

Finnish partitive case as a determiner suffix

Problem: Finnish partitive case shows up on subject and object nouns, alternating with nominative and accusative respectively, where the interpretation involves indefiniteness or negation (Karlsson 1999). On these grounds some researchers have proposed that partitive is a structural case in Finnish (Vainikka 1993, Kiparsky 2001). A problematic consequence of this is that Finnish is assumed to have a structural case not found in other languages, losing the universal inventory of structural cases. I will propose an alternative, namely that partitive be analysed instead as a member of the Finnish determiner class.

Data: There are three contexts in which the Finnish subject is in the partitive (alternating with the nominative in complementary contexts): (i) indefinite divisible non-count nouns (1), (ii) indefinite plural count nouns (2), (iii) where the existence of the argument is completely negated (3). The data are drawn from Karlsson (1999:82-5).

(1) Divisible non-count nouns

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>a. Partitive mass noun = indef
Purki-ssa on leipä-ä.
tin-INESS is bread-PART
‘There is some bread in the tin.’</p> | <p>b. c.f. Nominative mass noun = def
Leipä on purki-ssa.
Bread is tin-INESS
‘The bread is in the tin.’</p> |
|---|---|

(2) Plural count nouns

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>a. Partitive count noun = indef
Kadu-lla on auto-j-a.
Street-ADESS is.3SG car-PL-PART
‘There are cars in the street.’</p> | <p>b. c.f. Nominative count noun = def
Auto-t ovat kadulla.
Car-PL are.3PL street-ADESS
‘The cars are in the street.’</p> |
|--|---|

(3) Negation

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>a. Partitive, negation of existence
Kadulla ei ole auto-a.
street not is car-PART
‘There aren’t any cars in the street.’</p> | <p>b. c.f. Nom, incomplete negation
Auto ei ole kadulla.
car not is street
‘The car is not in the street.’</p> |
|---|--|

Partitive objects appear in four contexts, alternating with accusative case: (i) negative sentences (4), (ii) indefinites of unlimited quantity (5), (iii) non-resultative clauses (6), (iv) with verbs of emotion (7).

(4) Negation

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>a. Partitive with negation
En osta auto-a.
not buy car-PART
‘I won’t buy the car.’</p> | <p>b. c.f. Accusative in positive sentence
Osta-n auto-n.
buy-1SG car-ACC
‘I buy/will buy the car.’</p> |
|---|---|

(5) Indefinite, non-limited quantity

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>a. Partitive, indefinite quantity
Silja joi maito-a.
Silja drankmilk-PART
‘Silja drank some milk.’</p> | <p>b. c.f. Accusative resultative object
Silja joi maido-n.
Silja drankmilk-ACC
‘Silja drank the milk.’</p> |
|---|---|

(6) Non-resultatives

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>a. Partitive in non-resultative
Tyttö luki läksy-ä.
girl did homework-PART
‘The girl was doing her homework.’</p> | <p>b. c.f. Accusative in resultative
Tyttö luki läksy-n.
girl did homework-ACC
‘The girl did her homework.’</p> |
|--|---|

- (7) Verbs of emotion
- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>a. Partitive, emotion
Pelkäätkö koir-i-a?
fear dog-PL-PART
'Are you afraid of dogs?'</p> | <p>b. c.f. Acc, emotionally neutral verb
Osta-n auto-n.
buy-1SG car-ACC
'I will buy the car.'</p> |
|---|---|

Generally in the Principles and Parameters framework (Chomsky 1981 onwards), nominative and accusative are regarded as the universal structural cases. These partitive-nominative and partitive-accusative alternations in Finnish are a problem in that they raise the question of whether Finnish has an additional structural case not found in other languages. Its appearance with verbs of emotion further complicates matters, since this looks more like the selection of an inherent case due to an idiosyncratic property of the predicate, thus inviting a dual analysis of partitive as both structural and inherent.

Solution: I propose that partitive be analysed as a type of indefinite determiner or quantifier suffix, instead of a case. Finnish lacks overt determiners, and some of the indefinite determiner and negative polarity functions are carried out by the partitive case. This explains its appearance in contexts where one expects structural case in other languages, but where indefinite determiners or negative polarity items would be added in translation (1-5). Partitive in non-resultatives (6) might also be connected with definiteness, an indefinite (partitive) object being in some sense unfinished (6a), and a definite (accusative) object finished (6b), with the same idea potentially stretching also to verbs of emotion, since these tend not to involve the completion of an action. Recent research on adpositions often analyses 'local' cases as the spell-out of PP (c.f. Riemsdijk & Huijbregts 2001, among others). If a noun can raise to P to receive directional/locational case endings, then, by the same logic, it can raise to intervening heads such as D, to gain other inflections. The Finnish partitive case can thus be seen as an indefinite counterpart to definite determiner suffixes in languages such as Romanian and Norwegian.

- (8) Definite article suffixes (Giusti 2002:58)
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <p>a. băiat-ul
b. gutt-en</p> | <p>(Romanian)
(Norwegian)</p> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
- boy-DEF
'the boy'

In Indo-European languages, genitive case often has certain partitive uses (c.f. Latin, Ancient Greek, German). Time allowing, I will show that the genitive case in German also has an intrinsic link with definite and indefinite determiners, and patterns differently from the other cases in German. This suggests that it may also come into consideration for such an analysis, and that the proposal might be further reaching, cross-linguistically. On this hypothesis the fact that Hungarian, a case-rich language, is able to manage without genitive or partitive could be linked to the fact that it has a full set of determiners and a possessive agreement paradigm.

Theoretical implications: If the Finnish partitive is a suffix spelling out D (as I argue here), and if directional/locational suffixes spell out P (as Riemsdijk & Huijbregts 2001 argue), then case paradigms such as those listed in traditional grammars of morphologically rich languages such as Finnish are in fact epiphenomenal, with different suffixes corresponding to different layers of structure above the noun.

References: Chomsky (1981) *Lectures on government and binding* Dordrecht: Foris; Karlsson (1999) *Finnish: an Essential Grammar* Routledge; Kiparsky (2001) 'Structural Case in Finnish' *Lingua* 111:315-76; Riemsdijk & Huijbregts (2001) 'Location and Locality' *Progress in Grammar* Oostendorp & Anagnostopoulou (eds) Utrecht: Roccade; Vainikka (1993) 'Three Structural Cases in Finnish' *Case and other Topics in Finnish Syntax* Holmberg & Nikanne (eds) Dordrecht: Kluwer