

Is invariable DE an allomorph of the partitive article? The insight from Francoprovençal

David Paul Gerards¹ / Tabea Ihsane² / Elisabeth Stark²
(1: University of Leipzig, 2: University of Zurich)

1. Puzzle. In this presentation, we will contribute to the debate on whether there is a dichotomy between partitive articles (PAs) and bare nouns (BNs) in Romance languages by discussing Francoprovençal (FrPr), an endangered Gallo-Romance language, which has not, or only little been discussed in the literature in this respect. FrPr does not have BNs but, on the other hand, partitive articles (PA), which are marked for number and/or gender, as well as an invariable DE-element unmarked for number/gender. More specifically, we will examine the role of this DE compared to PAs and evaluate the possibility that these elements are allomorphs.

2. Data. FrPr does not have BNs (Stark/Gerards 2020). Number marking is overt on most feminine nouns in the great majority of varieties; masculine nouns are however unmarked for number, except in one variety, in Evolène (Valais, Switzerland), where masculine nouns have a sigmatic plural suffix (Paciaroni et al., in prep.). With respect to the presence/absence of fully-fledged PAs, FrPr varieties have been classified into two types in the literature, FrPr A with PAs and FrPr B with invariable DE rather than PAs (Kristol 2016). Yet, this split into two types is not as sharp since DE is actually found in several syntactic contexts in FrPr A and since some varieties of FrPr B also have PAs in addition to DE (Stark/Davatz 2021, Ihsane/Winistörfer/Stark 2022, in prep.). This means that some varieties of FrPr have both PAs and DE (e.g., FrPr A), whereas others only have DE (i.e., some varieties of FrPr B).

3. Background. Romance languages vary as to whether they allow BNs, (e.g., Spanish), or not (e.g., French) as indefinite complements. In the literature, the possibility to have BNs is often associated to overt number marking on the noun (e.g., Spanish) and the impossibility to have BNs to the absence of such overt number marking on the noun, which would be compensated by the appearance of PAs (e.g., French) (Delfitto/Schroten 1991, Gerards/Stark 2020, a.o.; for a diachronic perspective Mathieu 2009, Carlier/Lamiroy 2014). In languages like Spanish and French, there is thus a competition between overt number marking on N and PAs, respectively, as the French plural *-s* is not pronounced: *Compraré \emptyset leche/manzanas* (Sp.)/*j'achèterai du lait/des pommes* (Fr.) 'I will buy milk/apples'. This picture is blurred by the existence of languages in which Ns are overtly marked for number and which have *both* BNs and PAs, like Standard Italian (*compro (del) pane/(dei) pani* (It.) 'I buy (some) bread/(loaves of) bread'): Pinzin/Poletto (2022) show that in such languages PAs are not optional (i.e., BNs and nominals with a PA have different interpretations) and that a strict complementary distribution of overt number marking on N and PAs does not hold. In addition, their study of Northern Italian Dialects (NIDs) in which number marking is different depending on gender, shows that overt plural marking on feminine nouns is not relevant to the existence of BNs (Emilian); put differently, "absence of BNs only correlates with absence of plural marking on masculine Ns" (2022: 8). They conclude, thus, that in order to have BNs, number must be marked on both masculine *and* feminine Ns.

4. Discussion. In this presentation we will examine FrPr, including varieties which only have DE (no PAs). These latter, importantly, represent the fourth logically possible option of the paradigm (existence/absence of BNs and PAs): languages with *neither* BNs nor PAs. To the best of our knowledge, this option has not been discussed in the literature.

Table 1.	Language	BNs	PAs
1	Spanish/Friulian	Yes	No
2	French/Emilian	No	Yes
3	Standard Italian	Yes	Yes
4	FrPr varieties with only DE	No	No

The issue under study can be decomposed into the following aspects:

- (i) Competition of BNs (e.g., Spanish) and PAs (e.g., French)
- (ii) Correlation between overt number marking on N and the availability of BNs (e.g., Spanish)
- (iii) Correlation between the absence of number marking on N and the availability of PAs (e.g., French)

What FrPr reveals on these points is the following: (i) The fact that some FrPr varieties have neither BNs nor PAs, but DE, corroborates Pinzin/Poletto's (2022) observation that the dichotomy BNs/PAs is only part of a larger picture. (ii) FrPr supports the claim that the correlation between overt number marking on N and BNs needs to be qualified since the gender of the N plays a role (§ 3, Pinzin/Poletto 2022): FrPr has no BNs although a great majority of feminine Ns are overtly marked for plural, in contrast with masculine nouns which are not (except in Evolène) (Ihsane/Winistörfer/Stark, in prep.). (iii) In FrPr, there are no correlations between overt plural marking on the noun and the (un-)availability of PAs, except in Evolène, where masculine nouns have sigmatic plural marking (Ihsane/Winistörfer/Stark, in prep.).

The findings (i) – (iii) raise the question of the role of PAs and DE in FrPr. Pinzin/Poletto (2022) suggest that PAs are used to realize a Choice Function (Reinhart 1997) in languages of types 2 and 3 in Table 1 and that this is represented in the nominal syntactic structure by a projection ChfP. A Choice Function is “a function that applies to a set and has its output a member of that set” (2022: 15). It differs from a specific/speaker's belief of existence interpretation but represents a necessary prerequisite for such readings. Since many FrPr varieties are analogous to Emilian in that they have (a) overt plural marking on most feminine Ns, but not on masculine nouns, (b) no BNs but (c) PAs, we will ask the question whether DE is an allomorph of PAs realizing the same functional projection. Some FrPr varieties could have two morphs for this position, PA and DE, whereas others would have only DE. In this view, in FrPr A, DE and PAs would be in complementary distribution – PAs in positive contexts vs. DE after negative particles/quantifiers like *beaucoup* ‘a lot’ in French (Ihsane/Winistörfer/Stark, in prep.) –, whereas in FrPr B, DE would be in free variation with PA_{SG} and PA_{PL}. That complements introduced by DE may have a specific reading (Stark/Gerards 2020, Ihsane 2021), in contrast to BNs, could support this analysis, in which the specific interpretation builds on a smaller structure (Ihsane 2008). With regard to the FrPr B varieties, we will also investigate the role of gender in the apparition of the singular PA morph. Indeed, there is no variety with only masculine PAs in the singular: among the FrPr B varieties that have PAs, some have both masculine and feminine PAs in the singular, whereas others only have feminine PAs. To account for the facts, we will explore a line of analysis in which masculine is the default gender (cf. Kramer 2016).

5. Conclusion. If PAs and DE are allomorphs, they fill the same projection and can be in complementary distribution (FrPr A) or in free variation (FrPr B), with gender playing a role in the distribution of PAs. This contributes to the knowledge of nominal determination in Romance.

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