



# The (co-)evolution of ‘partitive constructions’ in Breton and (Gallo-Angevin) French

International Workshop *Partitivity and Language Contact*

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# Outline

1. Introduction
2. Corresponding constructions in Old and Modern Galloromance?
3. Early Modern and Modern Breton – further developments
4. Discussion – Pattern similarities and divergencies
5. Conclusion

# 1. Introduction

## Breton as a member of the Celtic subgroup

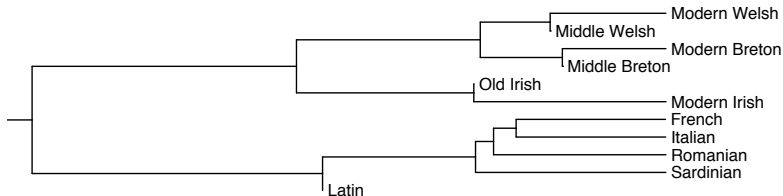


Figure 1: Insular Celtic and some Romance languages

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Old Breton	700–1100	poorly attested
Middle Breton	1200–1650	attested from 1500
Early Modern Breton	1650–1800	well attested, hardly ever investigated
Modern Breton	1800–	well attested

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Table 1: Breton: Stages, approximative dates, and attestation

# 1. Introduction

## Brittany



Figure 2: Breton geography and dialects

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## Middle Breton: prepositional non-first arguments

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1PL deliver.IMP.2PL of all evil  
'deliver us from all evil' H: 6; 1576
- b. *na alle ... enem deliura anez-a*  
and.not be\_able.IPF.3SG REFL free.EN of-3SG  
'and was not able to free herself from it'  
prepositional argument; Speret Santel 1656: 85; 1656
- (2) a. *prennit un dra benac*  
buy.IMP.2PL a thing INDEF  
'Achetez quelque chose!' Qu; 1632
- b. *prenit a bara*  
buy.IMP.2PL of bread  
'achetez du pain!' pseudo-partitive; Qu; 1632
- (3) a. *pan o-guel-af*  
when 3PL-see-PRS.1SG  
'when I see them' G 821; 1581
- b. *... beuraige, dicouraichaff; anez-aff, pan taff-er*  
beverage awful of-3SG.M when taste-PRS.IMPERS  
'... an awful beverage; *quand on en goûte*'  
real partitive; M 2482; 1575

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## Observations and research questions

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- *a*-marked objects clearly Breton innovation (Hemon 1975; Ernault 1897)
- obvious semantic and constructional parallels in Galloromance varieties
- constant socio-economic contact with neighbouring Galloromance populations
- political union with France from 15th century onwards

### Research questions

1. Is the rise of *a*-marked arguments in Middle Breton possibly induced by Galloromance patterns?
2. If yes,
  - 2.1 which concrete patterns were borrowed?
  - 2.2 did the systems develop in parallel?

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## 2. Corresponding constructions in Old and Modern Galloromance?

Galloromance contact varieties of Breton (diglossia, Tréhel-Tas 2007: 29):

- Non-dialectal French (already maybe medieval Northern French *scripta* = koiné writing tradition on the way to become (part of) the later standard variety)
- Le Gallo (< Bret. *gall*: ‘foreign’): French (*d’oïl*) dialect spoken in Haute-Bretagne, endangered (old speakers, no monolingual speakers), rarely attested (some lexical elements in medieval and Renaissance documents), not standardized.

### Gallo

- Systematic support of Gallo since the late 19th century, Paul Sébillot, “Les amis du Gallo”, “Bretagne gallèse”, now being investigated in CREDILIF and SyMiLa, by Nicolas Guilliot

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### 2.1 Pseudo-partitive *de* (example 2b)

Impossible in Modern French, obligatory 'partitive article' *du* with mass:

- (5) a. \* *Achetez de pain!*  
buy.IMP.2PL of bread
- b. *Achetez du pain!*  
buy.IMP.2PL PART bread

Attested in some varieties of Francoprovençal (Kristol in press) and Gascon/Provençal (Occitan, Bossong 2016: 69) – No contact?!

- (6) a. *Manjar (de) carn* (Gsc.)  
eat.INF (of) meat
- b. *Vòli d' oulivas* (Prov.)  
want.PRS.1SG of olives

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### 2.2 'Partitive *en*' (example 3b)

First observations:

Breton example is an example of real partitivity, i.e. prep. *a* + personal pronoun indicates a subset of a specific, definite substance; French *en* in the translation is semantically equivalent.

## 2. Corresponding constructions in Old and Modern Galloromance?

### 2.2 'Partitive *en*' (adverbial clitic, i.e. no gender/number/person features)

Functional range of *en* – overall: “partitive pronoun *en*” is a misnomer!

#### 1. *en* replaces *de*-PPs:

##### 1. locative: 'from': < Lat. INDE:

- (7) *Il rentre du travail – Il en rentre.*  
he return.PRS.3SG of.the work he therefrom return.PRS.3SG

##### 2. Replaces *de*-complements of verbs and adjectifs:

- (8) a. *Il est fier de ses enfants. – Il en est fier.*  
he be.PRS.3SG proud of his children. he *en* be.PRS.3SG proud
- b. *Il parle de sa femme. – Il en parle.*  
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That is the functional, but not the constructional equivalent of Breton *a*+personal pronoun.

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- (10) *J'en ai bu un (verre de vin)*  
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Status of the corresponding Breton construction to this latter *en* unclear:

- (13) ... *ha-m bugale so anez-e try*  
and-1SG children IS.REL of-3PL three  
'... and my children, of which there are three' G 59; 1581



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- *En* as replacement of prepositional, often locative arguments (with *de*, in the 13th century also other *de*-complements: *parler de – en parler*) or causal adjuncts with *de* seem to be the only functions of *en* in Old French until at least the 13th century (cf. e.g. Kaminska 1965, but also Foulet 1958; Jensen 1990).
- Nothing can be found in the literature on the precise development of the *en* replacing *de*-PPs in real partitive constructions (example (9), (3b)) or indefinite nominal internal arguments (NPs, QPs, NumPs).

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Behave exactly like Modern French (cf. e.g. Auffray 2012: 75).

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### 2.3 *de* under the scope of negation (example 4c)

Modern French:

(14) *Et nous ne désirons pas de choses superflues*  
and 1PL NEG desire.PRS.1PL NEG of thing.F.PL superfluous.F-PL

- Complete parallel construction: *de* after negative adverbs like *pas/point/plus* ('not', 'not at all', 'no more' etc.), irrespectively of semantic class (mass, count, abstract, animate) or features of the internal argument (gender/number)
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- (15) *Ne mengiez de char ne*  
NEG eat.IMP.2PL of meat NEG.COMP  
*ne bevez de vin*  
NEG drink.IMP.2PL of wine  
(*La Queste de Saint Graal*, 1225–123, 129.14; apud Jensen 1990: 129)

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Keep the indefinite determiners of the affirmative sentence, even the 'partitive article' (cf. e.g. Auffray 2012: 53):

- (16) *I manje pās de la chē ...*  
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	obligatory under scope of negation	gender/number like PA	preference for semantic class	postverbal position in non-dislocated structures
Modern French	+	-	-	+
Old French	-	-	-	+
Gallo	+	+	-	?
Middle Breton	optional	-	-	+
Modern Breton	wide-spread	-	-	+

Table 2: Synthesis

### 3. Early Modern and Modern Breton

(17) *e tispinfes an-e*

PTCL spend.SUBJ.2SG a-3PL

'you would spend them (sc. all the écus)'

EN 804; late 18th

prefixed	a marking
79	19

Table 3: Marking of pronominal direct objects in *Louis Eunius ou le Purgatoire de saint Patrice* (EN; late 18th cent.)

	nouns	pronouns
19th cent.	some <i>a</i> -marking	prefixes mentioned in grammars
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21th cent.	some <i>a</i> -marking	generalized <i>a</i> -marking (except Vannetais)

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#### Pronominal objects

- *a*-marking, prefixing marginal
- all pronominal arguments morphosyntactically unbound
- preposition *a* with nouns disappears in some varieties, replaced with  $\emptyset$ s 'from', therefore ...
- no parallelism between *a*+noun and *a*+personal pronoun anymore

#### Internal argument in some existential/copular constructions

(18) *an teodoù fall – hag ez eus anezho e kêr – ...*  
ART tongues bad and PTCL be.PRS 3PL in town  
'The detractors – and they exist in town! – (do this and that)'  
Ledunois 2002: 236

(19) *ur brezhoneger ez eus anezhañ*  
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#### Borrowing

- Emergence of object marking with a hardly independent of Galloromance
- Adaptation rather than simple copying

#### Further developments in Breton

- *a*-marked pronouns replace prefixed pronominal indexes (“externalization”)
- similar processes in Welsh and Irish
  - Irish: prefixal object indexes replaced with free S/A pronouns
  - Welsh: prefixal object indexes replaced with (mutated) free S/A pronouns
- *a*-marked pronouns introduced in copular/existential constructions; cf. also

(20) *hogos dez eu anez-y*  
close day be.PRS.3SG of-3SG.F  
'it will soon be morning'

expletive; Pa. 3742; 1530

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expletive; Pa. 3742; 1530

## 4. Discussion – Pattern similarities and divergencies

- Syntax:  
grammaticalized (= not locative) *a* + pers pronoun, *a* + NP (DP?), *a* / *de* under the scope of negation and *en* are all and only found with internal arguments (direct objects / P arguments, S of unaccusatives, argument of presentational constructions) – but see example (19)!
- Semantics:  
*a* + pers. pronoun seems to mark the specific substance (PP, 'of it') in real partitive constructions at the beginning (end of 16th century; example (3b)), one of the functions of *en* (example (9)) – of which however we ignore the precise history!

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### Potential Galloromance source patterns for Breton constructions:

- *de* under the scope of negation (section 2.3): attested since 14th century, but: no partitive semantics (with indefinites), no individuation function, not specialized on pronouns.
- *de* with indefinite internal arguments (section 2.1): attested only in the 15/16th century, soon combined with the definite article to result in ‘partitive article’ – very little overlap with Breton data.
- *en* with real partitive constructions (section 2.2): not mentioned in grammars of Old French, no research available on the partitive or indefinite *en*, only on the locative/adverbial/indirect complement function.

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- Further developments completely different, but see Carlier and Lamiroy 2014: stage III of partitive article grammaticalization: *de* with def. NPs marks highly individuated / affected discourse referents (15th/16th century).
- Marking of highly individuated / affected discourse referents is a function of differential object marking (cf. Lazard 1994; Næss 2004; Stark 2011) – maybe that is the common point?
- In this perspective, Breton constructions would be inspired by *precursors* of (Gallo-)Romance partitive constructions, without however sharing the special indefinite semantics/their syntactic properties, but the individualization function of definite *de*-complements in real partitive constructions (early stage of ‘partitive article’ grammaticalization).

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## 5. Conclusion

- Breton *a*-constructions and Galloromance *de/du/en*-constructions seem to be similar patterns and Breton phenomena thus a case of pattern borrowing – result of language contact.
- Careful detailed comparative analyses have shown, however, that there is very little in common, mainly two points:
  1. Syntactic position: (parts of) internal arguments (but note indefinite – definite opposition, esp. for pronominal internal arguments).
  2. Individuation function of early Galloromance real partitive (= prepositional) constructions with *de*.
- What looked like ‘partitive borrowing’ may be a case of ‘individuation marking borrowing’ by prepositions, leading to a DOM pattern not uncommon in Romance (but with *a*, not *de*, see Körner 1987!)
- What has to be done now: Detailed work on original data (medieval and Renaissance documents, esp. for *en* and the Breton data).

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