

Account. I argue that despite appearances, it is a semantic property of the vP rather than that of the event predicate which can license partitive case on the object. In support of this claim, I show that habitual interpretation and measure phrases are interpreted outside of vP and thus do not affect partitive case licensing by vP. To account for the apparently varied sources of partitive case, I adopt the assumptions of Chomsky 2000, 2001, and argue that a unique account covers all instances of partitive case mentioned above. It is the property of divisibility, defined in (4), which correlates with partitive case. Divisibility applies to event descriptions and nominal predicates alike, and so permits a uniform treatment of the two sources of partitive case.

To implement the correlation with case, I assume that structural case marking is underspecified, but checked or valued in the syntactic component. The surface form of structural case is determined in the morphological component, and it is realized as partitive when licensed by divisibility. Licensing can take place in two ways: (a) if the case marked constituent is divisible or (b) if the vP is divisible. The divisibility of the case marked constituent licenses partitive case on divisible objects, subjects and adjuncts alike, while that of a vP licenses partitive case only on objects. Crucially, the range of partitive constituents differs in the two environments: divisible nominals are all partitive, and a divisible vP only licenses partitive case on objects (5). To derive this asymmetry, I impose a restriction on the licensing of partitive case:

(6) Partitive case is licensed only if a case feature is realized or checked in a minimal divisible phase

The relevant domains are the phases (Chomsky 2000, 2001) vP and DP, the phases for which divisibility can be defined. Structural case can be realized in divisible DPs, and any divisible DP (including adjuncts) is partitive. Structural case can be checked within a divisible vP, since v can check case. I argue that object case is checked within the vP, but that of subjects and adjuncts is not; this results in divisible vPs licensing partitive case only on objects. I show that subject case is checked by T and the case of adjuncts is checked by v, but outside of the minimal maximal vP. The partitive case distribution in the two licensing conditions is thus appropriately derived.

Extensions. In addition to Finnish case alteration, the proposed account can be extended to other instances of semantically conditioned alternations, such as that of polarity items or subjunctive / indicative alternations. In all these cases, the alternating element is underspecified, and morphological insertion is sensitive to information supplied by the semantic component. Thus the present approach, in addition to encoding semantic dependency, predicts that locality effects are constrained to phases. It also predicts that the behavior of phases depends on the appropriate semantic property only; the syntactic category of the phase is inconsequential. In the case of Finnish alternations, the relevant property was divisibility; thus it is predicted that the relevant phases are those for which divisibility can be defined.

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