Finnish and Estonian partitive case: In-between structure and semantics

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On the concept of case

- Theories of case often make a distinction between structural and non-structural case:
  - **Structural case** of a noun phrase is determined by its structural position
  - **Non-structural case**:
    - **lexical case** that is assigned by a lexical head (such as V or P) to its dependent
    - **inherent case** that is associated with specific thematic positions

More concepts of case

- Configurational approaches to case, e.g. Dependent Case Theory, **Case realization disjunctive hierarchy** (Marantz 1991):
  1. **Lexical/inherent** case: assigned by the selecting V₀ or P₀
  2. **Dependent** case: assigned to a caseless DP in an asymmetric c-command relationship (e.g., accusative and ergative)
  3. **Unmarked** case: assigned to otherwise caseless DPs (e.g. nominative or absolutive)
  4. **Default** case: assigned to any DP which is not otherwise marked for case

The Finnic partitive

- In the literature, the analyses of Finnish partitive vary from default structural case to semantic case
  - Configurational case model, Dependent Case Theory:
    - It is the **unmarked** case in the VP domain (Baker 2015)
    - It is the **unmarked** case in the AspP phase of case assignment & there is also **semantic DP-level** partitive (Poole 2015)
    - It is an **unmarked** case in Estonian and **inherent** case in Finnish nominals (pseudopartitives) (Norris 2018)
The partitive case is in-between structure and semantics

- It cannot be analysed as an unmarked case in the VP domain, but should rather be analysed as a marked case
  - In nominal constructions, we see semantic effect related to partitive, which is present also in VP
  - It cannot be analysed as a semantic case across the board, related to some specific property (e.g. divisibility, unboundedness)
    - complements of adpositions
    - free variation between partitive and non-partitive cases

Preview

- A closer look at the partitive in Finnish and Estonian
  - The distribution of the partitive
  - Focus on the two instances of the partitive
    - Partitive in VPs
    - Partitive in nominals
A closer look at the Finnic partitive

- The distribution of the partitive in Finnish and Estonian:
  - In VPs
    - object
    - adjunct
    - in the scope of a negated verb
    - complement of a copula/predicative
  - With adpositions (on the complement of adpositions)
  - On the subject (both transitive & intransitive constructions)
    - in the subject position (SVO, SVX)
    - in the subject function (XVS)
  - In nominal constructions
    - numeral constructions
    - pseudo-partitive constructions, partitive constructions
    - quantifier constructions
    - pre-nominal modifiers of N (only in Estonian)
  - Comparative adjectives (only in Finnish)
  - Free variation between partitive and genitive
    - in the object function
    - in non-finite clauses

Examples

A. Partitive in VPs (Estonian & Finnish)

- on the object to indicate imperfective aspect (ex.1a)

(1) a. Ta kirjutas luuletust/luuletusi.
    3SG.NOM write.3SG.PST poem.PAR.SG/ poem.PAR.PL
    ‘S/he was writing a poem/ poems’

b. Ta kirjutas luuletuse/luuletused.
    3SG.NOM write.3SG.PST poem.GEN.SG/ poem.NOM.PL
    ‘S/he wrote (a/the) poem / poems.’

- on the adjunct (ex.3)

(3) Tellisin seda ajakirja aastaid ~ aasta.
    order.PST.1SG this.PAR/ journal.PAR.SG year.PAR.PL/ year.GEN.SG
    ‘I subscribed to this journal for years / for a year.’
A. Partitive in VPs (Estonian & Finnish)

• on the **object** of a negated verb (ex.4)

(4) *En löytänyt kirja / kirjan.*
    not.1SG find.PST.SG book.PAR.SG book.GEN.SG
    ‘I didn’t find (a/the) book.’

• on the **complement** of a copula/ predicative (ex.5)

(5) Joonas on maamees/ maamiehi.
    Joonas.NOM be.PRS.3 countryman.NOM.SG/ PAR.PL
    ‘Joonas is a countryman/ one of (the) countrymen.’

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B. Partitive on subjects (Estonian & Finnish)

• **not only with unaccusative verbs**
• **not only with motion verbs**

• in the **subject** position (SVX, SVO) (ex.6)

(6) a. *Inimesi sõitis maale.*
    people.PAR.PL drive.PST.3SG countryside.ALL
    ‘People were travelling to the countryside.’

b. *Meistrit jätkus igale poole.*
    master.PAR.SG suffice.PST.3SG every.ALL side.ALL
    ‘The presence of (the) master could be felt everywhere.’

c. *Tuhansia ihmisä löysi työpaikan.*
    thousand.PL.PAR people.PL.PAR found.3SG job.GEN.SG
    ‘Thousands of people found a job.’

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C. In nominal constructions (Estonian & Finnish)

• in pseudo-partitive constructions on N2 (ex.7)

(7) Kühveldasin [hunniku liiva].
    shovel.PST.1SG pile.SG.GEN sand.SG.PAR
    ‘I shoveled a pile of sand.’

• in quantifier constructions (ex.8)

(8) Leidsin [palju kive].
    find.PST.1SG lot.NOM stone.PL.PAR
    ‘I found a lot of stones.’

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D. On pre-nominal modifiers (only in Estonian)

• on attributive modifiers of N that refer to a type property (ex.9)

(9) a. *kollast värvi pliiats*
    yellow.PAR.SG colour.PAR.SG pencil.NOM.SG
    ‘(a) yellow pencil’, lit.: ‘(a) pencil of yellow colour’

b. *kollast värvi pliiatsitele*
    yellow.PAR.SG colour.PAR.SG pencil.PL.ADE
    ‘onto yellow pencils’

c. *pikka kasvu mees*
    tall.PAR.SG height.PAR.SG man.NOM.SG
    ‘(a) tall man’, lit.: ‘(a) man of tall height’
E. Free variation (Finnish and Estonian)

- on the object between the partitive and genitive (ex.10)

(10) Korrigeerisime maksegraafikut / maksegraafiku.
    correct.PST.1PL paying.schedule.PAR.SG / GEN.SG
    ‘We corrected (the) paying schedule.’ EKK (2007:474)

- on the object of non-finite clauses (ex.11)

(11) Ta tahab [osta autot/ auto].
    3SG.NOM want.PRS.3SG buy.INF car.PAR.SG/ car.GEN.SG
    ‘S/he wants to buy (a) car.’

Focus on two instances of partitive

- Partitive in VPs
  - object
  - adjunct
  - in the scope of a negated verb
  - complement of a copula/predicative
    - In nominal constructions
      - numeral constructions
      - pseudo-partitive constructions, partitive constructions
      - quantifier constructions
      - partitive as pre-nominal modifier of N (only in Estonian)

Point 1: Partitive in the VP domain is a marked case

Reasoning:
- ACC (gen, nom, -t form) cannot be aspectual case marker, since it is not assigned in vP but by phi-features
- If so, where does the aspectual interpretation come from? Partitive!

Evidence:

A. In Finnish, the GEN -n suffix disappears in clauses without phi-agree:

(12) Minun täytyy etsiä kirja / *kirjan.
    1SG.GEN must.PRS search.INF book.NOM.SG/book.GEN.SG
    ‘I have to find a book.’

(13) Etsi kirja / *kirjan.
    search.IMP book.NOM.SG/book.GEN.SG
    ‘Search for (a/the) book!‘

Point 1: Partitive in the VP domain is a marked case
The GEN & NOM variation extends to adverbials – it is not only related to the case realization of the object argument.

Point 1: Partitive in the VP domain is a marked case

- GEN and NOM cannot be associated with v or Asp heads
- The case marking on the object nevertheless reflects the aspectual properties of the predicate
- Several case forms (NOM, GEN, ACC/-t form) bring about the same interpretation (e.g. perfective aspect/boundedness)

Therefore:

- The partitive marks the imperfective aspect/unboundedness of the predicate – it is a marked case
- The partitive is assigned by the verb or the v/Asp head

Point 2: Partitive is often lexically selected

- A subset of verbs always selects complements in the partitive in Finnish and Estonian, regardless of the type of NP
  - Lexically assigned partitive is often overlooked in the literature (but see Kiparsky 1998, 2001)

Therefore:

- If partitive is lexically selected in VP, it cannot be the unmarked case
Point 3: The partitive of negative polarity is not unmarked case

- Negative polarity items, e.g., tuskin ‘hardly’, trigger partitive marking on the object:

  (19) **Tuskin** hän löytää **avainta** / ?avaimen.
      hardly s/he.NOM find.PRS.3SG key.SG.PAR key.SG.GEN
      ‘S/he will hardly find (a/the) key.’

- This suggest that some semantic mechanism is needed to assign partitive in instances such as (ex.19)

- Polarity items (adverbials, particles) that express the speaker's attitude occur higher than in VP, in T-domain or C-domain

  (20) **Tuskin** Pekka-kaan löytää **avainta** / ?avaimen.
      hardly Pekka.NOM-KAAN find.PRS.3SG key.SG.PAR key.SG.GEN
      ‘Pekka will hardly find (a/the) key either.’

Point 4: The partitive on the subject is not unmarked case

- Partitive on the subject is sensitive to the number of an NP – singular count nouns are not accepted:

  (21) a. **Täällä** pysähtyy **junat** / **junia**.
      here stop.PRS.3SG train.PL.NOM train.PL.PAR
      ‘Here stop (the) trains / (some) trains.’

  b. **Täällä** pysähtyy **juna** / **junaa**
      here stop.PRS.3SG train.SG.NOM train.SG.PAR
      ‘Here stop (a) train / intended: (some part of a/the) train’

- We see a semantic effect of the partitive on singular count nouns, hence the partitive cannot be unmarked case in this position

Point 5: Partitive seems not to be unmarked case in nominals

- For example, partitive is sensitive to the number of N2 in pseudo-partitive constructions, hence it cannot be the unmarked case (but see Norris 2018)

  (22) a. **Ostsin** **hunniku raamatuid.**
      buy.PST.1SG stack.SG.GEN book.PL.PAR
      ‘I bought a pile of books.’

  b. **Ostsin** **hunniku raamatut.**
      buy.PST.1SG stack.SG.GEN book.SG.PAR
      lit.: ‘I bought a pile of (pieces of) book.’

- Partitive semantics is present in (ex.22b)

- This data shows that Estonian pseudo-partitives are marked (unlike previously argued in the literature)
Differences between Estonian and Finnish

(24) a. Miten paljon kaloreita on liitri-s piima-s?
   how many calorie.PL.PAR are liter-INE milk.PAR
   ‘How many calories are in a liter of milk?’ (Norris 2018)

b. Kui palju kaloreid on liitri-s piima-s?
   how many calorie.PL.PAR be.3 liter-INE milk-INE
   ‘How many calories are in a liter of milk?’ (Norris 2018)

• This difference can be accounted for by language change
• These examples illustrate how the partitive is in-between structure and semantics

Conclusions

• The Finnic partitive cannot be analysed as an unmarked case within VP
• The partitive shows sensitivity to noun semantics within NPs (singular count nouns give a semantic effect)
• There are some intricate syntactic differences between Finnish and Estonian partitive, but the semantic effects (of partitivity) are the same

Further evidence that partitive is a marked case in nominals and related to the semantics of partitive:

• There is no case concord, hence partitive must be lexical

(9) a. kollast värvi pliiats
   yellow.PAR.SG colour.PAR.SG pencil.NOM.SG
   ‘(a) yellow pencil’, lit.: ‘(a) pencil of yellow colour’

b. kollast värvi pliiatsitele
   yellow.PAR.SG colour.PAR.SG pencil.PL.ADE
   ‘onto yellow pencils’

c. pikka kasvu mees
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References


