

Indefinite determiners across Italo-Romance varieties, optionality and variation

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The expression of indefiniteness presents a wide degree of variation across languages. In addition to indefinite quantifiers (*alcuni* ‘some’) or pseudo-partitive constructions (*un po’ di* ‘a bit of’), Italo-Romance varieties present at least five types of indefinite determiners that can combine with mass or plural nouns. Interestingly, more than one of these determiners may be available in one and the same variety, producing a certain degree of optionality and / or a fine-grained distinction in the semantics of indefiniteness.

In this paper, we concentrate on the most wide-spread forms of indefinite determiners, claiming that they are variants of one and the same syntactic structure, namely an indefinite operator in SpecDP, which may be either covert or realized by the uninflected form *di*, and a head D projecting the gender and number features of the nominal projection, which may also in turn be either covert or realized. These two dimensions of variation give rise to four different forms: the zero determiner, indefinite bare *di*, the so-called “partitive determiner” *di*+article, or the use of the definite article as indefinite determiner.

We first show that in Italian, optionality is in some cases apparent, giving rise to subtle semantic differences. We then focus on the lesser studied central Italian dialect of Ancona, which provides further evidence for the different scope properties of indefinite mass vs. plural count nouns.

The rest of the paper is devoted to a preliminary review of the cross-linguistic data reported by three AIS maps (1037 “if there was water”, 1343 “to go to the cellar to take wine”, and 637 “to go and look for violets”). Although AIS was mainly collected to report lexical choices, the three maps set two mass nouns and one count plural nouns in postverbal position, which facilitate indefinite non-specific narrow scope. This will allow us to have a general picture of the realization of the core notion of indefiniteness in Italo-Romance varieties at the beginning of the century.