The Use of Partitive Plural Predicatives by Learners of Finnish from Related and Non-related L1 Backgrounds: The same side of a slightly different coin

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The use of the partitive case, a typical case characterizing Finnic languages, remains a constant struggle for learners of Finnish as a foreign language. This paper reports on a study on the (under)use of partitive plural predicatives in the writings of Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish as a foreign language. The overall aim of the study reported on in this paper was to identify and address similarities and differences between the use of partitive plural predicatives by learners of Finnish as a foreign language from related and non-related L1 backgrounds (Estonian vs. German/Dutch). Research materials (Estonian learner corpus 82,749 words; German learner corpus 60,490 words; Dutch learner corpus 47,753 words) were selected from the International Corpus of Learner Finnish and aligned to the CEFR proficiency scales. As will be discussed, all learner corpora were particularly at the lower proficiency levels characterized by frequent replacement of partitive plural predicatives by nominative predicatives. However, partitive plural predicatives were in the Estonian learner corpus generally substituted by nominative plural predicatives and in the remaining learner corpora mainly by nominative singular (i.e. uninflected) predicatives, suggesting reliance on L1 morphosyntax versus simplification. It will nevertheless be argued that these seemingly different phenomena also have much in common.

Keywords: Finnish learner language, partitive case, use of prior linguistic knowledge, L1 influence

1 Introduction

The partitive, a typical case characterizing Finnic languages such as Finnish and Estonian, gradually developed from a locative case with separative meaning (*e.g. kotoa* 'from home') into a widely used grammatical case (Denison 1957). In modern Finnish, the partitive is first and foremost used in objects, subjects and predicatives and may indicate partiality, unboundedness and negative polarity. Every Finnish language teacher is very well aware of the fact that the use of the partitive case presents learners of Finnish as a foreign language with a challenge

(e.g. Schot-Saikku 1990). The use of the partitive in Finnish learner language has however not been systematically studied so far, neither has it been addressed which patterns of use, underuse and overuse of the partitive case are common and which specific to groups of learners.

The current study, which is part of a research project on the use of partitive objects, subjects and predicatives in learners from related and non-related L1 backgrounds (Spoelman 2013), investigates the use of partitive plural predicatives by Estonian, German and Dutch learners of Finnish as a foreign language. By comparing groups of learners from different L1 backgrounds, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the use of the partitive case in Finnish learner language and into the use of prior linguistic knowledge in foreign language learning.

1.1   *Predicative case-marking in Finnish and Estonian*

Finnish and Estonian are closely related, which for example comes to light when considering their case systems and the use of the partitive case. Considering the case alternations of the object and the existential subject, the partitive is in both languages used to express unboundedness and negative polarity. Unlike the essentially similar object and subject case alternations, there is an important difference between Finnish and Estonian when it comes to the case-marking of predicatives. This difference resides in the lack of an Estonian equivalent to the Finnish nominative-partitive predicative case alternation and will be specified in the succeeding.

Because a predicative can be defined as a noun or adjective phrase functioning as the complement of a copula construction, predicatives may also be referred to a copula complements. In addition to a predicative, copula constructions involve a subject noun phrase (to which the predicative refers) and a copula verb. The prototypical copula verb is *to be* (*olla* in Finnish and Estonian) (ISK 2004: §944; EKK 1997: 409). Aside from a marginal class of non-alternating predicatives indicating group inclusion or category membership (cf. example (1)), the case of Finnish predicatives alternates between nominative and partitive. This nominative-partitive predicative alternation is typical of Finnish and is not found in any other Finnic languages (Sadeniemi 1950). The Finnish predicative case alternation is based on the general principle that the predicative expresses the divisibility of its subject referent and conforms to the referent in number. Divisible referents license partitive predicatives and indivisible referents nominative predicatives (Vilkuna 1996: 105; ISK 2004: §946). According to the divisibility distinction (cf. Chesterman 1991: 133), Finnish nouns are divided into two categories: divisible and indivisible nouns. Mass nouns, abstract nouns and plural NPs denote divisible entities, while singular count nouns denote indivisible entities (ISK 2004: §555). Because of the lack of this predicative case alternation in Estonian, the occurrence of partitive predicatives is very limited in Estonian (Metslang 1994: 210; Erelt 2009) and limits itself to the marginal class of non-alternating predicatives expressing group inclusion or category membership (Erelt 2003: 97-98). All remaining predicatives bear nominative case in Estonian, regardless of whether the referent denotes indivisible or divisible entities (Denison 1957: 247).

The similarities (≡) and differences (≠) between Finnish and Estonian predicative case-marking are illustrated in example (1)-(3). Example (1) shows that partitive predicatives expressing group inclusion or category membership

occur in both Finnish and Estonian. In addition, singular count nouns take a nominative predicative in both languages (cf. ex. (2)). The differences are illustrated in example (3): where Estonian predicatives always bear nominative case, Finnish predicatives take partitive when referring to a divisible entity. Such a divisible entity can either be a mass noun (3a), an abstract referent (3b) or a plural referent (3c).

(1)   **Finnish**   Hän on maailman <u>parhaimpia laulajia</u>.
        ≡   s/he(Nom) be-3Sg world-Gen.Sg   best-**Part.Pl** singer-**Part.Pl**
        Estonian   Ta on maailma <u>parimaid lauljaid</u>.
                          s/he(Nom) be-3Sg world-Gen.Sg   best-**Part.Pl** singer-**Part.Pl**

                          'He/she belongs to the world's best singers.'

(2)   **Finnish**   *Nainen* oli vielä <u>nuori</u>.
        ≡   woman(Nom.Sg) be-Past.3Sg still-Adv young(**Nom.Sg**)
        Estonian   *Naine* oli veel <u>noor</u>.
                           woman(Nom.Sg) be-Past.3Sg still-Adv young(**Nom.Sg**)

                          'The woman was still young.'

(3) a. **Finnish**   *Maito* on <u>terveellistä</u>.
         ≠   milk(Nom.Sg) be-3Sg   healthy-**Part.Sg**
         Estonian   *Piim* on <u>kasulik</u>.
                           milk(Nom.Sg) be-3Sg   healthy(**Nom.Sg**)

                          'Milk is healthy.'

     b. **Finnish**   *Kauneus* ei ole <u>pysyvää</u>.
         ≠   beauty(Nom.Sg) Neg.3Sg be-3Sg lasting-**Part.Sg**
         Estonian   *Ilu* ei ole <u>püsiv</u>.
                           beauty(Nom.Sg) Neg.3Sg   be-3Sg lasting(**Nom.Sg**)

                          'Beauty is not lasting.'

     c. **Finnish**   *Naiset* olivat vielä <u>nuoria</u>.
         ≠   woman-Nom.Pl be-Past.3Pl still-Adv young-**Part.Pl**
         Estonian   *Naised* old veel <u>noored</u>.
                           woman-Nom.Pl be-Past.3Pl still-Adv young-**Nom.Pl**

                          'The women were still young.'

1.2 The use of prior linguistic knowledge in foreign language learning

The influence of the first language (L1) on the language to be learned (target language/TL), commonly referred to as *L1 influence*, *L1 transfer* or *crosslinguistic influence*, has probably been one of the most extensively investigated SLA phenomena of the past few decades (Jarvis 2000). Studies on L1 influence have, however, mainly focused on English, while genetically distant and typologically different languages such as Finnish have remained under-researched (Kaivapalu & Martin 2007).

In this paper, L1 influence is viewed as a cognitive phenomenon that emerges as a result of the L1-TL similarities that learners establish. Kellerman (1977) was the first to approach L1 influence from a cognitive perspective, followed by Ringbom (1987; 2007) and Jarvis and Pavlenko (2010), among others. The cognitive approach to L1 influence implies that it is not *objective similarity* (i.e. the actual degree of congruence between languages) but *subjective similarity* (the degree of congruence learners perceive or assume to exist) that serves as the main driving force behind L1 influence. The nature of L1 influence can nevertheless be predicted on the basis of the overlap between subjective and objective L1-TL similarities: negative L1 influence occurs where subjective and objective similarities diverge, while positive L1 influence occurs where subjective and objective similarities converge (cf. figure 1). However, L1 influence often ends up being both positive and negative at the same time given that there is almost never a complete one-to-one correspondence between L1 and TL features, structures or phenomena (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2010: 176-183). Accordingly, it appears to be relatively rare that learners formulate L1-TL similarity hypotheses that are completely accurate (Ringbom & Jarvis 2009). At least at the beginning stages of foreign language learning when their knowledge of the target language is still limited, learners make often use of oversimplified equivalence hypotheses (i.e. TL structure ≡ L1 structure). Because of the presence versus lack of objective L1-TL similarities, it is more likely that learners from a closely related L1 background than learners from a non-related L1 background establish L1-TL similarities (Ringbom 2007).
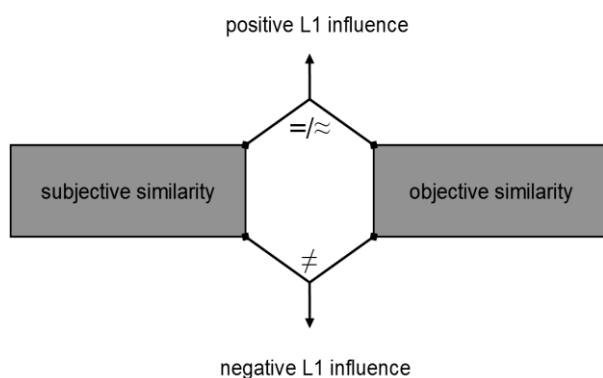

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the emergence of L1 influence

For L1 influence is ultimately a subjective phenomenon (Ellis 2008: 400) that can manifest itself in many different ways (e.g. overuse, errors, facilitation, preference, avoidance) (Odlin 2003) and can work differently in different linguistic subsystems (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2010: 202), it is very challenging if not impossible to exactly predict the nature and likelihood of L1 influence. Also given the fact that the investigation of L1 influence has often lacked methodological rigor (cf. Jarvis 2000; 2010), it may not be surprising that studies on L1 influence have often provided contradictory outcomes. This also holds true for studies on the interaction between L1 influence and target language proficiency, which is one the most important and at the same time one of the most complex factors affecting L1 influence (Odlin 1989: 133-134). Although several studies have supported the widespread assumption that L1 influence decreases with increasing target language proficiency, Jarvis (2000: 246-247)

listed six different directions that L1 influence was found to take in the literature: L1 influence decreased, increased, nonlinearly decreased, nonlinearly increased, remained constant or continually fluctuated as target language proficiency decreased. Jarvis and Pavlenko (2010: 202-203) claim that these contradictory findings are mainly due to significant differences in approach and methodology. Target language proficiency has for example been defined and measured differently by different researchers. Jarvis and Pavlenko also argue that the fact that the studies differ in that some merely focus on negative L1 influence and others on both negative and positive L1 influence accounts for many of the contradictory findings. In line with Odlin (1989: 133-134), Jarvis and Pavlenko state that negative L1 influence ultimately decreases (generally to a point of stabilization) with increasing target language proficiency, while a similar inverse relationship does not hold true for positive L1 influence.

With respect to the present study, the close genetic and typological relatedness between Finnish and Estonian as well as the fact that the Finnish nominative-partitive predicative case alternation does not exist in Estonian create an excellent opportunity for L1 influence to occur in the writings of Estonian learners. Finnish and Estonian are because of their genetic relationship namely not only broadly speaking very similar but the languages also have essentially similar subject and object case-marking conditions. These similarity relations could possibly cause Estonian learners to sometimes assume that Finnish and Estonian predicative case-marking principles are also (largely) interchangeable and cause them to use principles of Estonian predicative case-marking in Finnish. Such L1-TL equivalence hypotheses could then result in either negative L1 influence (e.g. errors) or positive influence (e.g. facilitation). Jarvis' framework (2000; 2010) is hereby adopted to rigorously identify potential L1 influence effects. According to this framework, one way to confirm L1 influence is to determine statistically significant differences in TL behaviour between different groups of learners. The German and Dutch learners' data are however not only involved to identify potential instances of L1 influence in the Estonian learners' of partitive plural predicatives but also to explore the consequences of the lack of relevant L1 knowledge with which the German and Dutch learners are faced, due to the fact that German and Dutch are typologically different from, as well as genetically unrelated to the morphologically rich Finnic languages. Together with Frisian and English, the German and Dutch languages namely constitute the West-Germanic languages (Janssens & Marynissen, 2008). While a productive four-case system (similar to that of classical Latin) is still in existence in German (Lockwood, 1982), the Dutch language has gradually lost nearly of its morphological case distinctions (cf. Bennis, 2000; Weerman, 2003). The German case system and the decline of the Dutch case system are illustrated in table 1, from which the absence of a morphological partitive case can simultaneously been observed (cf. Spoelman 2013: 20-25, for an in-depth discussion on this matter).

Table 1. Singular declination of the masculine NP *der Mann* (German), *die man* (Middle Dutch) and *de man* (Modern Dutch) ('the man')

Case	Modern German	Middle Dutch	Modern Dutch
Nom	der Mann	die man	
Gen	des Mann(e)s	dies man(ne)s	de man
Dat	dem Mann(e)	dien manne	
Acc	den Mann	dien man	

Although the literature on L1 influence does not really go into the question whether the lack of L1-TL similarities implies that simplification or overgeneralization of target language rules and structures may possibly occur, Taylor (1975) paves the way for such hypotheses by characterizing negative L1 influence and overgeneralization as two different manifestations of reliance on prior linguistic knowledge serving the common purpose of facilitating the foreign language learning process. Building on this, and taking into account that the use of the partitive (in all its complexity) is novel to German and Dutch learners of Finnish, it is justified to expect instances of simplification and/or overgeneralization in the German and Dutch learners' use of partitive predicatives, resulting from reliance on their limited knowledge of Finnish.

2 Method

The *International Corpus of Learner Finnish* (ICLFI[1]; cf. Brunni, Lehto & Jantunen, forthcoming, for an elaborative description) is a written learner corpus that was initiated in 2007. The ICLFI is a corpus of Finnish as a foreign language, which is being compiled with the help of Finnish language teachers from more than twenty universities around the world. These university teachers collect their student's assignments, of which the texts to be included in the ICLFI are subsequently selected. Given that the assignments are collected during various language courses, the ICLFI comprises different text types. Most writing samples are descriptive essays, but the corpus also involves letters, narratives, summaries, reviews and other argumentative texts. The corpus is made up of subcorpora covering different L1 backgrounds. Subsets of the Estonian, German and Dutch subcorpora of the International Corpus of Learner Finnish were selected as the materials of this study. The texts chosen to include were those written by native speakers of Estonian, German or Dutch whose parents were also native speakers of these respective languages. The texts were aligned with the proficiency levels (A1-C2) of the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages* based on proficiency ratings performed by two qualified raters (cf. Spoelman 2013: 181-184, for a detailed description of the rating procedure). An overview of the research materials is provided in table 2. As outlined in the succeeding, the unequal distribution across proficiency components[2] and overall corpora did by no means prevent the possibility of conducting meaningful analyses.

Table 2. Overview of the selected learner corpus data

CEFR proficiency level		Subcorpus of Learner Finnish					
		Estonian LC 82,789 words		German LC 60,490 words		Dutch LC 47,753 words	
basic language user	A1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	A2	17,291	21%	9,173	15 %	12,727	27%
independent language user	B1	31,964	39%	30,875	51 %	17,993	38%
	B2	24,143	29%	20,442	34 %	17,033	35%
proficient language user	C1	6,406	8%	-	-	-	-
	C2	3,069	4%	-	-	-	-

The learner corpora were linguistically annotated and error-tagged on the basis of a problem-oriented annotation procedure (cf. McEnery & Wilson 2001: 69): All partitive case-marked noun phrases were tagged as partitive objects, partitive subjects, partitive predicatives or remaining partitives with the help of a set of macros designed to automatically identify partitive forms and to simplify linguistic annotation. Hereafter, the learner corpora were error-tagged on the occurrence of partitive overuse errors (*i.e.* the use of the partitive instead of another case) and partitive underuse errors (*i.e.* the use of another case instead of the partitive). The absolute frequencies of occurrence of partitive case-marked predicatives, partitive predicative overuse errors and partitive predicative underuse errors were extracted from the corpus data with the help of WordSmith Tools 5.0 (Scott 2008). The number of correctly used partitive predicatives was subsequently calculated by subtracting the partitive overuse errors from the partitive case-marked predicatives, and the number of partitive-requiring contexts (PRCs) for partitive predicatives was calculated by adding up the correctly used partitive predicatives and the partitive predicative underuse errors.

Error rates were subsequently calculated in order to be able to draw meaningful comparisons between the learner corpora. The *partitive overuse error rate*, reflecting the percentage of incorrectly used partitive predicatives, was calculated by relating the number of partitive predicative overuse errors to the total number of partitive case-marked predicatives. Accordingly, the *partitive underuse error rate*, reflecting the percentage of PRCs in which the partitive was not realized as the case of the predicative, was calculated by relating the number of partitive predicative underuse errors to the number of predicative PRCs. The *partitive plural underuse error rate,* reflecting the percentage of plural PRCs in which the partitive was not realized as the case of the predicative, was calculated by relating the number of partitive plural underuse errors to the number of partitive plural PRCs. Statistical comparisons were drawn by means of the Log-Likelihood chi-square. A two-tailed α-level of 0.01 was used for all statistical comparisons.

3 Results

Figure 2 provides the partitive predicative overuse and underuse error rates calculated for each learner corpus as a whole as well as for each separate proficiency component. Because only the Estonian learner corpus contained a (small) C1 and C2 component, overall error rates for the A2-B2 part of the Estonian learner corpus were incorporated to facilitate comparisons between the respective learner corpora.

As illustrated in figure 2, approximately 8% (35/424) of the partitive predicatives contained in the overall Estonian learner corpus, 23% (126/560) of the partitive predicatives occurring in the German learner corpus and 21% (105/511) of the partitive predicative represented in the Dutch learner corpus were used incorrectly (referred to as *partitive overuse errors*). In contrast, in 40% (259/648) of the PRCs represented in the Estonian learner corpus, 46% (364/798) of the PRCs contained in the German learner corpus and 30% (174/580) of the PRCs occurring in the Dutch learner corpus the partitive was not realized as the case of the predicative (referred to as *partitive underuse errors*). In figure 2, it is also shown that partitive underuse error rates are higher than partitive overuse errors in all cases except for the B1 component of the Dutch learner corpus. Moreover, all learner corpora are characterized by decreasing partitive underuse error rates with increasing target language proficiency. The partitive predicative underuse error rate observed from the Estonian learner corpus shows a particularly rapid and substantial decrease (from 90 % at A2 to 10 % at C2).
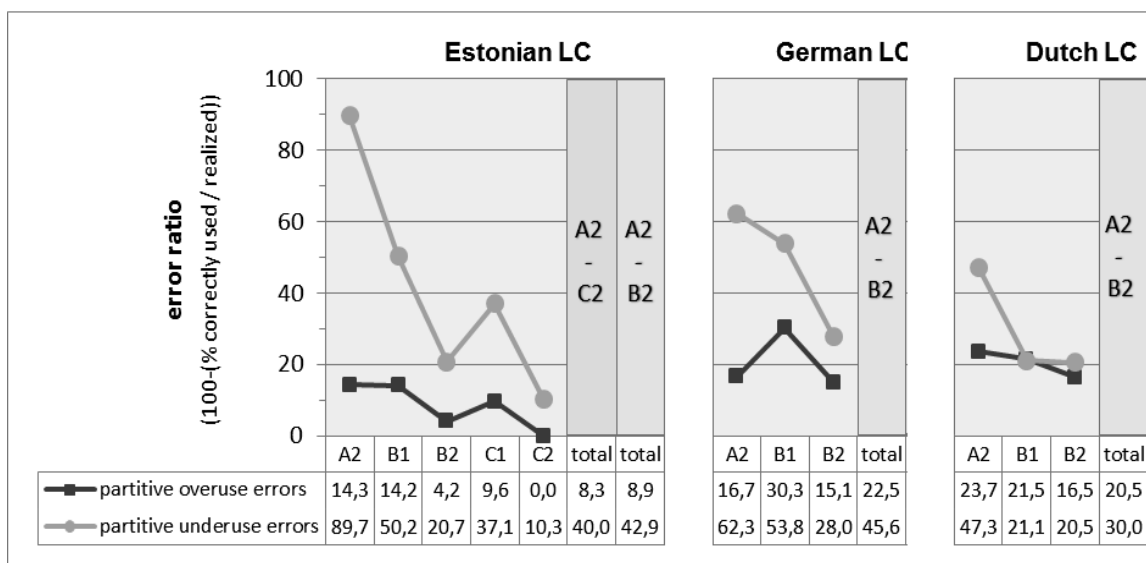

	Estonian LC							German LC				Dutch LC			
	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	total	total	A2	B1	B2	total	A2	B1	B2	total
partitive overuse errors	14,3	14,2	4,2	9,6	0,0	8,3	8,9	16,7	30,3	15,1	22,5	23,7	21,5	16,5	20,5
partitive underuse errors	89,7	50,2	20,7	37,1	10,3	40,0	42,9	62,3	53,8	28,0	45,6	47,3	21,1	20,5	30,0

Figure 2. The overuse versus underuse of the partitive as the case of the predicative

Statistical testing revealed that the overall partitive overuse error rate observed from the Estonian learner corpus was significantly lower than the overuse error rates observed from both the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 32.39; *p* = .0001) and the Dutch learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 24.78; *p* = .0001) but that there were no significant differences between the German and Dutch learner corpora (G^2 (1) = 0.47). The Estonian and German learner corpora were additionally found to exhibit significantly higher overuse error rates at the B1 than at the B2 level (G^2

(1) = 9.01; *p* = .01 and G^2 (1) = 13.24; *p* = .001, respectively), while no significant differences were found to exist between the successive proficiency components of the Dutch learner corpus. With respect to the occurrence of partitive predicative underuse errors, there were no significant differences between the Estonian and the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 2.66), but the Dutch learner corpus was found to exhibit a significantly lower partitive underuse error rate than both the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 21.58; *p* = .0001) and the Estonian learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 8.70; *p* = .01). Furthermore, significant differences were found to exist between all successive proficiency components of the Estonian learner corpus. The lower proficiency component hereby generally showed a higher partitive underuse error rate than the higher proficiency component: the A2 component of the Estonian learner corpus revealed a significantly higher underuse error rate than its B1 component (G^2 (1) = 11.24; *p* = .001), the B1 component a significantly higher error rate than its B2 component (G^2 (1) = 27.68; *p* = .0001), and the C1 component a significantly higher underuse error rate than its C2 component (G^2 (1) = 8.47; *p* = .01). As the one exception to this, the Estonian learner corpus showed a significantly higher underuse error rate at C1 than at B2 (G^2 (1) = 6.78; *p* = .01). Furthermore, the German learner corpus showed a significantly higher partitive underuse error rate at the B1 than at the B2 level (G^2 (1) = 27.40; *p* = .0001) and the Dutch learner corpus a significantly higher underuse error rate at the A2 than at the B1 level (G^2 (1) = 21.27; *p* = .0001). Although the differences between the over- and underuse error rates appeared to be the largest within the Estonian learner corpus, significantly higher under- than overuse error rates were not only observed from this respective learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 111.05; *p* = .0001) but also from the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 51.63; *p* = .0001) and the Dutch learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 9.62; *p* = .01).

Zooming in on the underuse of partitive plural predicatives, figure 3 illustrates the partitive plural underuse error rates observed from the learner corpora and simultaneously exhibits how these underuse error rates were built up. As illustrated in figure 3, partitive plural predicatives were in all learner corpora replaced by either nominative plural or nominative singular predicatives, but not to a similar extent across the learner corpora. The use of nominative plural instead of partitive plural is shown to be particularly common in the Estonian learner corpus, while the use of nominative singular instead of partitive plural is revealed to be most common in the German and Dutch learner corpora. The figure also shows that the use of nominative plural instead of partitive plural clearly decreases when proceeding from the lower to the higher proficiency components of the Estonian learner corpus and the use of nominative singular instead of partitive plural when proceeding from the lower to the higher proficiency components of the German and Dutch learner corpora.
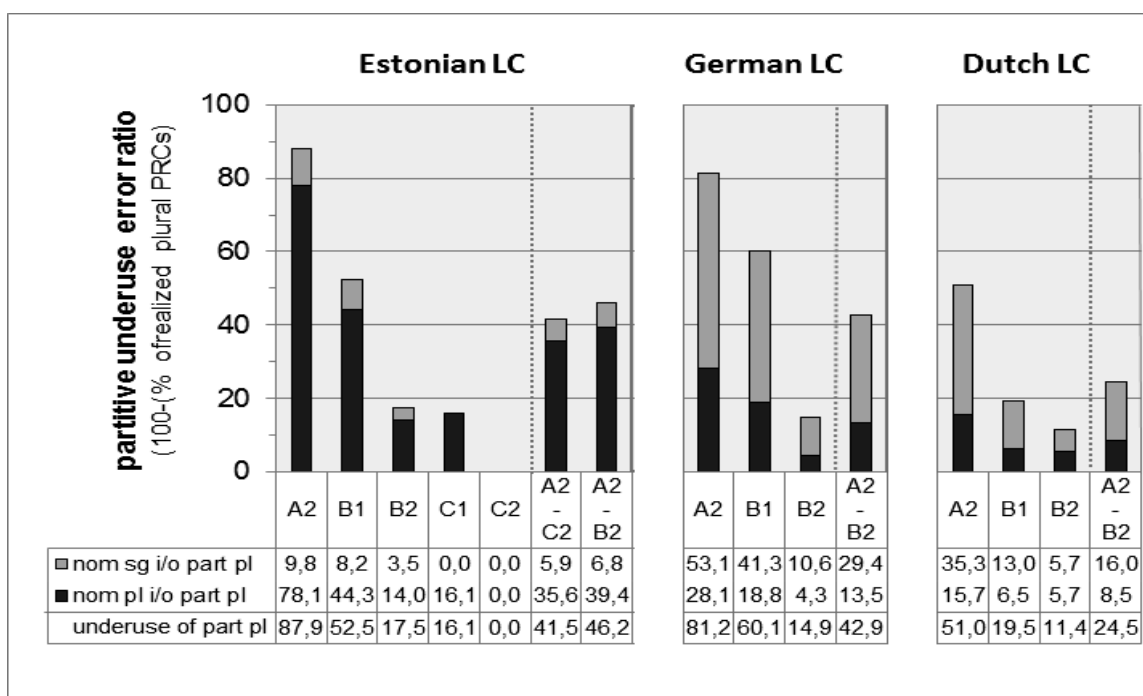
The chart shows the partitive underuse error ratio (100-(% of realized plural PRCs)) across Estonian LC, German LC, and Dutch LC.

	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	A2-C2	A2-B2	A2	B1	B2	A2-B2	A2	B1	B2	A2-B2
nom sg i/o part pl	9,8	8,2	3,5	0,0	0,0	5,9	6,8	53,1	41,3	10,6	29,4	35,3	13,0	5,7	16,0
nom pl i/o part pl	78,1	44,3	14,0	16,1	0,0	35,6	39,4	28,1	18,8	4,3	13,5	15,7	6,5	5,7	8,5
underuse of part pl	87,9	52,5	17,5	16,1	0,0	41,5	46,2	81,2	60,1	14,9	42,9	51,0	19,5	11,4	24,5

Figure 3. The underuse of partitive plural as the case of the predicative

Statistical testing revealed that the replacement of partitive plural by nominative plural was significantly more frequent in the Estonian learner corpus as a whole than in the German and Dutch learner corpora (G^2 (1) = 46.83; p = .0001 and G^2 (1) = 56.51; p = .0001), while there were no significant differences between the German and the Dutch learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 3.01). In addition, substitution of partitive plural by nominative plural was significantly more common in the B1 than in the B2 components of both the Estonian learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 16.23; p = .0001) and the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 14.58; p = .001), while no significant differences were found within the Dutch learner corpus.

By contrast, replacement of partitive plural by nominative singular occured significantly less frequently in the Estonian learner corpus than in the German and Dutch learner corpora (G^2 (1) = 52.17; p = .0001 and G^2 (1) = 12.15; p = .001, respectively) but also significantly less frequently in the Dutch learner corpus than in the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 10.31; p = .01). While there were no significant differences between the successive proficiency components of the Estonian learner corpus, substitution of partitive plural by nominative singular occurred significantly more common in the B1 than in the B2 component of the German learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 28.54; p = .0001) and in the A2 than in the B1 component of the Dutch learner corpus (G^2 (1) = 7.32; p = .01).

4 Discussion and conclusions

On the whole, the Estonian learner corpus showed significantly lower partitive predicative overuse error rates than the other learner corpora, and the Dutch learner corpus significantly lower underuse error rates than the remaining learner corpora. All learner corpora furthermore showed significantly higher partitive predicative under- than overuse error rates, but the Estonian learner corpus even revealed a virtual lack of partitive predicative overuse errors. These

findings suggest that the error pattern observed from the Estonian learner corpus simultaneously reflects positive and negative L1 influence. As the Estonian learners' virtual lack of overuse errors neatly ties in with the fact that partitive predicatives rarely occur in Estonian, this finding can very well be interpreted as positive influence of L1 morphosyntax. In contrast, the significant underuse of the partitive as the case of the predicative seems to reflect negative influence of L1 influence, taking into account that Estonian predicatives generally take another case (i.e. nominative) than partitive. Confirming evidence for interpreting this error pattern as negative influence of L1 morphosytax was however sought by analyzing the underuse errors in more detail, also given the fact that the German learner corpus was also found to be characterized by fairly high underuse error rates.

More detailed analyses, once again, clearly distinguished between the Estonian learner corpus on the one hand and the remaining learner corpora on the other. Specifically, these analyses revealed that although the underuse of partitive plural as the case of the predicative was common in all learner corpora, substitutions of partitive plural by nominative plural occurred significantly more frequently in the Estonian learner corpus than in the remaining learner corpora and substitutions of partitive plural by nominative singular predicatives significantly more frequently in the German and Dutch learner corpora than in the Estonian learner corpus.

The Estonian learner corpus was thus found to be mainly characterized by substitutions of partitive plural by nominative plural predicatives. Complementing these findings with the case-marking of plural predicatives in Estonian, this already provides sufficient evidence suggesting that the underuse errors of this category reflect negative influence of L1 morphosyntax. As was shown in example (3), plural copula subjects namely always take nominative plural predicatives in Estonian. Nevertheless, the examples in (4)-(5) do not only illustrate the substitution of partitive plural by nominative plural predicatives but also provide some additional cues confirming the existence of negative influence of L1 morphosyntax in the Estonian learner corpus.

(4)	*B2 component of the Estonian learner corpus*
Error example	***Minusta *olit* näyttelijät <u>hyvät</u>.**
	I-Elat be-3Pl actor-Nom.Pl good-**Nom.Pl**
Target-like	**Minusta näyttelijät olivat <u>hyviä</u>.**
	I-Elat actor-Nom.Pl be-3Pl good-**Part.Pl**
Estonian equiv.	**Minu arvates *olid* näitlejad <u>head</u>.**
	I-Gen according-Post be-3Pl actor-Nom.Pl good-**Nom.Pl**
	'I think the actors were good.'

(5)	*B2 component of the Estonian learner corpus*
Error example	***Mutta *ned on* <u>yhteiset ongelmat</u>.**
	but those-Nom.Pl be-**3Sg** common-**Nom.Pl** problem-**Nom.Pl**
Target-like	**Mutta ne ovat <u>yhteisiä ongelmia</u>.**
	but those-Nom.Pl be-**3Sg** common-**Part.Pl** problem-**Part.Pl**
Estonian equiv.	**Aga *need on* <u>ühised probleemid</u>.**
	but those-Nom.Pl be-3Pl common-**Nom.Pl** problem-**Nom.Pl**
	'But those are common problems.'

In (4), the third person plural past predicate *olivat* has been replaced by *olit*, for which the resemblance to the Estonian third person plural past predicate *olid* is obvious. The verb-final consonant /d/ was merely changed into /t/, probably either because the Estonian /d/ is pronounced [t] or because the predicate was adapted to the Finnish orthography. Also the word order follows a word order pattern that is not accepted in Finnish but typical of Estonian sentences as (4). In error example (5), the nominative plural demonstrative pronoun *ne* ('those') was substituted by the self-created form *ned*, which closely resembles the Estonian equivalent pronoun *need*. The shortening of the geminated vowel /e/ may indicate that the Finnish and Estonian nominative plural forms were blended. In accordance with this apparent reliance on Estonian, the predicate *on* likely represents the Estonian third person plural form of the verb *olla* (cf. example (5); Estonian equivalent) rather than the Finnish third person singular form of the same verb. On the whole, the Estonian learners' use of nominative plural instead of partitive plural can clearly be attributed to negative influence of L1 morphosyntax. Furthermore, the significant difference concerning errors of this type as found to exist between the B1 and the B2 component of the Estonian learner corpus provides some evidence suggesting an inverse relation between the occurrence of this kind of negative influence of L1 morphosyntax and target language proficiency.

In contrast to the common use of nominative plural instead of partitive plural predicatives in the Estonian learner corpus, the German and Dutch learner corpora reflected frequent usage of nominative singular instead of partitive plural (cf. example (6)). Because nominative singular is the basic non-inflected word form that can be retrieved from a dictionary, the findings suggest that the German and Dutch learners were likely inclined to leave the predicative uninflected for the sake of simplification. More specifically, the learners might have ended up with lots of uninflected predicatives because they did not yet (sufficiently) master the rules for predicative case-marking or, alternatively, because their attention was shifted away as a consequence of the fact that they simply did not yet manage to address morphosyntactic, morphological and semantic issues all at the same time. This reasoning would also be in line with the finding that the uninflected predicatives gradually started to occur on a less frequent basis when proceeding to higher proficiency levels, as TL knowledge then gradually becomes more established. All of this relates to the trade-off hypothesis (Skehan 1998), which assumes that an imperfectly acquired L2 poses a large burden on a learner's limited attentional capacity and may consequently lead to the potential prioritization of certain linguistic dimensions over others (Foster & Tavakoli 2009). Alternatively, the German and Dutch learners' overuse of nominative singular as the case of the predicative could, in theory, also be explained as an instance of L1 influence, for the very reason that adjective predicatives are inflected in neither of the two languages (cf. comparison example (7)). However, more elaborate work than the present study (Spoelman 2013) has shown that the German and Dutch learners also often erroneously resorted to basic uninflected partitive objects (cf. e.g. pg. 226-227), which could by no means be interpreted as L1 influence but points to simplification only. Drawing the parallel between these uninflected objects and the uninflected predicatives in question, the simplification explanation is not only confirmed but compelling evidence for the occurrence of overall morphosyntactic simplication has simultaneously been provided.

(6)   *B1 component of the German learner corpus*
Error example   **He ovat *<u>työtön</u>.**
                      they(Nom) be-3Pl jobless(**Nom.Sg**)
Target-like   **He ovat <u>työttömiä</u>.**
                      they(Nom) be-3Pl jobless-**Part.Pl**

                      'They are jobless.'

(7)   *Comparison example*
Finnish   **Hän on <u>työtön</u>.**   **He ovat <u>työttömiä</u>.**
                      s/he(Nom) be-3Sg jobless(**Nom.Sg**) they(Nom) be-3Pl jobless-**Part.Pl**

German   **Er/sie ist <u>arbeitslos</u>.**   **Sie sind <u>arbeitslos</u>.**

Dutch   **Hij/zij is <u>werkloos</u>.**   **Zij zijn <u>werkloos</u>.**
                      s/he(Nom) be-3Sg jobless(**Nom.Sg**) they(Nom) be-3Pl jobless(**Nom.Sg**)

                      'S/he is jobless.'   'They are jobless.'

Thus, the current study revealed conspicuous differences between the (under)use of partitive predicatives in learners of Finnish from a closely related L1 background (Estonian) and learners of Finnish from non-related L1 backgrounds (German and Dutch). These differences were not only found to reside in the lack versus presence of certain error types but also in the nature of the error patterns. The Estonian learner corpus was found to reflect both positive and negative L1 influence. Positive influence of L1 morphosyntax was primarily found to be manifested in the virtual lack of partitive overuse errors observed from the Estonian learner corpus, and negative influence of L1 morphosyntax in the Estonian learners' frequent replacement of partitive plural by nominative plural predicatives. Also for the use of nominative plural instead of partitive plural, these errors were found to substantially decrease with increasing target language proficiency, suggesting the existence of an inverse relationship between negative L1 influence and target language proficiency. These findings thus provide supporting evidence suggesting that positive and negative influence of L1 morphosyntax generally tend to occur simultaneously (cf. Jarvis and Pavlenko 2010: 182) and that negative L1 influence decreases with increasing target language proficiency (cf. Odlin 1989: 133-134).

The frequent replacement of partitive plural by nominative singular predicatives observed from the German and Dutch learner corpora seemed to reflect a tendency to rely on uninflected predicatives, probably for the sake of simplification. Errors of this category also decreased with increasing target language proficiency. As mentioned in the introduction, it is by no means fully addressed in the literature what kind of consequences the lack of L1-TL similarities may have on the use of the target language, except from the fact that L1 influence is not likely to occur. The present findings indicate that the lack of relevant L1 knowledge faced by learners from non-related L1 backgrounds may trigger simplification of the target language. Depending on the presence versus absence of L1-TL similarities, it was namely either L1 influence or simplification that was found to predominantly occur. Yet, as the Estonian learner corpus was particularly characterized by L1 influence and not by simplification, while the remaining learner corpora were characterized by simplification and not by L1 influence, this suggests that both phenomena not only function in a similar

manner but also that predominant occurrence of the one phenomenon tends to go hand in hand with marginal occurrence of the other.

To conclude, the outcomes of the study suggest, at least in the case of the use of Finnish partitive predicatives, that it is a matter of prior linguistic knowledge that determines whether either L1 influence or simplification effects are likely to predominantly manifest themselves. Both obviously serve the common purpose of getting along with and facilitating the use of the target language, but the difference between them resides in that L1 influence is triggered by the presence, and simplification by the absence of L1-TL similarities. The presence of L1-TL similarities namely provides the opportunity to rely on L1 knowledge, while the absence of L1-TL similarities implies that the limited knowledge of the target language is what remains to deal with and build upon. The phenomena of L1 influence and simplification can therefore be likened to the same side of a slightly different coin, essentially similar in that both depend on prior linguistic knowledge but essentially different in that linguistic knowledge drawn from between the L1 and the target language are concerned in the case of L1 influence, and linguistic knowledge from within the target language in the case of simplification.

Endnotes

[1]   http://www.oulu.fi/suomitoisenakielena/node/20896

[2]   As can be inferred from table 1, the C1 and C2 proficiency components of the Estonian learner corpus are fairly small in size and even completely absent from the remaining learner corpora. The reasons for including these upper proficiency components in the Estonian learner corpus were explorative in nature and basically two-fold. To start with, the imbalance between the Estonian learner corpus on the one hand and the German and Dutch learner corpora on the other provides in itself already a glimpse of insight into the advantage Estonian learners of Finnish generally have over German and Dutch learners of Finnish as a foreign language. Particularly during the proficiency rating procedure, it was namely revealed that, in contrast to the Estonian university students, even nearly none of the German and Dutch final-year bachelor students managed to produce texts exceeding the B2 level of proficiency. Furthermore, the incorporation of the C1 and C2 proficiency components in the Estonian learner corpus provided the opportunity to explore the interaction between L1 influence and foreign language proficiency in some more depth.

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