

**Partitivity of the Partitive:  
A Syntactic Probe**

**A Dissertation Presented**

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**Session        2009-2011**



Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of  
The Degree of Master of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics

At the

**University of Management and Technology,**

**Lahore, Pakistan.**

**March, 2012.**

## **Certificate of Acceptance**

The dissertation entitled “Partitivity of the Partitive: A Syntactic Probe” has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MS/M. Phil in Applied Linguistics by the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

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### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, thanks be to ALLAH, the Magnificent, and the Merciful, for endowing me the quest for learning, and bestowing the ability to do so, (Ameen!). I would like to acknowledge and extend my debt and many thanks to my teachers these last two years for their guidance and encouragement; My heartiest gratitude and eternal indebtedness to my supervisor, Dr. Anjum P. Saleemi, for his inspiration and guidance in all syntactic and semantic matters, his sound advice in the mechanics of writing, and his endless encouragement when I felt daunted and slow on the uptake. My special thanks to UMT both for providing a platform for linguistic inquiry and for facilitating my education in more than one ways; to professor Shahzad Ahmed for helping me with the soft copy of material on syntax that I needed, his moral support, and pieces of friendly advices; to Professor Zameer Naqvi, my external supervisor and my venerable teacher for his encouragement, patronage and valuable feedback that have always been my strength.

**Dedicated To**

**My Mentors**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation aims to look at the syntactic structure of Partitive in the nominal complex. For this purpose it will attempt to analyze the structures of the various Partitive constructions examining their form, function, characteristic features and types (like Partitive and Pseudopartitive). It will also focus on the meaning component primarily from the syntactical, and secondarily from Semantic perspective. An attempt will also be made at a comparison and contrast between Partitive and Pseudopartitive, and N-Partitive and Q-Partitive respectively, looking at any relationship that may exist between the either. The syntactic behavior of Partitive in adjectival modification and its syntactical positioning like fronting, extrapositioning, and recursion will also be analyzed. The close syntactic similarities and differences between Partitive and genitive structures will also be examined. The data for the analysis will be collected from English. Chapter 1 will introduce the problems related with the syntax of Partitive in the noun-phrase. Chapter 2 will look at the literature review related with the subject. Chapter 3 will looked at the microsyntax of Partitive in some detail by examining its various grammatical forms, functions, and salient features. Chapter 4 will consider the major types of Partitives namely Entity Partitive and Mass Partitive bringing out their inter-relationship. Chapter 5 will make a contrastive analysis of Partitive and Pseudopartitive structures. Chapter 6 will make an investigation of Quantified Partitives looking at their syntactic characteristics. Chapter no 7 will study the similarities and differences of Partitive and genitive constructions. Chapter no 8 will conclude the dissertation.

Key words: Partitive, Pseudopartitive, determiner phrase (DP), measure phrase (MP)

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 The Probe

This dissertation aims to probe the Partitive structure in the English language. The syntax of the Partitive exhibits an intricacy that brings forth the potential complexity and puzzle of the nominal structure, therefore it will be pertinent to look into the Partitive in the English noun phrase with a view to understand some of its ambiguities. The complexity associated with some of the structural constructions of the English noun phrase has baffled many syntacticians. It is at its best exhibited in the Partitive construction, as in the example: “some of those books”, and is extensively linked with its bi/multi-nominal structure. In Barker’s opinion, “any property denoted by a Partitive will have at least two entities in its extension, and cannot uniquely identify an individual; thus Partitives are anti-unique” (Page No. 679, Barker: 1998). The potential complexity of the noun phrase, the determiner phrase, and the Partitive would be interesting to probe. The following examples (1-4) show the apparent simplicity and similarity in the constructions which are syntactically quite different from each other.

- 1) A number of those people (Quantification noun construction)
- 2) A box of Maxi chocolate (Container noun construction)
- 3) A piece of cheese cake (Part-whole noun construction)
- 4) A litter of that creamy milk (Measure noun construction)

These complex noun phrase-constructions are just a few examples which represent a host of diversities inherent in the noun phrase structure, especially exhibited in the Partitive constructions, which bear a close similarity with structures like binominal noun phrase, possessive-genitive, and quantified nominal. Keeping these diversified configurations, the study

attempts to look into the validity of the Partitive Hypothesis (Barker: 1998) which claims that double genitives are structurally Partitive in nature. For example, in the genitive phrase “a friend of Akram’s”, the element “of” is in fact not the genitive “of” as in “the daughter of the king”, but the Partitive “of” as in “one of those men”. This syntactic area is highly vague in categorical expressions, raising a number of questions.

An attempt is also made at a comparison and contrast between Partitive and quantifiers, looking at any relationship that may exist between them. It can be guessed at this stage that quantifiers play a significant role in the Partitive construction, and since their syntactical status is quite puzzling owing to their confusing and fuzzy behavior, it would be appropriate to understand and discuss some salient features of the quantifiers in the Partitive structure in the present study. The role of the Partitive in adjectival modification and its syntactical positioning like fronting and extrapositioning are also analyzed.

In order to look into the cross-syntactic behavior of the Partitive nominal, this dissertation analyzes the structure of the Partitive that is manifested in various constructions, like the Partitive and the Pseudopartitive, exemplified in “a piece of that pie”, and “a piece of pie”, respectively. The Partitive and the Pseudopartitive structures contrast not only at the surface level but also at their deeper syntactic level. However, the Partitive is inherently a bi-nominal or we could call it a multi-nominal construction that exhibits a part-whole or a subset-superset relationship, while the Pseudopartitive seems to be a unit manifestation of an amount or quantity of some substance. Moreover, the Partitive structure is highly significant in terms of the assignment of the dominant node of its constituents that could be accepted as representing the entire phrase for its Headedness.

There seem to be a possibility of a multi-tier formation in which the status of the head cannot be easily fixed. The issue of head in the Partitive structure is thus filled with a number of interpretations. Does it have a single head in its constituent structure, or does its complexity allow for a double headedness? There seems to be quite a debate over the question whether a nominal phrase in the Partitive construction possesses a single head or is double headed. Also should the head be a noun or can a functional constituent benefit the role of a head? ( Zwicky: 1993). The role of the governor and the governed in the Partitive construction is therefore quite controversial, and is often associated within its embedded bi/multi-nominal structure, which can be subcategorized as N1 and N2, as shown in the following examples (5-8):

- 5) A slice of that bread
- 6) A box of those dates
- 7) A piece of this cake
- 8) A part of her journey

The relationship between “slice”, “box”, “piece”, and “part”, which are functioning as N1, and “bread”, “dates”, “cake”, and “journey” functioning as N2 in their respective phrases (5-8) in the above examples, could be syntactically expressed as that of predicate and subject (Aarts:1998) or alternatively, as that of subject and object respectively (Barker:1998).

In English, from the structural point of view, the partitivity of the Partitive is syntactically shown through the presence of more than one nominal head in the NPs, and more than one determiner through the presence of two DPs. It is also expressed through the preposition “of”, whose syntactic status is highly controversial. Does it exhibit the characteristics of its class association? Can other prepositions take its place? What is its relationship with other members within the noun phrase it embeds? These and a multitude of other questions are yet to receive a satisfactory

answer. Along with other issues, this seems to be one of the core issues: therefore the present study analyzes the status of the “of” element, its syntactical role, its function, its lexical contribution if any, or its licensing quality, i.e if it has any.

This study also attempts to discern the related issues like; where do we place the Partitive? Is it erroneous to consider the Partitive as a category of syntax? If it’s grounded in semantics then how does the syntax of the Partitive reflect the meaning component? The dissertation therefore, focuses on the meaning component primarily from the grammatical, and secondarily from semantic perspective respectively. The intricacy linked with this area is also linked with the semantic component because the Partitive structure represents a subset of a larger set that has a pragmatic referent in the discourse field. Hence the meaning component cannot be isolated from any syntactic study as grammar is also closely associated with meaning, though the grammaticalization of the meaning component, too, has its basis in the syntactic structure.

## **1.2 The Hazy Backdrop**

It is quite interesting to observe that there seems to be no agreement even as to the syntactical structure of the English Partitive in the current literature dealing with this subject. Keenan and Stau (1986) propose that in the Partitive structure “one of the books”, “one of the” functions as a constituent, while the other grammarians consider “of the books” as a constituent. Mathewson (2001) asserts that “of” in the Partitive construction has no semantic content, whereas Ladusaw (1982), and Barker (1998) contend that the “of” element bears a semantic role.

Another dimension of the complexity of the Partitive structure has generated a debate concerning that presence of two NPs or one NP in a Partitive construction. Jackendoff (1977) assumes that the Partitive always involves two NPs. He proposes that the prepositional element in a Partitive

indicates the existence of an empty Noun that precedes it and is often followed by a quantifier so as to project the idea of two nested sets of entities. On the contrary, Belletti (1979), Mallen (1992), and Bosque and Piccolo (2009, cited in Cartwright 1984) claim that there is only one nominal head, and no empty noun is present in the Partitive structure.

As Partitive interpretation is primarily assumed to be associated with the notion of subset of a set that is denoted by a Partitive element, so in order to look at the semantic orientation some syntacticians focus on the structural interpretation of the Partitive. Contrary to this viewpoint, there is another assumption that the prepositional element “of” is just a functional element that gives the Partitive construction a syntactic licenser, but in semantic terms it is void and empty. Vos (1999) proposes that the prepositional element in a Partitive structure does not have any meaning but only establishes the relationship between the quantifier and the noun. De Hoop (1998) claims the preposition in the Partitive merely aids the accessibility of the expression to the higher determiner. It is the quantifier that selects the type of Noun Phrase it will permit. Mallen (1992), on the other hand, proposes that the prepositional element in the Partitive structure is a lexical preposition; he asserts that it can select different categories like DP, NP, and even AjdP.

### **1.3 The Core Issues/Questions**

Keeping in view the intricacies related with this area of syntax, the present study aims at understanding of the inter relationship of the various syntactic features of the English Partitive structure and, in order to achieve this end, proposes some of the following research questions that are dealt in detail in the coming chapters:

- A. Whether the Partitive is a grammatical category or its basis lies in its semantics, or both?
- B. What is the nature of the English Partitive structure? Is it a nominal or a bi/multi-nominal construction?
- C. How does the complexity of the Partitive structure centre around the prepositional form “of”?
- D. What is the relation between the Partitive and quantifiers? A comparison is also made between the Partitive construction and the role of quantifiers in it, looking at their differences and similarities, if any.
- E. Why is the genitive structure associated with the Partitive one and whether the double genitive structure is identical to the Partitive structure?
- F. What are the various types of Partitives and whether their grammatical forms and properties also exhibit these differences?

These questions are investigated by studying in particular the following sub issues\areas:

- a. The research investigates the basic syntax of the Partitive in English. It will highlight the complexity of an embedded bi/multi-nominal noun phrase but also focus on the relative role of Partitive in the structure of a noun phrase.
- b. It would also look at the major types of the Partitive; namely Standard-Partitive, Pseudopartitive, Entity Partitive, Set Partitive, N-Partitives, Q-Partitive and if possible more types, bringing out their internal structures and inter-relationships.
- c. Adjectival modification, fronting and recursion in the Partitive structure may also be analyzed keeping in view the Partitive constraint.

**1.4 The Method**

This study employs the descriptive qualitative method. A descriptive design simply describes an existing phenomenon by using data to characterize individuals or a group, so in order to analyze the English Partitive structure a sample from a corpus of English sentences\phrases based on the native speakers' intuitions is collected to form the basis of the study. The data is gathered by using such instruments as observation, intuitive judgment of grammatically correct sentences/phrases and intuitive judgment of ungrammaticality. The data is analyzed qualitatively. The analysis of this study is to obtain an insight into the structure of the Partitive and try to resolve some of the queries put forth.

The approach is eclectic and bears on the available syntactic and semantic theories. Tree diagrams and bracket format are also exploited where needed using the standard format. The lower case letters are used for the typography of the word classes. However, the term "Partitive" is used with the first letter in the uppercase just for emphasis as it concerns the core of this study. Abbreviations are used in the upper case and specific combinatorial terms may also be employed with the first letter in the upper case.

**1.5 An Overview**

The dissertation is organized as follows. In chapter two, the related literature on the syntax of the Partitive is reviewed, bringing out the salient controversies connected with it. These controversies in turn are helpful in looking at the various aspects of the Partitive structure that are analyzed in detail later.

In chapter three, the focus is on the Partitive from various angles. It takes into consideration the general and the broader but deeper analysis of the syntax of the Partitive. Some of the queries are

probed in detail such as: “How does the syntactic structure of the Partitive construction behave under some syntactic constraints?, and “What are its characteristic features?” In chapter four I lay out the different types of Partitives as this type of construction does not stick to one structure, neither does it have a singular manifestation. There seems to be an endless debate in the current literature relevant to the constitution of the Partitive configuration concerning its different types. In most cases these interpretations overlap; therefore, focus will be kept on some of the salient types of Partitives that constitute the core of this complex nominal construction. In chapter five, I look at a nominal structure that is often confused with the Partitive structure. It has such a close semblance with the Partitive that it is termed as Pseudopartitive. The structure of the Partitive will be contrasted with the structure of the Pseudopartitive to highlight their syntactic behavior in order to bring out their differences.

Chapter six I look into quantifiers that play a significant role in the Partitive construction, and since their syntactical standing is quite confusing owing to their fuzzy behavior, it seems appropriate to understand and discuss some salient features of the quantifiers in the Partitive structure. In chapter seven, I explore the structure of the English genitive phrase, bringing out its various syntactic manifestations along with its major syntactic properties, and make a comparison with the Partitive structure, drawing out those salient features that bring them closer and those that make them distinct and dissimilar. In the final chapter, the conclusions of the dissertation will be summarized.