Indefinite determiners across Italo-Romance varieties:
optionality and variation
Anna Cardinaletti and Giuliana Giusti (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice)

1. Seven types of indefinite determiners in Italo-Romance

1.1 indefinite singular un(o)/una cf. AIS: 533 “a tree”; 181 “a handsome man”:

(1) a. Ho raccolto una violetta.
   [I] have picked a violet
b. Ho raccolto (*un) fieno.
   [I] have harvested (*a) hey

(2) a. *Ho raccolto une violette.
   [I] have picked one f.pl violets
b. He recogito unas violetas. (Spanish)
   [I] have picked one f.pl violets
c. Le am dat nişte violette unor fet. (Romanian)
   [I] cl.dat have given one acc violets one dat.pl girls

1.2. Zero determiner, only with mass and plural count:

(3) a. *Ho raccolto violetta.
   [I] have picked violet
b. Ho raccolto fieno, ho raccolto violette.
   [I] have harvested hey, [I] have picked violets

1.3. Definite article with indefinite interpretation only with mass and plural count (Rohlfs 1968:119; Renzi 1997:163):

(4) a. Ho raccolto la violetta. (only acceptable with definite interpretation)
   [I] have picked the violet
b. Ho raccolto il fieno, ho raccolto le violette. (ambiguous)
   [I] have harvested the hey, [I] have picked the violets

1.4. Bare di “of”, only with mass and plural count:

(5) a. sei fyse d’aqua (Piedmontese; Berruto 1974: 57);
   if there was DI water
   b. anda sarkà d viulatte (AIS 637, 153 Giaveno (Turin))
   to-go to-pick DI violets
(6) a. di bon vino (Tuscan; Rohlfs 1968:117)
   DI good wine
b. di belle patate
   DI nice potatoes

1.5. So-called “partitive article” with mass and plural count:

(7) a. Ho raccolto una /*della violetta.
   [I] have picked a / DI-art violet
b. Ho raccolto del fie no, ho raccolto delle violette.  
[I] have picked di-art hey, [I] have picked di-art violets

1.6. The adjective “**certain**”:

(8)  
a. *(un) certo ragazzo  
a certain boy  
b. (*della) certa roba, (*dei) certi ragazzi  
certain stuff  
certain boys  

(9)  
a. s’era cencato mmiezo a ccerto fie no (Neapoletan; Rohlfs 1968:118)  
[he] was lying on some hey  
b. certi kundi (Avezzano; Giammarco 1979:141)  
some stories

1.7 **Numeral “two”** only with plural including plural “collective” nouns:

(10)  
a. Mangiamo due spinaci/fagioli/spaghetti.  
Let’s eat two spinach/beans/spaghetti  
b. du viole bambele, (AIS 617, 590 Porto S. Stefano (Grosseto)  
two violets

(11)  
a. *Di spinaci, ne abbiamo mangiati due.  
(of spinach [we] NE have eaten two  
(Not a Quantifier!)  
b. *Mi dia due di quegli spinaci.  
let me have two of those spinach

2. Cardinaletti and Giusti’s (2015a, 2015b) account for the indefinite determiners in 1.2-1.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(12)</th>
<th>Spec</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Vino Violette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>il</td>
<td>il vino le violette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>di</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>di vino di violette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>di</td>
<td>il</td>
<td>del vino delle violette</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biberauer and Roberts’ (2012) Parameter Hierarchy

(13) For a given value \( v_i \) of a parametrically variant feature F:

a. Macroparameters: all heads of the relevant type share \( v_i \);  
b. Mesoparameters: all functional heads of a given category (e.g. all verbal heads, all nominal heads, all \( \varphi \)-bearing heads or all finite Cs) share \( v_i \);  
c. Microparameters: a small subclass of functional heads (e.g. auxiliaries, pronouns) share \( v_i \);  
d. Nanoparameters: one or more idiosyncratic lexical items are specified for share \( v_i \);

(14)  
a. Microparameter: D is must be overt / covert in Spec-Head relation with a given indefinite determiner.  
b. Nano-parameter: Indefinite determiner: \( di / 0 \).

**Today’s questions:**  
- Can both choices of the same parameter coexist in one grammar?  
- How many indefinite determiners in SpecDP are there?
3. Specialization for different indefinite meanings

3.1. Italian

(15) a. Ho bevuto vino / Ho raccolto violette  
   [I] have drunk wine / [I] have picked violets  
   zero determiner zero D
b. Ho bevuto il vino / Ho raccolto le violette  
   [I] have drunk the wine / [I] have picked the violets  
   zero determiner overt D
c. Ho bevuto del vino / Ho raccolto delle violette  
   [I] have drunk DI-art wine / [I] have picked DI-art violets  
   overt determiner overt D

3.1.1. Indefinite object of telic vs non-telic events

(16) a. Ho tagliato erba (*in un’ora) / (per un’ora)  
   [I] have mowed grass in an hour / for an hour
b. Ho raccolto more (*in un’ora) / (per un’ora)  
   [I] have picked blackberries in an hour / for an hour

(17) a. Ho tagliato l’erba (#in un’ora) / (per un’ora)  
   [I] have mowed the grass in an hour / 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

(18) 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

• **Optionality in the standard**: the indefinite interpretation of the zero determiner (16) and of the definite article in (17) in non-telic contexts.

• **The optionality dissolves in colloquial registers**: e.g. (17) is preferred in the Center, (16) is preferred in Sicily.

• **Some specialization**: “saliency” = zero det + overt D, “small quantity” = overt det + overt D


(19) a. Non ho invitato ragazzi alla festa ma solo ragazze.  
   ¬∃  
   [I] did not invite boys at the party, but only girls
b. *Non ho invitato ragazzi alla festa perché erano antipatici.  
   *∃¬  
   [I] did not invite boys at the party, because there were obnoxious

(20) a. Non ho invitato i ragazzi alla festa ma solo (delle / le) ragazze.  
   ¬∃  
   [I] did not invite the boys at the party, but only (di-art / the) girls
b. #Non ho invitato i ragazzi perché erano antipatici.  
   #∃¬  
   [I] did not invite the boys at the party, because there were obnoxious

(21) a. Non ho invitato dei ragazzi alla festa, ma solo (delle) ragazze.  
   ¬∃  
   [I] did not invite DI-art boys at the party, but only DI-art girls
b. Non ho invitato dei ragazzi alla festa perché erano antipatici.  
   ∃¬  
   [I] did not invite DI-art boys at the party, because there were obnoxious
3.2. Variation in the dialect of Ancona

(23) a. Se ce fosse l’acqua / *acqua / *de acqua. (AIS 1037)
    if there was the water / water / D1 water
b. Vago a pià ’l vi / *vi / *de vi.
    [I] go and take the wine / wine / D1 wine
c. ’Ndam a cercà le viulette / *viulette / *de viulette
    let’s go and look for the violets / violets / D1 violets

Cardinaletti and Giusti (2015b, 2016):
(24) a. Se ce fosse l’acqua / *de l’acqua
    if there was the water / D1-art water
b. Vago a pià ’l vi / *del vi
    [I] go and take the wine / D1-art wine
c. ’Ndam a cercà le viulette / de le viulette
    let’s go and look for the violets / D1-art violets

(25) a. *Nun ho ‘nvitato dei fioli ala festa, ma solo dele fiole. *(22)  
    [I] did not invite D1-art boys at the party, but only D1-art girls
    [I] did not invite D1-art boys at the party, because they were obnoxious

(26) Nun ho ‘nvitato i fioli ala festa, ma solo le fiole.  
    [I] did not invite the boys at the party, but only the girls

- If narrow scope interpretation of di+art is not allowed in Anconetano (25a), it is expected that in this dialect, di+art be incompatible with mass nouns, (cf. (22b) above in Italian).
- AIS does not report di+art in the Ancona area because the questionnaire in the three AIS maps favor narrow scope interpretation.

4. Variation across dialects in three AIS maps

4.1. AIS map 1037 “if there was water”
In map 1037, we observe the following distribution:
- The zero determiner is present in the North (north-eastern Piedmont, northern Lombardy, the whole of Veneto, and the whole of Istria), in the South of Italy (southern Campania, southern Apulia, southern Calabria, Sicily), and in Sardinia. It is absent elsewhere.
- The definite article with indefinite interpretation is widespread: three attestations in the province of Trento (330 Mortas, 331 Stenico, 323 Predazzo), a compact area from southern Lombardy to the border with Veneto (360 Albisano (Verona)), interrupted by a large area of di+art in Emilia Romagna, restarting in the rest of central and southern Italy, where the zero determiner is present again. Definite articles are found spotlike in Sicily and Sardinia.
• Bare *di* is limited to Val d’Aosta and western Piedmont (from 122 Saint Marcel (Aosta) down to 182 Limone Piemonte (Cuneo)) with only two attestations towards East: one in northern Lombardy (209 Isolaccia (Sondrio)) and one in central Veneto (354 Romano (Vicenza), where zero is also given as a second option), and one attestation in Sardinia (943 Macomer (Nuoro)).
• *Di+art* is present in the so-called Gallo-Italic varieties: from eastern Piedmont and Liguria down to the whole Emilia and Romagna, with 2 cases in Northern Tuscany (520 Camaiore (Livorno), 532 Montespertoli (Firenze)) and one in Sardinia (937 Nuoro).

The four different forms seen in (12) distribute along two crossing axes.
• The North-South axis is defined by the distribution of the zero determiner at its extremes versus the definite article in its core part.
• The Northwest-Northeast axis is defined by the presence of *di* either by itself or combined with the definite article in the area where the two axes intersect.

(27) Diatopic distribution of the different values of the two parameters in (14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0+0</th>
<th>0+art</th>
<th>di+0</th>
<th>di+art</th>
<th>di/0+0</th>
<th>0+art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0+0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0+art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di+0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di+art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di/0+0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0+art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0+0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Innovations (overt D and overt det) are in the central areas.

4.2 AIS map 1343 “[to go to the cellar] to take wine”
The context favors saliency and small quantity of the object
• The definite article is much more widespread than in map1037:
  o it alternates with the zero determiner in the extreme North and South and in Sardinia,
  o and with *di+art* in the areas where this form was attested with “water”.
  o saliency is not definiteness, cf consistent bare *di* in Val d’Aosta and western Piedmont.
• *di+art* is more widespread than in map1037;
  o it is present in one place in Trentino (341 Tiarino di Sotto (Trento)) and resumes from south-eastern Veneto 373 Montebello (Vicenza), 372 Raldon (Verona), 393 Fratta Polesine (Rovigo) down to central Tuscany (550 Castagneto Carducci (Pisa), and 570 Elba (Livorno), where only the zero determiner was attested in map 1037.”

To conclude, parallel to what we observed for Italian above,
• some areas seem to have more than one indefinite determiner specialized for different nuances of indefiniteness.
• This is not the case of the dialects where *di+art* is predominant (e.g. in Emilia and Romagna, where very few instances of the definite article are found with “wine” (cf. (38a) and (39a) below), and *di+art* consistently appears with “water”).

4.3 AIS map 637 “[to go and look for] violets”
The context ensures a narrow scope interpretation of the plural indefinite; it is compatible with saliency interpretation of violets and may favor the small quantity interpretation.
• The zero determiner is more restricted than in 1037 “if there was water” and wider than in 1343 “take wine”: it is present in the whole Piedmont through Liguria down to one point in
Tuscany, and one in Veneto, it spreads down to the border with Emilia. In the South, it spreads all over Sicily and Calabria and appears in a couple of places in Campania and Apulia.

- **Bare di** has the same distribution as in 1037 “if there was water” displaying some isolated points: one in Veneto (325 Cencenighe (Belluno)), one in western Emilia (412 Carpaneta (Piacenza)), and one in Liguria at the border with western Emilia (179 Rovegno (Genova)).

- **Di+art** is more extended with count plural than with mass singular, esp. in the horizontal axis where the plural is attested in 2 points in Lombardy (229 Sonico (BS), at the border with Trentino, and 278 Solferino (Mantova), at the border with southern Veneto); 4 points in Veneto: 345 Vas (BL), 374 Teolo (PA), 381 Cerea (VR) and 385 Cavarzere (VE); and 3 points in Friuli: 326 Claut (PD), 328 Tramonti di Sotto (UD) and 367 Grado (GO).

- The definite article expressing indefiniteness is present all over the place, interspersed with all of the other three forms, as is the case with “take wine”.

To conclude

- AIS map 637 favors a small quantity interpretation which competes with the core notion of existential indefiniteness, which in turn may be salient or not.

- In areas in which more than one form is possible, the different realizations appear to distribute as in Italian, namely
  - the core notion of indefiniteness is expressed by the zero determiner (zero determiner in SpecDP and covert features in D),
  - the salient indefinite by the definite article (a zero determiner in SpecDP and overt features in D),
  - the small quantity by **di**+**art** (overt **di** in SpecDP and overt D).

- The areas which do not allow for more than one indefinite form confirm the distribution of bare **di** in the North-West, of **di**+**art** in Emilia and Romagna, of the zero determiner at the very further North and South, and of the definite determiner elsewhere.

### 5 Micro-variation

#### 5.1. Variation at specific points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(28)</th>
<th>107 Trasquera (Verbania)</th>
<th>147 Cavaglia (Biella)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIS 1037</td>
<td>Akwa</td>
<td>d l’eva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1343</td>
<td>a to vin</td>
<td>a gavà dal vin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>637</td>
<td>dal viol</td>
<td>i avyuletti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175 Vicoforte (Cuneo)</td>
<td>133 Vico Canavese (Torino)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS 1037</td>
<td>d r eva</td>
<td>d ewa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1343</td>
<td>a pyé del vin</td>
<td>par piar d vin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>637</td>
<td>Violüta</td>
<td>fyure vyulette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>319 Cedarchis (Udine)</td>
<td>328 Tramonti di Sotto (Udine)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS 1037</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>aga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1343</td>
<td>a cìolì l vin</td>
<td>a tweli l vin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>637</td>
<td>Violes</td>
<td>da las violes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>550 Castagneto Carducci (Pisa)</td>
<td>551 Chiusdino (Pisa)</td>
<td>532 Montespertoli (Firenze)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS 1037</td>
<td>Il akwa</td>
<td>l akwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1343</td>
<td>per piglià l vino</td>
<td>per piglià l vino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>637</td>
<td>delle viole mammole</td>
<td>le vyol ammammole</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Variation inside specific areas

(32) a. awa, 124 Selveglio (Vercelli)
   b. d ayvi, 132 Ronco Canavese (Torino)
   c. d éva, 123 Brusson (Aosta)
   d. d éve, 122 Saint Marcel (Aosta)
   e. d l’awa, 135 Pettinengo (Novara)

(33) a. to vin, 124 Selveglio (Vercelli)
   b. a gavar de vin, 132 Ronco Canavese (Torino)
   c. pé cercé o vin, 123 Brusson (Aosta)
   d. per ertsì de vén, 122 Saint Marcel (Aosta)
   e. per pyé dal vin, 135 Pettinengo (Novara)

(34) a. viole mammole, 124 Selveglio (Vercelli)
   b. le violete, 132 Ronco Canavese (Torino)
   c. de violette, 123 Brusson (Aosta)
   d. de vyulette, 122 Saint Marcel (Aosta)
   e. dal viulatti, 135 Pettinengo (Novara)

(35) a. per tor vin, 343 Volano (Trento)
   b. a tœr el vin, 340 Roncone (Trento)
   c. a tœr del vi, 341 Tiarno di Sotto (Trento)

(36) a. violes, 319 Cedarchis (Udine)
   b. la vyoles, 327 Forni di Sotto (Udine)
   c. da las violas, 328 Tramonti di Sotto (UD)

(37) a. d l akwa, 456 Bologna
   b. d l akwe, 446 Minerbio (Bologna)

(38) a. a tor al ven, 456 Bologna
   b. par tor dal ven, 446 Minerbio (Bologna)

(39) a. al viol, 456 Bologna
   b. dal viol, 446 Minerbio (Bologna)

(40) a. akwa, 333 Viarago (Trento)
   b. l akwa, 330 Mortaso (Trento)

(41) a. a tœr vin, 333 Viarago (Trento)
   b. a tœr al vin, 330 Mortaso (Trento)

(42) a. viole, 333 Viarago (Trento)
   b. le viole, 330 Mortaso (Trento)

(43) a. akwa, 821 Vita (Trapani)
   b. akwa, 824 Baucina (Palermo)

(44) a. pi pigghiari vinu, 821 Vita (Trapani)
   b. pi pigghiari u vinu, 824 Baucina (PA)

(45) a. violi, 821 Vita (Trapani)
   b. i vyoli, 824 Baucina (Palermo)

- more than one form is available to the speakers of these dialects: one carries the unmarked value, while the other(s) convey some additional semantic / pragmatic interpretation flavors.

5.3 Lack of variation inside specific areas

- the extreme North especially the Grigioni area in Switzerland only displays the zero determiner;
- the extreme West of Val d’Aosta and Piedmont only displays bare *di*;
- the Center-South to northern Calabria and Apulia only displays the definite article.

6. Highlights

- The four most common indefinite determiners can be analyzed as having a unified structure including an indefinite determiner in SpecDP and nominal features in D, either can be null according to different parametric choices (12), (14).
- Only the standard language has true optionality (both choices of the same micro-parameter). In colloquial registers and in the dialect of Ancona, different forms have different meanings (and scope-taking properties).
- Ais map 1037 “if there was water” gives a clearer picture of the distribution of the four forms.
This allowed us to formulate the hypothesis that the overt/covert realization of the indefinite determiner in SpecDP and of the nominal features in D is related to two different parameters that interact diatopically.

- The realization of features in D regards the whole Italian territory and displays covert D only at the very northern and southern extremes, while overt D is found elsewhere from Lombardy to Calabria).

- The overt realization of the indefinite determiner in SpecDP characterizes Gallo-Italic dialects. It is found at the extreme North-West (Val d’Aosta, Piedmont, and partially Liguria) and spreads towards Emilia and Romagna. In the former area it combines with covert D yealding bare \textit{di}, in the latter it combines with overt D yealding \textit{di+art}.

- The other two AIS maps (1343 and 637) show that one area, more than one form is available. This raises the question whether even in the narrow scope interpretation, different nuances of indefiniteness may be realized by different forms of the indefinite determiner.

- This is confirmed by the variation found in specific points for the three different maps, and by the variation in specific areas for each separate map.

References


