

The (co-)evolution of partitive argument marking in Breton and Gallo-Angevin French (preliminary title)

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In Middle Breton (Insular Celtic, Indo-European; spoken in Brittany between 12 cent.–c. 1650 CE, well attested from the 15th cent. onwards, cf. Hemon 1975), indefinite partitive constructions (= indicating an indefinite amount of a definite substance, Hoeksema 1996) in object position may be marked with a particular marker *a*, cf. example (1a), in which the direct pronominal object of a low transitivity verb of ingestion is preceded by the allomorph *anez-/ahan-* of *a*. The paradigm of this marker is given in (1b). The alternative encoding regularly has the pronominal direct object prefixed to the verb without the marker *a*, cf. (1c).

- (1) a. *anez-aff taff-er*
of-3SG.M taste-PRS.IMPERS
‘on en goûté/one tastes (of) it (sc. of a drink)’ M 2428; 16th cent.
- b. *ahan-off ahan-ot anez-aff anez-i ahan-omp ahan-ech anez-e*
of-1SG of-2SG of-3SG.M of-3SG.F of-1PL of-2PL of-3PL Hemon 1975, 101f.
- c. *en-guel-aff*
3SG.M-see-PRS.1SG
‘I see him’

The marker *a* reconstructs to an Insular-Celtic adposition with separative/source semantics ‘from, of’, roughly comparable in meaning to Romance DE.

Substantival direct objects may be marked with *a*, too (ex. 2). Parallel to French *de*, Middle Breton *a* is also attested with the complements of presentational/existential constructions under the scope of negation as in ex. (3).

- (2) *pren-it a=bara*
buy-IMP.2PL of=bread
‘Achetez du pain!/Buy some bread!’ Qu, 17th cent.
- (3) *nac eux quet a=trecte*
NEG.COOR have.PRS EMPH a=mercy
‘Et il n’y a pas de pardon./And there is no mercy.’ M 1602; 16th cent.

In (1a), the construction *a* + pronominal direct object looks like the semantic, but not morphosyntactic equivalent of French *en*, the (also) partitive clitic pronoun (‘on en goûté’; cf. Ihsane 2013). In (3), Breton *a* looks like French *de* under the scope of negation, a minimal determiner possibly related to the ‘partitive article’ *du/des* (cf. Kayne 1977; Ihsane 2008; Ihsane 2013; Stark 2016).

Language contact thus might have played a role in the evolution of these constructions – all the more so since the sister languages of Breton (Welsh and Cornish) did not develop similar constructions.

In our talk, we would like to retrace the emergence of the marker *a* in the aforementioned contexts as well as the semantically equivalent *en*-construction in (2) and the ‘negative *de*’ determiner in Old Gallo-Angevin documents in order to test the language contact hypothesis. We will check available data for lexical items, semantic classes, morphological features (gender, number, case), referential properties, position, grammatical category (pronoun vs. NP), interaction with negation, for the direct object constituent, as well as clause types, and genres for their overall distribution.

Abbreviations

- M Emile Ernault (1914). *Le Mirouer de la mort. Poème breton du XVIe siècle*. Publié d’après l’exemple unique, traduit et annoté par Emile Ernault. Paris: Champion.
- Qu Guillaume Quiquier de Roscoff (1632). *Dictionnaire et colloques françois et breton*. 3 vols. Morlaix: G. Allienne.

References

- Hemon, Roparz (1975). *A historical morphology and syntax of Breton*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- Hoeksema, J., ed. (1996). *Partitives. Studies on the syntax and semantics of partitive and related constructions*. de Gruyter.
- Ihsane, T. (2008). *The layered DP in French. Form and Meaning of French Indefinites*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Ihsane, T. (2013). “*EN* pronominalisation in French and the structure of nominal expressions”. In: *Syntax* 16.3, pp. 217–249.
- Kayne, R. (1977). *Syntaxe du français. Le cycle transformationnel*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
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Abbreviations used in the glosses

1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, COOR = coordinator, EMPH = emphatic (particle), F = feminine, IMP = imperative, IMPERS = impersonal, M = masculine, NEG = negative, PL = plural, PRS = present, SG = singular.