CHAPTER 4

Synchronic Corpus Study of Object Case Alternation

1 Introduction

While the alternation of object case between the partitive and accusative is said to be similar in all the Finnic languages, as explained in Chapter 3, there are some differences. In this chapter the differences between the languages are examined by using the corpus predominantly from St. Matthew’s gospel and the First letter to the Corinthians in recent editions of the New Testament. The results from these two books are combined, although there are some differences due to difference in genre. The main texts compared are Estonian (1989), Finnish (1992), Karelian (Olonets) (2003), Livonian (1942) and Veps (2006). The diachronic study dealing with older translations, and also the most recent Estonian one from 1997, are presented in Chapter 5. Both St. Matthew’s gospel and 1 Corinthians are also available in the 1905 NT in the Võro dialect of Estonian, but have been omitted from this chapter, being instead discussed with the diachronic studies of southern Estonian in Chapter 5. St. Matthew’s gospel in the southern Estonian Seto dialect from 1926 is also included in Chapter 5. The small section of St. Matthew’s gospel in Votic, although this is an early translation from 1883, is compared here with the corresponding section from the other languages. Where relevant, some reference is made to other material, especially in Votic.

The objects of all verb forms, except the impersonal (passive), are included in this chapter. Negative clauses, where the objects are all partitive, are omitted in the general results. Livonian does have some accusative objects in negative clauses and these have been counted separately. As pronouns are often dealt with differently from full noun phrases, separate analyses of personal and other pronouns have been carried out.

Included under personal pronouns are the 1st, 2nd and 3rd, singular and plural. There is no grammatical gender. The situation is complicated somewhat by the observation that in many instances inanimate objects are referred to by the 3rd person pronoun. These are included in the analysis of personal pronouns. The pronouns are mostly cognate in the various languages, but some variation is found with the 3rd person. The pronoun se/see ‘it’ in Estonian

* Some of the data in this chapter has been published in Lees (2003).

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2015 | DOI 10.1163/9789004296367_005
and Livonian also covers the meanings ‘this’ and ‘that’. Other languages have other more specific demonstrative pronouns as well. In addition to differences between the various languages, there are also considerable dialectal differences, but these are mainly evident in the transcribed oral collections. The personal pronouns mostly have all the same cases as nouns, except for the additional -t accusative, but their usage differs in some respects.

2 General Comments about the Languages

Estonian and Finnish are standardized and reasonably well known. Information relevant to the present study has been given in Chapters 1 and 3. The comments concerning the other languages are based partly on the available grammars and partly on observations from the present corpus.

2.1 Karelian

In Karelian the genitive is clearly distinguishable from the partitive, as in Finnish, with the ending -n. The partitive has a number of different endings, but these are generally fairly easy to distinguish. Karelian differs from the others in that it has the plural accusative case listed by Markianova and Mensonen (2006: 48) as homonymous with the genitive plural (AK I), as well as the nominative (AK II), while in other languages only the nominative form is used for the plural accusative object. However, in the corpus the Olonets dialect has no genitive plural objects of finite verbs. Singular accusative objects of 3rd person plural verbs are mostly in the nominative form rather than genitive. Such usage is also mentioned by Zaikov (2002: 58) in his grammar based on the Viena dialect of northern Karelian. This appears to be due to the fact that the 3rd person plural active verb form is cognate with the Finnish impersonal form. In Estonian and Finnish the undergoer (logical object) of impersonal verbs has the accusative object in the nominative form in the singular as well as the plural (Chapter 3, Section 2.3.1). Impersonal verbs are discussed in Chapter 6, but it needs to be said at this point that the impersonal voice in Karelian is difficult to distinguish from the active 3rd person plural, as subjects are often omitted. Some consider that there is no impersonal voice in Karelian (Zaikov 1999: 243). If there is no subject expressed or understood from the context, I have considered such forms to be impersonal, and have omitted them from the results in this chapter. It is of course possible to say that they are active 3rd person plural verbs with the understood subject ‘they’ or ‘people’. I have chosen to make this somewhat artificial separation into active and impersonal in order to provide a set of data comparable to the other languages. Kont (1963: 158) also states that the use of the nominative-accusative for singular objects of