

Case Alternation and NPIs in Questions in Finnish

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I investigate a seemingly optional variation between accusative and partitive case-marked objects in yes/no questions in Finnish. I argue that the ‘optional’ partitive is NPI-like, both in terms of the properties of the contexts which license it and its semantic effects. After reviewing the basics of object case-marking in Section 1, in Sections 2 and 3 I take a closer look at contexts which license and fail to license the case alternation and NPIs. I show that the ‘optional’ partitive and NPIs have two main functions in common: (i) They are licensed when the presupposition introduced by a factive verb is only locally projected (Section 4), and (ii) the ‘optional’ partitive and NPIs can both produce a negative bias in questions, which can be linked to their effects in *wh*-questions (Section 5). The conclusion in Section 6 summarizes my claims.

1.1. Object case marking in Finnish

Finnish is a flexible word order language with canonical SVO order (e.g. Vilkuna 1995). In declaratives, the object is usually in the accusative or the partitive case. To understand the division of labor between these two cases, it’s easiest to start by looking at the partitive case. As Kiparsky (1998) notes, the partitive has two main functions: (i) an aspectual function and (ii) an NP-related function.

In its aspectual function, the partitive case occurs on the objects of verbs with irresultative¹ interpretations (ex. 1a). Verbs that are interpreted resultatively have accusative objects, as in (1b) (see Kiparsky 1998:3).

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1. Work on the aspectual nature of the partitive/accusative distinction uses a range of terms: resultative/irresultative, telic/atelic, terminative/durative etc (see e.g. Heinämäki 1994). Aspect does not play a central role in this paper, but I will use the term ‘resultativity’ when I do mention it.

- (1) a. Rakastan *sinut/sinua.²
 love-1sg *you-ACC/you-PART
 ‘I love you.’ (irresultative)
- b. Sain lahjan/*lahjaa.
 got-1sg present-ACC/*present-PART
 ‘I got a/the present.’ (resultative)

The second main function of the partitive case is the so-called NP-related function. As Kiparsky notes, this function is observable on the objects of resultative verbs. It is not morphologically ‘visible’ with irresultative verbs, as their objects are obligatorily partitive anyway. The object of a resultative verb such as *saada* ‘to get’, which is normally accusative, is partitive if it is a “quantitatively indeterminate” bare plural (Kiparsky 1998:4). Mass nouns are also always partitive, even when they are objects of resultative verbs. These facts are illustrated in (1c).

- c. Saan karhuja/karhut/vettä
 Get-1sg bears-PART/bears-ACC/water-PART
 ‘I get bears/the bears³/water.’

In sum, partitive-marked objects occur with irresultative predicates and when the object is “quantitatively indeterminate” (Kiparsky 1998:5). Thus, accusative-assigning verbs can, in some cases (mass nouns and bare plurals) have partitive objects, but partitive-assigning verbs do not occur with accusative objects.

In addition to the resultative function and the NP-related function, partitive case is also required on objects in negative sentences, regardless of the telicity of the verb, as shown in (1d). Heinämäki (1994) notes that this use of the partitive can be connected to the resultative function: Negative sentences are “unbounded” (Heinämäki 1994:221), just like irresultative sentences are unbounded.

- d. En ostanut karhua/*karhun.
 neg-1sg buy-p.part bear-PART/*bear-ACC.
 ‘I did not buy a/the bear.’

2. I will often use the slash / to condense two examples into one. In some cases, I also use / to indicate an irrelevant or undetermined distinction, particularly in translating articleless Finnish nouns into English (e.g. 1d, where Finnish does not overtly encode the distinction between ‘the’ and ‘a’).

3. As Kiparsky points out, “the NP-related accusative/partitive contrast does not correspond exactly to definiteness or to any other familiar determiner feature” (Kiparsky 1998:4).

2. Some unexpected data

Consider verbs like *huomata* ‘to notice,’ *tietää* ‘to know,’ and *antaa* ‘to give’, which permit only accusative case in declaratives with singular count noun objects.⁴ Unexpectedly, when those declaratives are turned into yes/no questions, both accusative and partitive case are allowed. The case alternation is allowed regardless of whether the verb is factive or non-factive.

- (2) a. Pekka huomasi **miehen/*miestä**.
 Pekka-NOM noticed **man-ACC/*man-PART**
 ‘Pekka noticed a/the man.’
- b. Huomasiko Pekka **miehen/miestä**?
 Noticed-QUES Pekka-NOM **man-ACC/man-PART**
 ‘Did Pekka notice a/the man?’

The primary question I aim to address in this paper is, how can the object be ‘optionally’ partitives in yes/no questions, when only accusative case is possible in positive declaratives? What guides this alternation? Moreover, why – as we will see later – is this alternation impossible in certain other kinds of questions, such as yes/no questions with ‘only’ and clefted questions? I leave for future work the question of how this ‘optional’ partitive/accusative alternation relates to the ‘grammatically required’ partitive/accusative marking (e.g. on quantitatively indeterminate objects, objects of irresultative verbs, etc). This is a difficult question, given that there is still disagreement about whether the different functions of the grammatically required partitive can be unified, and which of the cases is unmarked (e.g. Leino 1991, Kiparsky 1998, Heinämäki 1994, Itkonen 1976, Larjavaara 1991).

2.1. The connection between partitive case and NPIs

In the subsequent sections, we take a closer look at the contexts which license, and fail to license, the accusative/partitive case alternation. I will show that the contexts which permit the ‘optional’ partitive have a

4. Some verbs, like *antaa* ‘to give’ can be ‘coerced’ into having an irresultative or atelic interpretation with partitive singular count objects in declaratives. However, in the subsequent examples, we consider only the resultative interpretation.

5. I will often use the term ‘optional’ partitive to mean the partitive which alternates with accusative in contexts such as (2b)–even though the alternation is not really optional. The term is intended to contrast with the ‘grammatically required’ partitive in contexts such as on objects of irresultatives, mass nouns etc.

remarkable similarity to the distribution of NPIs in Finnish.⁶ This is summarized in the chart below.

	<i>'Optional' partitive</i>	<i>NPI</i>
Positive declaratives ⁷	*	*
Regular yes/no questions	ok	ok
Yes/no questions with 'only'	*	*
Yes/no questions with clefts	*	*
Wh-questions	*	*

In light of these data, I will argue that the 'optional' partitive is NPI-like, both in terms of the properties of the contexts which license it and its semantic effects. I will show that the 'optional' partitive and NPIs have two main functions in common: First, they are licensed when the presupposition introduced by a factive verb is only locally projected. The licensing ability of a context with local presupposition projection can be attributed to its being downward entailing (see e.g. Ladusaw 1980) or nonveridical (see e.g. Giannakidou 1998), as we will see later. I also show how the observation that the 'optional' partitive and NPIs are ruled out in certain other kinds of questions, such as yes/no questions with 'only' and clefted questions, follows from this analysis. Second, I provide evidence illustrating that the 'optional' partitive and NPIs can both produce a negative bias in questions, and I will relate this to their effects in wh-questions.

3. NPIs in declaratives and yes/no questions

We saw in (2a) that positive declaratives do not license the ACC/PART case alternation. Similarly, as is well known, NPIs⁸ are also ungrammatical in positive declaratives.

- (3) Pekka rakastaa Liisaa/*ketään.
 Pekka loves Liisa-PART/*anyone-PART
 'Pekka loves Liisa/*anyone.'

In contrast to declaratives, yes/no questions license the 'optional' partitive case, as we saw already in (2b). As is well known, NPIs – which in Finnish

6. Kiparsky (1998) notes that negation assigns partitive case (see ex. (1d)), and further notes that, "like a negative polarity item, partitive case can appear in implicitly negative contexts" (p.23), and as an example, he presents the two questions I've repeated in (9a). However, he does not present a systematic comparison of contexts which license NPIs and partitive case.

7. By 'declaratives', I mean affirmative/positive declaratives. Partitive case is of course licensed on objects in negative declarative (ex. 1d).

8. Note that free-choice items and NPIs are clearly morphologically different in Finnish. *Ketään* 'anyone-PART' cannot be interpreted as a free-choice item.

must be in the partitive case if they are in object position⁹ – are also licensed in questions, as (4) shows.

- (4) *Huomasitko sinä ketään?*
 Noticed-QUEST you-NOM anyone-PART?
 ‘Did you notice anyone?’

In the next sections, I present evidence from the interpretation of different types of yes/no questions which shows that ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs have the two functions mentioned above, namely that they (i) indicate that the presupposition introduced by a factive verb is only locally projected, and (ii) can produce a negative bias in yes/no and wh-questions.

4. Local presupposition projection cases

In this section we will see that, with a factive verb, use of the ‘optional’ partitive case or an NPI can have an impact on the presupposition. We will start by characterizing the semantic intuitions concerning the accusative/partitive case alternation. Second, we will show that the same effect generated by the ‘optional’ partitive is triggered by NPIs. Third, an account will be outlined that relates the licensing requirement of NPIs to these presupposition effects. Finally, yes/no questions with “only” and clefts, which license neither the ‘optional’ partitive nor NPIs, will be considered.

4.1. ‘Optional’ partitive with factive verbs

In yes/no questions with factive verbs, the accusative/partitive alternation seems to correspond to different contextual assumptions. Consider example (5a), with accusative case. Here, the invitation in question had a signature, and the speaker is asking whether Henrik noticed it or not. In other words, the question asks about the polarity of the predicate. Now, consider example (5b), with partitive case. In contrast to the accusative case, the ‘optional’ partitive case implies that the speaker does not know whether a draft is present at the relevant location.

- (5) a. *Kysyn huomasiko Henrik kutsun **sigun**.*
 Ask-1sg noticed-QUES Henrik invitation-GEN **sig-ACC**

9. The lack of an accusative NPI form already strikes me as suggestive of a relation between NPIs and the partitive case. It suggests that object NPIs and accusative objects are not compatible – and, as we will see in the course of this paper, this is what we would expect, given the uses of the ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs.

‘I’m asking whether Henrik noticed the signature on the invitation’
(www.cs.tut.fi/~leopold/Babylon5/SiL2000/Synttarit.html)

- b. Avatessasi ovia laboratorion huoneisiin, huomasitko vedon
tunnetta?
Opening-2sg-part doors laboratory-GEN rooms-ILL, noticed-2sg-?
draft-GEN **feeling-PART**?
‘When you opened doors into the rooms of the laboratory, did you
notice a draft?’ (lit. ‘feeling of a draft’)
(<http://www.fanison.fi/sivut/tarkistuslista.htm>)

Below is the constructed example with a minimal pair of accusative and partitive case that we already saw in (2b):

- (2) b. Huomasiko Pekka **miehen/miestä**?
Noticed-QUES Pekka-NOM **man-ACC/man-PART**
‘Did Pekka notice a/the man?’

Here, when the object ‘man’ is accusative, the question can be interpreted as asking ‘Did Pekka notice a/the man or did Pekka not notice a/the man?’. In contrast, when the object is partitive, the question implies that the speaker doesn’t know whether a man is present at the relevant location for Pekka to notice him. In some sense, the question asks, was a/the man present?¹⁰

4.2. NPIs and factive verbs

NPIs in yes/no questions with factive verbs seem to have the same effects as the ‘optional’ partitive case in these contexts. A question such as (6), with a NPI, does not presuppose that someone was present. In contrast, use of an indefinite pronoun implies that the speaker knows that someone was present.

- (6) Huomasitko sinä ketään/jonkun?
Noticed-QUEST you-NOM anyone-PART/someone-ACC?
‘Did you notice anyone/someone?’

10. It is important to note that full names or pronouns also exhibit the accusative/partitive case alternation in object position. We should thus not characterize accusative as marking an existentially presupposed/definite noun or partitive as associated with indefinite nouns.

4.3. Explaining the semantic effect

Let us now consider why, in yes/no questions with factive verbs, the ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs give rise to the interpretive effects discussed above. A factive verb such as ‘to notice’ presupposes the truth of its propositional complement (see e.g. Karttunen 1973, Beaver 1995, *inter alia*). For example, ‘Peter noticed that Jane was eating ice cream’ presupposes that ‘Jane was eating ice cream.’ If the verb has an NP object, e.g. ‘Peter noticed Jane,’ then the presence of that NP at the relevant location is presupposed, as if the NP is a concealed embedded sentence. Thus, (2a) means that ‘Pekka noticed that a/the man was present,’ and thus it presupposes that ‘a/the man was present (at the relevant location).’

Presuppositions can project to different levels, depending on other elements present in the sentence (see e.g. Karttunen 1974, Gazdar 1979). In the case of total projection, the presupposed content is part of the speaker’s beliefs. For example, a speaker who utters a declarative like (2a) believes that a man was present at the relevant location. On the other hand, in the case of local presupposition projection, the presupposed content is part of an embedded subject’s beliefs or it is included as asserted content under some operator. Consider the example “If Mary’s married then her husband must be very tolerant” (Beaver 1995:23). Here, the possessive NP ‘her husband’ presupposes that Mary is married. However, this presupposition is not fully projected in this example, as it is cancelled by the if-clause. Thus, it is only locally projected under the conditional operator. In an example such as “If Mary goes home, she will see her husband,” the presupposition that Mary is married does project to the top and reaches the speaker’s beliefs. Thus, in ‘if-then’ constructions, we can have local or total projection.

With this distinction in mind, let us now return to the accusative/partitive alternation in yes/no questions. Recall that yes/no questions with factives, such as (2b), allow both partitive and accusative case, with each case being associated with a different interpretation. E.g. in (2b), with an accusative object, the speaker presupposes a man is present at the relevant location. With a partitive object, however, s/he doesn’t know whether a man is present.

- (2) b. Huomasiko Pekka **miehen/miestä** ?
 Noticed-QUES Pekka-NOM **man-ACC/man-PART**
 ‘Did Pekka notice a/the man?’

Since questions contain the operator Q, there are two logical possibilities when it comes to presupposition projection: (i) default total projection, or (ii) local projection under Q. I claim that these two

possibilities correspond to accusative and partitive case respectively. When the presupposition that arises lexically from the verb ‘to notice’ is projected to the top, the question presupposes that the speaker believes that ‘a/the man is present (at the relevant location),’ just like the declarative version of this same sentence. The NP object then bears accusative. However, if the presupposition is only projected under the Q operator, the presupposed content does not reach the speaker’s beliefs.¹¹ As a result, the question does not presuppose that the speaker believes a/the man to be present at the relevant location. This is marked by using partitive case on the NP. As for NPIs, as we saw before, they have the same effect as partitive case: They enforce the local presupposition projection reading.

Now, let us consider the relation between NPI/partitive licensing and the local presupposition effect. Regardless of whether we opt for a monotonicity-based approach (e.g. Ladusaw 1980 and others) or a veridicality-based approach (e.g. Giannakidou 1998, Zwarts 1995) to NPI licensing, it’s clearly the case that whatever licenses NPIs needs to have the proposition containing the NPI in its scope. Thus, for an NPI or ‘optional’ partitive case to be licensed in a yes/no question with a factive verb, we need to have the NPI or the partitive object in the scope of the licensing operator, i.e. we need to have local projection. The effect we saw with ‘optional’ partitive of the speaker not knowing whether the partitive-marked object is present at the relevant location follows from this scopal licensing requirement. If the object is accusative, we can have default total projection.

It is worth pointing out that, for the present account, we crucially need the NPI (or ‘optional’ partitive) licenser to have scope over both the asserted and the presupposed content containing the NPI (or ‘optional’ partitive). In other words, it does not seem to be sufficient to have the licensing satisfied only at the assertion level. The kind of double licensing needed here also occurs with factive verbs in Catalan,¹² and an investigation

11. It is not clear whether the disappearance of the presupposition at the speaker level in the partitive/NPI examples should be labeled local presupposition projection or local accommodation under Q (see Beaver 1995:214 for discussion of another unclear case). However, in the present paper, for reasons of clarity and brevity, I will refer to it as local projection.

12. In Catalan, the distinction between total vs. local presupposition can be flagged by mood (indicative vs. subjunctive). In (1), subjunctive mood indicates local projection (we do not know if there was a draft) and indicative mood indicates total projection of the presupposition that there was a draft. (Maribel Romero, p.c.).

(1) La Núria no va notar que hi hagués/ havia corrent d’aire.
The Nuria not noticed that there-was-SUBJ/there-was-IND draft of air
‘Nuria didn’t notice that there was a draft.’

of the crosslinguistic significance of this phenomenon is an interesting avenue for future research.

4.4. Nonlicensing question contexts

In contrast to regular yes/no questions, yes/no questions with the focus marker ‘only’ and clefted yes/no questions do not allow factive verbs to occur with ‘optional’ partitive or NPI objects. As shown below for questions with ‘only’, this is the case even if *vain* ‘only’ is not modifying the object. This pattern is illustrated for the ‘optional’ partitive case in (7a), and the NPI ‘anyone’ in (7b).

- (7) a. Huomasiko (vain) Pekka (vain) **miehen/*miestä** (vain maanantaina)?
Noticed-QUEST (only) Pekka-NOM (only) **man-ACC/*man-PART** (only Monday-on)?
‘Did (only) Pekka notice (only) a/the man (only on Monday)?’
- b. Huomasiko (*vain) Pekka (*vain) **ketään** (*vain) maanantaina?
Noticed-QUEST (*only) P-NOM (*only) **anyone-PART** (*only) Monday-on?
‘Did (only) Pekka notice (only) anyone (only) on Monday)?’

Like yes/no questions with ‘only’, clefted questions are also incompatible with the ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs, regardless of which constituent is clefted. In Finnish, any constituent can be clefted in a question by moving it to spec-CP and adding the question marker suffix [-ko/kö]. However, any clefting of a yes/no question results in an ungrammatical sentence if an NPI or ‘optional’ partitive object is present. This is illustrated below.

- (8) a. **Miehenkö/*Miestäkö** Pekka huomasi?
Man-ACC-QUEST/Man-PART-QUEST P-NOM noticed?
‘Was it a/the man that Pekka noticed?’
- b. Pekkako **miehen/*miestä** huomasi?
Pekka-QUEST **man-ACC/*man-PART** noticed?
‘Was it Pekka who noticed a/the man?’
- c. **Liisanko/*ketäänkö** Pekka huomasi?
L-ACC-QUEST/anyone-PART-QUEST P-NOM noticed?
‘Was it Liisa/*anyone that Pekka noticed?’
- d. Pekkako **Liisan/*ketään** huomasi?
Pekka-QUEST **Liisa-ACC/*anyone-PART** noticed?
‘Was it Pekka that noticed Liisa/*anyone?’

The crucial difference between ‘regular’ yes/no questions on the one hand, and clefted questions and yes/no questions with ‘only’ on the other hand, is that the latter introduce an additional presupposition, triggered by “only” and the cleft construction. A clefted question such as ‘Was it Pekka that noticed Liisa?’ presupposes ‘Someone noticed Liisa’. Similarly, the focus marker ‘only’ also generates a presupposition. A question such as ‘Did Pekka notice only Liisa?’ presupposes ‘Pekka noticed someone.’ Importantly, these additional presuppositions originating from “only” and clefts seem to project to the top, outside the domain of the question and into the speaker’s beliefs, i.e. they cannot be locally projected. As a result, ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs, which are licensed by local projection, are ungrammatical in these contexts.

5. Negative bias

In this section I show that, in addition to being NPI-like in the sense that it flags a yes/no question with a factive verb as having only local presupposition projection, ‘optional’ partitive case also produces a negative bias in questions, just like certain NPIs do. This interpretive effect applies both to factive and non-factive verbs. After considering data illustrating the negative bias of the ‘optional’ partitive and NPIs in yes/no questions, I relate this to their rhetorical effects in wh-questions.

5.1. Optional partitive and negative bias

Previous work on the Finnish partitive has noted that an ‘implicit negation’ is associated with the ‘optional’ partitive (see e.g. Hakulinen & Karlsson 1979, Heinämäki 1994, Kiparsky 1998). For example, Kiparsky notes that “If the speaker expects a negative answer, he would be more likely to use [9b] rather than [9a]” (Kiparsky 1998:23). In other words, use of the ‘optional’ partitive indicates a bias towards a negative answer. This holds for both factive and non-factive verbs (9c, 2b).¹³

13. A related context in which the partitive is associated with a negative expectation is in examples such as (1). Here, the ‘optional’ partitive can occur in the scope of the negative expressions such as *tuskin* ‘hardly, unlikely.’ It seems that, when the partitive case is used on the object, the likelihood of noticing is lower than when the accusative case is used. NPIs are also licensed in these contexts.

(1) Tuskin Pirkko **Antin/Anttia** huomaa.
hardly Pirkko **Antti -ACC/Antti -PART** notices
 ‘Pirkko probably will not notice Antti.’
 (example modified from Heinämäki 1994:222)

- (9) a. Onko sinulla **kynä**? (Kiparsky 1998:23)
Is-quest you-ADESS **pen-NOM**?¹⁴
'Do you have a pen?'
- b. Onko sinulla **kynää**? (Kiparsky 1998:23)
Is-quest you-ADESS **pen-PART**?
'Do you have a pen?'
- c. Antoiko Pekka Liisalle **kirjan/kirjaa**?
Gave-QUES P.-NOM L.-ALL **kirjan-ACC/book-PART**?
'Did Pekka give Liisa a/the book?'

5.2. NPIs and negative bias

As for NPIs, a lot of recent research has addressed the issue of why questions with certain kinds of NPIs in questions are negatively biased, while others have no such bias (e.g. Lahiri 1998 on Hindi, Guerzoni 2002, Han & Siegel 1997 on English). In Finnish, whether a yes/no question is negatively biased seems to depend on the particular NPI. For example, questions with *kukaan* 'anyone-NOM' and *ketään* 'anyone-PART' are fairly neutral (unless the NPI is phonologically stressed), whereas questions with NPIs of the *yksikään* '(emphatic) any-NOM'¹⁵ paradigm are more negatively biased (ex. 10). This is independent of the (non)factivity of the verb. Thus, like the 'optional' partitive, certain NPIs in yes/no questions are negatively biasing.

- (10) a. Huomasiko Liisa **yhtäkään turistia**?
Noticed-QUEST Liisa-NOM **one-clitic-PART tourist-PART**?
'Did Liisa notice any tourist (at all)?'
- b. Antoiko Liisa juomarahaa **yhdellekään taksikuskille**?
Gave-QUEST Liisa-NOM tip-PART **one-clitic-ALL taxi driver-ALL**?
'Did Liisa give a tip to any taxi driver (at all)?'

14. These examples involve the Finnish possessive construction, in which the possessed object is in nominative or partitive and the possessor in adessive case (Finnish has no verb 'to have'). The nominative/partitive-marked possessee in this construction is relatively more object-like, and the adessive-marked possessor more subject-like (see e.g. Vilkuna 1996:341).

15. This NPI can be decomposed into the numeral *yksi* 'one' and the negative enclitic particle *-kaan/-kään*. See e.g. Karttunen (1975) for a discussion of the meaning of this rather flexible particle. Finnish also has the form *yhtään* 'any-PART' which seems somewhat less negatively biasing.

5.3. Rhetorical wh-questions

Additional evidence illustrating that the ‘optional’ partitive resembles NPIs in terms of being negatively biased comes from wh-questions.¹⁶ NPIs and the ‘optional’ partitive case are ungrammatical in neutral wh-questions, but licensed in rhetorical wh-questions.¹⁷ The wh-question with an NPI in (11a) implies that no one knows anything about Slovenia,¹⁸ and the wh-question with ‘optional’ partitive in (11b) implies that no one would notice the two missing combat helicopters. The same facts seem to obtain for non-factive verbs.

- (11) a. *Mutta kuka tietää **mitään** Sloveniasta?*
 But who-NOM knows **anything-PART** Slovenia-ELAT
 But who knows anything about Slovenia?
 (www.helsinginsanomat.fi/uutisarkisto/19981221/ulko/981221ul05.html)
- b. *Kuka edes huomaisi **niitä kahta taisteluhelikopteria**, jotka ovat siinä tapauksessa jääneet uupumaan tilauksesta????*
 Who-NOM even would-notice **those-PART two-PART combat-helicopter-PART**, which are that-INESS case-INESS remained missing order-ELAT?
 ‘Who would even notice the two combat helicopters that are missing from the order?’
 (www.yle.fi/a2/online/vanhus/6/608.html)

A number of analyses bearing on the licensing and interpretative effects of NPIs in wh-questions have been proposed (e.g. Ladusaw 1980, Progovac 1993, Higginbotham 1993, Han & Siegel 1997). Here, I will not argue for one analysis over another, as my aim is simply that point out that both the ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs are licensed in rhetorical wh-questions in Finnish.

16. For reasons of brevity, I will not discuss the case alternation or NPIs in clefted questions/questions with ‘only’ with nonfactive verbs in this paper, although they raise interesting questions about negative bias and positive presupposition.

17. This discussion focuses on argument wh-questions. Adjunct wh-questions are left as a topic for future research.

18. In this example, the wh-word is the subject and the NPI the object, i.e. the trace of the wh-word c-commands the NPI. Subject wh-questions with NPIs like *ever* are also grammatical when interpreted as having a negative bias. For some reason, configurations where the wh-word is the object and the NPI is the subject seem to be more marginal (even with a negatively biased interpretation), at least for some speakers. See Han & Siegel (1997) for an analysis of subj-obj asymmetries in English wh-questions with NPIs.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I investigated a seemingly optional variation between accusative and partitive case-marked objects in questions in Finnish. I claim that the ‘optional’ partitive is NPI-like, and that it shares two main functions with NPIs. On the basis of evidence from native speaker judgments and corpus examples, I claim that NPIs and the optional partitive case are licensed when the presupposition introduced by a factive verb is only locally projected. In addition, I show that the ungrammaticality of the ‘optional’ partitive and NPIs in yes/no questions with ‘only’ and clefted questions follows from my analysis. Second, I provide evidence illustrating that the ‘optional’ partitive and NPIs can both produce a negative bias in questions, and relate this to their effects in wh-questions. At this stage, I leave open what the right analysis of NPI licensing operators and of negative bias is. My main point is that the ‘optional’ partitive case and NPIs in Finnish have the two uses discussed above, and these two uses are also attested for NPIs or NPI-like expressions in other languages.

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