

Partitive subjects and the verbal indexing

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1 Introduction

Partitives are understood here as grammatical constructions that may be used to encode the true-partitive relation (cf. *some of our students*), which crucially involves two (normally) distinct sets of referents of the same kind, without relying on contextual inferences (Seržant 2021a, 2021b drawing on von Heusinger 2002; von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2017; von Heusinger, Kornfilt & Kizilkaya 2019; Hoeksema 1996).¹ Partitives obligatorily encode a quantifier (e.g. *some* in *some of our students*) and the restrictor (*our students*). Partitives are often encoded by a special marker (*of*) or lexically.

In addition to the true-partitive meaning which is definitional for partitives here, partitives are sometimes used to encode plain quantification, e.g. ‘some words’ in *a bunch of words*. This use does not encode the true-partitive relation but rather simply quantifies the NP in the restrictor. This use of the partitive construction is referred to as pseudo-partitives (Selkirk 1977).

Quite frequently partitives generalize the indefinite quantifier ‘some, any’ as part of their inherent meaning. In this case, the quantifier is no longer expressed overtly and there is only a restrictor NP. For example, the partitive expression ‘of his colleagues’ in (1b) does not have an explicit expression of the quantifier which, in this case, has to be understood as ‘some’ while other frequent meanings of the quantifier such as ‘one (of)’, ‘most (of)’ or ‘the majority (of)’ are excluded:

- (1) Lithuanian (Indo-European; p. k.)
- a. *Mačiau keletą jo kolegų.*
see.PST.1SG **some.ACC** 3SG.GEN colleague.GEN(=PART).PL
‘I saw **some** of his colleagues.’
- b. *Mačiau jo kolegų.*
see.PST.1SG 3SG.GEN colleague.GEN(=PART).PL
‘I saw [**some**] of his colleagues.’

I refer to this type of partitives as *generalized partitives*.

Since partitives in general and generalized partitives in particular are most frequently indefinite they are mostly found in the object, sometimes in the intransitive-subject and only rarely in the transitive-subject position due to the well-known dispreference of transitive subjects for indefinite referents. Some languages even do not allow partitives in the (transitive) subject position altogether. However, if partitives are allowed in the subject position, there may be different ways how they are indexed on the verb (on indexing see Haspelmath 2013; Lazard 1998).² In this paper, I present an overview of indexing strategies that languages employ.

¹ Contextual inferences are understood in the narrow sense, excluding anaphora resolution.

² I avoid the more traditional terms *bound pronouns* or *agreement markers* (cf. Corbett 2006) and follow Lazard (1998) and Haspelmath (2013) and refer to these as (*bound person-number*) *indexes* (already introduced in Boelaars 1950 or earlier). Furthermore, I avoid the notions *pro-drop* and *agreement* which are ill-advised for many reasons (see Haspelmath 2013 with further literature).

2 Indexing the quantifier, the restrictor or none

In the languages of Europe, partitive subjects are indexed on the verb along the number and person of the explicit quantifier, cf. the third-person plural and first-person singular quantifiers in (2) and (3), respectively:

(2) *Some of our students are really good.*

(3) Russian (p.k.)

Iz vsech prepodavatelej tol'ko ja ne pojdu na večerinku.
from all.GEN.PL lecturer.GEN.PL only 1SG.NOM NEG go.PFV.1SG on party
'From all lecturerers only I won't go to the party.'

This situation is expected since the verb generally indexes the head of the NP in these languages:

(4) *The house in the States was shabby.*

Generalized partitives lack an explicit quantifier. Accordingly, many languages of Europe do not index generalized partitives on the verb at all, for example, Russian, Basque, Lithuanian, Ossetic (with the exception of coordinated partitives, see below), or Turkish. The verb carries the default third-person singular form, for example in Turkish:

(5) Turkish (Turkic; Özyıldız 2017: 889)

Öğrenci-ler-den gel-di.
student-PL-ABL(PART) come-PST.3SG
'(Some of the) students came.'

It is always the third singular form regardless of the number and person properties of the generalized partitive. Non-indexing is even more evident in Lithuanian, because this language has a dedicated non-agreeing form of the participle that is used with subjects that lack person and number properties (e.g. infinitives):

(6) Lithuanian (Indo-European, p.k.)

Mūsų studentų buvo ten atsirad-ę
1PL.GEN student.GEN(PART).PL be.3PST there appear.PTCP.ACT-NONAGREEING
'(Some) of our students had appeared there.'

However, there are also languages in which the quantifier of a generalized partitive is indexed. In the following example of a generalized partitive from Garifuna, the quantifier, which is third plural, is indexed, but not the restrictor, which is first plural:

(7) Garifuna (Awakan; South America; Barchas-Lichtenstein 2012: 189):

Ēibagua-tiyan wá-dagiya.
run-3PL 1PL-from(PART)
'(Some) of us ran.'

In these languages, the verbal index is the only coding of the referent of the quantifier. The partitive reminds of split exponence here: the quantifier of the generalized partitive is the verbal index while the restrictor is coded in the partitive NP. Likewise, in Ancient Greek, the verbal

index provides the (number) properties of the quantifier of generalized partitives (Seržant 2012). In (8), the verbal index refers to a singular quantifier while in (9) it refers to a plural quantifier:

- (8) Ancient Greek (Eur. Her. 976-7)
ouk ésti thnētôn, hóstis ...
 NEG be.3SG mortal.GEN(PART).PL REL.NOM.SG
 ‘There exists not a (single one) of mortals who (would rescue him).’
- (9) Ancient Greek (Arist. Hist. Anim. 513a)
Eisì de kai tôn peri fúsin
 be.PRS.3PL PRT and DET.GEN(=PART).PL about nature
 ‘There **are [some]** of the nature philosophers ...’

Examples of generalized partitives in the subject position whose quantifier is only coded on the verb via indexing are found in other languages as well (possibly also in Tlingit (Athabaskan), cf. Leer 1991: 135):

- (10) Modern Eastern Armenian (Indo-European; Dum-Tragut 2009: 313)
Āradioyov herarjak-v-um ēin Hovhannes
 radio.ins broadcast-PASS-PTCP.PRS AUX.3PL.PST Hovhannes
T’umanyan-i patmvack’-ner-ic’.
 T’umanyan-DAT story-PL-ABL(PART)
 ‘(Some) of Hovhannes T’umanyan’s stories were broadcasted on the radio.’
- (11) Jibbali (Afroasiatic, Semitic; Oman; Hofstede 1998: 42)
mən é-yó dcod yəzir iḳbért
 from(PART) DEF-people still visit.IMPF.3M.PL DEF.tomb
 ‘(some) people still visit a (saint’s) tomb’

Above I have discussed partitives with the true-partitive meaning relying on a proportion between two distinct sets. Partitives, however, may also pattern as pseudo-partitives. In this case, their meaning is the one of plain quantification or measure phrase. Under this meaning, their syntactic structure tends to shrink into one NP (Selkirk 1977). Accordingly, the verb indexes the number value of the entire partitive construction. This development is frequently found with headed partitives, turned quantification phrases:

- (12) *There are a lot of cars.*

The former head *a lot* is obviously a singular noun historically. Nevertheless, the verb indexes the plural of *cars*. The entire meaning is the one of plain quantification with no relation to the true-partitive meaning.

Similarly, generalized pseudo-partitives, which encode the meaning of indefinite quantification (similar to ‘some/any’) of objects encoded by the restrictor NP, may require plural index on the verb in some languages. Thus, in French, the generalized pseudo-partitive turned completely into an indefinite-plural expression that is no longer case-marked. Accordingly, the verb indexes the plural:

- (13) *Des hommes sont venus.*
 PART.PL man.PL AUX.3PL gone
 ‘Some people went.’

Similarly, cross-indexing of the superset is found occasionally in Veps (Lytkin & Majtinskaja 1975: 108) and occasionally in North Russian (e.g. around Onega lake) (Seržant 2014: 311–313):

- (14) North Russian (Seržant 2015: 142)
Tut-to medvedej byvajut, tol’ko malo
 here-PRT bear.GEN.PL occur.3PL only few
 ‘There are bears here, but only few.’ (lit. ‘There are of bears here, only a few.’)

- (15) Veps (Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli 2001: 568)
mamšid’ ni’abad
 woman.PART.PL carry.PRS.3PL
 ‘Women carry ...’

The situation in Ossetic is not entirely clear. The ablative subjects trigger plural agreement only if they occur in coordination, in which case it is not entirely clear whether there is semantic indexing (*Peter, John and Bill are ...*) or whether the ablative NPs themselves are indexed with plural on the verb (note that the number of the ablative NPs is singular):

- (16) Ossetic (Ossetic National Corpus,³ courtesy of Oleg Belyaev)
Fos-εj, ts’u-εj, sabi-je sε fellad uαk-oj
 cattle-ABL bird-ABL child-ABL their labour leave-PST.3PL
 ‘Cattle, birds, children were resting.’

Above I have discussed instances of quantifier indexing and non-indexing. In what follows I provide examples in which the restrictor is indexed. In the following example from Warapu, the verb indexes the second person (plural), that is, the referent of the restrictor, while the quantifiers ‘one’ and ‘some’ are likely to be third person:

- (17) Warapu (Sko; Papua New-Guinea; Corris 2005: 158)
Ra n-amá-ute, owu n-o-ké(p)í.
 one IRR-2SG.M-walk some IRR-2PL.M-sit
 ‘One of you will go, some of you will stay.’

Likewise, the first person partitive pronoun of Eibela ‘of us’ marked via the locative affix *-je:* on the first-person plural form *ni:* is indexed on the verb as first person, while the quantifier is evidently a third person:

- (18) Eibela (Bosavi; Papua New-Guinea; Aiton 2016: 371)
ni:je: la: smene:na: kei di-si
 1.PART DET go.1.FUT ASSERT PFV-MED.PFV
 ‘(U:gei said) “Some of us will also go.”’

³ <http://corpus.ossetic-studies.org/search/>

In the following example the NP *kiñekentu* ‘some’ – literally ‘ones’ and formally a group derivation from the noun *kiñe* ‘one’ – encodes the quantifier while the verbal index *-iñ* (1PL) encodes the restrictor:

- (19) Mapuche (Araucanian; Chile; Smeets 2008: 382; glosses adapted)
kiñekentu tripa-y-iñ ðoy kiñe tripantu.
 some.PL go.out-IND-1PL more one year
 ‘Some of us left for more than a year.’

Bininj-Gun-Wok requires the demonstrative and relativizing adnominal marker *-wu(-bu)* for the partitive meaning of *yika* ‘some’ (Evans 2003: 131–132). In the following example, the verb indexes the restrictor, i.e., the first plural (“non-augmented” in Evans 2003) and not the quantifier ‘some’:

- (20) Bininj-Gun-Wok (Evans 2003: 495)
wanjh yika na-wu ngarri-ngime ku-rurrk ngarri-djarrk-yo-y.
 well some M-REL 1PL-enter.NON-PST LOC-house 1PL-together-sleep-PST.PFV
balanda-dorreng, dja yika na-wu wurdwurd birri-lobme-ng.
 white-with and some M-REL children 3PL-run-PST.PFV
 ‘Some of our people went into the dormitory, and slept among white people;
 but some of the children ran away.’

In Tatar, the verb optionally may index either the explicit quantifier (cf. §2.1) or the restrictor (Lyutikova, forthc.):

- (21) Tatar (Turkic; Russia; Lyutikova, forthc.; glosses adapted)
berär-egez şuşı kijem-ne kij-ep irkenlek-kä čig-ıp kit-ärgä
 any-2PL this clothing-ACC put_on-CNV space-DAT exit-CNV go-INF
telä-mi-sez-me?
 want-NEG.IPF-2PL-Q
 ‘Would anyone of you put on this clothing and go outside?’

3 Conclusions

In this paper I have provided an overview of different indexing patterns of partitive subjects. While some languages simply employ the default, non-indexing verb form, in other languages, the verb tends to index either the quantifier or the restrictor. Interestingly, the choice of the former or the latter strategy seems to correlate with the degree to which languages allow for the subject referents to be solely expressed by indexing (soc. *pro*-drop). Lithuanian is a counterexample here since this language predominantly expresses the anaphoric subject by indexing only, but, at the same time, employs only the non-indexing form.

Author note

It is a great pleasure indeed to contribute to this Festschrift in honor of Klaus von Heusinger. He was not only the mentor of my habilitation thesis devoted to partitives but he was also the first and the only one I have so extensively consulted on this topic since back in 2010 in Stuttgart.

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