

Phrasal alternation with Estonian indefinite nominal quantifiers

Maarja-Liisa Pilvik, Liina Lindström, Carl Eric Simmul & Helen Plado

(University of Tartu, University of Tartu, University of Tartu & University of Tartu)

Keywords: quantifiers, agreement, language variation, Estonian, Circum-Baltic languages

Acknowledgements: The study has been conducted within the project "Morphosyntactic variation in Estonian" (EKKD-TA2) which is funded by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

Indefinite quantifiers (e.g., *few*, *some*, *several*, *many*, *much*) express a nonspecific or vague number or quantity. In Estonian, indefinite quantifiers exhibit diverse syntactic behaviors when referring to the quantity of collective (plural) entities (see Metslang 2017). Some operate exclusively within plural paradigms, while others are used in both singular and plural (e.g., SG *mõnes raamatus* 'in some books', PL *mõnedes raamatutes* 'in some books'). In both cases, the quantifiers function as modifiers within a noun phrase (NP), agreeing with the head noun in case and number. Certain quantifiers (1) alternate between agreement and government, acting as the head of a quantifier phrase (QP) in the singular paradigm. Plural quantifiers, however, can still be analyzed as modifiers within an NP.

(1) QP: <i>mitu</i>	<i>raamatu-t</i>	<i>mitme-s</i>	<i>raamatu-s</i>
several.SG.NOM	book-SG.PAR	several-SG.IN	book-SG.IN
NP: <i>mitme-d</i>	<i>raamatu-d</i>	<i>mitme-te-s</i>	<i>raamatu-te-s</i>
several-PL.NOM	book-PL.NOM	several-PL-IN	book-PL-IN
'several books'		'in several books'	

The current study focuses on the agreement patterns used with indefinite nominal quantifiers *osa* ('some; part (of)'), *enamik* ('most; majority (of)'), and *enamus* ('most; majority (of)'), which also lexically express partitivity. These quantifiers also alternate between functioning as QPs and NPs but, regardless of the number, always trigger plural marking on the noun denoting the collective whole (2). Therefore, agreement may occur in both case and number, in case alone, or in neither.

(2) QP: <i>osa</i>	<i>raamatu-i-d</i>	<i>osa-s</i>	<i>raamatu-te-s</i>
part.SG.NOM	book-PL-PAR	part-SG.IN	book-PL-IN
NP: <i>osa-d</i>	<i>raamatu-d</i>	<i>osa-de-s</i>	<i>raamatu-te-s</i>
part.PL.NOM	book-PL.NOM	part-PL-IN	book-PL-IN
'some (of the) books'		'in some (of the) books'	

The choice of NP over QP is regarded as a relatively recent development (Erelt, Metslang 1998) and has been discouraged in language planning (Kindlam 1978: 62, Erelt et al. 2020: 492). The two patterns, however, are not considered completely synonymous, as they evoke different types of construal. The use of a singular quantifier in a QP emphasizes (indefinite) quantity and part-whole relations, whereas a plural

quantifier in an NP specifies individuals, functioning similarly to non-quantifying determiners (Erelt, Metslang 1998). Nonetheless, the distinction is often ambiguous in actual usage, suggesting an ongoing shift in the language.

In this paper, we compare the extent and conditions influencing the choice between the two phrase types using data from the Estonian National Corpus 2023 (Koppel et al. 2023). Conditional inference trees and logistic regression were employed to assess whether the alternation is sensitive to factors such as genre, modification, animacy, case form, frequency, or the predictability of the collective whole within the phrase. The results indicate that the choice between QP and NP is primarily conditioned by the syntactic function of the phrase: adverbials in oblique cases emerge as a potential source of change towards number agreement, while the specifying function of the quantifier is increasingly solidified in phrases functioning as subjects. Given that the relationship between (pseudo-)partitives and indefiniteness has been attested cross-linguistically (Seržant 2021a, 2021b), and that indefinite quantifiers occur in both NPs and QPs also in other Circum-Baltic languages (e.g., Latvian *lielāka daļa grāmatu* 'most books', lit. 'biggest part of the books'), we also explore the areal typology of the investigated phenomenon.

References

- Erelt, Mati; Metslang, Helle (1998), Oma või võõras? ("Muutuv keel") [A local or a stranger? (Changing language)], *Keel ja Kirjandus* 10, 657–668.
- Erelt, Mati; Erelt, Tiiu; Ross, Kristiina (2020), *Eesti keele käsiraamat. Uuendatud väljaanne* [Handbook of Estonian. New edition], Tallinn: Eesti Keele Instituut / Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.
- Kindlam, Ester (1978), Sõltumussuhetest [On dependency relations], *Keelevoos* 76, 55–66.
- Koppel, Kristina; Kallas, Jelena; Jürviste, Madis; Kaljumäe, Helen (2023), *Eesti keele ühendkorpus 2023* [Estonian National Corpus 2023], Lexical Computing Ltd. / Eesti Keele Instituut.
- Metslang, Helle (2017), Kvantorifraas [Quantifier Phrase], in M. Erelt, and H. Metslang (eds), (2017), *Eesti keele süntaks* [Syntax of the Estonian language], Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 463–478.
- Seržant, Ilja A. (2021a), Diachronic typology of partitives, in P. Sleeman, and G. Giusti (eds), *Partitive Determiners, Partitive Pronouns and Partitive Case*, (Linguistische Arbeiten 580), Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 111–167. <https://doi-org/10.1515/9783110732221>
- Seržant, Ilja A. (2021b), Typology of partitives, *Linguistics* 59(4), 881–947. <https://doi-org/10.1515/ling-2020-0251>