The Finnish partitive case: insights from L2 acquisition

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the partitive case in L2 Finnish. The partitive has developed from a separative or ablative case (Aikio 2022) into a structural case (Kiparsky 1998, among others) and in modern Finnish it has always been considered as one of the hardest aspects to be acquired by non-native speakers (Denison 1957; Heinämäki 1994; Huumo 2005, 2010, 2020). The difficulties with the partitive in second and foreign language acquisition are generally assumed to be due to the many functions that the partitive case can have. With reference to object, the partitive is related to: quantity, negation and unboundedness of the event. In order to answer the question whether learners of Finnish make a distinction between the different circumstances under which the object partitive is required, an online task was created. The results show a clear hierarchy of the partitive contexts: negation was the context with less variability whereas aspect was the one with more difficulties for L2ers.

Keywords

Finnish; L2 acquisition; morphological cases; partitive case

1. Partitive: what it was and what it is.

Several works have been written on the Finnish partitive case and its history. The aim of this section is to summarize the main stages of its development from a historical and terminological point of view.

The first mentions of the Finnish nominal declension appear in the 17th century in Petreaus (*Linguae Finnicae brevis institution*, 1649) and Martinius (*Hodegus Finnicus*, 1689) but their descriptions are based on Latin declension and nomenclature, as it was the language used among scholars at that time.

 | SFU – Studi Finno-Ugrici, n.s. 3 (2023), 1-26 | ISSN 1826-753X
https://doi.org/10.6093/1826-753X/10968

No mention of partitive as a separate case is made, as Latin does not have a proper partitive. At that time, the partitive case ending was included under the label of 'accusative' as a (morphological) variant of it. Bartholdus Vael (1733) was the first one to present a more detailed description of the Finnish case system and distinguished between two subcategories of the accusative: *accusativus totalis*, corresponding to the accusative (*-n* in singular and *-t* in plural, and *accusativus partialem*, corresponding to partitive (*-a/-ä* and *-ta/-tä*). Since then, the partitive case has been identified as separate and its name has varied: it has been called *quantitativus* (Renvall 1815), *infinitivus* (von Becker 1824), *osanto* (from *osa* 'part', Eurén 1852), and finally *casus partitivus* in Koskinen (1860) (cf. Spoelman 2013 for a review). The term 'partitive' became established in Setälä's grammar (1926) and since then has been extensively adopted by grammarians and scholars (Denison 1957; Hakulinen 1968; Itkonen 1974, 1982; Larjavaara 1991; Leino 1991; Huumo 2006, *et alii*).

The most recent work on the partitive case is, as to our knowledge, Matti Larjavaara's *Partitiivin valinta* (2019, The choice of partitive) which includes a whole chapter devoted to the development of the partitive case since its use as a separative case[1]. While partitive case endings have not undergone any remarkable changes, the syntactic-semantic and pragmatic aspects have undergone a significant evolution over the centuries.

Larjavaara (2019, 50-115) resumes the evolution of Finnish partitive case in three main stages.

(i) The first stage is found during the early Proto-Finnic (3000-2500 BCE - 0 CE) when the use of a separative case **tA* meaning 'from somewhere' is attested. This is considered the ancestor of the modern partitive. This early separative case has been reconstructed by comparing linguistic data from Baltic (Finnish, Estonian, Veps, among others), Saami, Mordvin (Erzya and Moksha), Mari, and Samoyedic languages. This separative case became little by little a real partitive through a semantic expansion and the acquisition of new grammatical functions (such as object marking). At the same time

[1] On the historical development of partitive case see also Helasvuo (2001), Huumo (2013), Luraghi and Huumo (2014). For a different approach based more on language contact and possible influence from the Baltic languages see Kont (1961) and Larsson (1983), among others.

this developing partitive got a quantitative meaning in opposition to the accusative case[2]. (61)

(1) a. *Syön kalan*[3].
I eat fish-acc
b. Syön kalaa.
I eat fish-part
'I eat fish (from the fish)'

(ii) During the second stage, the mid Proto-Finnic, the object marking partitive started to be related to (unbounded) aspect and, in parallel, the accusative/nominative began to be used for the bounded aspect, or in other words, partitive *vs* accusative/nominative stood for the open/non-punctual *vs* punctual opposition. Even though the seed for this change was the quantitative partitive that developed in Early Proto-Finnic, the change towards an aspectual use of partitive only took place later. (88)

(2) a. *Syön* *nyt* *kalaa.*
eat-pres.1sg now fish-part.sg
'I'm now eating fish.'

Finally, according to Larjavaara it is also plausible to assume that it was in mid proto-Finnic that the partitive of negation emerged and by the end of this period it became widespread across all sentence types. This development possibly occurred under the influence of a Baltic equivalent to some extent.

[2] I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that the initial phases of the transformation of separative **tA* into an object encoding case can be traced back as far as to Western Uralic, the proto-language stage from which Finnic, Saami, and Mordvin languages emerged. This is visible in Erzya Mordvin where the very same suffix is used to encode partial object (cf. Bartens 1999; Hamari and Ajanki 2022).

[3] The following abbreviations are used: NOM nominative, GEN genitive, PART partitive, ACC accusative, INE inessive, ELA elative, ILL illative, ADE adessive, ABL ablative, ALL allative, SEP separative, PRES present, PAST simple past tense.

(3) a. *En syö* *kalaa.*
neg-1sg eat fish-part.sg
'I don't eat fish.'

(iii) The third stage is closer to our age and corresponds to when the partitive case started to appear also in predicative constructions, (4)a. This use of partitive case has not spread outside Finland and partitive in predicative constructions is not attested in any related Finno-Ugric languages, as exemplified by the contrast between Estonian and Finnish.

(4) a. *Miehet* *ovat* *kalastajia.* (Finnish)
men are fishermen-part.pl
'The men are fishermen.'
b. *Mehed* *on* *kalurid.* (Estonian)
men is fishermen-nom.pl
'The men are fishermen.'
(from Larjavaara 2019, 51)

Larjavaara (2019) summarizes derived meanings of the partitive case under five main labels, as schematized in Figure 1:

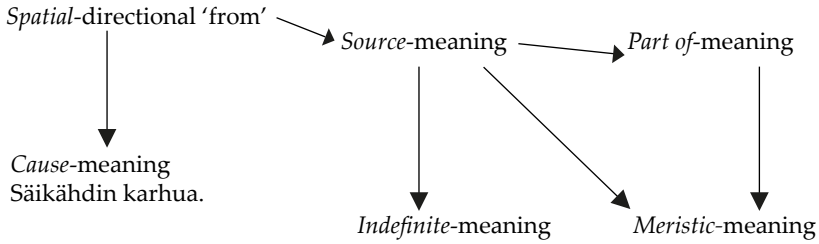

Figure 1 – The development of partitive's meanings, from Larjavaara (67).

It is worth mentioning that the historical ancestor of the partitive, the separative, is represented in present-day Finnish by two cases indicating separation ('from somewhere'), elative (*-stA*) and ablative (*-ltA*). Both

separative cases have evolved from the ancient separative case **tA*. As we can see, preceding **tA*, there is consistently a suffix indicating either inner or outer locations[4].

(5) a. *Opiskelija* *tuli* *huoneesta.*
student-nom come-past.3sg room-ela
'The men are fishermen.'

b. *Kissa* *hyppäsi* *pöydältä.*
cat-nom jump-past.3sg table-abl
'The cat jumped from the table.'

Interestingly, elative, in addition to its pure locative meaning, is used in the so-called partitive constructions, as in (6)a-b whereas partitive is not, (6)c:

(6) a. *kolme* *lapsista*
three children-ela.pl
'Three of the children.'

b. *suurin osa* *meidän* *opiskelijoista*
biggest part we-gen student-ela.pl
'The majority of our students.'

c. **kaksi teitä*
two you-part.pl
'Two of you.'

[4] In fossilized expressions such as (i), or in postpositions, such as (ii), the former **tA* still encodes pure separative function.

(i) *Tulen* *koto-a.*
come-pres.1sg home-sep
'I come from home.'

(ii) *Kissa* *tuli* *puun* *taka-a*
cat-nom come-past.3sg tree-gen behind-sep
'The cat came from behind the tree.'

In contrast, the proper partitive is used in constructions known in literature as pseudo-partitive constructions. In these constructions elative case is ruled out, as we see from the contrast in (7):

(7)	a.	*lasillinen*	*viiniä*
		glass	wine-part.sg
		'A glass of wine.'	
	b.	**lasillinen*	*viinistä*
		glass	wine-ela.sg

Lastly, in the past the partitive was indicated morphologically by the ending *-tA*. Nowadays, in addition, we find the following syncretic forms, which vary according to the root form of the noun to which the ending attaches.

Partitive singular	Partitive plural
-A, -tA, -ttA	*-(i)A, -(i)tA*

As well as using the partitive for the object of transitive verbs, it can also be used for the subject of existential sentences and in predicative clauses. In the present work we focus on the partitive in object position and ignore its other functions.

In conclusion, the partitive has developed from a separative case meaning 'from somewhere' to a 'structural' or 'grammatical' case with multiple functions. First of all, it can appear in the subject of existential sentences, in predicative constructions or in the object of transitive verbs. Then, focusing on the object marking partitive, we saw that it has evolved to be related to three main functions: quantity, aspect, and negation.

2. The main functions of partitive case

As we have seen, the partitive case is multifunctional, which in contemporary Finnish can appear under different syntactic and semantic circumstances. It can occur in three main constructions: as the subject of existential sentences, in predicative constructions and as the object of

transitive verbs. The latter seems to be one of the hardest things to learn for learners of Finnish and it is the one on which we focus in this section. It is generally accepted that the object marking partitive is related to three main functions: quantification (unbounded quantity), aspect (for which several terms have been used: irresultative, atelic, unbounded), and negation (ISK 2004, § 920: Kiparsky 2005; Huumo 2020; Larjavaara 2021, among others). The general function of partitive is to indicate 'incompleteness' in terms of 'unboundedness' (Kiparsky 1998, 2005; Heinämäki 1994) or 'unaffectedness' (Thomas 2003), of the event and/or of the object. Even if the three abovementioned functions can be distinguished, it is also true that they may partially or totally overlap and in some case they can hardly be disentangled within the same sentence (cf. Leino 1991; Huumo 2020, among others) if no further context is provided, as exemplified in (8) for which three readings are possible: in (8)a we have a progressive reading for which the action of eating has not been completed, in (8)b the partitive is only related to unbounded quantity (but not aspect), and in (8)c the two components (aspectual and quantificational) interact.

(8) *Jussi* *söi* *keittoa.*
Jussi eat-past.3sg soup-part.sg
a. Jussi was eating the soup.
b. Jussi ate some soup (but didn't finish it).
c. Jussi was eating some of the soup.
(adapted from Huumo 2020, ex. 11)

This possibility to have multiple interpretations is assumed to be strictly related to the historical development of partitive case from a separative case to a case indicating, in order, a part of something, indefinite quantity, aspectual unboundedness, and finally marking the object under negation (Larjavaara 1991, 2019).

In the sense of incompleteness/unboundedness of the object or of the event, the partitive is often put in contraposition with the total object, with which it alternates, and which conversely is related to completeness/boundedness, as exemplified in (9) and (10).

(9) a. *Aamulla* *Mari* *juo* *kahvia*.
(some coffee, unbounded quantity)
morning-ade Mari drink-pres. 3sg coffee-part
'In the morning Mari drinks coffee.'

b. *Aamulla* *Mari* *juo* *kahvin*.
(one coffee, bounded quantity)
morning-ade Mari drink-pres. 3sg coffee-acc
'In the morning Mari drinks a/the/one coffee.'

(10) a. *Jere* *luki* *kirjaa,* *kun puhelin* *soi*.
(unbounded event)
Jere-nom read-past.3sg book-part when phone-nom ring-past.3sg
'Jere was reading a/the book when the phone rang.'

b. *Jere* *luki* *kirjan* *ja lähti* *salille*.
(bounded event)
Jere-nom read-past.3sg book-acc and leave-past.3sg gym-all
'Jere was reading a/the book and went to the gym.'

The partitive and total objects in (9)a-b, respectively, are related to quantity, but not to aspect, and conversely the partitive and total objects in (10)a-b are related to aspect, but not to quantity.

2.1 Partitive and quantification

The partitive is related to quantification and more specifically to weak quantification. Quantifiers, when weak or expressing cardinality, occur under the same circumstances and in Finnish they occur with the partitive. Hence, the term 'quantificational partitive' is used to identify this specific

use (Thomas 2003; Kiparsky 2005). The partitive is assigned to objects to denote unbounded quantity, as exemplified from the contrast in (11)a-b for the singular and (12)a-b for the plural.

(11) a. *Syön* *kalaa.*
eat-1sg fish-part.sg.
'I eat (some) fish.'

b. *Syön* *kalan.*
eat-1sg fish-acc.sg.
'I eat a/the fish.'

(12) a. *Syön* *kaloja.*
eat-1sg fish-part.pl.
'I eat (some of) the fish.' (an indefinite number of fish)

b. *Syön* *kalat.*
eat-1sg fish-acc.pl.
'I eat the fish.' (some specific fish)

(13) a. *Maailma* *tarvitsee* *rauhaa.*
world-nom need-pres.3sg peace-part

b. **Maailma* *tarvitsee* *rauhan.*
world-nom need-pres.3sg peace-acc
'The world needs peace.'

The object in the partitive case should be a singular mass noun denoting an indefinite quantity, (11)a, or a plural noun denoting an unbounded set of entities, (12)a, or an abstract noun, (13)a, which differently from the previous two cases cannot alternate with a total object. The examples above also show how interrelated are quantitative boundedness and definiteness in Finnish and this is particularly visible in the examples in plural: (12)b denoting not only a bounded quantity of fish but also a specific set of fish, which is known in the discourse context (on partitive related to definiteness see Chesterman 1991). The same contrast is not straightforward in the singular example in (11)a-b.

In addition, partitive case is also required with weak quantifiers such as numerals (except *yksi* 'one'), when uninflected, and with *paljon* 'many', *vähän* 'a little/few', *hiukan* 'a bit, some'.

(14) a. *Luin* *kolme* *kirjaa*.
read-pres.1sg three book-part.sg
b. *Ostin* *kolme* *kirjaa*.
buy-pres.1sg many book-part.pl

2.2 Partitive and aspect

The partitive case is traditionally related to incompleteness or irresultativeness of the event (Leino 1991; Sulkala 1996; Vilkuna 2000; ISK/ Hakulinen *et al*. 2004) also referred to as 'lack of culmination' (Huumo 2020). Differently from languages in which aspect is marked on the verb (e.g., Russian) or by the imperfective tense of the verb, in Finnish it relies (mostly) on the nominal part of the sentence, i.e., on the object (Huumo 2005, among others). For verbs that can alternate between a partitive and a total object, we can have the following contrast, for example:

(15) a. *Luin* *kirjaa* *koko illan*.
read-pres.1sg book-part.sg whole evening
'I read the book during the whole evening.'
b. *Luin* *kirjan*, *kun puhelin soi/*koko illan*.
read-pres.1sg book-part.sg when phone rang/whole evening
'I read the book when the phone rang / *the whole evening.'

With a partitive object, the event of reading has a progressive interpretation, it is associated with irresultativeness, and can thus take a durative modifier, (15)a, whereas the total object is related to resultativeness and only a cessative interpretation is possible (Leino 1991; Huumo 2005; 2010, 2020, among others).

It is important to note that in Finnish the interpretation of aspect in a sentence is not solely dependent on verb features; rather, it's the combination of different aspectual elements within the sentence that ultimately

determines the overall aspect. Finnish verbs can be categorized into different aspectual groups based on the objects they typically associate with, and they have been traditionally classified in verbs that can take a total or a partitive object depending on the aspectual (or quantificational, as discussed in section 2.1) features, and verbs more strongly requiring a partitive object. This kind of classifications into various categories, which vary slightly among different scholars, serves as a valuable foundation for comprehending the aspectual object case alternation.

Just to mention a few of the most relevant proposals, Leino (1991) bases his classification on the notion of resultativity: the interpretation is resultative, when it is completed and leads to a result, whereas it can be considered irresultative when there is no clear endpoint. This author thus suggests that Finnish transitive verbs can thus be classified into four categories:

(i) irresultative verbs (which include activity verbs, such as *opiskella* 'to study', *etsiä*[5] 'look for' and emotion verbs such as *rakastaa* 'love', *pelätä* 'fear' *jatkaa* 'continue',) that take a partitive object,
(ii) resultative verbs (such as *löytää* 'to find', *huomata* 'notice') that take a total object
(iii) ambivalent verbs that can take either a partitive or a total object such as *lukea* 'read', *kirjoittaa* 'write', *ampua* 'shoot',
(iv) quasi-resultative verbs (such as *kuulla* 'hear', *nähdä* 'see', *omistaa* 'own'). In Huumo (2005) quasi-resultative verbs are further subdivided into verbs of perception, mental verbs and verbs of state or location.

Another influential categorization comes from Kiparsky (1998, 2005) who suggests a classification of verbs based on the notion of boundedness. More specifically, he suggests a tripartite classification:

(i) telic verbs, which in the majority are bounded, and assign a total object,

[5] Notice however that for verbs such as *opiskella* 'to study' and *etsiä* 'to look for' the object can occur in genetive-accusative as well (cf. later proposals such as e.g., ISK 2004).

(ii) atelic verbs, which in the majority are unbounded, and consist of verbs denoting psychological state, intention, a continuous motion or contact (such as: *rakastaa* 'love', *suudella* 'kiss', *onnitella* 'congratulate', *väsyttää* 'tire', *ravistella* 'shake') and

(iii) verbs that assign accusative or partitive depending on the boundedness of the VP and consist of verbs denoting creation, destruction, events whose progress is mapped out into the parts of the object and verbs with different meanings depending on the case of the object (such as *syödä* 'eat', *ommella* 'sew', *rakentaa* 'build', *avata* 'open', *kirjoittaa* 'write', *tuhota* 'destroy')[6].

The most comprehensive descriptive grammar of Finnish, *Iso suomen kielioppi* (Hakulinen *et al*. 2004, § 1508-1510), presents a more simplified classification in only three categories: (i) unbounded verbs taking a partitive object (fin. *rajapakoinen*, verbs such as *ihailla* 'admire', *rakastaa* 'love', *ajatella* 'think', *auttaa* 'help', *odottaa* 'to wait'), (ii) bounded verbs taking a total object and 'looking for boundedness' (fin. *rajaava*, verbs such as *kadottaa* 'loose', *keksiä* 'invent', *unohtaa* 'forget'), and (iii) verbs taking either a partitive or a total object (fin. *rajahakuinen*, verbs such as *syödä* 'eat', *kirjoittaa* 'write', *rakentaa* 'build'). It seems that this broad classification is also the one that is mostly followed in Finnish textbooks aimed at foreign learners.

2.3 Partitive and negation

As a last factor instantiating partitive case, we present negation. In negative sentences, regardless of the sentence's aspectual boundedness or the object's quantitative boundedness, a partitive object is assigned. In this sense, negative polarity overrules all other conditions (Huumo 2013).

[6] See Lauranto (p.c., forthcoming) for a rather different approach under which true partitive constructions are only of two kinds: (i) with verbs which can take a 'causer' adverbial (e.g., *Pelästyin sinua*, litt. 'I got scared by you-PART'); (ii) 'psychological state clause' (*tunnetilalause*, e.g., *Minua väsyttää*, litt. 'Me-PART get tired', I get tired) in which *minua* 'me' is the partitive object of the clause. Lauranto also notes that verbs otherwise indicating a psychological state can also take a total object, for example in transitive constructions (*Taas sä väsytit mut*, litt. 'Again you tired me-ACC').

(16) a. *Jere ei lukenut kirjaa.*
Jere not read-prt book-part.sg
'Jere did not read a/the book.'
b. *Jere ei juonut kahvia.*
Jere not drink-prt coffee-part.sg
'Jere didn't drink coffee.'

Huumo (2020) points out that the fact that the partitive is triggered by negation could be explained in terms of 'lack of culmination' as a relevant factor as well (see also Larjavaara 1991, 397-399 and Heinämäki 1994, 221).

To sum up, in the traditional view the main conditions under which the partitive case occurs can be represented in a hierarchy from the strongest, negation, overruling all other conditions, to the weakest, quantity, that can be found in interaction with aspect (cf. Chesterman 1991; Vilkuna 2000).

(17) negation > aspect > quantity

In Huumo (2013) the traditional view in which partitive's main function is considered to be incompleteness is revised and the scholar suggests a classification in terms of (in)completeness and (ir)resultativity, as this strongly correlates with the lexical semantics of the verb. Hence, the hierarchy in (17) is re-defined in light of a more fine-grained classification where aspect is divided into three further subfunctions: progressive (the event is ongoing), cessative (the event does not reach an endpoint) and irresultative (the event reaches an endpoint but does not bring a substantial final result, in other words it is semelfactive, like *tönäistä* 'nudge'). In light of this analysis, the revised hierarchy is as follows:

(18) negation > progressive > cessative > unbounded quantity > irresultative

In conclusion, we agree that although object-marking partitive always indicates lack of culmination of the event, as stated in Huumo (2021), not all functions of partitive are equivalent in terms of strength. The hierarchies in (17) and (18) represent the functions of object-marking partitive case

and, as we will see in the following section, despite the more adequate and fine-grained classification in (18) it is (17) that mostly corresponds to what is formally explained in textbooks of Finnish to foreign learners.

3. Partitive in textbooks

Generally, in Finnish textbooks for foreign learners, the partitive object is presented as occurring under a number of circumstances and basically having an alternative form that we call here the total object, along the lines of Hakulinen *et al*. (2004, § 925). If, on the one hand, the label partitive object is uncontroversially used to indicate incompleteness or unboundedness, for its counterpart indicating completeness a number of different labels have been suggested: total object (*ibidem*), restrictive object (Huumo 2006, 2010), accusative object (Hakulinen, Karlsson 1979; Vilkuna 2000), totalitive object (fin. *totalitiivinen objekti*, Larjavaara 2019). This is traditionally related to the fact that partitive objects have partitive case endings, whereas total objects can appear with different endings corresponding to different cases: *-n* (gen. sg.) or *-t* (nom.pl), *-t* (accusative, existing only for personal pronouns), zero ending (nominative), depending on the grammatical structure. Textbooks do not enter into such semantic and terminological details and the total object is mainly addressed through the name of the morphological cases that can be assigned to it. Nevertheless, partitive object also corresponds semantically to the notion of partitivity whereas the situation remains fuzzy for its counterpart for which the name of the morphological case is often used to indicate the object, giving rise to possible misunderstandings (e.g., How can genitive be both the case of possessor and object?).

Examining six textbooks of Finnish for foreign learners, we found that while partitive case and partitive object coincide, total object is presented under the different names of the morphological cases it can be assigned (*Suomen mestari* 1, *Hyvin menee* 1, *No niin*) or on the basis of its function[7] (*Kieli käyttöön* 1, *Suomi sujuvaksi* 1, *Totta kai*). More specifically, total object

[7] cf. also Karlsson (2008) on the use of the term 'accusative' to indicate the total object. In the textbooks that use the term 'accusative', accusative is intended along these lines as an abstract case of the object.

is named as follows: accusative object and accusative without ending (i.e., nominative singular) (*Kieli käyttöön* 1, 235-237, and *Suomi Sujuvaksi* 1), genitive object (*Suomen mestari* 1), genitive, base-form (i.e., nominative singular), and nominative plural (*Hyvin menee* 1, 180, *No Niin* 1, 310), accusative object (*Totta kai*, 93-94).

As we have seen in the previous section, the partitive has a wide range of circumstances in which it can or must be used. From our observations it emerges that, in these textbooks, the functions of partitive object are not presented in such a detailed way and the circumstances under which partitive can occur are subsumed under the main rule «Use partitive whenever one of the following circumstances occur»:

- with numbers and some quantifiers (such as *monta* 'many', *paljon* 'much', *vähän* 'little')
- with verbs requiring partitive (*rakastaa*, *vihata*, *odottaa*, etc.)
- when the event is incomplete (cf. aspectual unboudedness above)
- with the object under negation

And the rule continues:

… if none of the criteria requiring partitive object are met, use total object.

As also pointed out in Panka (2015, 44) in general the formal teaching of the partitive through textbooks is much simplified with respect to the complex scenario depicted in the previous sections. For example, aspect is never analysed in more detail nor are the so-called partitive verbs further categorized on the basis of e.g., reaching an endpoint.

3. Previous studies on the acquisition of partitive case.

In this section we will present recent works on the acquisition of partitive case in adult learners. As attested by both learners and teachers, partitive case is one the most problematic issues for adult learners of Finnish (Itkonen 1988; Martin 1995). While a good number of studies have focussed on the linguistic variability shown by Swedish speaking Finns, little attention has been devoted to other L1s, and in particular with respect to the acquisition of cases. In the last decade, two dissertations in particular stand out in this regard.

The first is Marianne Spoelman's (2013) dissertation *Prior linguistic knowledge matters: The use of partitive case in Finnish learner language*. The

author discusses the use of partitive subjects, predicatives and objects in the written production of Estonian, German, and Dutch learners. All the three languages show nominal declension but crucially Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language of the same linguistic branch of Finnish while German and Dutch are Germanic languages. The author attempts to verify whether and in what measure prior linguistic knowledge coming from the L1 may influence L2 acquisition (based on Jarvis' 2000 approach and on the Integrated Contrastive Model proposed in Gilquin 2000/2001).

The author gathers her data from the *International Corpus of Learner Finnish* (ICLF) and divides the corpora not only by language but also for level of proficiency according to the CEFR.

With particular reference to object marking partitive case, the first finding is that in the Estonian corpus there are significantly more occurrences of the partitive case with respect to the Dutch and German corpora, in which, according to the author, partitive objects are underrepresented. The second observation is that in the Estonian learners' subcorpus significantly fewer errors were observed with respect to Dutch and German. The latest is the corpus with the highest error rate. As for error type, interestingly the German and Dutch corpora contain more underuse than overuse errors whereas the Estonian corpus is characterized by slightly more overuse errors. The only subgroup with more underuse errors in the Estonian corpus is the A2 level providing further evidence for the role of time of exposure, notwithstanding the relatedness of the two languages and the influence that the L1 Estonian can have. Spoelman discusses the specific errors in the Estonian subgroup in light of subtle L1-L2 differences in partitive use between Estonian and Finnish.

In conclusion, Spoelman's study attests that both the L1 and prior knowledge do have an important role in language acquisition and in particular in the acquisition of the partitive case.

The second relevant study on the acquisition of the Finnish partitive case is presented in Erzsébet Panka's (2015) dissertation *Objektin sijanvaihtelun oppiminen ja opettaminen* (Learning and teaching object case variation). Panka conducted extensive research on the acquisition of partitive case by Hungarian and German learners. The author gathered data from the YKI (Yleinen Kielitutkinto) written corpus and from a fill-in test in which the participant was given the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* and asked to write the correct

form of the missing words. In addition, Panka conducted interviews with learners of Finnish as a foreign language in order to add an introspective and metalinguistic insight to her data. Her work not only focuses on acquisitional aspects in the framework of contrastive analysis and constructionist grammar, but also connects it to teaching: she analyses four different textbooks of Finnish for foreign learners[8], observing how the partitive case is presented. The main aim of the whole study is to find out the most problematic areas in the acquisition of partitive objects by Hungarian and German speakers and if and how learning difficulties may be overcome with adequate teaching materials. As a general result, Panka's data demonstrate that in the related language (Hungarian) errors are less frequent at all levels than in German.

In sum, both dissertations point out that Finnish object case alternation is one of the hardest to learn for a non-native speaker and that learner's L1 do have an impact on it: if the L1 is a typologically related language, learners show less variability than learners with an unrelated L1 and it is supposed that it is so for the (more) similar morpho-syntactic properties of the L1 with respect to the target, Finnish. What remains unrevealed in these works is a more fine-grained and controlled analysis of non-target patterns in light of the different functions of the partitive case (and how they are presented in textbooks).

Few master's theses have been written on the use of the partitive case by non-native speakers of Finnish. Two recent works are Holkkola (2014) and Piri (2017). Holkkola investigates the use of object cases by Swedish speaking Finns in relation to linguistic competence. The tradition of analyzing Swedish speaking Finns' object errors is longer than that of learners of other L1s which fits well with this thesis.

Piri discusses the morpho-syntactic errors in the use of the partitive case in learner Finnish but focusing more on errors in the form than on contexts of use.

As a final mention, Ranua and Ruotsalainen (2008) observe syntactic errors in (written) learner language in two different groups of learners:

[8] The analysed textbooks are: *Suomea suomeksi* (Nuutinen 1979), *Aletaan!* and *Jatketaan!* (Hämäläinen 1996, 1997), *Kieli käyttöön!* (Kenttälä 2000), *Suomen mestari* (Gehring-Heinzmann 2010-2016).

Finnish as a foreign language (learning abroad) and Finnish as a second language (learning in Finland). The authors did not focus only on object errors, but they are included in the research and seem to be the area with the greatest number of errors. The most common non-target pattern is the use of nominative instead of partitive or genitive case. The authors explain the pattern as in Manninen and Martin (2000) who state that learners tend to prefer unmarked forms. In this sense, for learners of Finnish, the nominative case does not have an ending and thus is the unmarked form.

As we have seen in the previous section, the majority of studies on the acquisition of partitive case by foreign language and L2 learners is based on corpus study. Only in Panka's (2015) dissertation part of the analysed data is collected through fill-in-the-gap tasks. Fill-in tasks are more demanding for language learners compared with e.g., to multiple choice tasks, in which the different forms of the noun are given. The participant has a double task: to correctly choose the case of the noun and to correctly produce it. Consequently, fill-in task errors can be classified in two types: based on the form or based on the choice of the case. The main aim of the present pilot study is to contribute to the state of art by providing further L2 data on the production of partitive case by speakers of different L1s. We focus on the choice of the case, and we do not consider errors concerning purely the form (except when an erroneous form is not directly ascribable to a morphological case). The two research questions that guided this study were:

(i) Do learners of Finnish show a different performance in the different circumstances under which partitive is said to be required in textbooks?
(ii) Can a hierarchy of partitive use be observed in learners' production?

A fill-in-the-gap task was created with 24 target items (on the object) and 8 fillers[9] (on locative cases). Six sets of sentences were created with four items each. The items were created starting from the point of view of the learner who is introduced to the following contexts as those where a

[9] The relatively low number of fillers makes it possible to avoid tiredness bias. Moreover, given the many different sets of sentences, it was assumed that participants would remain unaware of the real topic under investigation.

partitive object is required: atelic/unbounded event: alternation partitive *vs* total object[10]; negation; unbounded quantity (mass Ns, weak Qs like *monta* 'many'); numerals (weak Qs); unbounded (or cessative) verbs. Items were randomized and administered through a googledoc-link or during language classes. Participants were not told about the aims of the test, and they were asked to fill in the questionnaire without using any support and, to lower any possible performance anxiety, they were told that no scores were given and the first answer that came to mind was the best one.

The group of participants consisted of 39 foreign language learners of Finnish living in Hungary, Italy, Germany, and Poland. They were all university students, and the age range was 18-25 and the mean length of study 1.8 years.

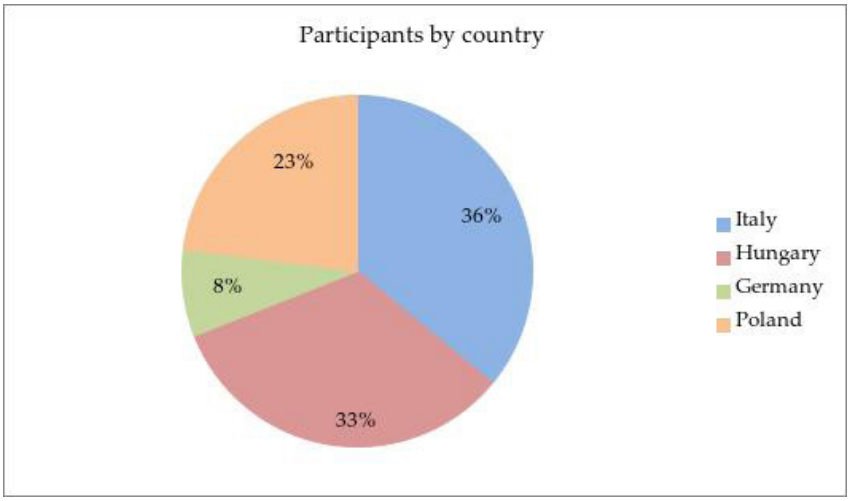

Figure 2 – Percentage of participants by country.

Below we present an example of each set of sentences.

[10] The bounded contexts were inserted in order to observe whether the production of a total object would differ with respect to the production of a partitive object. A variation could be expected due to the overall complexity and wider contexts of use of partitive with respect to the total object.

Unbounded: partitive expected

(19) *En voi tulla nyt, koska luen (TÄMÄ KIRJA)* _____ .
expected: *tätä kirjaa*

Bounded: total object expected

(20) *Ensin kirjoitan (SÄHKÖPOSTI)* _____ *opettajalle, sitten tulen.*
expected: *sähköpostin*

Negation: partitive expected

(21) *Maija ei osta (TAKKI)* _____*, koska hän ei pidä siitä.*
expected: *takkia*

Indefinite quantity and weak quantifiers: partitive expected

(22) a. *Minä juon vain (VESI)* _____ .
expected: *vettä*
b. *Tarja haluaa monta (LAHJA)* _____ .
expected: *lahjaa*

Numerals: partitive expected

(23) *Minä ostan neljä (SÄMPYLÄ)* _____ *retkeä varten.*
expected: *sämpylää*

Unbounded verb (verbs requiring partitive): partitive expected

(24) *Illalla Mikko katsoo (TELEVISIO)* _____ .
expected: *televisiota*

5. Results and discussion

Overall, participants performed well in the task. The total of correct answers was 78.85% (738/936). The Results table below represents the percentage of correct productions for each set of sentences. All endings of partitive case (also when appearing only on one element) were considered as correct. This means that a case such as in (25) was considered correct

even though the correct partitive form would be *tätä kirjaa* 'this-part.sg book-part.sg' in (25)a and *lahjaa* 'present-part.sg' in (25)b.

(25)	a.	*En voi tulla nyt, koska luen*	**tämä kirjaa.*
		not can come now because read	this-nom.sg book-part.sg
	b.	*Tarja haluaa monta*	**lahjoja.*
		Tarja want many-SG	present-part.pl
		'Tarja wants many presents.'	

For the total object, only objects with an ending were considered. The bare noun form was not counted, even when it could be an ending for the total object under some circumstances such as imperative or passive forms as presented in section 3, which were not used in the test. In addition, the bare form, which corresponds to nominative singular, would be too ambiguous, and in the present study impossible to control for, between the lack of competence on nominal declension and the 'conscious choice' of using the zero-form of accusative.

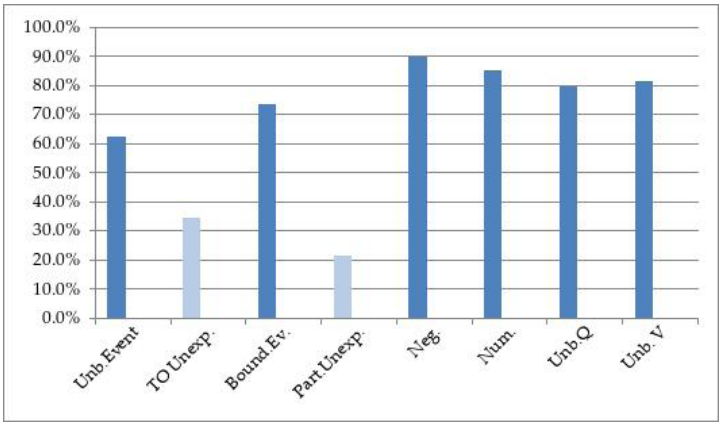

Figure 3 – Partitive case in L2 production

Negation (Neg., 89,7%) and numbers (Num., 85%) are the contexts in which L2ers perform better with almost 90% of correct results. Also with

unbounded verbs, i.e., verbs that assign partitive (Unb.V, 81,4%) and unbounded quantity (Unb.Q, 79,5%) we observe a high number of correct answers. The greatest variability is attested with verbs which can alternate and take a partitive object or a total object depending on the boundedness feature in the 'unbounded event' context (Unb.Ev., 62,2%). The non-target pattern that emerges is overwhelmingly the n-accusative (54/156), and only few instances of the bare form (nominative singular) are produced.

Interestingly, the same type of verb in a 'bounded event' context shows less variation (Bound.Ev., 73,7%). Here, again the overwhelmingly most common non-target pattern is the alternative case, partitive (33/156).

Considering these results in relation to the hierarchy presented earlier, we observe that negation and numerals seem to require less complex features to be acquired than partitive in cessative and progressive events/functions. Thus, if we put together the hierarchy in (18) with the variability observed in elicited L2 production we have the following:

(26) Hierarchy of L2 variability:
negation > weak Q (num) > unbounded V (cessative) > weak Q (*monta*) > unbounded event (progressive)

It seems that, the less complex the rule, the better the L2ers perform. In fact, under negation the object should always be in partitive (see also Panka 2019, 244 for a similar observation in her data). In addition, negated sentences and numbers are presented quite early in textbooks and practiced extensively and this possibly also have a role. Also, the so-called partitive verbs (unbounded Vs in our data) are presented as a clear-cut set of verbs always requiring the partitive case. Conversely, the partitive used with unbounded events remain conceptually less clear, less space is devoted to it in textbooks, and it appears at a later stage of language acquisition.

6. Final remarks

The Finnish partitive case can be dated very early from a historical point of view. It has developed from a separative case to modern partitive in steps and with the addition of some level of complexity at each stage.

Nowadays it is well-known as one of the hardest things that a learner of Finnish has to cope with. The aim of this paper was to add some empirical data to the ongoing discussion on the acquisition of partitive case by foreign learners and in particular on partitive as the case of object in transitive constructions. Future research is welcome to continue disentangling the complexity of Finnish partitive case in language acquisition in relation to the other functions that partitive case can have.

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