

Contact induced change in the languages of Europe: the rise and the development of partitive cases and determiners

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In recent research, much attention has been paid to parallels between the Balto-Finnic partitive case and the partitive genitive of the Balto-Slavic languages (Bjarnadóttir & De Smit 2013, Seržant 2015). Even though it morphologically shares the distribution of case endings, the partitive is quite peculiar, in that it does not fulfill the typical function of cases, i.e. to indicate the grammatical relation of a NP (Luraghi 2003: 61, cf. Blake 2000: 1). Rather, in Finnish and Estonian the partitive can encode both subjects and direct objects, and expresses a meaning connected with indefiniteness or unboundedness (Luraghi & Kittilä 2014). Similarly, in Russian, Latvian and Lithuanian the partitive genitive can function as direct object or as subject, and indicates indefiniteness (Luraghi & Kittilä 2014, Paykin 2014, Seržant 2014). Far from being an isolate feature of Balto-Slavic, this type of multi-functionality is typical of the partitive genitive in many early Indo-European languages, and may well be a common heritage from Proto-Indo-European, as it occurs both in European and in non-European branches of the IE language family, notably Indo-Iranian (Dahl 2014). It seems plausible to regard the development of a partitive case out of an ancient ablative (Wickman 1955) in Balto-Finnic as a contact induced change proceeding from IE languages (Larsson 1983). However, the extension of the partitive genitive in Russian and in Baltic languages does not match its extension in other IE languages: this points toward bi-directionality of contact, as typical of linguistic areas. Besides Balto-Finnic languages, Basque also has a partitive case which is diachronically connected with an earlier ablative (Aritzimuño 2014). In Basque grammatical descriptions, the partitive is often described as a determiner (de Rijk 2007), as it shares the distribution of determiners. A parallel can be drawn with the partitive article of the Romance languages, such as French *du/de la /des*. This latter item also developed out of a former marker of a case function (the preposition *de*), which later merged with the definite article and presently shares the distribution of determiners (Carlier 2007). The chronology of the Romance and the Basque developments allows viewing the latter as a contact induced change as well (remarkably the development of the partitive article at its onset also involved Ibero-Romance (Carlier & Lamiroy 2014: 502-504). In our paper we will elaborate on the details of the developments described above. Issues to be addressed include the extension of a partitive-like case in other Uralic and IE languages of the Circum-Baltic and neighboring areas (e.g. Germanic, Mordvin), and patterns of possible syncretism which include the partitive. We will also discuss putative parallels in Turkic and Mongolic languages (Pakendorf 2007), and argue that they are only apparent. In particular, we show that misunderstandings are brought about by inconsistent use of the word ‘partitive’, which indicates both partitivity involving part/whole relations, and partitive case markers as those described here (Heine & Kuteva 2002), which have nothing to do with part/whole relations (Luraghi & Kittilä 2014). We conclude by highlighting the peculiarity of partitive case markers/determiners, which have little parallels outside Europe.

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