The use of the partitive case in Finnish learner language:

Estonian, German and Dutch learners’ use of partitive subjects

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Corpora & Language Dynamics
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Starting point

- **Schot-Saikku (1990):**
  Partitive case often problematic for learners of Finnish

- **Denison (1957:15):**
  "The most baffling and at the same time the most intriguing problem which the foreign student of Finnish syntax has to face"
Ph.D. project

- Corpus study on the use of partitive objects, subjects and predicatives in Finnish learner language
- Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish
- Nature of the partitive case in learner language
- Role of L1 influence
Design: Source languages

- Genetic and typological distance:
  - the more similar a learner’s source language and a learner’s target language are, the easier it is to learn the target language in question
  
  (Ringbom, 1987)

1. Estonian: closely related to Finnish,
2. German / Dutch: Indo-European, Germanic languages
Design: Source languages

- **Typological distance:**
- A target language’s linguistic phenomenon is assumed to be more difficult to acquire, when the phenomenon in question does not exist in the learner’s native language (*Kaivapalu, 2008*)

1. **Estonian:** partitive case
2. **German:** four grammatical cases; no partitive case
3. **Dutch:** no cases
The use of partitive subjects

- What are Estonian, German and Dutch learners’ major stumble blocks in the use of the partitive subject?
- Does L1 influence play a role?
- => partitive subjects – existential sentences
## Existential sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Initial Word</th>
<th>Example sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Il y a</td>
<td>Il y a beaucoup à faire et à voir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>C'è</td>
<td>C'è molta da fare e da vedere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Det finns</td>
<td>Det finns mycket att göra och att se.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Es gibt</td>
<td>Es gibt viel zu tun und zu sehen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Er is</td>
<td>Er is veel te doen en te zien.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>There is</td>
<td>There is a lot to do and to see.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finnish existential sentence

- No subject-verb agreement
- Third person singular of *olla* (‘to be’) or another existential verb
- The postverbal subject (e-subject) alternates between nominative and partitive
- Existential sentences - Possessive sentences
  - *Kadulla on auto* (street-Adess be-3Sg car(Nom))  
    ‘There is car on the street.’
  - *Hänellä on uusi auto* (he-Adess be-3Sg new car(Nom))
    ‘He has a new car.’
### Subject case alternation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTITIVE EXISTENTIAL SUBJECT</th>
<th>NOMINATIVE EXISTENTIAL SUBJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-subject denoting an unbounded quantity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Affirmative sentences containing subjects that denote a bounded quantity</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Pöydällä on leipää.  
  ‘There is (some) bread on the table.’ | |
| - Pöydällä on kirjoja.  
  ‘There are (some) books on the table.’ | - Pöydällä on leipää.  
  ‘There is a (loaf of) bread on the table.’ |
| **Negative sentences** | |
| - Pöydällä ei ole leipää.  
  ‘There is no (loaf of) bread on the table.’ | - Pöydällä on kirja.  
  ‘There is a book on the table’ |
| - Pöydällä ei ole kirjaa.  
  ‘There is no book on the table.’ | |
| - Pöydällä ei ole kirjoja.  
  ‘There are no books on the table.’ | |
Materials

International Corpus of Learner Finnish

SUBCORPORA

Estonian
LC 38.195

German
LC 27.672

Dutch
LC 37.228

REFERENCE CORPUS

native Finnish corpus 2.768.670
Frequency analysis: An overview

![Frequency analysis chart](chart.png)

- Partitive objects
- Partitive predicatives
- Partitive subjects

Categories: Dutch LC, German LC, Estonian LC, Native reference

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Frequency analysis
The occurrence of partitive subjects

![Bar chart showing relative frequencies of realized partitive subjects in Dutch LC, German LC, Estonian LC, and Native Finnish RC.](image)
The occurrence of partitive subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Log Likelihood test (LL)</th>
<th>p Value</th>
<th>Critical Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch LC vs. reference corpus</td>
<td>LL = 3.86</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German LC vs. reference corpus</td>
<td>LL = 15.75</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td>15.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian LC vs. reference corpus</td>
<td>LL = 0.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The occurrence of partitive subjects

![Bar chart showing relative frequencies of partitive subjects in Dutch LC, German LC, Estonian LC, and Native Finnish RC.](chart.png)

**Relative Frequencies**

1. **Dutch LC**
2. **German LC**
3. **Estonian LC**
4. **Native Finnish RC**

**Significance Levels**

- ***** 0.0001 (+)**
- *** 0.05 (–)**

**Annotations**

- **(–)** = sign. underuse in comparison to the RC
- **(+)** = sign. underuse in comparison to the RC
Partitive subject overuse errors

![Bar chart showing the relative frequencies of correctly used partitive subjects and overuse errors for Dutch LC, German LC, Estonian LC, and Native Finnish RC.](image)
Correct use of partitive subjects

The diagram shows the relative frequencies of correctly used partitive subjects in Dutch LC, German LC, Estonian LC, and Native Finnish RC. The frequencies are calculated as (raw frequencies / corpus size) * 100.
Partitive subject underuse errors / obligatory contexts for partitive subjects

The diagram shows the relative frequencies of correctly used partitive subjects and underuse errors for different languages and contexts. The x-axis represents different languages and contexts: Dutch LC, German LC, Estonian LC, and Native Finnish RC. The y-axis represents the relative frequencies ((raw frequencies / corpus size) * 100). The colors indicate correctly used partitive subjects (blue) and underuse errors (yellow).
Observed main error types

1. Overgeneralization of the partitive e-subject to the subject of basic (in)transitive sentences => partitive overuse errors (part. instead of nom.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lainasanoja</strong>- <em>Part.Pl</em> voivat kartuttaa kieltä. (German LC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Loanwords can enrich a language.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Minä halveksin ihmisä, <strong>joita</strong>-<em>Part.Pl</em> tekevät näin. (German LC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I despise people that do that.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mutta <strong>tutkimusta</strong>-<em>Part.Sg</em> näyttää, että (…) (German LC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘But research shows that (…)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observed main error types

2. Undergeneralization of the partitive as the case of the subject of the existential sentence

=> partitive underuse errors (nom. instead of part.)

**EXAMPLES**

On myös **tutkijat-** *Nom.Pl*, jotka väittävät (...) (Dutch LC)
‘There are also (some) researchers that claim (…)’

On varmasti **toiset keinot-** *Nom.Pl* (...) (German LC)
‘There are definitely (some) other ways (…)’

Kaupassa oli **ihanat banaanit-** *Nom.Pl* (Estonian LC)
‘There were (some) fantastic bananas in the shop.’
Observed main error types

2A. Polarity has not been taken into account as a factor that affects the case of the existential subject => partitive underuse errors (nom. instead of part.)

EXAMPLES

Annalla ei ole siihen hyvä syy-*Nom.Sg (Dutch LC)
‘Anna does not have a good reason for that.’

Minulla ei ole sisko-*Nom.Sg (Estonian LC)
‘I do not have a sister.’

Hänellä ei ole työ-*Nom.Sg (German LC)
‘He/she does not have a job.’
**Observed main error types**

2B. Agreement + undergeneralization of the partitive e-subject

=> partitive underuse errors (nom. instead of part.)

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<tr>
<td>Helsingissä <em>ovat</em> <strong>vanhat kirkot</strong>- <em>Nom.Pl</em> (Dutch LC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘In Helsinki, there are old churches.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Target structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helsingissä <em>on</em> <strong>vanoja kirkkoja</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘In Helsinki, there are old churches.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ~ Vanhat kirkot *ovat* **Helsingissä**. |
| ‘The old churches are in Helsinki.’ |

existential sentence vs. basic intransitive sentence
The Estonian vs. Finnish existential sentence:
‘There is a book ~ there are books on the table.’

Based on Nemvalts (1996)
Observed main error types

2B. Agreement + undergeneralization of the partitive e-subject

=> difference between Estonian and Finnish e-sentences

(L1 influence?)

EXAMPLE

Pöydällä ovat kirjat-*Nom.Pl

• table-Iness be-3Pl book-*Nom.Pl

‘There are books on the table.’

Estonian counterparts

Laual on raamatuid partitive / no agreement

Laual on raamatud nominative / agreement (3Pl = 3Sg = on)
Conclusions
The use of partitive subjects

Why is it that difficult for foreigners to learn how to use the partitive case?

Major stumbling-blocks in the use of partitive subjects:

• rules (broader in scope than the rules concerning E-subjects though =>):
  • basic subject vs. e-subject
  • basic sentences vs. existential sentence
  • differences between Estonian and Finnish e-sentences
Kiitos

Kiitos käyttäjäsi, ja kiitos käyttäjäsi Laura.
Kiitos on aika.