

Workshop description

Some languages, notably Baltic Finnic and Basque, have a partitive case, which is usually said to indicate partial affectedness of patients (cf. Blake 2001: 151). Such function is also attributed to other cases in languages that do not have a separate partitive, as in the case of the Hungarian partitive/ablative, and the partitive/genitive of various Indo-European languages (a separate partitive, lexically restricted, also exists in Russian).

Depending on the language, the use of partitives may be more or less restricted. In Basque, for example, the partitive occurs in negative sentences and it can indicate either the object of transitive verbs or the subject on intransitive verbs (in other words, it can substitute the absolutive case in negative sentences; it only occurs as subject with unaccusative verbs). A connection between negation and partitive (genitive) also occurs in the Slavic and the Baltic Finnic languages. The alternation between the partitive and other cases sometimes also has connections with aspect: this has been argued for Baltic Finnic, Slavic (see e.g. Fischer 2004), and possibly Sanskrit (Dahl 2009). In fact, partitivity is not only a possible feature of patients: in Finnish existentials, for examples, even agentive intransitive verbs such as *juosta* ‘run’, *opiskella* ‘study’, etc. (unergative), take partitive subjects.

In some Indo-European languages, besides partitive objects and partitive subjects (mostly with unaccusative verbs, cf. Conti 2009 on Ancient Greek), partitive adverbials also exist, for example in time expressions (such as *Nachts* ‘during the night’ in German). In Ancient Greek, some locative occurrences of the partitive genitive are attested (see Luraghi 2003, 2009):

ē halòs ē epì gês

or sea:GEN or on land:GEN

“either at sea or on land” (Homer, *Od.* 12.26-27).

In one of the few existing cross-linguistic description of partitives, Moravcsik (1978: 272) summarizes typical semantic correlates of partitives as follows:

- a. the definiteness-indefiniteness of the noun phrase;
- b. the extent to which the object is involved in the event;
- c. the completedness versus non-completedness of the event;
- d. whether the sentence is affirmative or negative.

Moravcsik further remarks that marking difference brought about by the partitive “does not correlate with any difference in semantic case function”. Thus, the use of the partitive seems to be at odds with the basic function of cases, that is “marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads” (Blake 2001: 1): rather than to indicate a specific grammatical or semantic relation that a NP bears to the verb, the partitive seems to indicate indeterminacy (in various manners). In fact, this has been noted by several authors. For example, Laka (1993: 158) suggests that “what is referred to as ‘partitive case’ in Basque is a polar determiner, much like English *any*”. In Finnish, the functions of the partitive are also related to indeterminacy, unboundedness and polarity, and it is noteworthy that the partitive is not the sole marker of any

grammatical function but participates in a complementary distribution with other cases in all its main functions, i.e. as marker of the object (PART~ACC), the existential subject (PART~NOM) and the predicate nominal (PART~NOM), or as complement of adpositions (PART~GEN).

In this connection, one must mention the so-called partitive article of some Romance varieties, which derives from the preposition which has substituted the Latin genitive (Latin *de*). In French, the partitive article is clearly a determiner and not a case marker, as shown by its distribution:

L'enfant joue dans le jardin / un enfant joue dans le jardin

the child plays in the garden / a child plays in the garden

Les enfants jouent dans le jardin / des enfants jouent dans le jardin

the children play in the garden / some(=part. art.) children play in the garden

The brief survey above shows that there are striking similarities among partitives across languages, which are not limited to the indication of partial affectedness. However, research on partitives is mostly limited to individual languages. In this workshop we would like to bring together and compare data from different languages in which a case (or an adposition, as in French) are classified as partitive.

Research questions

- (a) The distribution of partitives in different syntactic positions (objects, subjects, other roles) and across constructions;
- (b) Partitives as determiners;
- (c) Types of verbs with which partitive subjects (or objects) can occur;
- (d) The diachrony of partitives: what are the sources of partitive markers? What is the diachronic relation between ablative, genitive, and partitive? (cf. Heine and Kuteva 2002: 32-33, 241);
- (e) Partitives as non-canonical grammatical markers: Finnish partitive subjects and objects have been treated under the heading of 'non-canonical marking' (Sands and Campbell 2001). However, it is highly questionable that the occurrence of partitive subjects and objects marked by a partitive article, as in French, should also be considered under this heading. Is the change from case marker (including adpositions) some kind of grammaticalization process and at what stage should a morpheme start to be considered a determiner, rather than a case marker?
- (f) Discourse functions of partitives: Since partitives indicate indeterminacy, it might be expected that they are not topical elements in discourse. For instance, Helasvuo (2001) has shown that the referents of Finnish partitive subjects (unlike those of nominative subjects) are typically not tracked in discourse. What is the discourse function of partitives crosslinguistically?
- (g) Partitives, aspect and quantification: The Baltic Finnic partitive object is well-known for its function of indicating aspectual unboundedness. Other BF partitives (existential, copulative) do not share the aspectual function proper but often indicate an incremental theme (in the sense of Dowty

1991), which gives rise to unbounded “nominal aspect” (Huumo 2003, 2009). What are the aspectual and quantificational functions of partitives crosslinguistically?

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