

Quantifiers and partitive case marking in Finnish

Tuomas Huumo
University of Turku

The case alternation of the Finnish object between the accusative and the partitive is a well-known and thoroughly studied phenomenon: the accusative marks bounded quantity together with culminating aspect, while the partitive marks unbounded quantity, non-culminating aspect, or both (cf. Huumo 2010 and the literature cited there). Nominals including quantifiers, however, often behave idiosyncratically in this respect. In my presentation I focus on the quantificational and aspectual functions of partitive objects with two kinds of nominal quantifiers, which Hakulinen and Karlsson (1979: 81–82, 144) call **mass quantifiers** (e.g., *vähän* ‘a little’, *paljon* ‘a lot of’; see also Karttunen 1975) and **number quantifiers** (e.g., *moni* ‘many’, *usea* ‘several’). Finnish mass quantifiers are unvarying forms that quantify singular mass nouns (*vähän maito-a* [a.little milk-PAR] ‘a little milk’) and plurals (*paljon auto-j-a* [a.lot.of car-PL-PAR] ‘a lot of cars’), both in the partitive. Number quantifiers quantify count nouns in the singular (*moni mies* [many.NOM man.NOM] ‘many a man’) and in the plural (*mone-t miehe-t* [many-PL.NOM man-PL.NOM] ‘many men’), and they agree with the quantified noun in number and case (e.g., *mon-i-a mieh-i-ä* [PL-PAR], *mon-i-lla mieh-i-llä* [PL-ADESSIVE], etc.).

In spite of the partitive marking of the quantified nominal and, in the case of number quantifiers, even of the quantifier itself, it has been demonstrated in the literature that both types of quantifiers in fact indicate a bounded quantity and a culminating aspect when they quantify partitive-marked object nominals (Yli-Vakkuri 1973, 1979). In such contexts, an accusative (in the singular) or nominative (in the plural) object would be expected; however, according to Yli-Vakkuri, the partitive has largely replaced the accusative and the nominative in quantified nominals. For instance, (?)*Liisa ost-i usea-t kirja-t* [name buy-PST.3SG several-PL.NOM book-PL.NOM] is idiosyncratic in meaning (‘Liisa bought several sets of books’) as opposed to *Liisa ost-i use-i-ta kirjo-j-a* [name buy-PST.3SG several-PL-PAR book-PL-PAR] ‘Liisa bought several books’, even though unquantified objects allow both forms in this context (---*kirjat* [NOM] ‘L. bought the books’ vs. ---*kirjoja* [PAR] ‘L. bought some books’).

I argue that phrases with mass quantifiers are aspectually equal to accusative objects (they indicate bounded quantity and culmination of the event; cf. Karttunen 1975), while the situation is more complicated in phrases including number quantifiers. These establish a higher-order (collective) quantificational and aspectual level to the clause and allow quantificational boundedness and aspectual culmination to prevail at that higher level, even if the situation is non-culminating at the more specific level of the individual referents. For instance, when the referents participate sequentially, their quantity gradually increases and, when it reaches a boundary, the aspect culminates, even if the verb is not telic (cf. **Hän seura-a bloge-j-a päivä-ssä* [s/he follow-PRES.3SG blog-PL-PAR day-INE] ‘*He follows blogs in a day’ vs. *Hän seura-a use-i-ta bloge-j-a päivä-ssä* [s/he follow-PRES.3SG several-PL-PAR blog-PL-PAR day-INE] ‘He follows several blogs in a day’). Thus an ‘in a day’ type of durative adverbial can indicate the temporal boundaries of the event, even though this is not generally possible with (unquantified) partitive objects.

References

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