Partitives in the A/S slot and verb indexing

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Partitives (three of the students) denote (i) a part-whole relation in which the part (three (students)) is a subset from a superset (the students) (ENÇ 1991; VON HEUSINGER 2002: 261-62; KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM 2001, 2009) or (ii) they may also develop into simple quantifier/numeral/measure phrases (pseudo-partitives, SELKIRK 1977) as in English a cup of tea. Most frequently partitives feature indefinite subsets. Accordingly, many languages generalize/conventionalize this asymmetry and develop generalized partitives in which the subset is inherently unexpressed:

(1) Lithuanian (Indo-European)

Kieme privažiavo žmonių
village.LOC arrive.PST.3 PEOPLE.GEN/PART.PL ‘(Many) people arrived in the village.’

The partitive žmonių ‘of people’ has no nominal head. Since it occupies the S slot, it is supposed to trigger verb agreement. However, it does not and the verb is demonstrably in the default, non-agreeing form.

Cross-linguistically, generalized partitives in the A/S slot may trigger three types of agreement patterns: (i) default as in (1), (ii) subset or (iii) superset agreement.

Some other languages have (ii) subset agreement: the implicit value of the subset is copied on the verb (semantic “agreement” in CORBETT 2006: 155):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The value of the implicit subset</th>
<th>‘[one] of us’</th>
<th>‘[some] of us’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The value of the verbal index</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Cross-indexing generalized partitives on the verb

In Garifuna, the partitive expression is formed by means of the ablative-like postposition - dagiya. The verb agrees with the person and number of the subset:

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

Éibagua-liyan wá-dagiya.
run-T3PL P1PL-from/part
‘[Some] of us ran.’

In (2), the subset value ‘some’ is plural and third person, while the superset is first-person plural. It is the former and not the latter value that the verb agrees with. Similarly, the plural subset agrees with the auxiliary in Armenian and Jibbali:

(3) Modern Eastern Armenian (Indo-European; Dum-Tragut 2009: 313)
R’adio-y-ov heř arjak-v-um ēín 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.’

(4) Jibbali (Afroasiatic, Semitic; Oman; Hofstede 1998: 42)

män ē-ôn̥ dccd yazar îkbért
from/PART DEF-people still.3M.SG/C.PL visit.impf.3M.PL DEF.tomb

‘some people still visit a (saint’s) tomb’

Finally, there are languages with the (iii) superset agreement:

(5) Eibela (Bosavi; Papua New-Guinea; Aiton 2016: 371)

niːje: la: mënːnaː kĕi di-si
1.PART DET go.1.FUT ASER PFV-MED.PFV

‘(Uːgei said) “Some of us will also go.” and then…’

(6) Warapu (Sko; Papua New-Guinea; Corris 2005: 158)

Ra n-amá-ute, owu n-o-ké(p)i.
one irr-2SG.M-walk some IRR-2PL.M-(2PL.M).sit

‘One of you will go, some of you will stay.’

In this paper, I argue for a diachronic explanation for the threefold agreement patterns:

(7) subset > default > superset

I compare it with the development to partitives with an overt subset NP in which the head noun develops into a measure phrase or a quantifier:

(8) a. A group of students was present.

b. A group of students were present.

The development of a group into a quantifier makes the whole construction one NP. Accordingly, in (8), formally the former superset provides for the number value for the verb.

References


