent rather than as averted. This appears to be typical of the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction, which has been classified as a proximative, or propinquative, in earlier research (see Maamies 1997 and Ylikoski 2003). However, it is also clear from the sentence context that the pictures did not run out in (45), that the subject's appendix did not burst in (46), and that the Finnish defence did not (quite) collapse when peace was made in (47). These examples can thus be considered avertives, corresponding to Caudal's (2023) preparatory stage avertive readings.

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Table 11. Distribution of the semantic prosody of the top 50 non-shared verbal collexemes across the three constructions

SEMANTIC PROSODY	Negative	Neutral	Sum
oli + *mAisillA*	22	6	28
meinasi + INF_A	8	**13**	21
oli + INF_A	14	2	16
Sum	45	20	65
$\chi^2 = 14.26$, $p = 0.0008$			

Table 12. Distribution of agentivity of the top 50 non-shared verbal collexemes across the three constructions

AGENTIVITY	Agentive	Non-agentive	Sum
oli + *mAisillA*	9	**19**	28
meinasi + INF_A	**18**	3	21
oli + INF_A	8	8	16
Sum	35	30	65
$\chi^2 = 13.98$, $p = 0.00092$			

Table 13. Distribution of transitivity of the top 50 non-shared verbal collexemes across the three constructions

TRANSITIVITY	Intransitive	Transitive	Sum
oli + *mAisillA*	**22**	6	28
meinasi + INF_A	7	**14**	21
oli + INF_A	10	6	16
Sum	39	26	65
$\chi^2 = 10.29$, $p = 0.0058$			

(45) *Kuvat **olivat loppumaisillaan** kun alkoi tulla rohkeampia otoksia.*
'The pictures **were running out** when the bolder shots started to come in.'

(46) *Kun sitten joku vuos tapauksen jälkeen mun umpisuoli **oli puhkeamaisillaan**, määräs lääkäri mut leikattavaks seuraavana aamuna.*
'Then, some years after the incident, when my appendix **was about to burst**, the doctor ordered an operation the next morning.'

(47) *Suomalaisten puolustus **oli romahtamaisillaan**, joten rauha tehtiin oikeastaan yhdennellätoista hetkellä.*
'The Finnish defence **was on the verge of collapse**, so peace was actually made at the eleventh hour.'

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Table 14. Distribution of telicity of the top 50 non-shared verbal collexemes across the three constructions

TELICITY	Telic	Atelic	Sum
oli + *mAisillA*	27	1	28
meinasi + INF_A	17	4	21
oli + INF_A	15	1	16
Sum	59	6	65
$\chi^2 = 3.65$, $p = 0.16$			

Meinasi + INF_A, on the other hand, contrasts clearly with the other two constructions: eight of its 21 exclusive verbal collexemes (38%) do not carry negative semantic prosody, 18 have mainly active, agentive subjects (86%), and 14 are transitive (67%). *Meinasi* also has the highest proportion of atelic verbs (see Table 14). Examples (48)–(51) illustrate four of the top ranked verbs which are exclusive to *meinasi* + INF_A, namely *laittaa* 'to put', *tilata* 'to order', *aloittaa* 'to begin', and *syödä* 'to eat'. As these examples show, with *meinasi* not all the uses involving verbs with active subjects are avertives. Instead, depending on the context, the interpretation may be simply that of intention, that is, the verb situation is, of course, non-realised, but not averted. This is what the sentences in (48a)–(51a) indicate, in contrast to the b sentences, where the verb situations are explicitly averted by the adversative conjunction *mut(ta)* 'but'. The uses in (48b)–(51b) express mainly avertives with a full event structure reading, or, perhaps, in (51b), an inner stage avertive reading.

(48) a. *Ai että **meinasit laittaa** nenään tavallisen nappi-/tappikorviksen?*
'Oh, so **you meant to put** a regular button/tap earring in your nose?'

b. *Mäkin ensin **meinasin laittaa** ne väärin päin, mut sitten tarkistin tehtävänannosta ja siellä luki et 'Auvo Hannun artikkeli'.*
'At first **I was also about to put** them the wrong way round, but then I checked the assignment and it said "Auvo Hannu's article".'

(49) a. *Mistäpä muuten **meinasit tilata**?*
'Where **were you planning to order** them by the way?'

b. *Eihän siinä suurta eroa ole, mut **mä meinasin tilata** sen vahingossa, mutta huomasin tarkistaa.*
'There's not much difference, of course, but **I was about to order** it by mistake, but then I realised I should check.'

(50) a. *Milloinkas **meinasit aloittaa** kaljanjuonnin?*
'When **were you planning to start** drinking beer?'

b. *Just **meinasin aloittaa** samanlaisen keskustelun, mutta puit oloni aika hyvin sanoiksi.*
'**I was just about to start** a similar conversation, but you put my feelings into words pretty well.'

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(51) a. *en tiedä onko merkitystä, mutta itse ainakin **meinasin syödä** just ohjeiden mukaan.*
'I don't know if it matters, but at least **I was going to eat** exactly as indicated.'

b. *Jos kalorit nousee 4000-5000 välille lihomisen vaara on suuri. Nytkin **meinasin syödä** yöllä vielä ohukaiset mansikkahillon kera, mutta en syönyt koska kalorit olisivat nousseet liian isoksi.*
'If calories reach between 4000-5000, the risk of gaining weight is high. Even now, this evening, **I was about to eat** some pancakes with strawberry jam, but I didn't because the calories would have been too high.'

Finally, the 16 exclusive verb collexemes of the *oli* + INF_A constructions have predominantly negative semantic prosody (88%), but they can be either intransitive or transitive (10:6) and combine with both agentive and non-agentive subjects (8:8). In short, the verbs which are exclusive to *oli* + INF_A are very similar to those of *oli* + *mAisillA*, the main difference lying in a greater preference of *oli* + INF_A for negative semantic prosody (see Table 11). This finding underlines that *oli* + INF_A is the most clearly avertive construction of the three, as examples (52)–(54) illustrate:

(52) *Neljän vuoden kirjoittelun jälkeen tapasimme ja **olin seota**, niin mielettömältä se tuntui.*
'After four years of writing, we met and **I nearly freaked out**, it felt so insane.'

(53) *Hoitaja pyyhki naamani verestä ja **olin pillahtaa itkuun** koska hän teki sen niin hellästi.*
'The nurse wiped the blood off my face and **I almost burst into tears** because she did it so gently.'

(54) *Aluksi **olin vaipua epätoivoon** lukiessani niin ristiriitaisia kommentteja laminaateista (. . .) ja lautaparketeista (. . .) kun nämä olivat ainoat vaihtoehdot, joita tiesin.*
'At first **I almost fell into despair** after reading such contradictory comments about laminates (. . .) and plank parquets (. . .) when these were the only options I knew of.'

Indeed, in these examples, despite the absence of any adversative conjunction, the interpretation is that the verb situation is averted either completely (full event structure avertive), as with *seota* 'to go crazy' and *pillahtaa* 'to burst into tears' in (52) and (53), or before completion, as with *vaipua* 'to fall (into despair)' in (54) (inner stage avertive reading).

5. Overall characterisation of the Finnish avertive constructions

In this subsection we provide an overall characterisation of the constructions under study by illustrating how they can be situated within the Finnish constructicon, on the one hand, and with regard to each other, on the other. It is important to bear in mind that we are considering both the meaning and the form of the constructions as well as their relationship to other similar AUX + infinitive constructions in Finnish.[26] In this regard, we may first note that *oli* + *mAisillA* is related to the *olla mA-* + inessive case construction, e.g. *olla tekemässä* 'to be doing', which is a

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prominent progressive construction in Finnish (see Niva 2021). This construction is often used with an imminent reading (*Olin juuri sanomassa* 'I was just about to say'), from which the avertive reading is a potential extension: progressivity > imminence > (sometimes) avertive.

Second, the *olla* + INF_A construction is, of course, formally related to the *oli* - *mA*-inessive case and the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction by means of the auxiliary *olla* 'to be'; but *olla* can also be combined with other non-finite forms, such as the participle form to create the compound perfect tense form *olla tehnyt* 'to have done', the periphrastic modal construction *olla tehtävä*, *olla mentävä* 'to have to do, to have to go'. Within the family of *olla* + non-finite verb, *olla* + INF_A has become specialised as the most clearly avertive construction in Finnish. Thirdly, *meinasi* + INF_A can be seen as a parallel to *oli* + INF_A, involving the same INF_A element but another auxiliary.

This means that the INF_A form appears to make up a productive constructional schema together with auxiliar verbs, AUX + INF_A. From this perspective, the introduction of *meinata* can be seen as an analogical extension of the avertive construction *oli* + INF_A.[27] At what time the *meinasi* + INF_A construction was coined and to what degree it has developed in relation to *olla* + INF_A is, however, a matter that must be left for future research. Of course, all three constructions merit their own, detailed descriptive analysis, something we also have to leave for future endeavours.

In Figure 1 we have tried to situate the three avertive constructions within both the broader constructional network (formal dimension) and the semantic domains of progressivity, proximativity, avertivity, and intentionality, considering the semantic poles of the three constructions (marked by different background colours). That is, in Figure 1 we situate the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction on the left, associating it with the progressive construction, *olla mA*+inessive; it frequently exhibits meanings such as proximativity/imminence, as indicated in the lower part of Figure 1. The *olla* + INF_A construction, on the other hand, inherits its form from the more schematic AUX + INF_X construction, but it is intrinsically tied to the specific meaning of avertivity. *Meinasi* + INF_A, finally, is also an elaboration of the AUX + INF_X and, secondarily, the AUX + INF_A schema, but its meaning components coincide only partially with *olla* + INF_A due to the semantic purport of *meinata*, which occupies the auxiliary slot and carries a meaning of intentionality.

Note that the notification used in Figure 1 is meant to indicate that the expressions are all situated at the level of constructions, i.e. abstractions over contextually observed uses (constructs). The verbs used in the INF_A and *mAisillA* slots, *kuolla* 'to die', *räjähtää* 'to explode', *tukehtua* 'to choke', *pyörtyä* 'to faint', and *mennä* 'to go' represent top collexemes, i.e. typical collocates, of the constructions, following the results of the collostructional analysis presented above. We have also included a more specific expression within the *oli* + INF_A construction, i.e. *olin pyörtyä siihen paikkaan kun* 'I was about to faint on the spot as . . . ' (see example (55)), in order to illustrate that there are, of course, more elaborate constructions, depending on the verb used in the INF-slot of the construction.

A final comment on Figure 1 involves the three colour shades, with the avertive notional area in the centre; this area extends left and right, towards the areas of progressivity/proximativity (left) and intentionality (right) situated on the edges.

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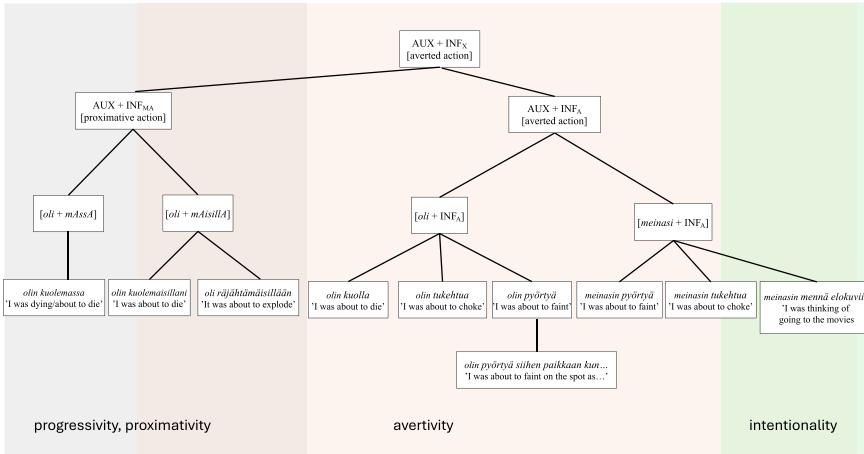


Figure 1. Network structure of the avertive construction family.

The overlap, on the left, between the dimensions of progressivity/proximativity and avertivity reflects the fact that it is impossible to decide on the schematic construction level whether a given *oli* + *mAisillA* combination has an avertive or proximative meaning. Only on the specific level of the construct, i.e. the actual usage context, is the reading disambiguated (see examples (18)–(23) in Section 4.1).

In order to complement the simplified and schematic illustration of the proximative/ avertive subpart of the Finnish constructicon in Figure 1, in Figures 2 and 3 we provide classical CxG box notations following Fried & Östman (2004) at two levels of specificity. Figure 2, first, is an attempt to characterise the schematic avertive construction in Finnish, i.e. an abstraction over the three constructions, *olla* + *mAisillA*, *olla* + INF_A and *meinasi* + INF_A, as seen at the top of Figure 1. Figure 3, in turn, is a description of a specific, substantial contextual usage instance of *oli* + INF_A.

What exactly does this schematic avertive construction involve? Following Fried & Östman (2004:Ch.6), at the top of the box notation, we suggest that the construction is syntactically (syn = syntactic domain) categorised as a verb functioning (gf = grammatical function) as the predicate of the sentence in which it is used. It is also a phrasal predicate (lex –) which needs to be expanded (max –) (see Fried & Östman 2004:30–31). In the semantic domain (sem), the construction's meaning is characterised as 'action narrowly averted' following Kuteva (1998), and we argue that it involves one obligatory argument, or frame element (FE), bearing the #1 and corresponding to the semantic role of undergoer (rarely, an agent). Pragmatically (pragm), the construction typically refers to (the avoidance of) undesired situations (reflecting the negative semantic prosody of its collexemes). Finally, in the valence of the construction the syntactic realisation of the prime frame element (FE #1) is stipulated: it is a distinguished argument (da +), it bears the grammatical function (gf) of subject, and its thematic role is that of an undergoer or, exceptionally, an agent.[28]

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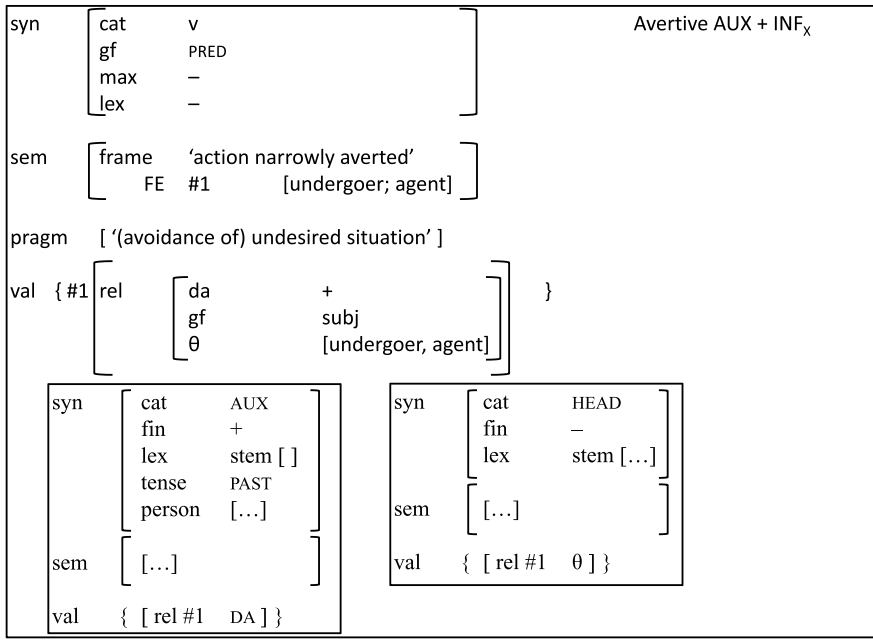


Figure 2. Box notation of the schematic avertive construction.

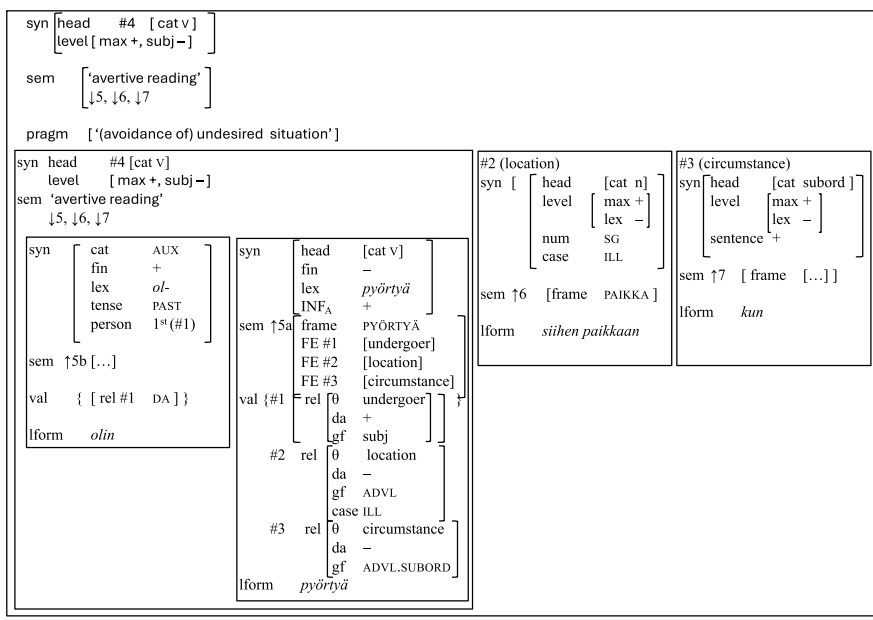


Figure 3. Box notation of a specific usage instance of the *oli* + INFA construction: *olin pyörtyä siihen paikkaan kun* . . . ‘I was about to pass out on the spot when . . . ’.

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The lower part of the notation involves two boxes, describing the syntactic, semantic and valence information of the two elements of the complex predicate, i.e. the auxiliary and the infinitive. The auxiliary is characterised as precisely that (AUX) and also as a finite verb form (fin +); it is a lexically unspecified stem (lex stem []) in the past tense with an unspecified person ending. Semantically the auxiliary is unspecified for meaning. Its valence, finally, specifies that, from the perspective of the auxiliary, the primary frame element (FE #1) is a distinguished argument (DA), i.e. one that needs to be realised here. In the second box, referring to the infinitive, the valence of the construction stipulates that the relationship (rel) between the primary frame element (FE #1) and the verb corresponds to the thematic role stipulated in the construction level valence above, i.e. undergoer (or agent). The semantics of the infinitive is unspecified at this level of schematicity (lacking an explicit verb stem), and the syntactic level simply specifies that the infinitive is the head, is non-finite (fin –) and lexically unspecified.

Whereas Figure 2 illustrates the schematic avertive auxiliary construction, in Figure 3 we offer a detailed characterisation based on a specific usage instance of the *oli* + INF_A construction, namely example (25), repeated here as (55):

(55) *Samainen poika oksensi kerran koulumatkalla bussiin ja* ***olin pyörtyä*** *siihen paikkaan, kun haistoin oksennuksen.* (ex. (25))
'The same boy once threw up on the bus on the way to school and **I was about to faint** on the spot when I smelled the vomit.'

In (55), the averted action is to faint. Apart from the first-person subject, the verb is combined with two additional arguments: first, an adverbial indicating the location (where the fainting takes place, i.e. 'on the spot') and, second, a subordinate clause indicating the circumstance which, in this case, is the cause of the (non-realised) fainting. From the perspective of this specific usage instance of the *oli* + INF_A construction, both these elements are important for the averted event: the locative element adds drama and emphasis to *pyörtyä*, whereas the circumstantial when-clause amounts to the cause of the event. In fact, *pyörtyä siihen paikkaan* can be considered an idiom, and used as such, the locative element is a fixed part of the expression. The box notation in Figure 3 thus includes these two elements as part of the frame of the construction apart from the 'obligatory' undergoing subject. Compared to the box notation in Figure 2, there are several layers of additional complexity when characterising a construct, so detailed comments on Figure 3 are in order.

Starting with the syntactic dimension at the top, the first thing to notice is that the construct, as a whole, is categorised as a verb (cat V), which is maximally realised, i.e. it cannot be expanded further (Fried & Östman 2004:30). Finnish being a pro-drop language, the subject is not (necessarily) realised as a syntactically distinct element, hence the notation (subj –). Semantically, the construct is only specified as having an avertive meaning, and the numbers (5, 6, and 7) with downward pointing arrows refer to the three main elements of the expression in (55): 5 being the complex predicate (*olin pyörtyä*), 6 the locative adverbial *siihen paikkaan*, and 7 the circumstantial *kun*-clause. Pragmatically we find the same

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information as in Figure 2, that is, the construct is associated with (the avoidance of) an undesired situation.

Moving down to the three constituents, we can start by the verbal construction, *olin pyörtyä* 'I was about to faint', which is formalised in the largest, leftmost one of the three enclosed boxes. The predicate is, quite naturally, categorised as a verb (cat v); it is marked with #4 to reflect the fact that it is the formal realisation of the head of the sentence (numbers 1–3 are reserved for the frame elements (FE #1, #2, and #3)). As a complex verb form it is, again, maximally realised (hence max +), but its subject is not syntactically explicit but only marked morphologically on the verb (hence subj –). Reference to the three main semantically defined elements of the predicate (↓5, ↓6, ↓7) is repeated on the semantic level (sem) along with the specification of the whole construct bearing an 'avertive reading'.

In the leftmost of the four small boxes in the lower part of Figure 3 is the specification of the auxiliar form *olin* 'I was'. This form is characterised, syntactically, as auxiliary (cat AUX) and finite (fin +); it is lexically specified as the stem *ol-* (to which tense (tense PAST) and person affixes (person 1st) are later added). Note two things here: first, although the subject is not explicitly realised (hence there is no box marked with #1), it is present here in the form of the person ending on the auxiliary. Second, the auxiliary form is marked, on the semantic level, with ↑5b, indicating that it is part of the predicate, which makes up constituent 5 in the general description (in the upper part of Figure 3). In the valence description of *olin*, there is also a reference to the subject (constituent #1 of the main verb *pyörtyä* 'to faint') which is a distinguished argument (DA) albeit it is syntactically not realised.

The most important information of Figure 3 is found in the characterisation of the main verb *pyörtyä* (second box from the left on the lower level). Syntactically, *pyörtyä* is, of course, a verb and it is the head of the sentence (head [cat V]), it is non-finite, lexically specific (lex *pyörtyä*) and appears in the INF_A form. Semantically, this is where most information is located: the frame is made up by the meaning of the verb, i.e. 'to faint', and this verb is construed around three elements: a subject (FE #1), a location (FE #2), and a circumstance (FE #3). The characteristics of the three frame elements (FEs) are specified below: FE #1 refers to the subject (gf subj), which is deemed a distinguished argument (da +) and its semantic role is that of an undergoer. FE #2, on the other hand, is the location (θ location), which is not a distinguished argument (hence da –), it is realised as an adverbial (gf ADVL) bearing illative case. Finally, FE #3 corresponds to the circumstantial subordinate clause (θ circumstance; gf ADVL.SUBORD), which is not a distinguished argument (da –).

The two rightmost boxes of the lower part of Figure 3 refer to frame elements #2 and #3, i.e. the locative and circumstance adverbials. #2, *siihen paikkaan* 'on the spot' is syntactically specified as a noun phrase (cat n, lex –) which is, in this case, maximally realised (max +), singular (num SG) and in illative case (case ILL). Semantically, this NP is made up of the predicate paikka 'place, spot' and corresponds to argument 6 in the global construction, hence the mark ↑6, meeting the ↓6 of the higher level boxes.

The subordinate clause introduced by *kun* 'when', finally, makes up frame element #3, and is specified as a subordinate clause (cat subord), it is complex

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(lex –), maximally realised (max +) and a sentence (sentence +). Semantically, we have decided to leave the characterisation without further specification due to space limitations (in Figure 3 we only include *kun*, but actually the whole subordinate sentence, with all its elements, would need to be specified in a similar fashion to the earlier parts of Figure 3, which is neither pertinent nor relevant since our aim is to describe the avertive construction). Thus, Figure 3 simply indicates that the frame would need further elaboration in a full account.

We also refrain from elaborating specific constructs, i.e. attested usage instances, of the remaining two constructions, *oli* + *mAisillA* and *meinasi* + INF_A due to space limitations and probable overlap, but we hope that the information included in the box notations shown in Figures 2 and 3 illustrate both the relationships among the salient elements of a specific example of one of the constructions (Figure 3) and between the schematic avertive construction and more specific constructions (Figure 2).

6. Conclusions

In this paper we set out to explore what a collostructional analysis of three verbal constructions in Finnish can tell us about the expression of avertivity in Finnish, both from a language-internal and a cross-linguistic perspective. Where on the avertivity continuum are the Finnish constructions situated? And how do they relate to (a) other similar (AUX + INF) constructions in Finnish and (b) other means of expressing the meaning 'almost V' (Kuteva 1998)?

An initial, obvious answer to the last question is that the Finnish verbal constructions conform quite closely to the main pattern of expressing avertivity in European languages, i.e. they are periphrastic verb constructions involving a finite auxiliary-like verb followed by an infinitive-like main verb (see Kuteva 1998). This, of course, contrasts with the broad family of avertive/frustrative affixes found in the languages of Australia and the Americas (cf. Caudal 2023, Overall 2017). However, by concentrating on three verbal constructions, we have largely overlooked other, lexically based and semantically highly transparent and thus totally conventional means of expressing the meaning 'almost V', such as the adverb *melkein* 'almost' and the use of the adverbial *vähällä* 'by a little' in combination with *olla* 'to be' and an infinitive.

In the previous sections, we have described the three constructions individually, based on their prime collexemes, i.e. the infinitival verb forms, which according to the collostructional analysis are most strongly attracted to them (Sections 4.1–4.3). These analyses show the following: (1) The *oli* + *mAisillA* construction mainly carries a proximative/propinquative meaning; however, in context, the meaning is sometimes that of an avertive, especially with verbs such as *räjähtää* 'to explode' and *tukehtua* 'to choke', which are punctual verbs with negative semantic prosody over which the undergoing subject lacks control. (2) The *oli* + INF_A construction is first and foremost an avertive construction, in the sense that the verbs used in this construction consistently involve averted actions. (3) The *meinasi* + INF_A construction, finally, seems to be ambivalent between an avertive reading and

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imminent/proximative readings on the one hand, and intentional readings on the other, a fact due to the intention meaning inherent in the verb *meinata* 'to intend'.

We also compared the constructions based on their most salient unique verb collexemes (Section 4.4), finding that the *oli* + *mAisillA* construction appears to be the most versatile of them all in terms of distinct collexemes. *Oli* + *mAisillA* is also the construction which is most strongly associated with intransitive verbs combined with non-agentive subjects and bearing negative connotations. *Meinasi* + INF_A is more often combined with agentive subjects, a reflection of its origin as a verb expressing intention. Of the three, *oli* + INF_A is the least salient in terms of collexemes, coinciding to a high degree with *oli* + *mAisillA*, the main difference being that while the latter is often ambiguous between proximative and avertive readings, the former mainly expresses averted actions.[29]

With regard to the question of what kind of avertivity the three constructions encode, our results suggest that there is no one-to-one mapping between the constructions and Caudal's different types of avertivity. Instead, a given occurrence of any of the three constructions can yield a full event structure (a), a preparatory stage (b), or inner stage (c) avertive reading depending on the main verb and the usage context. In order to shed more light on this matter, more detailed analyses of the usage contexts of all the corpus cases must be carried out. We might, however, still point out that the *olla* + *mAisillA* construction, due to its propinquative nature, is prone to preparatory stage readings when the context explicitly makes it clear that the reading is avertive and not proximative/propinquative (see examples (45)–(47) in Section 4.3). But since all three constructions are combined with telic verbs alike (see Table 14 in Section 4.3), this does not appear to be a factor that sets the three constructions apart.

This said, it is clear that much work remains in order to achieve a complete picture of the expression of avertivity in Finnish. First and foremost, all three constructions merit detailed and individual description, considering the importance of the usage context for the actual meaning. An important question that remains to be answered is to what degree the constructions actually express avertivity as compared to proximativity (*olla* + *mAisillA*) and intentionality (*meinasi* + INF_A). Individual studies of the three constructions would also allow for a more thorough evaluation of the data included in the Suomi24 corpus. All the corpus cases need to be examined individually in more detail, and it would also be highly beneficial to consider the importance of different text types and conversation topics of the corpus (see Niva, Silvennoinen & Wahlström 2025).

In addition, on a conceptual level, we could ask why all the three avertive constructions seem to prefer, by and large, telic, intransitive verbs taking non-agentive subjects and bearing negative semantic prosody. That is, why do avertives seem to prefer this kind of events? Based on our initial explorations, our hypothesis is that it is because there appears to be a need to communicate about 'on the verge of' situations, where something unpleasant was about to happen but, luckily, didn't occur. In such situations, it is normal that the subject lacked control of the situation which, instead, almost came upon her. Conventional implicatures might be behind the linking of avertive readings to such situations, turning expressions such as 'something being about to happen' (*oli* + INF_A and *oli* + *mAisillA*) into avertives.

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Lastly, we feel a need to highlight that this paper should be seen as a first, overarching overview of three avertive constructions in Finnish, which have not been systematically described and compared earlier, let alone from a CxG perspective. Future studies will need to build on this initial picture. We hope, however, to have set the stage for future research; and also to have shown that collostructional analysis is an analytical method well suited to our descriptive purposes.

Notes

1 The following glosses are used in the paper: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person =, ACC = accusative, ADE = adessive, DEF = definite, DIST = distal, FRUST = frustrative, GEN = genitive, ILL = illative, INE = inessive, INF_A = A infinitive, INF_{MA} = MA infinitive, INF_{MAISI} = infinitive followed by MAISI- morpheme cluster, MASC = masculine, NEUT = neuter, NOM = nominative, NVIS = non-visual, SG = singular, PAR = partitive, POSS = possessive, PL = plural, PRF = perfect, PRS = present, PST = past, REC = reciprocal, REFL = reflexive. The glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules.

2 In the Finnish reference grammar (ISK:§123, §685) the infinitive form *-mAisi-* is always used in combination with the adessive ending (*-lla*) and a possessive suffix. As such, *mAisillA*+POSS, e.g. *mAisillAni*, *mAisillAsi*, *mAisillAAn*, etc. has been considered a morpheme cluster (Leino 2003:102–103).

3 Actually, the example cited by Kuteva (1998:117) has the form *Olin kadota kadulla*, which is a clear mistake. The infinitive *kadota* 'disappear' does not correspond to Kuteva's translation nor does it make up a natural expression in Finnish contrary to the version with *kaatua* 'to fall (down), trip'.

4 In Finnish, due to its characteristic vowel harmony, archiphonemes are often represented with capital letters. Thus, an A indicates that the vowel can correspond to either *a* or *ä*, U that it can be either *u* or *y*, depending on the vowel pattern of the word. A verb such as *kuolla* 'to die' will be realised as *kuolemaisillaan* (with *a*), whereas a verb such a *lyödä* 'to hit' will be realised as *lyömäisillään*, with *ä*. Note, also, that we do not include the possessive suffix following the *mAisillA*-ending in the shortcut name of the *olla* + *mAisillA* construction; a more detailed denomination could be, for example, *olla* + *mAisillA*-POSS.

5 We acknowledge that auxiliary is not a frequently used category label within the Finnish grammatical tradition, but for sake of simplicity we use auxiliary as a cover term for *olla* and *meinata* as the finite verb element of the constructions. Note that *meinata* is generally considered a modal verb in Finnish (ISK:§1564).

6 The few cases of present tense found in our data usually correspond to a historical present sense, thus underlining the pastness of the events.

7 Maamies' (1997) study offers a corpus-based description of the grammaticalisation of the *olla* + *mAisillA* construction, but it largely overlooks the avertive meaning associated with it.

8 Caudal does not provide explicit examples of his four types, so it seems appropriate to use Finnish examples as an illustration. We follow Caudal's (2023) definitions of the four subtypes, so the Finnish examples provided are not always a perfect match in all possible senses. For example, in type (a) the examples do not illustrate both expectedness and desirability; indeed, the events are clearly undesired for the subject, but in these situations, drowning and being hit by a car were apparently very close to happening, i.e. expected. Examples (10)–(17) in Section 2.2 further illustrate how Caudal's four avertive/frustrative categories are expressed in Finnish.

9 Unless indicated otherwise, all examples stem from the Suomi24 corpus, which we introduce in Section 3.

10 Leino (2005) presents a sentence-level construction, which can potentially be considered an example of this kind of avertive reading: ***Lähestyin*** *siis ruokailutarkoituksessa tässä suhteessa paikkaa asiallisesti sonnustautuneena* ***kuullakseni****, ettei sisään ole asiaa, koska lahkeitteni alta pilkahtivat puukengät* 'So **I approached** the place for a meal, properly dressed in this respect, only to be told that I was not allowed in because my wooden shoes were peeking out under my trousers'.

11 See Erelt & Metslang (2009) for periphrastic constructions in Estonian, Hansen (2010) on the Czech *ne a ne zaprset* construction, Dalrymple & Vincent (2015) for an analysis of the conative *go to* + infinitive construction in English, Cruschina (2018) for the conative '*jiri pi* (go for) + infinitive' construction in Sicilian, Arkadiev (2011, 2019) on the *buvo* + *be*-present participle construction in Lithuanian, and Zinner &

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Dowah (2020), Granvik & Sanromán (2025) for the avertive *hube de* + infinitive in Spanish and Sanromán & Granvik (In press) for Galician.

12 This does not seem very likely, however, given that when *olla* + INF_A is used in the present tense the averted event can be cancelled, i.e. realised, as in *Hän on menettää pallon, ja menettääkin* 'He is on the verge of losing the ball, and indeed loses it'. With the present tense, it thus seems more likely that *olla* + INF_A expresses proximativity, with the avertive reading being conventionalised in the past tense.

13 The values on the ⌐*kuolla* line refer to verbs other than *kuolla* in the *olla* + INF_A construction (5675) and other verbs in all other constructions (88 502 816).

14 Hence, in the remainder of this paper we use the labels *oli* + INF_A, *oli* + *mAisillA* and *meinasi* + INF_A, with the past tense form, to refer to the constructions.

15 Up to 90% of these false positives are instances of the shell noun construction (Schmid 2000), such as *Tarkoituksena oli lähteä seuraavana päivänä* 'the idea was to leave the following day', which is only found in the third person with the infinitive functioning as the subject.

16 We are well aware that the simple, original collexeme analysis only provides partial, initial insights into the relationship between the top ranked verbs and the constructions they occur in. In order to overcome some of the shortcomings of the analysis (such as the conflation of several important factors, e.g. directionality of the attraction, dispersion of the verb across the corpus, etc., into one single number; see Gries 2019, especially §2), we go into quite some detail in the analysis of the actual usage context of the constructions in order to provide a more nuanced analysis of the semantics of the Finnish avertive constructions. We believe that this is a reasonable solution at this stage, since our aim is to provide an overall characterisation of the constructions. In future work, we aim to explore Gries's idea of tupleisation in order to consider the issues of the simple collexeme analysis more seriously.

17 Unlike the introductory chapters, for reasons of space we refrain from providing glosses in the examples of the analysis and only present their translations. We consider this sufficient, since the primary focus is on verb semantics and the meaning of the expression, not on (morpho)syntax.

18 Inasmuch as the aim of the collostructional analysis is to highlight the most important collocates (verbs, in this case) of a given construction, the fact that it also identifies repelled verbs, such as *olla*, with which under closer scrutiny it is found to give rise to a completely different construction, can be considered a beneficial side effect.

19 These four verbs are semantically similar, and typically used in combination with different surrounding conditions which provoke unpleasant feelings, leading to dramatic descriptions of how the experiencing subject is about 'to burst, go under, or succumb'. See example (26) for an idiomatic translation.

20 Note that there are 10 transitive verbs among the top 50 collexemes of *oli* + INF_A, a figure that doubles the five transitive verbs found with *oli* + *mAisillA*. Three of these 10 verbs, namely *menettää*, *unohtaa*, and *pudottaa* however, refer to events where the (human) subject is, typically, non-agentive, in the sense that s/he does not intend to lose, forget, or drop something. When these three non-agentive transitive verbs are taken into consideration, the difference between *oli* + *mAisilla* and *oli* + INF_A is insignificant from a quantitative perspective.

21 One can also note that, even if *meinasi* is used in the past tense, the intentionality inherent in the verb's meaning can be felt in the present or the future: a sentence such as *Meinasin mennä elokuviin* 'I was planning to go to the movies' can mean that the subject still intends to go.

22 Note that, as stated in Section 3, we have not manually checked the reading of each of the 27 500 examples. A manual check of small samples of *ostaa* 'to buy' and *saada* 'to get, receive' reveals that the majority of the uses are indeed avertive. In the case of *hommata* 'to get, acquire' and *tilata* 'to order', on the other hand, the intentional use is more frequent. Future research involving a close reading of all examples is needed to dig deeper into this situation.

23 Somewhere between Kuteva et al.'s (2019:852) apprehensional and avertive nuances.

24 The verbs are listed according to their rank (strength of association to the construction), semantic prosody, agentivity, and transitivity. The lists start with the highest-ranked, intransitive, and non-agentive verbs with negative semantic prosody. The verbs are grouped according to the importance of the descriptive feature (see Tables 11–14), so that semantic prosody has preference over agentivity, which has preference over transitivity.

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25 The verb *loppua* 'to end' does not in and of itself carry a particularly negative meaning; however, in about half of the cases included in our data something coming to an end can be seen as something undesired, and thus negative, e.g. *paristo oli loppumaisillaan* 'the battery was about to run out'.
26 For reasons of space, we disregard comparison with adverbial avertive/frustrative and proximative structures such as *olla vähällä* + INF 'be close to V' and *melkein* V 'almost V', both bearing meanings similar to the infinitive constructions analysed in this paper.
27 By suggesting the existence of a schematic AUX + INF_A construction here, we want to get at the fact that *olla* and *meinata* occupy the same slot and, together with the infinitive, make up two constructions expressing avertivity. This is what is meant by the schematic AUX + INF_A construction with an avertive meaning, as shown in Figure 1. Although one might be tempted to expand the AUX position to include other modal verbs, such as *voida* 'may, be able to', *saada* 'to get, receive', *saattaa* 'may', or mental verbs, such as *haluta* 'want', *tahtoa* 'want, desire', *vihata* 'to hate', we refrain from elaborating this idea here. Also, we do not suggest that *meinata* + INF_A is, historically speaking, an analogical extension of *olla* + INF_A; *meinata* indeed has undergone semantic change and a grammaticalisation process leading to its use as a marker of avertivity (see Granvik & Niva 2025).
28 An example of a frustrated action involving an agentive subject is *En tiedä kuuluisko tämä tänne palstalle mutta joka tapauksessa ongelmana on se että meinasin alkaa päivittämään digiboksia (finlux) tietokoneella mutta kun päivitys ohjelman käynnistää, niin ruutuun tulee ikkuna jossa lukee "Com port open failed!"* 'I don't know if this belongs here but anyway the problem is that I was about to start updating the digibox (finlux) on my computer but when I start the update program, a window appears that says "Com port open failed!"', where the *but when* part in *meinasin alkaa päivittämään digiboksia . . .* ***mutta kun*** . . . 'I was about to start updating the digital (TV reception) box **but when** . . .' imposes an avertive reading.
29 Future studies could, of course, dig deeper into the comparison of the constructions by performing, for example, distinctive collexeme analysis (Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004; see also Verroens 2024 for a recent application) in order to identify distinctive collexemes from another perspective; multifactorial collostructional analysis along the lines of Olguín Martínez & Gries (2024) and Jensen & Gries (2025) are also worthwhile extensions for future work.

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