Finnish partitive case as a determiner suffix

**Problem:** Finnish partitive case shows up on subject and object nouns, alternating with nominative and accusative respectively, where the interpretation involves indefiniteness or negation (Karlsson 1999). On these grounds some researchers have proposed that partitive is a structural case in Finnish (Vainikka 1993, Kiparsky 2001). A problematic consequence of this is that Finnish is assumed to have a structural case not found in other languages, losing the universal inventory of structural cases. I will propose an alternative, namely that partitive be analysed instead as a member of the Finnish determiner class.

**Data:** There are three contexts in which the Finnish subject is in the partitive (alternating with the nominative in complementary contexts): (i) indefinite divisible non-count nouns (1), (ii) indefinite plural count nouns (2), (iii) where the existence of the argument is completely negated (3). The data are drawn from Karlsson (1999:82-5).

1. **Divisible non-count nouns**
   a. Partitive mass noun = indef
      Purki-ssa on leipä-ä.    Leipä on purki-ssa.
      tin-INESS is bread-PART    Bread is tin-INESS
      ‘There is some bread in the tin.’  ‘The bread is in the tin.’
   b. c.f. Nominative mass noun = def

2. **Plural count nouns**
   a. Partitive count noun = indef
      Kadu-lla  on  auto-j-a.  Auto-t ovat kadulla.
      Street-ADESS is.3SG car-PL-PART Car-PL are.3PL street-ADESS
      ‘There are cars in the street.’  ‘The cars are in the street.’
   b. c.f. Nominative count noun = def

3. **Negation**
   a. Partitive, negation of existence
      Kadulla ei  ole auto-a.   Auto ei ole kadulla.
      street not is car-PART    car not is street
      ‘There aren’t any cars in the street.’  ‘The car is not in the street.’
   b. c.f. Nom, incomplete negation

Partitive objects appear in four contexts, alternating with accusative case: (i) negative sentences (4), (ii) indefinites of unlimited quantity (5), (iii) non-resultative clauses (6), (iv) with verbs of emotion (7).

4. **Negation**
   a. Partitive with negation
      En  osta auto-a.     Osta-n auto-n.
      not buy car-PART    buy-1 SG car-ACC
      ‘I won’t buy the car.’  ‘I buy/will buy the car.’
   b. c.f. Accusative in positive sentence

5. **Indefinite, non-limited quantity**
   a. Partitive, indefinite quantity
      Silja joi maito-a.  Silja joi maido-n.
      Silja drank milk-PART    Silja drank milk-ACC
      ‘Silja drank some milk.’  ‘Silja drank the milk.’
   b. c.f. Accusative resultative object

6. **Non-resultatives**
   a. Partitive in non-resultative
      Tyttö luki läksy-ä.    Tyttö luki läksy-n.
      girl did homework-PART    girl did homework-ACC
      ‘The girl was doing her homework.’  ‘The girl did her homework.’
   b. c.f. Accusative in resultative
Verbs of emotion
a. Partitive, emotion
   Pelkäätkö koir-i-a?
   ‘Are you afraid of dogs?’

b. c.f. Acc, emotionally neutral verb
   Osta-n auto-n.
   ‘I will buy the car.’

Generally in the Principles and Parameters framework (Chomsky 1981 onwards), nominative and accusative are regarded as the universal structural cases. These partitive-nominative and partitive-accusative alternations in Finnish are a problem in that they raise the question of whether Finnish has an additional structural case not found in other languages. Its appearance with verbs of emotion further complicates matters, since this looks more like the selection of an inherent case due to an idiosyncratic property of the predicate, thus inviting a dual analysis of partitive as both structural and inherent.

**Solution:** I propose that partitive be analysed as a type of indefinite determiner or quantifier suffix, instead of a case. Finnish lacks overt determiners, and some of the indefinite determiner and negative polarity functions are carried out by the partitive case. This explains its appearance in contexts where one expects structural case in other languages, but where indefinite determiners or negative polarity items would be added in translation (1-5). Partitive in non-resultatives (6) might also be connected with definiteness, an indefinite (partitive) object being in some sense unfinished (6a), and a definite (accusative) object finished (6b), with the same idea potentially stretching also to verbs of emotion, since these tend not to involve the completion of an action. Recent research on adpositions often analyses ‘local’ cases as the spell-out of PP (c.f. Riemsdijk & Huijbregts 2001, among others). If a noun can raise to P to receive directional/locational case endings, then, by the same logic, it can raise to intervening heads such as D, to gain other inflections. The Finnish partitive case can thus be seen as an indefinite counterpart to definite determiner suffixes in languages such as Romanian and Norwegian.

(8) **Definite article suffixes (Giusti 2002:58)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
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<tr>
<td>băiat-ul (Romanian)</td>
<td>gutt-en (Norwegian)</td>
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<tr>
<td>boy-DEF</td>
<td>‘the boy’</td>
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In Indo-European languages, genitive case often has certain partitive uses (c.f. Latin, Ancient Greek, German). Time allowing, I will show that the genitive case in German also has an intrinsic link with definite and indefinite determiners, and patterns differently from the other cases in German. This suggests that it may also come into consideration for such an analysis, and that the proposal might be further reaching, cross-linguistically. On this hypothesis the fact that Hungarian, a case-rich language, is able to manage without genitive or partitive could be linked to the fact that it has a full set of determiners and a possessive agreement paradigm.

**Theoretical implications:** If the Finnish partitive is a suffix spelling out D (as I argue here), and if directional/locational suffixes spell out P (as Riemsdijk & Huijbregts 2001 argue), then case paradigms such as those listed in traditional grammars of morphologically rich languages such as Finnish are in fact epiphenomenal, with different suffixes corresponding to different layers of structure above the noun.