CHAPTER 10

Summary and Conclusions

The aim of the study, as stated in Chapter 1, has been to show similarities and particularly differences in the use of the partitive case, especially the partitive-accusative alternation for objects, but also the partitive-nominative alternation for copula complements and the argument (subject) in existential clauses in the various Finnic languages. Differences in the choice of the form of the accusative have also been explored. The study is both synchronic and diachronic. For the synchronic study comparable texts from recent translations of the New Testament (Estonian 1989, Livonian 1942, Finnish 1992, Karelian 2003 and Veps 2006, with a small section of St. Matthew’s gospel in Votic 1883), have provided quantitative data to back up many of the previous empirical observations. Additional material from non-biblical sources has helped to amplify the findings from the main texts. Diachronic studies, using older Bible translations, have traced the changes in each of the main languages, with Estonian and Finnish providing the most material for study. St. Matthew’s gospel and St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians have been used for the synchronic corpus and the diachronic study of Estonian and Finnish, and St. Matthew’s gospel alone for the diachronic study of Livonian, Karelian and Veps. For both Estonian and Finnish early grammar books have been included in the study, and for Estonian some early non-biblical (religious as well as secular) material has also been analysed. A section from the first Finnish novel by Aleksis Kivi (1870) has been included. The main conclusions have been summarized at the end of each chapter, so the present summary is a brief reiteration of special points.

The close relationship between the Finnic languages is evident from this study. Livonian has been found to deviate most from the grammatical rules that have been established in Finnish and Estonian. The results fit with the division of the Finnic languages into the northern (Finnish, Karelian and Veps) and southern (Estonian and Livonian) groups. However, both Karelian and Veps show differences from Finnish, Karelian more so.

1 Synchronic Corpus Study of Objects (Chapter 4)

Objects in negative clauses are partitive, and are thought to have been so from the Proto-Finnic period, after the separation of Saami. This usage has become grammaticalized, but exceptions are found in Livonian.
The choice of the case form of the accusative is dependent on syntax. As a rule the genitive form is used for singular nouns and the nominative for plural ones in indicative clauses. In imperative and impersonal clauses the nominative form is used for singular nouns instead of the genitive. An exception to this is found in Livonian, where singular objects of imperative verbs are genitive in form. The nominative and genitive cases in Livonian are often homonymous in the singular and always so in the plural. For this reason in the present analysis there has not been any attempt to separate the various forms of the accusative in this language. Consideration has been given to the possibility that in Livonian all accusative objects are genitive in form in the 1942 NT. In the Olonets Karelian 2003 NT accusative singular objects of 3rd person plural verbs in the active voice are in the nominative form rather than genitive, presumably influenced by that verb form being cognate with the impersonal in Finnish and Estonian.

In affirmative clauses the alternation of object case between accusative and partitive is dependent on semantics, related to (un)boundedness. This includes boundedness of the verb and the object, as explained by Kiparsky (1998: 305). The accusative is used in bounded situations and the partitive otherwise. Boundedness is a composite of many features with varying degrees of influence in the different languages. When noun objects only are taken into account, in Finnish and Veps the accusative predominates, in Estonian and Livonian the partitive, with Karelian in between, but closer to Veps and Finnish. These findings fit well with the generally accepted differences between the languages.

The well-known difference between the northern and southern languages in the interpretation of the inherent aspect of verbs of perception and cognition is evident in the present corpus, and accounts for a considerable part of the difference in the results between the two groups. The northern languages consider these verbs as accomplishments, with bounded clauses and the southern ones as states, with unbounded clauses, although both Karelian and Livonian tend to have a mixture of accusative and partitive objects. In Livonian the partitive case is fairly often used in situations where the accusative would seem more appropriate and vice versa.

Personal pronoun objects show the greatest variation between languages, with Finnish the only language to have a special accusative form (-t accusative) in the section of the present corpus used for the synchronic study. All Finnish accusative personal pronoun objects are in this form. The Votic biblical text dating back to 1883, as well as the later oral collections do have some -t accusatives for the 1st and 2nd person plural. In the Olonets Karelian (2003) and the Veps NT (2006) all personal pronoun objects are partitive. Whether this is now also so in the spoken language is not clear, but I expect there to be dialectal