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Non-maximal definites in Romance (focus on Francoprovençal)

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1. Non-maximal definites (in Romance): the problem and a glance at Francoprovençal



1.1 (In)definiteness as [+ maximal] vs. [± maximal]

Cf. Frege (1892); Russell (1905); Hawkins (1978, 1991); Abbott (2010: 161f., 214); Heim (2011: 998ff.):

Definiteness = nominal refers to all (relevant) referents (maximality) falling under the description in the respective situation/context -

Indefiniteness: underspecified:

- (1) a. *Please close the window.*
- b. *Please close a window.*

Generally encoded by demonstratives, possessives, **definite articles** (next to rigid designators such as personal pronouns or proper names, Kripke 1972)



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

Possible test: *definiteness effect* (cf. Milsark 1974, 1977; for a summary of the literature cf. Lyons 1999: 236ff.):

definites are usually bad or completely ruled out in existential sentences, e.g. after presentationals (but see e.g. Leonetti 2008, 2019 for Italian):

- (2) a. Fr. **Il y a le lait dans le frigo.*
 it there has the milk in the fridge
 ‘There is the milk in the fridge.’
- b. It. **C’è la neve in montagna.*
 there.is the snow in mountain
 ‘There is the snow in the mountain(s).’



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

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- (2) c. It. *In cantina ci sono* *i topi.* (Leonetti 2019:15)
 in cellar there are the mice
 ‘In the cellar there are (the) mice.’

→ “habitual flavor” (Leonetti 2019, 16) – weak definites?!



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

See also Kupisch/Koops (2007:190):

- (3) a. It. *Se Mario avesse una/la macchina, potrebbe andare in Spagna.*
if Mario have.COND.3SG a/the car, can.COND.3SG
go in Spain
- b. Fr. *Si Mario avait une/*la voiture, il pourrait aller en Espagne.*
if Mario have.IMPFV.3SG a/the car, he can.COND.3SG
go in Spain
'If Mario had a car, he could go to Spain.'



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

Language-specificity (not yet clear, why):

Non-maximal definites much more widespread in Italian than in French or Spanish - often correspond to bare nouns, e.g. in incorporation contexts, but also productively used (Kupisch/Koops 2007 in data of child-directed speech and questionnaire data, Cardinaletti/Giusti 2018: 137f., 142f. no meaning difference?!);

convey a “habitual/familiar flavor” (Leonetti 2019: 16):

(4) a. Sp. *beber / tomar (#el) café / (#la) cerveza / (#el) vino*
drink / take the coffee / the beer / the wine

b. It. *bere / prendere il caffè / la birra / il vino*
drink / take (the) coffee / (the) beer / (the wine) (Leonetti 2019: 14)



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

Language-specificity (not yet clear, why) – non-maximal definites quite regular in ItaloRomance, alternating with bare nominals and PA ('partitive article') nominals:

- (5)
- | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| a. | <i>Ho</i> | <i>bevuto</i> | <i>il</i> | <i>vino</i> |
| | I.have | drunk | the | wine |
| | 'I drank {the/∅} wine.' | | | |
| b. | <i>Ho</i> | <i>bevuto</i> | <i>del</i> | <i>vino</i> |
| | I.have | drunk | PA.M.SG | wine |
| | 'I drank {of the/∅} wine.' | | | |
| c. | <i>Ho</i> | <i>bevuto</i> | \emptyset | <i>vino</i> |
| | I.have | drunk | \emptyset | wine |
| | 'I drank \emptyset wine.' | | | |
- (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 142)



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

Terminological note: *Partitive Articles (PA)*

- Indefinite determiners indicating a mass reading in the singular and indefinite reading in the plural (specific and non-specific readings available in the plural only).
- Historically, composed of a preposition (Carlier 2007) and the Latin ILLE: e.g., in French, *de* 'of' + allomorph of definite article (with a morphological distinction in gender and number), forming *du/de la/de l'/des* 'of.the'.
- Nominal phrases with a PA are comparable to **bare nouns** in other languages (e.g., English, German, cf. example (5b)).



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP

Alternation between definite articles and PA also rarely attested in French reported in Kupisch/Koops (2007: 210f.), again effect of ‘habitual effect’:

- (6) a. Fr. *Je vais acheter le pain.*
 I go.PRS.1SG buy the bread
 ‘I go buy bread.’
- b. Fr. *Je vais acheter du pain.*
 I go.PRS.1SG buy PA.MSG bread
 ‘I go buy bread.’



1.2 Non-definite = non-maximal uses of definite articles/DP in Francoprovençal (and Old Spanish)

- (7) *Tomen el léboro negro* (Old Spanish;
Moamín, 1250, see Gerards 2020)

take.IMP.3.PL **the** juniper black
'Take ?**the** black juniper'

- (8) *Fa pa pruprij'e læ bid'ũ avwe*
must.3.SG not clean.INF the jugs with

l=evə ts'ade (Modern Francoprovençal)

the=water lukewarm

'One must not clean the jugs with ?**the** lukewarm water'

(Gerards/Stark accepted)

What is Francoprovençal?

- **Non-standardised** Gallo-Romance language (Kristol 2016)
- Highly **endangered** language: 110'000 to 160'000 speakers in France, Switzerland and Italy (Zulato, Kasstan & Nagy 2018:13). Here: focus on the area circled on the map.
- At the **crossroads** between e.g., Italian dialects (like Piedmontese), Occitan and French



Source: Holtus, G./Metzeltin, M./Schmitt, C. (ed.) Lexikon der Romanistischen Linguistik, vol. V.1 (Tübingen 1990)



Observation in ALAVAL and fieldwork data and research questions

In some data, seemingly free variation (interspeaker) between PAs/invariable DE and ‘non-definite definite’ articles (cf. Cardinaletti/Giusti 2018 for Italian dialects and Gerards/Stark 2021 for older stages in Iberoromance):

(9) $\tilde{\epsilon}$ *fam'ελə nɔ mydz'ε* *ʃɔv'ε la pɔl'œnta*

in family we eat.PRS.1PL often the polenta

‘In family we often eat polenta.’ (Torgnon, Aosta Valley)

Research questions:

1. What is the semantics of the definite article in Romance data of type (9)?
2. Are there syntactic and semantic/pragmatic contexts that (dis)favor definite nominals like the one in (9)?

2. Two types of non-maximal definites



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

Basically two types of weakly referential definites:

a) *short weak definites* (SWD; Carlson & Sussman 2005):

(10) *Lola took the train from Amsterdam to Nijmegen.*

(Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2013: 34)

b) *representative object interpretations* (ROI; Krifka et. al 1995):

(11) a. *Look kids, this is **the lion**. It lives in Africa.*

b. *We filmed **the grizzly** in Alaska.*

(Krifka et al. 1995: 85, 87)



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

- Leonetti 2019: definite article has one and only one meaning = uniqueness/maximality.
- However: identification of the respective individual referent or maximality is not at issue in (10) or (11), i.e. truth-conditionally, we deal with indefinite interpretation/reference.
- SWDs form part of complex constructions that denote **familiar event kinds** (cf. Carlson et al. 2006, 2013, Espinal & Cyrino 2017b): event kind familiarity explains the morphological definiteness of SWDs.
- ROIs: Krifka et al. 1995: “*kind-oriented mode of talk*”:
“the object in the situation described is only relevant as a representative of the whole kind [and] a property can be projected from the object to the kind” (Krifka et al. 1995: 83; cf. similarly Mueller-Reichau 2013: 93): ‘**deferred**’ **kind reference**’ explains morphological definiteness? But what is the trigger?



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

Different properties (cf. Gerards 2020) for ROI against SWD (cf. Krifka et. al 1995):

- register-specific (technical prose, recipes, expert talk)
- **no lexical restriction (+ no morphological number restriction), but affinity to sub-kinds**
- **allow in many cases free modification**
- **allow anaphoric reference**



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

Different properties (cf. Gerards 2020) for ROI against SWD (cf. Krifka et. al 1995):

(12) *María cogió el tren a Madrid, y Juan también.* (Span., SWD)

‘María took the train to Madrid, and Juan too.’

(13) *Aquella mañana tuve mi primer encuentro con el gorila.* (Span, ROI)

‘That morning I had my first encounter with the gorilla.’

(Leonetti 1999: 873)

-



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

Different properties (cf. Gerards 2020) for ROI against SWD (cf. Krifka et. al 1995):

- no lexical restriction (+ no morphological number restriction)

(14) a. *I went to the hospital.* (SWD)

b. *I went to the clinic* (no SWD; Gerards/Stark 2020: 129)

(15) *I saw/found/collected/killed the gorilla/robin/boletus in the forest.*

only observation: ROI-readings better with taxonomic subkinds?! (cf. Stark/Gerards 2022 and results of pilot study in coop. with Artemis Alexiadou, ZAS)



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

Different properties (cf. Gerards 2020) for ROI against SWD (cf. Krifka et. al 1995):

- allow in many cases free modification

(16) *Ich habe den neuen Burger mit Mozzarella; bestellt und habe nach dem ersten Bissen feststellen müssen, dass dieser; mit Hühnchen ist!*
[reklamation24.de]

‘I ordered the new burger with mozzarella and after the first bite found out that it is with chicken!’

(Stark/Gerards 2022)



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

Different properties (cf. Gerards 2020) for ROI against SWD (cf. Krifka et. al 1995):

- allow anaphoric reference:

(12') *María took the train_j to Madrid, and Juan too. It_j was crowded = SWD reading gone!*

(13') *We filmed the grizzly_j in Alaska. Often, we could even observe them_j with their_j young. = ROI-reading preserved.*

-



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

ROIs and genericity:

+ number neutrality:

(17) [...]. *Unter Kiefern gibt es [...] den seltenen, nicht essbaren Finnischen Braunsporstachling_j, die_j bitter schmecken.[PL] [...]. Im Laubwald findet man den seltenen, nicht essbaren Gallen-Stachling_j, der_j ebenfalls bitter schmeckt.[SG]*

[Android app Meine Pilze]

‘Shingled hedgehog [...]. Under pines there is [...] the rare, inedible Finnish sarcodon_j, which_j taste.[PL] bitter [...]. In the deciduous forest you can find the rare, inedible bitter tooth_j, which_j also tastes.[SG] bitter.’

(Stark/Gerards 2022)



2. Two types of non-maximal definites

ROIs and genericity:

- stage-level predicates (even perfective tenses, see (10), (12), (13)):

(18) *Massaker an der Schwarzen Elster – Was ist hier passiert? Im Internet kursieren Bilder von einem Schaf-Massaker in Saathain. Der Wolf soll hier zugeschlagen haben, heißt es. [www.nordkurier.de]*

‘Massacre at the Schwarze Elster [a river] – What happened here? Pictures of a sheep massacre in Saathain are circulating on the Internet. The wolf is said to have struck here.’

(Stark/Gerards 2022)



Why non-definite uses of definite articles/DP and not simply (weak) indefinites?

Leonetti (2019: 11):

“The answer is again the same as before: weak readings of definites are indefinite/existential, but they have communicative effects that cannot be achieved by means of indefinite expressions. Such effects are due to the role of *stereotypical situations* and the *associated meaning enrichment*: *go to a beach* or *take a train* lack the meaning enrichment component that is found in *go to the beach* or *take the train*.”

→ True for SWD, but also for ROIs (stereotypical situations, semantic enrichment)? What type are our FrPr data of example (8) and (9)?

3. Data



3.1 ALAVAL: a Francoprovençal database

- audiovisual database: *Atlas linguistique audiovisuel des dialectes francoprovençaux du Valais romand* (<http://alaval.unine.ch/>)
- data collected between 1994 and 2001
- elicitation by means of a questionnaire: translations and open questions for free speech
- transcriptions in IPA
- 21 communalities in Valais (Switzerland): 42 speakers
- 2 communalities in eastern Haute-Savoie (France): 4 speakers
- 2 communalities in Aosta Valley (Italy): 4 speakers



3.1 *ALAVAL*: a Francoprovençal database

- 46 input sentences containing a partitive article:
 - 7 fem.sg.
 - 9 masc.sg.
 - 17 fem.pl.
 - 13 masc.pl.

Input: no typical SWD contexts (aller à l'école etc.)!



3.2 Fieldwork in the Aosta Valley (cf. Stark/Gerards 2021)

- Organisation: University of Neuchâtel (Federica Diémoz †)
- Other participants:
 - University of Zurich
 - Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg (Germany)
- data collected from 9-12 May 2017
- data elicitation by means of a questionnaire (translations)
- 17 native speakers from Saint Nicolas, Saint Vincent, Fénis, Pontey, and different native speakers at BREL (*Bureau Régional pour l'ethnologie et la linguistique*)
- 627 nominals elicited



3.2 Fieldwork in the Aosta Valley (cf. Stark/Gerards 2021)

- 28 input sentences containing a partitive article:
 - 7 fem.sg.
 - 6 masc.sg.
 - 8 fem.pl.
 - 7 masc.pl.

Input: no typical SWD contexts (aller à l'école etc.)!

4. Non-maximal definite articles in Francoprovençal - Distribution



General overview (data from ALAVAL plus Aosta Valley)

Nominals	DE	Def. article	PA	Bare
1441	939 (65.2%)	320 (22.2%)	173 (12%)	9 (<1%)

Definite articles are found quite often in translations of (positive) sentences with a PA = an *indefinite* determiner!



General overview

Francoprovençal A (North-West):

Nominals	DE	Def. article	PA	Bare
187	7	40 (21.4%)	139	1

Francoprovençal B (Central and Eastern Valais)

Nominals	DE	Def. article)	Bare
718	577	125 (17.4%)	11	5

Aosta Valley:

Nominals	DE	Def. article	PA	Bare
536	355	155 (28.9%)	23	3



4.1 Syntactic contexts

4.1.1 Presentational complements – present tense – partly habitual flavor:

12 different input sentences:

(19) En hiver, il y a **des glaçons** qui pendent au tuyau de la fontaine.

‘In winter there are icicles which hang from the tubes of the fountain.’

(20) Il y a **des poules** qui ont les plumes blanches.

‘There are chickens which have white feathers.’



4.1 Syntactic contexts

4.1.1 Presentational complements

	Definite article	PA	DE	bare
masc.sg.	9 (28.1%)	2	20	1
fem.sg.	25 (45.4%)	6	22	2
masc.pl.	13 (15.5%)	8	63	-
fem.pl.	4 (7.3%)	17	44	-



4.1 Syntactic contexts

4.1.2 Prepositional complements – present tense/*imparfait* – partly habitual flavor – partly recipes/food context:

10 different input sentences:

- (21) On le mettait dans **des draps**.
'We used to put it in cloths.'
- (22) On cuisine les épinards sauvages avec **du lard**.
'One cooks the spinach with bacon.'
- (23) Les enfants jouent avec **des coquilles d'escargot**.
'The children play with snail shells.'



4.1 Syntactic contexts

4.1.2 Prepositional complements

	Definite article	PA	DE	bare
masc.sg.	14 (31.8%)	3	27	-
fem.sg.	15 (24.6%)	13	33	-
masc.pl.	17 (41.5%)	7	33	1
fem.pl.	45 (43.3%)	11	48	-



4.1 Syntactic contexts

4.1.3 Direct objects – often present tense/*imparfait* – often habitual flavor – partly recipes/food context:

50 different input sentences:

- (24) Est-ce que tu mangeais souvent **de la fondue**?
'Did you often eat fondue?'
- (25) Les jeunes filles se faisaient **des tresses**.
'The young girls made each other/themselves pigtails.'
- (26) J'ai mangé **de la confiture de groseilles**.
'I ate red currant jam.'



4.1 Syntactic contexts

4.1.3 Direct objects

	Definite article	PA	DE	bare
masc.sg.	24 (12.5%)	26	142	-
fem.sg.	65 (36.1%)	27	87	1
masc.pl.	40 (16.3%)	20	185	2
fem.pl.	49 (11.2%)	33	354	2



4.2 Geographical distribution of non-maximal def articles

	Valais (FrPr A)	Valais (FrPr B)	Aosta Valley
Pres. complement	13/45 (28.9%)	20/111 (18%)	18/80 (22.5%)
Prep. complement	11/37 (29.7%)	37/145 (25.5%)	44/86 (51.2%)
Direct object	16/105 (15.2%)	68/462 (14.7%)	94/374 (25.1%)



5.1 Findings

- Non-maximal definite articles are slightly more frequent in the Aosta Valley than in Valais (with prep. compl. much more frequent!)
- Quite frequent with presentational complements (which reminds of Italian, see Leonetti 2019), but also with prepositional complements
- Presence of adverbial temporal operators might (slightly) increase the chances of a non-definite definite article (at least in the Aosta Valley), but no robust tendency
- No robust apparent gender/number bias, but slightly higher percentages in the fem. singular - to be continued!



5.2 Discussion of findings

- Geographical distribution does not contain much evidence of language contact, at most for direct objects and prep. compl.
- See new data for Northern Italian dialects of Pinzin/Poletto (2021): non-maximal definite articles as «background noise» all over their data points – interesting: their input sentences are ‘cooking contexts’ (cf. Pinzin/Poletto 2021):

(27) *La mamma non ha messo olio.*
 the mom not have.PRS.IND.3.SG put.PTCP oil
 ‘Mom didn’t put any oil.’

(28) *Il vicino ha cucinato polenta per giorni.*
 the neighbour have.PRS.IND.3.SG cook.PTCP
 for days

‘The neighbour cooked polenta for days.’



5.2 Discussion of findings

- Common point of Cardinaletti/Giusti 2018 and Pinzin/Poletto (2021): Italian PAs are semantically different from BN/non-maximal definite articles, which pattern together (only in atelic contexts, always narrow scope, ‘habitual flavor’ vs. PA):

(12) Costruisco case da 30 anni, ma una così brutta non l' ho

build.1SG houses from 30 years but one so ugly not it have.1SG

mai vista.

never seen

‘I’ve been building houses for 30 years, but I’ve never seen such an ugly one’

(13) *Costruisco delle case da 30 anni, ma una così brutta non l

build.1SG of.the.F.SG houses from 30 years but one so ugly not it

ho mai vista.

have.1SG never seen



5.2 Discussion of findings

- Common point of Cardinaletti/Giusti 2018 and Pinzin(Poletto (2021): Italian PAs are semantically different from BN/non-maximal definite articles, which pattern together: possible only in atelic contexts, always narrow scope, ‘habitual flavor’ vs. PA:
- Cardinaletti/Giusti 2018: 143:



5.2 Discussion of findings

- (12) a. *Ho tagliato erba (*in un'ora) / (per un'ora).*
[I] have mowed grass in an hour / for an hour
'I mowed grass for an hour.'
- b. *Ho raccolto more (*in un'ora) / (per un'ora).*
[I] have picked blackberries in an hour / for an hour
'I picked blackberries for an hour.'
- (13) a. *Ho tagliato l'erba (#in un'ora) / (per un'ora).*
[I] have mowed the grass in an hour / for an hour
'I mowed grass for an hour.'
- b. *Ho raccolto le more (#in un'ora) / (per un'ora).*
[I] have picked the blackberries in an hour / for an hour
'I picked blackberries for an hour.'
- (14) a. *Ho tagliato dell'erba (in un'ora) / (??per un'ora).*
[I] have mowed DI-art grass in an hour / for an hour
- b. *Ho raccolto delle more (in un'ora) / (??per un'ora).*
[I] have picked DI-art blackberries in an hour / for an hour



5.2 Discussion of findings

- If BN and non-maximal definite articles pattern together, why use the latter?:
- Cardinaletti/Giusti (2018: 148-152) claim a higher «saliency»: more non-maximal definite articles on map 1343 (AIS) for input *to go to the cellar and **take wine*** than for map 1037, *if there was **water**, and to go and look for **violets***, map 637):

Existential presupposition in expert talk??



6. Conclusion

- Non-maximal definite articles are a widespread phenomenon in Italo-Romance as well as in Francoprovençal, whereas they are not available in French (PA in all comparable contexts) or not always in Spanish (BN in many comparable contexts, see Leonetti 2019).
- They appear in fieldwork data in contexts where French PAs would have to be used = **not in typical SWD contexts** (*aller à l'école, lire le journal* etc.).

1. What is the semantics of the definite article in Romance data of type (9)?

Clearly non-maximal, not generic?!

2. Are there syntactic and semantic/pragmatic contexts that (dis)favor definite nominals like the one in (9)?

They seem to prefer habitually flavored contexts, esp. 'cooking contexts': **ROI!**



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