

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 žmoniu
 village.LOC arrive.PST.3 people.GEN/PART.PL
 ‘(Many) people arrived in the village.’

The partitive *žmoniu* ‘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):

The value of the implicit subset	‘[one] of us’	‘[some] of us’
The value of the verbal index	singular	plural

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-tiyan 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 herʹarjak-v-um ēin Hovhannes
 radio-INS broadcast-PASS-PTCP.PRS AUX.3PL.PST Hovhannes
Tʹumanyan-i patmvackʹ-ner-icʹ
 Tʹumanyan-DAT story-PL-ABL/PART
 ‘Some of Hovhannes Tʹumanyan’s stories were broadcasted on the radio.’

- (4) Jibbali (Afroasiatic, Semitic; Oman; Hofstede 1998: 42)
m3n é-yó d^c od y3zir iḳbért
from/PART DEF-people still.3M.SG/C.PL visit.IMP.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)
ni:je: la: menɛ:na: kei di-si
1.PART DET go.I.FUT ASSER PFV-MED.PFV
 ‘(U:gei 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.

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