

# THE COPULA CONSTRUCTION IN FINNISH LEARNER LANGUAGE: ESTONIAN, GERMAN AND DUTCH LEARNERS' USE OF PARTITIVE PREDICATIVES

Marianne Spoelman

## Abstract

The partitive case has often been found to be problematic for foreign learners of Finnish. This study, which is part of a larger corpus study on the use of the partitive case in Finnish learner language, investigates the use of partitive predicatives in the written Finnish of Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish as a foreign language. The purpose of the study is to identify and explain the learner's major stumble blocks in the use of partitive predicatives and to address possible cases of L1 influence. Research materials (Estonian Learner Corpus 90.236, German LC 32.300 and Dutch LC 46.670 words) were selected from the *International Corpus of Learner Finnish* (ICFLI). A subset (approx. 2.7 million words) of the *Native Finnish Corpus* was used as a native speaker reference corpus. The outcomes of a combined frequency-error analysis revealed conspicuous differences between the learners from a closely related L1 background (i.e. Estonian), on the one hand and the learners from a distant L1 background (e.g. German and

Dutch), on the other. While the Estonian learners showed instances of both positive L1 influence (i.e. practically the lack of partitive overuse errors) and negative L1 influence (e.g. the transfer of Estonian copula constructions involving plural predicative), the German and Dutch learners seemed to use partitive predicatives in a far more arbitrary way, sometimes even by using the non-inflected basic form as a default. These findings provide valuable and additional insights into the phenomenon of L1 influence and can be used to draw pedagogical implications.

**Keywords:** Finnish learner language, the copula construction, the use of partitive predicatives

## 1. Introduction

The partitive is a typical case characterizing the Finnic languages (Kiparsky 1998). By origin, the partitive case was a general locative case with separative meaning (ISK 2004: §1226). However, the partitive gradually developed into a case expressing more abstract syntactical relationships, a development that has gone further in Finnish than in any of the other Finnic languages (Denison 1957). Being in Modern Finnish nowadays first and foremost an object, subject and predicative case expressing partiality, unboundedness or negative polarity, the partitive case covers a wide range of functions related to a myriad of syntactic and semantic conditions.

Researchers and the Finnish language teachers have often observed the use of the partitive case as to be problematic for foreign learners of Finnish (e.g. Denison 1957: 15; Schot-Saikku 1990). It has, however, not systematically been investigated

what it is that makes the Finnish partitive difficult, whether some partitive functions are more difficult than others and whether certain points of difficulty are common to all groups of learners or specific to certain different groups of learners. In addition, studies on the use of the partitive case have, so far, particularly been based on class room observations and more general observations, and not on learner corpora, a fairly recent development. Corpus-based research would however lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of the learner language as the learner corpora are likely to reflect the actual performance of language learners, while the analyses based on experimental data provide, us in particular with information about learners' abstract knowledge (Nesselhauf 2004). Therefore, this study adopts a corpus-based approach in order to provide valuable insights into Finnish learner language and L1 influence.

The current study investigates the use of partitive predicatives in the written Finnish of Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish as a foreign language. The learner corpus data are selected from the Estonian, German and Dutch subcorpus of the *International Corpus of Learner Finnish* (ICLFI; cf. Jantunen, Piltonen 2009). Partitive predicative constitutes the object of this study for an obvious reason. The study is part of a Ph.D. project on the use of the partitive case. The purpose of this project, which is written within the framework of the research project 'Corpus study on language-specific and universal features in learner language' is to identify and explain the learners' main stumble blocks in the use of the partitive case. Which stumble blocks are common to all groups of learners and which are specific to a certain group of learners: Does L1 influence play a role? How can these insights be used to improve the teaching of Finnish as a foreign language?

In order to identify the learners' main points of difficulty in the use of the partitive, a systematic analysis of the main functions of the partitive (i.e. object, subject and predicatives) is required. This study on partitive predicatives is thus part of a larger ensemble that will come together as time progresses. Further on, the phenomenon of L1 influence will be discussed in more detail and partitive predicatives as well as the Finnish nominative-partitive predicative alternation will be outlined, partly from a crosslinguistic perspective.

## 2. The influence of the first language

During the past few decades, the influence of the learner's first language (L1) on his or her second language (L2), commonly referred to as *L1 influence*, *transfer* or *crosslinguistic influence* has probably been one of the most extensively investigated phenomena in the SLA field (Jarvis 2000). Studies on L1 influence have nevertheless largely focused on Indo-European languages, particularly English, and not on structurally and typically different languages such as Finnish (Kaivapalu, Martin 2007).

L1 influence is both complex and multifaceted (Dechert, Raupach 1989). The said L1 influence can be characterized across a host of different dimensions (cf. Jarvis, Pavlenko 2010: 20) manifesting itself in various forms (e.g. overuse, errors, facilitation, preference, avoidance) (Odlin 2003) and operating in complex interaction with factors that possibly promote or inhibit the role of L1 influence (i.e. constraints on L1 influence) (Ellis 2008: 379).

One of the most widely recognized constraints on L1 influence is the relationship or degree of congruence between the learner's L1 and L2, commonly referred to as *crosslinguistic similarity* or *language distance*. Crosslinguistic similarity can be both objective and subjective. *Objective similarity* is the actual degree of congruence between languages; while *subjective similarity* corresponds to the degree of congruence the learners perceive or assume to exist (Jarvis, Pavlenko 2010: 176). Objective and subjective similarity can hypothetically fully overlap if the learner accurately perceives or assumes the objective similarities between two languages, but this appears to be relatively rare (Ringbom, Jarvis 2009). Rather, learners frequently make use of an oversimplified equivalence hypothesis, e.g. L2 structure = L1 structure (Ringbom 2007: 55).

Robert Lado (1957) emphasized the importance of actual language distance, the objective degree of similarity between languages, in his Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH):

*"We assume that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult"* (Lado 1957: 2).

By assuming crosslinguistic difference to be equivalent to linguistic difficulty (Odlin 1989: 17), the CAH thus clearly overpredicts the transferability of elements, as it fails to explain when elements are transferred and when they are not, but rather assumes that objective language distance constitutes the ultimate constraint on language transfer (Jarvis, Pavlenko 2010: 1976).

In fact, subjective similarities have a more profound and direct effect on foreign second language learning than objective

similarities (Odlin 1989: 142). As foreign language learning is based on prior knowledge, learners constantly look for whatever L1-L2 similarities they can establish on the basis of their prior linguistic knowledge. At least at the beginning stages of foreign language learning, learners do not often actually perceive crosslinguistic similarities but they merely assume them to exist. Unlike objective similarities, linguistic by nature subjective similarities reflect the learning process (Ringbom 2007).

This is however not to say that objective distance is irrelevant to L1 influence: it is not the objective differences or similarities that cause L1 influence to occur but rather the L1-L2 similarities that learners perceive or assume to exist that serve as the main driving force behind the mental associations leading to instances of L1 influence (Jarvis, Pavlenko 2010). In other words, objective language distance merely provides or withholds the opportunity for the occurrence of L1 influence. Because of the presence versus lack of objective similarities, it is namely more likely that learners establish (accurate) L1-L2 similarities in case of closely related languages than in case of typologically distant languages. The similarity relations established by the learners determine, nevertheless, together with all other constraints, the likelihood of L1 influence actually occurring.

Considering these similarity relations in detail, there is no sharp or absolute boundary between similarity and difference. In the continuum of crosslinguistic similarity relations, three distinct types can be discerned: similarity, contrast and zero relations (Ringbom 2007: 5). A similarity relation means that an L2 pattern is perceived or assumed to be similar to an L1 pattern. In a contrast relation, the learner perceives an L2 pattern as in important ways differing from an L1 pattern,

though there is an underlying similarity between them (Ringbom, Jarvis 2009). A zero relation does not mean a complete lack of crosslinguistic similarity relations, but rather that the L2 patterns, at least at early stages of learning, seem to have little or no relation to the learner's L1 (Ringbom 2007: 5). The way in which objective and subjective similarities relate indicates whether L1 influence is positive or negative in nature. Negative L1 influence occurs when subjective and objective similarities conflict, while positive L1 influence occurs when subjective and objective similarities are compatible (Jarvis, Pavlenko 2010).

When analyzing the role of L1 influence in learner language, multiple comparisons need to be drawn. L1 influence, in particular positive L1 influence, can only be reliably identified on the basis of comparisons between different groups of learners, ranging from groups of learners of closely related L1 backgrounds to groups of learners of distant L1 background (cf. Jarvis 2000; Ellis 2008). Therefore, learner corpus data from Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish were selected as the research materials of this study, as these three L1s vary according to their genetic and typological distance to Finnish. Estonian, like Finnish, belongs to the Finnic branch of the Finno-Ugric language family. Being very closely related, both Finnish and Estonian are languages with a rich structure of nominal and verbal inflections. The Finnish and Estonian declinational systems, consisting of fifteen versus fourteen cases, respectively, both comprise a partitive case. German and Dutch, in contrast, belong to the West-Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. Although in German, a relatively rich case system has been preserved as compared to other Indo-European languages, the German declinational case system comprises merely four grammatical cases, and no partitive case. Considering the Dutch language, the Middle

Dutch case system has gradually disappeared. These objective differences between Finnish, Estonian, German and Dutch provide an excellent starting point for identifying possible instances of L1 influence. In what follows, the objective differences between Finnish, Estonian, German and Dutch predicatives will be outlined.

### 3. Partitive predicatives:

#### The Finnish predicative case alternation

Predicatives are part of the copula construction. In addition to the predicative, Finnish copula constructions prototypically involve a subject noun phrase and the copula verb *olla* ('to be'). A predicative can either be an adjective phrase or a noun phrase functioning as the copula complement of the sentence (ISK 2004: §944).

With the exception of a small group of non-alternating predicatives that indicate category membership or group inclusion (e.g., *Hän on suurta sukua* 'He is of a noble family'), Finnish predicatives alternate between nominative and partitive case. Alternating predicatives are also called *distributive* predicatives. Table 1 provides an overview of this predicative case alternation. As illustrated by the table, the case marking of adjective predicatives depends on the referent (i.e. the subject) and on how the referent is perceived (Vilkuna 1996: 105). The general principles are that the predicative conforms to the subject in number and expresses the divisibility of the referent: Divisible referents take a partitive and indivisible referents a nominative predicative (ISK 2004: §946; cf. Chesterman 1991 for a detailed description of the concept of divisibility). As the divisibility distinction is a semantic concept that separates singular count nouns



(indivisible) from plural count nouns and mass nouns (divisible) (Chesterman 1991: 133), the Finnish predicative case alternation is thus semantic in nature.

Referent characteristics		Predicative characteristics	Case of the predicative	Example sentences
Sg	indivisible	adjective phrase	nominative	(1a) <i>Nainen on <u>kaunis</u>.</i> Woman(Nom.Sg) be-3Sg pretty(Nom.Sg) ‘The woman is pretty.’
	Divisible	adjective phrase	partitive	(1b) <i>Kahvi on <u>hyvää</u>.</i> Coffee(Nom) be-3Sg good-Part.Sg ‘Coffee is nice.’
Pl	divisible	adjective phrase	partitive	(1c) <i>Naiset ovat <u>kauniita</u>.</i> Woman-Nom.Pl be-3Pl pretty-Part.Pl ‘The women are pretty.’
	Indivisible	adjective phrase	nominative	(1d) <i>Nämä sakset ovat <u>terävät</u>.</i> These scissors-Nom.Pl be-3Pl sharp-Nom.Pl ‘This pair of scissors is sharp.’

Sg	indivisible	NP / indivisible	nominative	(2a) <b><i>Tämä on <u>uusi auto</u>.</i></b> this(Nom) be-3Sg new car(Nom.Sg)  'This is a new car.'
	indivisible	NP / divisible	partitive	(2b) <b><i>Tämä on <u>sitä hyvää kahvia</u>.</i></b> this(Nom) be-3Sg that good coffee-Part.Sg  'This is that nice coffee.'
	indivisible	NP / indivisible	nominative	(2c) <b><i>Hän on maailman <u>paras laulaja</u>.</i></b> he(Nom) be-3Sg world-Gen.Sg best singer(Nom.Sg)  'He is the best singer in the world.'
	divisible	NP / indivisible	nominative	(2d) <b><i>Kahvi on maailman <u>paras asia</u>.</i></b> coffee(Nom.Sg) be-3Sg world- Gen.Sg best thing(Nom.Sg)  'Coffee is the best thing in the world.'

**Table 1.** Overview of the Finnish predicative case alternation

More specifically, the adjective predicative assumes nominative case if the referent is (conceived of as) a count noun, thus denoting an indivisible entity (1a). Similarly, the adjective predicative takes partitive case if the referent is either a mass noun (1b) or a plural form (1c), as a mass noun designates a divisible mass or substance and a plural form a divisible

multiplicity of referents (Huumo 2007; 2009). Because they refer to an indivisible referent, marginally occurring *pluralia tantum* (1d) and plural forms that otherwise holistically denote a set of entities (e.g. *tytön silmät ~ hiukset* ‘the girl’s eyes ~ hair’) form an exception to the rule of plural predicative case-marking (Vilkuna 1996: 106).

The case of plural substantive predicatives alternates in exactly the same way as the case of plural predicative adjectives alternates (Huumo 2007). However, as illustrated in table 1, it is not only the nature of the referent but also the nature of the substantive predicative itself that possibly affects the case assignment of singular substantive predicatives (ISK 2004: §944). Regardless of the divisible or indivisible nature of the referent (i.e. the subject), a singular predicative substantive assumes partitive when the predicative itself is divisible in nature (2b) and nominative when the predicative itself is indivisible in nature (2a, 2c, 2d) (Huumo 2007). The reason for the fact that substantive predicatives, do but adjective predicatives do not influence predicative case-marking is simple: divisibility is a semantic feature that nouns but not adjectives possess.

A similar predicative case alternation is not found in other Finnic languages, as the Finnish predicative case alternation has been the result of a recent development during which the partitive predicative gradually took over the function of the nominative predicative in case of divisible referents (Sademiemi 1950). The occurrence of partitive predicatives is, as a consequence, very limited in Estonian (Erelt 2009). As Estonian lacks a predicative case alternation similar to Finnish (Metslang 1994: 210), the Estonian distributive predicative always takes nominative case (Denison 1957: 247; cf. Ex1a-b). The occurrence of partitive predicatives restricts itself to the

category of non-alternating predicatives expressing category membership or group inclusion. Like in Finnish, these partitive predicatives nevertheless have a very limited occurrence (Erelt 2003: 97-98).

The crosslinguistic similarity relation between Finnish and Estonian predicatives can be considered a good example of the *contrast relation* introduced above. The copula construction is essentially similar in both languages, the only (but substantial) difference being that distributive predicatives show a nominative-partitive case alternation in Finnish while they assume nominative case in Estonian (cf. Ex1). Taking into consideration that Finnish and Estonian are very closely related and that the object and subject case alternations are similar in both languages, it could be expected that Estonian learners of Finnish are sometimes inclined to establish an oversimplified equivalence hypothesis (cf. Ringbom, 2007: 55), i.e. Finnish partitive predicative = Estonian partitive predicative. As for German and Dutch, those languages are typologically and genetically different from Finnish. Dutch is a morphologically poor language and the German declinational system does not contain a partitive case. As illustrated in Ex2, the predicative in both languages therefore always appears in the non-inflected basic form (which is identical to the nominative singular in German). This study aims at providing insights into learner's use of partitive predicatives and attempts to identify possible differences between groups of learners in order to anticipate pedagogical implications as to how partitive predicatives could be best taught to learners of Finnish from closely related L1 language backgrounds and distant L1 language backgrounds.

- |       |   |   |
|-------|---|---|
| (Ex1) | <b>Finnish</b>  | <b>Estonian</b>   |
|       | a. <i>Kahvi on <u>hyvää</u>.</i><br>coffee(Nom.Sg)<br>be-3Sg good-Part. Sg<br>'Coffee is nice.'   | <i>Kohv on <u>hea</u>.</i><br>coffee (Nom.Sg)<br>be-3Sg good(Nom.Sg)<br>'Coffee is nice.' |
|       | b. <i>He ovat <u>nuoria</u>.</i><br>they(Nom) be-3Pl<br>young-Part.Pl<br>'They are young.'        | <i>Nad on <u>noored</u>.</i><br>they(Nom) be-3Pl<br>young-Nom.Pl<br>'They are young.'     |
| (Ex2) | <b>German</b>   | <b>Dutch</b>  |
|       | a. <i>Kaffee ist <u>lecker</u>.</i><br>coffee(Nom.Sg) be-3Sg<br>good(Nom.Sg)<br>'Coffee is nice.' | <i>Koffie is <u>lekker</u>.</i><br>coffee be-3Sg good<br>'Coffee is nice.'                |
|       | b. <i>Sie sind <u>jung</u>.</i><br>they(Nom) be-3Pl<br>young(Nom.Sg)<br>'They are young.'         | <i>Zij zijn <u>jong</u>.</i><br>they(Nom) be-3Pl<br>young<br>'They are young.'            |

## 4. Method

A subset of the International Corpus of Learner Finnish (ICLFI) was selected as the learner data of the study. The ICLFI (cf. Jantunen, Piltonen 2009) was launched in 2007 and it comprises texts of different genres, mainly essays. Presently, the corpus contains over 500.000 words of learners of Finnish as a foreign language from 13 different language backgrounds. The corpus is made up of 13 different subcorpora, each

covering one of those language varieties. Subsets of the subcorpora of Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish were selected as the materials of this study. The materials were selected according to specific criteria: only texts written by native speakers of Estonian, German and Dutch whose parents were also both native speakers of respectively Estonian, German and Dutch were selected.

A native-speaker reference corpus of over 2.7 million words was selected from the Native Finnish Corpus, compiled by Anna Mauranen as the native component of the Corpus of Translated Finnish (Mauranen 2000). The native Finnish reference corpus consists of professional writing and involves several genres, i.e. academic texts, popular non-fiction, children’s literature, fiction and biographies. Figure 1 provides an overview of the research materials.

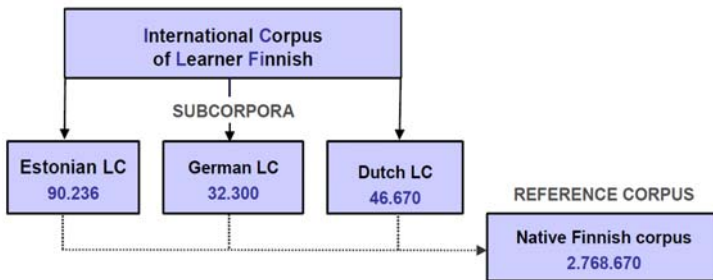


Figure 1. The materials of the study (corpus sizes in words)

Because the selected corpus data were not linguistically annotated, it was decided to run a problem-oriented annotation and tagging procedure (cf. McEnery, Wilson 2001: 69). On the basis of this procedure, the texts were annotated and error-tagged on the use of partitive noun phrases with the help of a

set of macros designed to automatically identify partitive forms and to simplify morphosyntactic annotation and error-tagging. The learner corpora were error-tagged for the occurrence of both partitive overuse and underuse errors. Partitive overuse errors are deviant usages in which the partitive has been incorrectly used as the case of the predicative. Partitive underuse errors, in contrast, correspond to those contexts in which a partitive predicative was required but another case was realized as the case of the predicative.

The absolute frequencies of partitive predicatives, partitive predicative overuse errors and partitive predicatives underuse errors were extracted from the corpora with the help of WordSmith Tools 5.0 (Scott 2008). Obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives were calculated by adding the amount of partitive underuse errors to the number of correctly used partitive predicatives. These obligatory contexts thus basically reflect the number of contexts in which a partitive predicative was required, regardless of whether or not it was indeed realized, and the frequencies of partitive predicatives indicate the number of contexts in which a partitive predicative was produced, regardless of whether they were produced correctly or incorrectly.

Statistical comparisons were drawn between the frequencies of partitive predicatives produced and between obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives observed in different learner corpora and those observed in native Finnish reference corpus. Furthermore, comparisons were drawn between the frequencies of partitive overuse and underuse errors extracted from the Estonian, German and Dutch learner corpora. For all comparisons, the  $\alpha$  decision level was set at 0.05.

## 5. Results

An overview of the frequency analysis on partitive predicatives is provided in figure 2. Of the categories represented in figure 2, the category of partitive predicatives produced purely reflects the outcomes of the frequency analysis, as this category refers to the actual occurrence of partitive predicatives in the corpora, i.e. regardless of whether or not correctly used. Considering this category of partitive predicatives produced, statistical testing (Log-Likelihood chi-square) revealed that partitive predicatives were significantly more frequently used in the Dutch learner corpus than in the reference corpus (LL = 12.08;  $p < .0001$ ) and significantly less frequently in the Estonian learner corpus than in the reference corpus (LL = 152.99;  $p < .0001$ ). No significant differences were found between the frequencies of partitive predicatives observed in the German learner corpus and the native-speaker reference corpus (LL = 3.80).

Gradually proceeding from the mere frequency analysis toward an analysis taking into consideration partitive predicative errors, the relative frequencies of correctly used partitive predicatives and obligatory contexts are provided as well. Obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives occurred significantly more frequently in the Dutch learner corpus (LL = 45.78;  $p < .0001$ ) and the German learner corpus (LL = 68.17;  $p < .0001$ ) than in the native Finnish reference corpus. In addition, obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives were found to occur less frequently in the Estonian learner corpus than in the reference corpus (LL = 4.63;  $p < .05$ ).



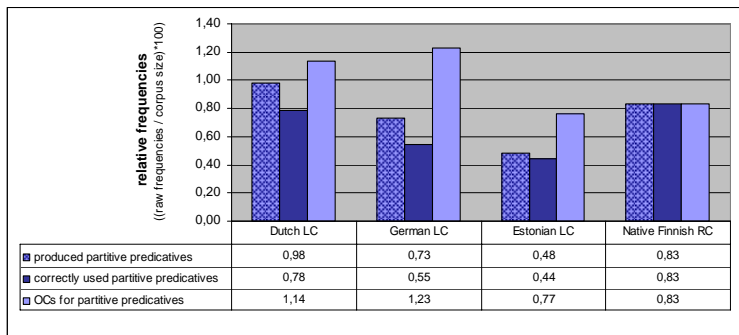


Figure 2. The use of partitive predicatives

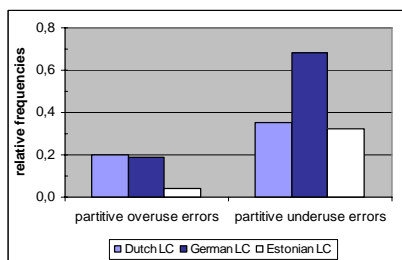


Figure 3. Partitive predicative errors

The frequencies of partitive predicative overuse and underuse errors, which are also covertly present in figure 2, are graphically represented in figure 3. From this graph, it can be inferred that partitive underuse errors were

more frequently represented in all learner corpora than partitive overuse errors.

Moreover, the Estonian learner corpus particularly shows a small number of partitive overuse errors, while a relatively large number of underuse errors was observed in the German learner corpus.

Statistical testing (Log-Likelihood chi-square) showed that partitive predicative overuse errors occurred significantly less frequently in the Estonian learner corpus than in the Dutch learner corpus (LL = 77.22;  $p < .0001$ ) and the German learner

corpus (LL = 53.68;  $p < .0001$ ). No significant differences were found between partitive overuse errors observed in the Dutch and the German learner corpus (LL = 0.24). Considering partitive underuse errors, the Dutch and Estonian learner corpora did not appear to differ significantly. However, partitive underuse errors occurred significantly more frequently in the German learner corpus compared to both the Dutch learner corpus (41.76;  $p < .0001$ ) and the Estonian learner corpus (LL = 65.69;  $p < .0001$ ).

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The outcomes of the frequency analysis suggested a significant overuse of partitive predicatives in the Dutch learner corpus and a significant underuse in the Estonian learner corpus, as compared to the native-speaker reference corpus. However, obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives were found to occur significantly more frequently in both the German and Dutch learner corpora than in the reference corpus indicating a significant overrepresentation of obligatory contexts in both learner corpora. In contrast, the obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives observed in the Estonian learner corpus slightly but significantly differed from the obligatory contexts observed in the native reference corpus in the way that obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives were under-represented in the learner data.

Considering the case-marking of predicatives, the error analysis first and foremost indicated that partitive underuse errors occurred more frequently than partitive overuse errors. The German learner corpus was, however, particularly characterized by a large number of underuse errors. Partitive overuse errors were found to occur significantly less frequently

in the Estonian learner corpus than in the other learner corpora. In fact, the Estonian learners nearly failed to show any instances of partitive overuse errors, while the German and Dutch learners showed comparable error frequencies.

These outcomes and in particular the error patterns and the way in which the actually produced partitive predicatives relate to the obligatory contexts for partitive predicatives provide valuable insights into the learners' use of partitive predicatives. Unlike the German and Dutch learners of Finnish, the Estonian learners showed a significant underuse of partitive predicatives. Based on the frequency analysis only, it could be expected that the underuse was a consequence of avoidance of partitive predicatives. The error analysis, however, revealed the underuse to be due to a large number of partitive underuse errors. Connecting these findings to the fact that the Estonian learner corpus showed an almost complete lack of partitive overuse errors, this could possibly indicate that the Estonian learners of Finnish use partitive predicatives in a less arbitrary way than the other groups of learners do, as a result of the presence of similarity relations between Finnish and Estonian versus the relative lack of L1-L2 similarities for the German and Dutch learners of Finnish.

In order to further explore the above outlined hypothesis, a detailed analysis was conducted concerning partitive predicative underuse errors. The outcomes of this detailed analysis are provided in table 2.

<b>Partitive underuse error category</b>	<b>Dutch LC</b>	<b>German LC</b>	<b>Estonian LC</b>
Nominative singular instead of partitive singular	72.1 %	47.0 %.	52.0 %
Nominative plural instead of partitive plural	9.7 %	24.9 %.	42.9 %
Nominative singular instead of partitive plural	16.4 %	24.0 %.	4.8 %
Remaining underuse errors	1.8 %	4.1 %.	0.3 %

Table 2. Detailed analysis of partitive predictive underuse errors

With respect to all groups of learners, most partitive underuse errors appeared to involve the use of nominative singular instead of partitive singular. As for the use of nominative plural predicatives instead of partitive plural predicatives, this error category has relatively frequently been observed from the Estonian learner corpus (in 42.9% of all underuse errors) and substantially less frequently from the other learner corpora. In contrast, the Dutch and German learner corpora show relatively high percentages of errors in which the nominative singular (i.e. the basic or dictionary form) has been used as the case of the predicative, while a partitive plural predicative was required. Similar errors represent a marginal error category in the Estonian learner corpus. These outcomes suggest conspicuous differences between the Estonian learners on the one hand and the German and Dutch learners on the other hand and simultaneously provide additional evidence supporting the hypothesis that L1 influence plays a role in the Estonian learners' use of partitive predicatives.

The finding that underuse errors in which the nominative plural was used instead of the partitive plural were observed substantially more frequently in the Estonian learner corpus than in the other learner corpora could be explained by taking into consideration the contrast relation between Finnish and Estonian predicative case assignment. As illustrated in (Ex3), a morphosyntactically similar sentence would be grammatically correct in Estonian, indicating that at least part of the errors would be due to an incorrectly assumed L1-L2 similarity, i.e. transfer of the Estonian morphosyntactic construction.

(Ex3)

<i>Produced structure</i>	<i>Target-like structure</i>	<i>Equivalent structure in Estonian</i>
<b>He ovat *<u>opettajat</u>.</b> they(Nom) be-3Pl teacher-*Nom.Pl 'They are teachers.'	<b>He ovat <u>opettajia</u>.</b> they(Nom) be-3Pl teacher-Part.Pl 'They are teachers.'	<b>Nad on <u>õpetajad</u>.</b> they(Nom) be-3Pl teacher-Nom.Pl 'They are teachers.'

Moreover, underuse errors in which the nominative singular basic form was used instead of a partitive plural predicative were relatively frequently observed in the German and Dutch learner corpora but were nearly absent in the Estonian learner corpus. This difference between the German and Dutch learners on the one hand and the Estonian learners on the other, could probably partially be explained by taking into account the relative absence of similarity relations between German/Dutch and Finnish. Unlike the German and Dutch learners, the Estonian learners are familiar with the phenomenon of predicative case-marking and extensive nominal (and also verbal) inflection. Therefore, it could be the case that German and Dutch learners more often than Estonian learners of

Finnish choose the (non-inflected) basic predicative form in order to, for example, decrease their processing load, while the Estonian learners in similar cases sometimes seem to rely on their L1. It could also be argued that the German and Dutch learners are inclined to use the non-inflected predicative form because predicatives are not inflected in their L1 either (cf Ex2, pg. 5). However, the former explanation (i.e. about the lack of processing load) is far more likely when taking into account the distant relationship between Finnish and respectively German and Dutch.

From the detailed analysis of partitive underuse errors, it was also revealed that the use of the nominative singular as the case of the predicative instead of partitive singular was highly frequent in all learner corpora. This outcome might be related to the non-transparency of the rules of predicative case-marking concerning abstract referents, zero-referents and dependent clauses or infinitive constructions functioning as the referent of the predicative. This will, however, be dealt with in further investigations, in which also general implications for teaching will be tackled. Some ideas of pedagogical value would be that teaching of partitive predicatives to Estonian learners of Finnish should emphasize L1-L2 differences, while learners from distant L1 backgrounds like German and Dutch learners of Finnish would benefit from focusing on 'the big picture', i.e. the general characteristics of Finnish copula constructions as well as the notion of divisibility.

To conclude, conspicuous differences were found between the use of partitive predicatives by learners of Finnish from distant mother tongue backgrounds (i.e. German and Dutch) and learners from a very closely related mother tongue background (i.e. Estonian). As a possible consequence of a lack of L1-L2 similarities, the German and Dutch learners seemed

to use partitive predicatives in a more arbitrary way than the Estonian learners and they were sometimes even inclined to rely on the non-inflected basic form as a default predicative form. In contrast, the contrast relation between Finnish and Estonian predicative case-marking seemed to play an important role in Estonian learners' use of partitive predicatives, resulting in instances of both positive L1 influence (e.g. the almost complete lack of partitive overuse errors) and negative L1 influence (e.g. the transfer of Estonian structures involving plural predicatives). The occurrence of both positive and negative L1 influence is in line with Jarvis & Pavlenko (2010: 176-183), who claim that positive L1 influence theoretically occurs when assumed similarities are compatible with objective similarities and negative L1 influence when these two are incompatible, but that L1 influence often ends up both positive and negative at the same time given that L1-L2 correspondences are rarely or exactly the same or completely different.

## References

- Chesterman, Andrew 1991. *On definiteness: A study with special reference to English and Finnish*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dechert, Hans W., Manfred Raupach 1989. Introduction. – *Transfer in language production* / Ed. By Hans W. Dechert, Manfred Raupach. Norwood NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, ix–xvii.
- Denison, Norman 1957. *The partitive in Finnish* (*Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae Ser. B, Vol. 108*). Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Ellis, Rod 2008. *The study of Second Language Acquisition*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Erelt, Mati 2003. Structure of the Estonian language: Syntax. – Estonian Language / Ed. by Mati Erelt (Linguistica Uralica Supplementary Series 1). Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Science, 93–129.
- Erelt, Mati 2009. Typological overview of Estonian syntax. – Language Typology and Universals 62: 1/2, 6–28.
- Huumo, Tuomas 2007. Kvantiteetti ja aika II: nominaalinen aspekti ja suomen predikatiivin sijnvaihtelu. – Virittäjä 111, 3–23.
- Huumo, Tuomas 2009. Fictive dynamicity, nominal aspect, and the Finnish copulative construction. – Cognitive Linguistics 20, 43–70.
- ISK 2004 = Iso Suomen Kieloppi 2004 / Ed. by Auli Hakulinen jt. Helsinki: SKS.
- Jantunen, Jarmo H., Saana Piltonen 2009. Oppijansuomen ja -viron sähköiset tutkimusaineistot. – Virittäjä 113: 3, 449–458.
- Jarvis, Scott 2000. Methodological rigor in the study of transfer: Identifying L1 influence in the interlanguage lexicon. – Language Learning 50, 245–309.
- Jarvis, Scott, Anna Pavlenko 2010. Crosslinguistic influence in language and cognition. New York/London: Routledge.
- Kaivapalu, Annekatrin, Maisa Martin 2007. Morphology in transition: Plural inflection of Finnish nouns by Estonian and Russian learners. – Acta Linguistica Hungarica 54, 129–156.
- Kiparsky, Paul 1998. Partitive Case and Aspect. – The Projection of Arguments: Lexical and Compositional Factors / Ed. by Miriam Butt, Wilhelm Geuder. Stanford: CSLI, 265–308.
- Lado, Robert 1957. Linguistics across cultures. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Mauranen, Anna 2000. Strange Strings in Translated Language: A Study on Corpora. – Intercultural Faultlines. Research Models in Translation Studies 1: Textual and Cognitive Aspects / Ed. by Maeve Olohan. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 119–141.
- McEnery, Tony, Andrew Wilson 2001. Corpus Linguistics. 2nd edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Metslang, Helle 1994. Kielet ja kontrastit. – Virittäjä 98, 203–226.
- Nesselhauf, Nadja 2004. Learner corpora and their potential for language teaching. – How to use corpora in language teaching / Ed.



by John McH. Sinclair. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publ. Co.

Odlin, Terrence 1989. *Language Transfer. Cross-linguistic influence in language learning*. Cambridge, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Odlin, Terrence 2003. *Crosslinguistic influence*. – *The handbook of second language acquisition* / Ed. by Catherine J. Doughty, Michael H. Long. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 436–486.

Ringbom, Håkan 2007. *Cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD.

Ringbom, Håkan, Scott Jarvis 2009. *The importance of cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning*. – *Handbook of language teaching* / Ed. by Catherine J. Doughty, Michael H. Long. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 106–118.

Sadeniemi, Matti 1950. *Totaalisesta ja partiaalisesta predikatiivista*. – *Virittäjä* 54, 46–53.

Scott, Mike 2008. *WordSmith Tools version 5. Lexical Analysis Software*. Liverpool.

Schot-Saikku, Päivi 1990. *Der Partitiv und die Kasualternation: Zum Fall Partitiv in der Finnischen Syntax*. Hamburg: Buske.

Vilkuna, Maria 1996. *Suomen lauseopin perusteet*. Helsinki: EDITA.

## Koopulakonstruktsioonid soome õppijakeeles: partitiivpredikatiivide kasutus eesti, saksa ja hollandi lähtekeelega õppijatel

Marianne Spoelman

### Resümee

Partitiivi on peetud soome keele õppijate jaoks problemaatiliseks käändeks. Käesolev uurimus, mis on osa laiaulatuslikumast soome õppijakeele partitiiviuuringust, käsitleb parti-

tiivpredikatiivi kasutust eesti, soome ja hollandi lähtekeelega õppijate kirjalikes tekstides. Eesmärk on kindlaks teha ja selektada õppijate peamisi komistuskive partitiivi kasutamisel ning analüüsida lähtekeele võimalikku mõju. Uurimisaines on valitud Oulu ülikooli soome õppijakeele korpusest: eesti lähtekeelega õppijate allkorpus sisaldab 90 236, saksa lähtekeelega õppijate allkorpus 32 300 ja hollandi lähtekeelega õppijate allkorpus 46 670 sõnet. Kontrollkorpuseks on kasutatud soome kirjakeele korpuse põhjal koostatud alamkorpust, milles on umbes 2,7 miljonit sõnet. Mitmedimensionaalse veaanalüüsi tulemusel selgusid silmnähtavad erinevused ühelt poolt eesti lähtekeelega ning teiselt saksa ja hollandi lähtekeelega õppijate partitiivpredikatiivide kasutuses. Kui tegu on lähisugulaskeeltega, näitasid analüüsi tulemused nii lähtekeele positiivset (nt partitiivi ülekasutuse puudumine) kui ka negatiivset mõju (nt eesti keele partitiivpredikaate sisaldavate koopulakonstruktsioonide ülekanne). Kui tegu on mittesugulaskeeltega, oli partitiivpredikatiivide kasutus ebasüsteemiline, mõnikord algvormi eelistav. Saadud uurimistulemused täiendavad olemasolevaid, lisades lähtekeele mõju olemuse kohta väärtuslikku teavet.

## Autor

MA Marianne Spoelman, University of Oulu, Finnish as a Second and Foreign Language.

marianne.spoelman@oulu.fi