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Sleeman, P.

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# Methods for studying variation in partitives

Petra Sleeman

University of Amsterdam

In the last sixty years, starting with the method of introspection to judge the acceptability of linguistic data, research methods in linguistics have become more varied and more sophisticated. This also holds for studies on partitivity. In this paper various methods are presented that have recently been used in the literature to study variation in the linguistic expression and the use of partitive constructions and partitive elements in Romance, Germanic and some other languages, language varieties and dialects. It is argued that different types of research call for adapted methods. It is shown that the use of different methods may lead to different results, although this is not always the case. The overview presented in this paper reveals that in recent years much progress has been made in the study of variation in partitives.

**Keywords:** partitive construction, partitive case, partitive determiner, partitive pronoun, methodology

## 1. Introduction

There has been much discussion on the best way to obtain reliable data on the basis of which theories can be (re)formulated. In the framework of Generative Grammar, introspection has been advocated as the best method to gain insights into the mental grammar of native speakers (Chomsky 1965). This mental grammar reflects the competence of the ideal speaker, who can provide negative evidence, that is, judge the acceptability of ungrammatical sentences that will never occur in spontaneous speech. This competence, referred to as internal language, is void of speech errors that may occur in concrete performance (Bricmont & Franck 2010).

The method of introspection has been criticized, mainly because theoretical assumptions have been made by linguists based on their own idiolects (Schütze 2016: 4). Hoffmann (2013) and Schütze (2016, published earlier as Schütze 1996) have argued, however, that by means of carefully constructed experimental settings,

introspection data can be gathered in a valid and reliable way. However, in such experiments, a large number of participants are involved, which inevitably will lead to variation in the judgments.

According to Newmeyer (2020), one of the alternatives to introspection is corpus-based evidence. He states that with a corpus study it is possible to find examples of sentences illustrating complex grammatical phenomena, but that the success of finding examples may depend on the size of the corpus and the register: a large corpus of literary texts may yield more results than a corpus of spoken language. Furthermore, corpora conflate grammars of speakers of various varieties of the same language, for instance the types of English spoken by American English speakers in different regions. In Newmeyer's view, corpora can thus be used if one wants to study the diversity of a language spoken across the country, but not if one wants to study the grammatical competence of an individual speaker, because corpora contain utterances from various speakers who are not all members of the same speech community. Vangsnes and Johannessen (2011) observe, however, that actual language use in corpora may display the existence of particular constructions that have not been observed before and that even few instances of a syntactic phenomenon may be of great value under the right circumstances.

In this paper various methods are presented and discussed that have been used in the literature to study variation in the linguistic expression and use of partitive constructions and partitive elements. It is shown, in Section 2, that partitives may present considerable variation in the way they are used and linguistically expressed, depending on various factors. In Section 3, some methods that have been used in recent studies on partitivity are presented. The paper ends, in Section 4, with a conclusion.

## 2. Partitives and variation

Partitives express a semantic relationship between a part and a whole. According to Falco and Zamparelli (2019) the partitive construction typically involves a noun phrase that is used to refer to a subset or subpart of another referent. Giusti and Sleeman (2021) show that partitives may be defined as proper partitive constructions, as in (1) or pseudo-partitive constructions, as in (2). They show that the relationship may be morpho-syntactically expressed in other ways as well: by partitive determiners, as in (3), partitive (clitic) pronouns, as in (4), and partitive case, as in (5).

- (1) three of John's books
- (2) a bunch of flowers

- (3) *du lait* (French)  
 PART.DET milk  
 ‘milk’
- (4) *Il en a vu trois.* (French)  
 he PART.CL has seen three (of them)  
 ‘He has seen three.’
- (5) *Anek ez du garagardo-rik edan.* (Basque)  
 Ane.ERG NO AUX beer-PART drink  
 ‘Ane has not drunk beer.’ (Etxeberria 2021)

The linguistic expression of partitive constructions and elements presents considerable variation among languages, language varieties and dialects (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018; Sleeman & Luraghi 2023) and a partitive construction or partitive element may even be expressed in different ways within the same language (Falco & Zamparelli 2019), but there may also be interspeaker variation in their use or variation depending on the linguistic context.

Sleeman (2022a) illustrates several of these types of variation for the Dutch weak partitive pronoun *er*, which is also called a quantitative pronoun in the literature. The partitive pronoun is typically used in combination with an elliptical indefinite quantified noun phrase in object position. With the help of a Grammaticality Judgment Task submitted to 25 L1 speakers of Dutch, Berends (2019) shows that L1 speakers of Dutch categorically (91%) accept a sentence like (6) with *er* in combination with the non-presuppositional quantifier *enkele* ‘some’.

- (6) *Gisteren heb ik vijf boeken gelezen. Jij hebt er ook enkele gelezen.*  
 yesterday have I five books read you have PART.WK also some read  
 ‘Yesterday I have read five books. You also read some.’

However, Berends shows that if the quantifier is the presuppositional quantifier *sommige* ‘certain’, there is more interspeaker variation (7).

- (7) *Jij hebt er ook sommige gelezen.*  
 you have PART.WK also certain read  
 ‘You have also read certain ones.’

Whereas linguists like de Jong (1983) and de Hoop (1992) judge a sentence like (7) ungrammatical, probably based on personal intuitions, the Grammaticality Judgment Task that Berends (2019) submitted to 25 L1 speakers of Dutch shows that the combination of *sommige* with *er* was accepted in 47% of the cases. According to the Dutch Reference Grammar (Haeseryn et al. 1997), the partitive pronoun should be present in (6), but absent in (7), as in (8), which could be analyzed as containing a non-overt variant of the partitive pronoun. The pronoun *er* in (7)

has a proper partitive meaning. This is not necessarily the case for (6), in which *enkele* ‘some’ can also refer to other books than to a subset of the five books mentioned in the introductory sentence. Another option would therefore be to use the partitive pronoun *ERvan*, as in (9), which has a proper partitive meaning in that it can only refer to a subset of a presupposed specific set (Berends 2019: 57–58). In (7), *er* is used as a linguistic variant of *ERvan* in (9). As suggested by Berends’ research, there are L1 speakers of Dutch who accept both variants in a context as illustrated in (9), others do not accept *er* in this context.

(8) *Jij hebt ook sommige gelezen.*

you have also certain read

‘You have also read certain ones.’

(9) *Jij hebt ook sommige ervan gelezen / Jij hebt er ook sommige van gelezen.*

you have also certain of.them read / you have PART.WK also certain of

read

‘You have also read certain ones of them.’

The same interspeaker variation occurred for the combination of *er* with an adjective. According to the Dutch Reference Grammar (Haeseryn et al. 1997; Coppen, Haeseryn & de Vriend 2012), in the Dutch standard language *er* cannot be used in combination with a noun phrase that contains an adjective. This shows again that the possibility to use *er* may depend on the linguistic context. According to Haeseryn et al., the use of *er* in combination with an adjective, as in (10), is, however, possible in certain regions of the Netherlands and Belgium (10) (see also Kranendonk 2010). This reflects the usage of the partitive clitic pronoun in, e.g., French, where *en* does not only co-occur with quantifiers, as in (4), but also with adjectives, as in (11).

(10) *Ik heb er nog vijftig witte en vijftig rode.*

I have PART.WK still fifty white and fifty red

‘I still have fifty white and fifty red ones.’

(11) *J’ en ai acheté une rouge.*

I PART.CL have bought a red

‘I have bought a red one.’

The 25 speakers of Netherlandic Dutch in Berends (2019) were asked to judge sentences that contained *er* in combination with an adjective. Despite Haeseryn et al.’s remark with respect to the use of this type of sentences in standard Netherlandic Dutch, the L1 Dutch participants accepted them in 61% of the cases. Building on Kranendonk’s (2010) syntactic analysis of constructions with *er*, Berends

(2019) suggests that Dutch is shifting towards a French structure as an explanation for this unexpected result, with *er* pronominalizing a smaller part of the DP-structure before its movement to the verbal domain, leaving room for an adjective in the structure.

Sleeman (2023) investigated if L1 speakers of Dutch accept the combination of *er* with an elliptical quantified adverbial NP in intransitive contexts, as in (12).

- (12) *Ik ben er twee in Spanje gebleven.*  
 I am PART.WK two in Spain remained  
 'I have remained two (days) in Spain.'

Barbiers (2017), possibly based on individual introspection, judges (12) ungrammatical. In contrast, the 28 L1 speakers of Dutch presented with this sentence in Sleeman's (2023) study showed more varied judgments, because 68% accepted the sentence and 32% did not. Sleeman (2022b) suggests that also here language change may have started to take place. The L1 speakers who accept sentences like (12) would analyze the intransitive verb as a transitive verb, and the quantified adverbial NP as a direct object rather than as an adjunct. The shift is in accordance with van Gelderen's (2004) Head Preference Principle, which, according to Van Gelderen, accounts for various cases of language change.

Sleeman (2023) shows that there may also be regional variation, just as for the combination with *er* and an adjective, as in (11). In a Grammaticality Judgment Task that was submitted to L1 speakers of Netherlandic Dutch and L1 speakers of Belgian Dutch, there was a striking contrast in judgments about the combination of *er* with a numeral expressing age, as in (13).

- (13) [*Marie is 25 jaar*] en *Jan is er 27.*  
 Marie is 25 years and Jan is PART.WK 27  
 'Marie is 25 and Jan is 27.'

None (0%) of the L1 speakers of Netherlandic Dutch accepted (13), whereas 93% of the L1 speakers of Belgian Dutch did so.

Interspeaker variation may also concern differences between adult L1 speakers and L1 or L2 learners or between L2 learners with different L1s. Based on a corpus study on L1 acquisition, Berends (2019) shows that partitive *er* is relatively complicated in L1 acquisition. L1 learners of Dutch start using the partitive pronoun *er* later than other types of *er*, and they also start using the partitive pronoun later than the French children. Beginning L1 learners of Dutch omit *er* where adult speakers of Dutch would not do so.

A Grammaticality Judgment Task used by Berends (2019) shows that the 25 French L2 learners of Dutch and the 25 English L2 learners of Dutch to whom the task was submitted, all with approximately 20 years of exposure to Dutch,

performed significantly differently from the 25 adult L1 speakers of Dutch in the condition ‘presence of *er* with a numeral’, as in *Ik heb er twee* ‘I have two (of it)’.

Making use of an Elicited Imitation Task, Berends (2019) shows that, as expected on the basis of the Transfer Hypothesis based on the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis by Lado (1957) and on the Full Transfer Full Access Hypothesis by Schwartz and Sprouse (1996), the French L2 learners of Dutch omitted *er* less often than the English L2 learners of Dutch in all conditions in which *er* is present, and inserted *er* more often than the English participants in all conditions in which *er* is absent. In most of the conditions, the difference was significant. Berends’ Grammatical Judgment Task did not reveal significant differences in most of the conditions between the French and English L2 learners. This suggests that an Elicited Imitation Task, testing implicit knowledge, is more sensitive to differences than a Grammaticality Judgement Task, testing explicit knowledge. This shows again, as in the case of introspection versus experimental research, that results may also depend on the research method that is used.

Berends (2019) made use of a Sentence Completion Task to compare the use of partitive *er* with a numeral by 46 typically developing monolingual Dutch children (age range: 4;6–8;4) and 38 typically developing bilingual English-Dutch children (age range: 4;8–8;7). The majority of the bilingual children were exposed to English and Dutch from birth. Both the child’s linguistic background and the child’s age turned out to be predictors of target *er* responses: monolingual children produced significantly more target *er* constructions than bilingual children, and older children produced significantly more target *er* constructions than younger children.

Summarizing this section, these data show that judgments reported in the linguistic literature or in traditional grammars are not always shared by L1 speakers. Additionally, there may be variation between languages, between synchronic and diachronic varieties, between standard languages and regional varieties, between L1 speakers and between adult L1 speakers and L1 or L2 learners. Furthermore, there may be variation in the form of the linguistic expression itself or variation in the use of a partitive construction or a partitive element depending on the linguistic context. The goal of this special issue is to detect and to study variation, more specifically, variation in the use of partitive constructions and partitive elements. Various methods are used to investigate variation. In the next section, some methods that have been used in recent studies on partitivity are presented.

### 3. Methods to detect variation in the linguistic expression or use of partitives

In this section, a number of methods are presented that have in recent years been used in research on partitive constructions (§ 3.1), partitive case (§ 3.2), partitive determiners (§ 3.3) and partitive pronouns (§ 3.4).

#### 3.1 Partitive constructions

One of the key studies on partitivity that have been published in recent years, is Falco and Zamparelli (2019). Falco and Zamparelli, besides canonical partitives, present twelve other types of partitive constructions, largely based on Hoeksema (1984) and the Introduction to Hoeksema (1996).

##### A. Canonical partitives

(14) I spoke with two of the students.

##### B. Indefinite partitives

(15) He ate three of some apples he found on the ground.

##### C. Proportional partitives and percentages

(16) half of the doctors

(17) 80% of the house was underwater.

##### D. The “among” construction

(18) Twenty students took the exam. Only five among all these students managed to pass.

##### E. Superlative partitives

(19) Only the most diligent of the freshmen managed to pass.

##### F. Double-noun partitives

(20) I only got two packages of the mail you sent me.

##### G. “Bare partitives”

(21) *Dei ragazzi sono qui.* (Italian)  
 PART.DET boys are here  
 ‘Some boys are here.’



- (22) *Ho comprato della birra.* (Italian)  
 I.have bought PART.DET beer  
 'I bought some beer.'

H. Covert partitives

- (23) Ten students took the exam. Two got top grades.

I. Extraposed partitives

- (24) Of all the students who took the exam, only five managed to pass.

J. Inverted partitives

- (25) one friend of John's

K. Maximal pronominal partitives

- (26) all of them

L. The "out-of" construction

- (27) two out of four doctors

M. Pseudo-partitives

- (28) a number of objections

Falco and Zamparelli take canonical partitives based on definites (type A) as their reference point, their "core case", excluding or analyzing as non-partitive those types that seem too different. The types that are set aside are pseudo-partitives (type M), "bare partitives" (type G), covert partitives (type H), maximal pronominal partitives (type K) and the "out-of" construction (type L). The research focusses on the remaining "core cases", in English and Italian (including the partitive clitic *ne* and the pronoun *one* in English), for which the authors propose the basic structure (29), in which PART is an overt or covert relational noun that introduces partitivity and that takes a PP as its complement.

- (29) [<sub>DP</sub> NUM PART [<sub>PP</sub> of DP]]

Although Falco and Zamparelli exclude pseudo-partitives (type M) from their analysis, because Selkirk (1977) analyzed them as "monoclausal", whereas canonical partitives and other related constructions appear to distinguish between an inner and an outer DP layer, Pfaff (this issue) compares these two types with respect to a partitive type not distinguished by Falco and Zamparelli, because it does not occur in English or Italian: agreement partitives in Icelandic, where a quantifier agrees with the definite head noun in case, number and gender

(Sigurðsson 1993, 2006; Pfaff 2015, 2017), without dependency marking of the superset by genitive case or the preposition ‘of’. Pfaff argues that, semantically, agreement partitives occupy an intermediate position between pseudo-partitives and canonical partitives. The data come from the linguistic literature and are often based on introspection of the authors. They also come from checking data with L1 speakers, such as colleagues.

To refine some of the delicate judgments found in the literature, Falco and Zamparelli used corpus searches (on the 2-billion word web-extraction corpora UKWAC and ITWAC), crowd-sourcing (for English only, via the crowd-sourcing platform Crowdfunder) and on-line questionnaires (for Italian only) to obtain as many judgments as possible for various complex constructions, validating their statistical significance. Some data were obtained by consulting a small group of L1 speakers, mostly linguists.

It was shown in Section 2 that in Berends’ experimental research on the combination of the Dutch partitive pronoun *er* with the presuppositional quantifier *sommige* ‘some, certain’, the judgments of L1 Dutch speakers differed importantly from the judgments of linguists reported in the literature. This is also observed by Falco and Zamparelli. The authors state that unlike other linguists that they consulted, their informant pool did not detect any difference between (30a) and (30b).

- (30) a. ??Two among John’s novels have become bestsellers.  
 b. ??Two novels among John’s have become bestsellers.

Judgments from a small group of linguists and judgments obtained via crowd-sourcing may also converge (Schütze & Sprouse 2013). This is shown by two different studies on gender mismatches in superlative partitives in French, Falco and Zamparelli’s type E. The judgments in Sleeman and Ihsane (2016) were obtained via introspection of the second author and by consulting a small group of L1 French speaking linguists. The judgments in Westveer (2021) were obtained by analyzing the results of 62 informants on a Grammaticality Judgment Task distributed online, via mailing lists in France. In both studies the results showed, among others, that gender mismatches in quantified partitive constructions as in (31) were much less accepted than gender mismatches in superlative partitive constructions (32).

- (31) ??*Une / un de mes anciens élèves a trouvé un emploi.*  
 one.F.SG / one.M.SG of my.PL former.M.PL pupils.PL has found a job  
 ‘One of my former students found a job.’

- (32) <sup>?</sup>*La /le plus jeune de mes anciens élèves a trouvé un emploi.*  
 the.F.SG /the.M.SG most young.SG of my.PL former.M.PL pupils.PL has found a  
 job  
 ‘The youngest of my former students found a job.’

Although the tendencies of the judgments did not differ between the two studies, Westveer used a 5-point Likert-scale and the number of informants was much higher than in Sleeman and Ihsane’s study, which made statistical calculations of differences between judgments possible (Schütze: 191). Although the convergence in the results of the two studies may be due to the fact that many informants from the mailing lists that Westveer made use of were linguists (Westveer, p.c.), a replication of his study for Italian by Zanoli (2022) showed again the same tendencies. The Italian questionnaire was spread via social media and direct messages. The data of 285 informants was used for analysis. Distribution via social media and the high number of informants suggest that the number of non-linguists was much higher in Zanoli’s study than in Westveer’s study. In both studies the number of female respondents was much higher than the number of male respondents (approximately 70% versus 30%). This variable could not be controlled for, due to the method of data collection. The unbalanced sex/gender groups may have influenced the results.

In (31)–(32) an epicene noun is used and the inner DP has a default masculine form. Both Sleeman and Ihsane (2016) and Westveer (2021) show that in superlative partitive constructions with feminine nouns in French that may refer both to men and to women, such as *la sentinelle* ‘the sentinel’ as in (33), grammatical agreement was preferred above semantic agreement. Westveer’s statistical analysis showed that this difference was even more pronounced in quantified partitive constructions as in (34), the absence of a gender mismatch being far more accepted than a gender mismatch.

- (33) *La plus grande /??le plus grand de ces sentinelles a une barbe.*  
 the.F.SG most tall.F.SG /the.M.SG most tall.M.SG of these.PL sentinels.F.PL has  
 a beard  
 ‘The tallest of these sentinels has a beard.’
- (34) *Une /\*un de ces sentinelles anglaises a une barbe.*  
 one.F.SG /one.M.SG of these.PL sentinels.F.PL English.F.PL has a beard

Falco and Zamparelli observe that Italian seems to be more permissive than French with respect to gender mismatches as in (34). They are also robustly represented in web searches, even though the matching case is the most common one.

- (35) <sup>?</sup>*Uno delle persone era arrivato molto presto.*  
 one.M.SG of\_the people.F.PL was arrived.M.SG very early  
 ‘One of the people arrived very early.’

For their Italian data, Falco and Zamparelli used, among others, the ITWAC corpus, an open 2-billion word web-extracted corpus, POS-tagged and lemmatized to allow pattern searches. D’Arcy (2011) calls such a corpus a conventional corpus. The focus of a conventional corpus is generally written language, it is balanced, typically representing standard and more formal registers. Some conventional corpora may also include spoken language. According to D’Arcy, what makes conventional corpora particularly well-suited to large-scale analyses is their size, although no corpus can capture all phenomena.

### 3.2 Partitive case

A type of large corpus that has recently also been used for research on partitives, is the ukTenTen corpus, a Ukrainian web corpus. The corpus belongs to the TenTen corpus family, which is a set of web corpora built using the same method with a target size of 10+ billion words. The TenTen corpora are currently available in 50+ languages. They can be accessed via Sketch Engine, via free trial or subscription. Chaika et al. (2024) used the ukTenTen corpus to establish the usage patterns of the Ukrainian partitive genitive and accusative objects. The article focuses on differences between concrete and abstract mass nouns as objects of perfective and imperfective verb. The authors searched for verbs like ‘add’ and ‘cook’, concrete mass nouns like ‘water’, ‘sugar’ and ‘borscht’ and abstract nouns like ‘vigor’, ‘optimism’ and ‘experience’. They present the proportions of occurrence of accusative or partitive genitive case for certain verb-noun combinations in the imperfective and the perfective in tables.

Chaika et al.’s (2024) results show that the Aktionsart of the verb as expressed by prefixes on the verb influences the use of partitive genitive or accusative case. With the prefix *na-* on the verb ‘cook’, a new portion of a concrete mass noun is produced, as shown by the translations of some of the Ukrainian data in (36)–(37). In the data for the combination ‘cook’ and ‘borscht’ there is one result with an imperfective verb and 29 results with a perfective verb. They are all in the partitive genitive case. The verb ‘cook’ with the prefix *na-* is not used with accusative case in the data.

- (36) ‘I have made (a certain amount of) borscht’  
 (37) ‘Grandma has cooked borscht (a certain amount)’

The verb ‘cook’ with the prefix *do-* and the mass noun ‘borscht’ occurs 6 times in the corpus, in all cases as an imperfective verb. In all cases the noun is in the accusative case. The meaning of the verb ‘cook’ with the prefix *do-* is ‘cook (until done)’. A genitive object is impossible as only the whole predefined object can be cooked until done. The verb with the prefix *do-* does not “portion” the object further. The prefix *do-* implies an earlier start for the cooking of the same borscht. The translation of one of the examples from the corpus is given in (38).

(38) ‘the woman forgot all the insults and quickly ran to finish cooking borscht’

While Chaika et al. (2024) used a large corpus to determine variation in object marking in one language, Ivaska and Tamm (this issue) compare the use of partitive and accusative/total case in two languages, Finnish and Estonian. They made use of the large digital CoStEP corpus (Graën et al. 2014), of which they used 990 texts of European Parliament plenary proceedings translated from English into Estonian and Finnish. They used a multifactorial modeling in contrastive research design to unfold subtle differences between the two languages. The results show that the distribution of Modern written Estonian and Finnish partitives is clearly different, as predicted by traditional, observation and insight-based grammars. Based on the quantitative study, the authors can exactly pinpoint the distributional differences.

### 3.3 Partitive determiners

As in Chaika et al.’s (2024) study, variation in the form of objects in cooking contexts is also reported by Gerards and Stark (2022). The authors analyzed 20 Old Spanish technical recipe treatises from the 13th–16th century, manually extracting a set of 1,439 ingredient-denoting nouns. These data are a subset of the data analyzed in Gerards (2020). None of the ingredient-denoting nouns were contained in a recipe ingredient list. Of the ingredient-denoting nouns, 70.6% were bare nouns, whereas 29.4% were introduced by a definite article, which Gerards and Stark analyze as a non-maximal definite. The minimal pair (39)–(40) illustrates both uses.

(39) *destienpla=lo*                                    *con olio rosado*  
 dissolve.IMP.2SG=3N.SG.ACC with oil   rose.infused  
 ‘dissolve it with rose-infused oil’

(40) *mescla*        *esto todo con el olio rosado*  
 mix.IMP.2SG that all   with the oil   rose.infused  
 ‘mix all of that with the (substance type) rose-infused oil’  
 (Old Spanish, *Cirugía de Tédrico*, 13th century)

Both in (39) and (40) the noun phrases appear in semantically indefinite contexts, where neither maximality nor familiarity is involved, which happens in the case of the use of the canonical definite article. Gerards and Stark observe that non-maximal definites, as in (40) mainly occur in contexts favoring an “habitual” reading of the predicate, expressing routine situations for the speaker and/or subject of the sentence. Such contexts occur among others in recipes. Gerards and Stark state that non-maximal definites come with representative object interpretations, available in a kind-oriented mode of talk. They belong to the class of weak referentials. Representative object-definites are often complements of  $V^{\circ}$  and  $P^{\circ}$ . They come with some sort of “generic flavor”, although a kind-denoting analysis is not appropriate. The object described is only relevant as a representative of the whole kind, what Krifka et al. (1995) calls a “deferred kind denotation”.

Gerards and Stark (2020) observe that in Old Spanish recipes there is a third way to express indefiniteness, which is the use of *de*-nominals, see also Gerards (2020).

- (41) *destiépren=la [...] con d=el vinagre fuerte*  
 dissolve.IMP.3PL=3F.SG.ACC with of=the.M.SG vinegar.M.SG strong.M.SG  
 ‘Dissolve it with strong vinegar.’

(Old Spanish, *Gerardus Falconarius*, 13th century)

Gerards and Stark argue that *del* in the *de*-nominal in (41) is not a partitive article. Although the noun phrase introduces a discourse-new referent, they claim that it contains a definite article and that it is, thus, a PP with a zero  $Q^{\circ}$ . They propose that discourse-new *del vinagre fuerte* in (41) contains the same type of definite as *el olio rosado* in (40). They analyze the definite article in *del* in (41) also as a definite article with “representative object interpretation”.

Variation in the expression of indefinite mass nouns as in (39)–(41) or indefinite plural nouns does not only occur in Old Spanish. Gerards and Stark (2022) also present data from fieldwork in the Aosta Valley and a database on the use of what they consider to be non-maximal definites in modern Francoprovençal. The data are mainly based on a translation task, some on guided interviews. The input sentences contained noun phrases with a partitive article. The results show that besides non-maximal definites (28%), the bare preposition *de* was used (67%) by the informants, besides partitive articles (4%) and bare nouns (1%). Whereas these data concern what has been called the region where the Francoprovençal B type is spoken (Kristol 2014, 2016), Ihsane, Winistörfer and Stark (2023) also investigated the region where the Francoprovençal A type is spoken. They found that in the Francoprovençal A area, partitive articles are used predominantly, but that invariable *de* is used next to partitive articles, sometimes even predominantly, depending on the syntactic construction.

In a similar way, Pinzin and Poletto's (2022) results on a translation task suggest that in Friulian bare nouns are much more used than partitive articles, whereas in Emilian it is the reverse: partitive articles are much more used than bare nouns. However, the authors discovered that the low number of partitive articles in their Friulian data and the low number of bare nouns in their Emilian data are the result of a priming effect due to the translation task. Furthermore, the informants who produced them were the youngest and were, presumably, more interfered with Italian. This suggests that in fact there is no variation in the expression of indefinite nouns within Friulian and Emilian.

Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) investigated the expression of indefinite determiners in informal Italian. The questionnaire was submitted in the framework of a MOOC. The data of 82 students were used for analysis. The goal of the research was to investigate the regional distribution of the use of a non-maximal definite article, the bare preposition *di*, partitive determiners, *certo* 'some' and bare nouns with indefinite mass nouns and indefinite plural nouns in various contexts. The results show that there is diatopic variation across Italy, but that the bare preposition *di* was not used. In their questionnaire, Cardinaletti and Giusti asked for indirect acceptability judgments (Cornips & Poletto 2005; Buchstaller & Corrigan 2011a, b). Rather than eliciting direct intuitions of the participants by asking about their own judgments, they asked what someone would say in their spoken variety of Italian, presenting the five different noun phrase options under investigation. The participants could choose more than one answer.

Variation in the expression of indefinite noun phrases has also been investigated in Germanic. Strobel and Glaser (2020) investigate the use of partitive markers in Walliser (and Walser) German (Highest Alemannic) and in Luxembourgish (Moselle Franconian). The results are based on questionnaire elicitation and fieldwork on partitive determiners and partitive pronouns. There were 40 test sentences and more than 30 informants from different places. The results show that in both varieties partitive markers are used. Strobel and Glaser state that, since there is no case marking on the noun, genitive forms of the determiner as in (42) pattern with the partitive article in French and Italian. They are analyzed as independent partitive genitives not directly governed by some head (Seržant 2021). The translations are Strobel and Glaser's.

- (42) *Hutt du dārs (dote) Béier?* (Luxembourgisch)  
 have you the.GEN.SG (there) beer?  
 'Do you have (some) of this/that beer (there)?'

In Walliser German it is also possible to use a bare noun and in the last decades a construction with *va* 'from, of' is spreading.

- (43) *Hets nu va der/discher Milch?* (Valais: Goms, Visp, Gütter-Feschel)  
 has.it still of the/this milk  
 ‘Is there still (some) of the/this milk?’

The use of bare nominals and *vun* ‘from, of’ can also be found in Luxembourgish, but the results show that partitive determiners are still very productive there. They have a stronger position than in Walliser German. In a comparative view, Strobel and Glaser observe that a hitherto unsolved problem concerns the rather unclear relation to the use of the indefinite article with mass nouns in Bavarian. The authors observe that Bavarian is considered a “radical” article language, nouns being obligatorily accompanied by an article.

- (44) *Hoi a Wossa!*  
 get a water  
 ‘Fetch some water!’

The problem of the relation between partitive markers in Highest Alemannic and Luxembourgish and the use of the indefinite article with mass nouns in German dialects is taken up by Brandner (2024). Brandner studied the production and acceptance of the indefinite article *ein* ‘a’ with indefinite mass nouns in the Alemannic varieties spoken in Germany (Baden-Württemberg) and Switzerland, neighboring Alemannic dialects of Bavarian. She used the so-called “layered method” (Cornips & Poletto 2005). The relevant construction was first presented in the form of a translation task and in a later round the various versions provided were presented to all informants in the form of a judgment task. In this way, later questionnaires could react on the results of a former one. Since the results for the translation task and the judgment task diverged in an important way, Brandner stresses how important it is to use different types of tasks when dealing with dialectal data (see also Vangsnes & Johannessen 2011), because the acceptance rates are much higher than the production rates, which may have been influenced by the normative grammar, the prestige norm (Cornips & Poletto 2005). On the basis of the results, Brandner concludes that *ein* is used both to express subsets (concrete nouns) and subkinds (mass nouns) in the Baden-Württemberg variety, but that in the Swiss Alemannic variety only the subset interpretation is allowed, because with mass nouns bare nouns are the highly prevalent option. Brandner accounts for the differences between the varieties and the differences in interpretation with the help of a fine structure of nominal functional projections.

The expression of *ein* with mass nouns is also investigated by Glaser (this issue), namely in a cookbook (cf. Gerards & Stark 2020, 2022) from 1556 written in the East Swabian variety of Augsburg. She analyzes 900 instances of mass nouns with and without the indefinite article, distinguishing an OBJECT and a QUALITY reading. Glaser compares the results with the investigation of *de*-nominals



in Old Spanish recipes in Gerards (2020) and discusses the characteristics of the mass nouns introduced by the indefinite article with respect to partitivity. Differently from Brandner (2024) for mass nouns with *ein* in modern Alemannic, Glaser concludes that *ein* with mass nouns, at least in the East Swabian cookbook, is not to be regarded as an explicit means of marking partitivity, although there may be a partitive flavor. In the spirit of Gerards and Stark's (2020) analysis of *de*-nominals in Old Spanish, Glaser proposes that the *ein*-nominals denote non-specific weakly referential representative objects.

### 3.4 Partitive pronouns

Besides the expression of partitive determiners in Walliser German and Luxembourgish, Strobel and Glaser (2020) studied the expression of partitive pronouns in these varieties, with the help of questionnaires and fieldwork. They discovered that both varieties have weak partitive pronouns besides partitive determiners. Strobel and Glaser observe that in their Alemannic dialects null anaphora are still rare, but that in Walliser German it is already the predominant strategy with masculine and neuter mass nouns, being up to twice as frequent as the partitive pronoun in this case. The use of null anaphora is no competing strategy in Luxembourgish, where the partitive pronoun is still much used.

- (45) *Där Wirschterscher / Vun dene Wirschterscher huet de Michel der*  
 the.GEN.PL sausages of these sausages has the Michel PART.WK  
*zéng giess!*  
 ten eaten  
 'Michel ate ten of these sausages!'

Variation in the expression of the partitive pronoun has also been investigated by Corver, van Koppen and Kranendonk (2013), in a project on the nominal expression in Dutch and Frisian dialects, the DiDDD project (Diversity in Dutch DP Design). Like Brandner (2024), the authors used a layered method. First, a small questionnaire was sent to a pool of informants, of whom 179 filled out the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 35 sentences that had to be translated. In a second round much more detailed questionnaires were submitted to informants from 53 different towns and villages, spread over the Netherlands, the Flemish speaking part of Belgium and Friesland. Because of the length of the four questionnaires, they were submitted in two phases to the informants. The informants were minimally 55 years old, they and their parents were born and raised in the relevant dialect region, they had not lived outside of their dialect region for more than eight years and they used their dialect also in the public domain (see also Buchstaller & Corrigan 2011b). The questionnaires contained a transla-

tion task and questions about the possible occurrence of sentences in the informants' dialects. In 30 towns and villages the questionnaires were discussed by pairs of two informants, in the presence of an interviewer (Schütze 2016: 188). In the remaining 23 ones the questionnaires were filled out by pairs of informants. In both cases the two informants did not have to agree with each other. One of the subjects that the researchers were interested in, was the expression of nominal ellipsis with quantifiers in object position. For, e.g., the village of Urk in the Netherlands, the relevant sentences in the dialect contained a weak partitive pronoun plus an additional schwa on the quantifier, which only occurs in the case of nominal ellipsis. In the results from the Dutch village of Onstwedde there is an additional schwa on the quantifier, but no partitive pronoun, and in the results from the Frisian city of Hindeloopen there is no schwa and no partitive pronoun. In Standard Dutch there is a partitive pronoun, but no schwa.

- (46) *Ik hew zes koenen en hij het 'r achte.* (Urk)  
 I have six cows and he has PART.WK eight  
 'I have six cows and he has eight.'
- (47) ... *en ik heb viere* (Onstwedde)  
 ... and I have four  
 '... and I have four'
- (48) ... *en ik heb vier* (Hindeloopen)  
 ... and I have four  
 'and I have four'
- (49) ... *en ik heb er vier* (Standard Dutch)  
 ... and I have PART.WK four  
 '... and I have four'

Since the questionnaires were discussed or filled out by only two informants per town or village, it is not sure whether the answers of these informants were shared by all other speakers of their dialect. There could be interspeaker variation. Furthermore, since there were only some questions per topic, it could be the case that there is also intraspeaker variation.

Interspeaker and intraspeaker variation in the expression of the partitive pronoun in Heerlen Dutch, one of the regional varieties of Standard Dutch, is studied by Cornips and Sleeman (this issue). Their results are based on sociolinguistic interviews (Labov 1972; see also Schilling 2013), in which dyadic pairs of speakers of Heerlen Dutch with the same sociolinguistic characteristics interviewed each other (Cornips 1994). There were two age groups: 20–45 years and 60+ years. Similarly, Buchstaller and Corrigan (2011b) recommend to target different age groups from two clearly contrasting generations in order to investigate diachronic

patterns of change. Cornips and Sleeman's results show that, differently than in normative standard Netherlandic Dutch, in the analyzed data of Heerlen Dutch, the partitive pronoun *er* is used variably both in the canonical quantifier construction and with cardinals expressing *age* and *weight* and that younger speakers differ in some contexts from older speakers, suggesting that language change is going on.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper various methods to detect variation in the linguistic expression or use of partitive constructions and elements have been presented. Most of the studies that were presented investigated the expression or use of partitives in Germanic and Romance languages and dialects, but some concerned Ukrainian, Hungarian and Finnish.

As for partitive constructions, the studies that were presented made use of introspective data, data from the literature, judgments provided by colleagues, judgments obtained via mailing lists or social media and judgments provided via crowd-sourcing. They all concerned the acceptability of partitive constructions with judgments from L1 speakers of different languages. Interestingly, for one of the constructions, superlative partitive constructions presenting gender mismatches between the outer and the inner DP, the judgments in three different studies obtained via consultation of a small number of colleagues and the judgments obtained via mailing lists, probably at least partially provided by a large number of linguists, or social media did not diverge. Falco and Zamparelli (2019), however, observe that in their study there were differences between linguists and non-linguists in their judgment of a special type of partitive construction, an inverted partitive containing the preposition *among*. Besides judgment data, Falco and Zamparelli made use of large digital corpora. Their large set of data allowed the authors to detect statistically significant differences in the use or acceptance of close variants of partitive constructions. The methods used in these studies show that there are subtle differences in the acceptability of partitive constructions, as revealed by the higher acceptance of gender mismatches in canonical partitives introduced by a superlative partitive than of those introduced by a quantifier in French and Italian. Similarly, gender mismatches in canonical partitives containing epicene nouns like *élève* 'pupil' in French were more accepted than gender mismatches with fixed gender nouns like *la sentinelle* 'the sentinel'.

Some studies discussed in this paper investigate the use of partitive determiners in cooking contexts. In these studies, it is argued that what seems to be a partitive determiner is or contains rather an article with a representative object

interpretation in these cooking contexts. Several studies were discussed that make use of translation tasks to detect regional variation in the linguistic expression of indefiniteness with mass nouns or plural nouns. Pinzin and Poletto (2022) warn, however, against a possible priming effect in the use of translation tasks, which may obscure the results, and against the influence of the standard language in the elicitation of dialectal data. Brandner (2024) therefore recommends to make use of the so-called “layered method”, in which data are elicited in several rounds and with different methods. In dialectal research translation tasks and questionnaires containing questions about the acceptability of dialectal data are necessarily used because of the low number of informants. For dialectal research available data resulting from interviews are generally limited. This may be different for data from standard languages, for which large digital corpora make big data research using various methods possible, as has been shown in this paper for studies on the use of partitive case.

Research on the acceptance or use of the partitive pronoun has revealed that there may be interspeaker variation. Judgments obtained via Grammaticality Judgment Tasks may differ from judgments obtained via introspection provided by linguists. It has also been shown that the use of different methods may lead to different results. Whereas in Berends’ (2019) study, French and English L2 learners of Dutch did not differ significantly in their explicit knowledge of the use of the Dutch partitive pronoun *er*, tested with the help of a Grammaticality Judgment Task, they did significantly differ, in most of the conditions, in their implicit knowledge of *er*, tested by an Elicited Imitation Task.

In this paper it has been shown that in research on partitivity, the method of introspection has in many studies been replaced by experimental methods and the use of large digital corpora. Different types of research may require specific methods. The use of various methods has led, in recent years, to considerable progress in research on variation in the linguistic expression and use of partitive constructions and partitive elements.

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## List of glossing abbreviations










ACC	accusative
AUX	auxiliary
ERG	ergative
F	feminine
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperative
M	masculine
N	neuter
PART	partitive
PART.CL	partitive clitic
PART.DET	partitive determiner
PART.WK	partitive weak
PL	plural
SG	singular

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## Address for correspondence

Petra Sleeman  
University of Amsterdam  
Spuistraat 134  
Amsterdam North-Holland 1012 VB  
Netherlands

A.P.Sleeman@uva.nl  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5095-3262>

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