

The bare Partitive Genitive in Ancient Greek and other Indo-European languages

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Abstract: The present paper aims to investigate the main semantic-functional, discursive and syntactic properties of partitives on the bases of the bare (independent) partitive genitive in Ancient Greek. Contrary to previous views that the bare partitive genitive (PG) primarily encodes a partitive relation I present a unified semantic account of the bare PG and I argue that the bare PG marks a participant as being un(der)determined as to reference, quantity and, partially, as to its thematic role. This indeterminacy of the bare PG is only a default one, i.e., the bare PG may take an overt determiner or quantifier and, hence, be definite in number and/or reference. The lack of determinacy mirrors the discourse functions of the bare PG: it makes the participant it refers to discursively inherently backgrounded while, at the same time, it “promotes” the superset to which the denoted participant belongs to in the discourse. This is why the bare PG is often found in generic use. Furthermore, I argue that the partitivity in narrow sense is only an implicature of the overall functional semantics of the bare PG. The bare PG only characterizes the type of the participant, not primarily its membership in a particular set. As regards morphosyntax, the bare PG in Ancient Greek has a number of atypical, typologically rare features such as its ability to trigger verbal agreement, while being in the subject position, based on its semantic number. In addition, the bare PG in the subject position also behaves otherwise as a nominative marked constituent: it can be coordinated with nominatives and it can agree with nominative case-marked participles. Finally, the bare PG deviates from the nominative–accusative alignment in that it can equally encode both intransitive subjects and transitive objects, levelling out, thereby, the morphological distinction between S and O (in Dixon’s terms).