

Determiner Ellipsis in Electronic Writing – Discourse or Syntax?

1 Introduction

Text messages (or SMS = *short message service*) constitute a type of electronic writing frequently described as having a strong tendency towards the elimination of function words (see e.g. FAIRON et al. 2006: 43, 54, for French, ANDROUTSOPOULOS/SCHMIDT 2002: 66, DÜRSCHIED 2003: 332, for German). At first sight, leaving out functional material that is not indispensable for communicative needs, but that is required by well-formedness (“grammaticality”) conditions of the language in question, for the sake of “brevity and speed” (cf. THURLOW/POFF 2013: 176 on the “maxims of text messages”) in electronic interactions seems straightforward. This is true also for semantically and pragmatically “superfluous” bound elements such as agreement markers (but see STARK 2011 and STARK/RIEDEL 2012 on French). However, the aforementioned and other recent studies on the grammar of texting (see also the current research project on WhatsApp messages, cf. <http://www.whatsup-switzerland.ch>) show that language-external factors such as technology, “need for speed”, avoidance of any effort etc. do not play a central role in the morphosyntactic make-up of text messages – in the great majority of cases, they respect the grammatical regularities of the respective languages. This will be shown in what follows for determiner drop, i.e. the omission of articles and similar elements, in two sub-corpora (French and Swiss-German) of the Swiss reference corpus of text messages (cf. STARK/RUEF/UEBERWASSER 2009-2015). In contrast to the lexicon and, of course, spelling conventions, grammar is not easily consciously accessible by the writer and thus much less vulnerable to innovations, be they technological or interactional in nature. In what follows, we will give a very brief overview of research on nominal determiner drop in French and German (Section 2), will then present our data, part of the Swiss reference corpus of text messages (Section 3), the results of our analysis (Section 4), before discussing them and concluding that nominal syntax remains largely unaltered in text messages, despite the specific extralinguistic and discursive properties of this form of mobile communication (in Sections 5 and 6).

2 Very brief state-of-the-art: bare nominals in German and French

Languages differ to the extent that they admit bare noun phrases (i.e. determiner- and quantifier-less nouns, with or without modifiers), especially in argument position. The best-known attempt to classify languages with regard to the distribution of bare nominals (NPs) vs. determiner-bearing nominals (DPs) is CHIERCHIA’s (1998) “nominal-mapping parameter”. According to CHIERCHIA (and reducing this seminal paper to its absolute core), lexical nouns are predicates in some languages (i.e., they denote a set of properties of a referent class) and need determiners in order to refer (in a broad sense), in argument position, whereas they are referential in others, i.e., capable of introducing and referring to discourse referents. The former holds true for Romance languages, i.e., in subject, direct object etc. position, we only find DPs (see STARK 2008 for a nuanced discussion of this issue). Germanic languages admit both DPs and NPs in

argument position (systematically for mass and plural nominals), a fact clearly illustrated by the German equivalent (2) of the French example (1):

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|------|-------|-----------|--------------|-----------|----------|---------|
| (1) | Nous | avons | vu | *(des) | touristes | à | Munich. |
| | we | have | seen | ART.INDEF.PL | tourists | in | Munich |
| (2) | Wir | haben | Touristen | in | München | gesehen. | |
| | we | have | tourists | in | Munich | seen | |
- “We saw (some) tourists in Munich.”

Languages e.g. of the Slavonic family (except Bulgarian) admit NPs everywhere without any restrictions in argument position (i.e., they have no grammaticalized articles).

This typology links nominal determination to argumenthood (cf. GHOMESHI/PAUL/WILTSCHEK 2009) and establishes a first parameter for the empirical and contrastive analysis of our data (see Section 3), namely the distinction between arguments on the one hand (no determiner drop, at least not for subjects, cf. LONGOBARDI 2007) and adjuncts, predicative complements, appositions etc. on the other hand (determiner drop more readily expected/accepted), with German admitting bare nominals also in argument position and having less grammaticalized nominal determination than French (the most advanced Romance language in this respect, cf. STARK 2008). Additionally, and cross-linguistically, determiner drop is widespread in light verb constructions such as Fr. *avoir faim* (“to be hungry”), in enumerations and under the scope of negation, even in languages which require DPs in argument position; these factors have, however, not been taken into account in what follows. Prepositions also facilitate determiner omission, a fact that we will rediscover in our study. As for noun classes, also historically (cf. STARK 2006 for Old Italian), concrete nouns require more regular determination than abstract nouns, and mass nouns often admit bare nominals more easily than count nouns (especially in the singular), which links nominal determination also to number and countability (cf. LONGOBARDI 2007). Indefinite, non-specific, or generic reference are also more compatible with bare nominals than definite or specific reference (cf. LONGOBARDI 2007). Noun class has not been taken into account systematically in the present study, but we did have a look at the definite – indefinite opposition.

3 The data

This study on determiner ellipses is based on data from the Swiss SMS corpus (STARK/UEBERWASSER/RUEF 2015), which is part of the international project “sms4science” (www.sms4science.org; www.sms4science.ch). The data for the multilingual Swiss project were collected between November 2009 and February 2010 (plus an additional collection in May and June 2011 to augment the number of Italian and Romansh text messages). Table 1 provides an overview of the key data of the corpus (cf. UEBERWASSER 2015):

SMS	Tokens ¹	Participants ²	Languages				
			Swiss German	Non-dialectal German	French (very few dialectal messages)	Italian (dialectal and non-dialectal)	Romansh (dialectal and non-dialectal)
25.947	~650'000	2'784	10'706	7'287	4'649	1'519	1'121

Table 1: Key data of the Swiss SMS corpus

For our comparative approach to determiner ellipsis, we decided to have a – mostly qualitative – look at 3.999³ Swiss-German text messages and to compare the regularities found to the complete French sub-corpus (4'649 messages) in the Swiss SMS corpus, annotated for specific features (see ROBERT-TISSOT forthcoming). Our choice of data was guided by a compromise between feasibility of manual searching and the annotations already on hand. Whereas the Swiss-German messages have been annotated with regard to different cases of “ellipses” in a broad sense (i.e., incomplete structures compared to the standard, cf. FRICK 2017), including determiner drop, in the French sub-corpus, subjects have been annotated for the entire data set, enabling us to provide some quantitative indications for determiner drop in French nouns in subject position. We took into account reference/determiner type (definite vs. indefinite nominals, DPs or QPs, see below) and syntactic distribution, i.e. position in the clause, complement vs. adjunct status of the respective nominal, complement or not of prepositions), but not noun class or number (concrete count vs. abstract and mass, singular vs. plural). We thus give only a first very broad and preliminary picture of determiner drop in Swiss German and French text messages, which will have to be refined by more systematic quantitative analyses. We did not take into account messages consisting of a “telegraphic style” only (cf. MORALDO 2011 for German electronic writing), as these most probably do not have an underlying sentential syntactic structure (cf. AELBRECHT 2012) and accordingly do not contain ellipsis in a strict sense – they are complete as they are and lack the need for functional material (but also inflection marking etc.) in a systematic way.

Before presenting our results, we have to mention that sometimes, alleged determiner drop in the Swiss German data is maybe due to some kind of “phonetic spelling”. There are some cases where the definite determiners *de* or *’s* (“the”_{MASC/FEM} or “the”_{NEUT}) is totally assimilated to and most probably fused with the first sound of the lexical noun (13 cases for *de* and 5 cases for *’s* have been identified among the 185 determiner omissions reported in FRICK 2017). Consider example (3), where the reduced article of *drecksbus*

¹ A *token* is here to be understood as a unit of computational linguistics and consists of a letter, number or symbol string between two blank spaces or between a blank space and a punctuation mark.

² Participants were invited to fill in an online questionnaire in order to provide sociodemographic information. Although only 1.316 persons accepted this invitation, they wrote most of the messages of the corpus, so personal data is available for nearly four fifths of the corpus (cf. UEBERWASSER 2015).

³ More detailed information on the Swiss-German sub-corpus can be found in FRICK (2017) and for the French sub-corpus in ROBERT-TISSOT (forthcoming).

“crappy bus” is *de* [də]. Once the schwa elided, there are two subsequent identical sounds [d] of which only one would be pronounced and hence also written.

- (3) Ø drecksbus hed verspötig (8956)
 Ø crappy.bus has delay
 “Crappy bus is delayed.”

4 Results

Overall, determiner drop is a very rare phenomenon in both sub-corpora. In only very few (about 5%) of the more than 9'000 text messages analysed is a determiner missing (i.e., the nominals in question would be ungrammatical in parallel spoken or standard sentences). This finding is in line with other studies based on the Swiss SMS corpus, which have shown that in contrast to lexical or graphic features, grammatical, i.e. morphosyntactic regularities are barely affected by what we could call register specific variation (cf. BIBER 1995). Grammatical phenomena such as subject-verb agreement or object-past participle agreement in French or the presence of overt subjects in French remain almost unaltered even in highly informal and creative environments (cf. e.g. STARK 2011, STARK/RIEDEL 2012, STARK/ROBERT-TISSOT forthcoming, ROBERT-TISSOT forthcoming).

For the subjects of the whole French sub-corpus (4.649 messages), we have data available for the overtly realized as well as for the dropped determiners (cf. ROBERT-TISSOT forthcoming). The non-pronominal and non-dropped French subjects (776 in total) were divided into determiner phrases (DP) including nouns with definite articles, possessive and demonstrative determiners, and quantifier phrases (QP) including nouns with indefinite articles, numerals, “partitive articles”, and with midscalar and universal quantifiers (cf. HASPELMATH 1997). Proper names were not taken into account, even if syntactically speaking, they belong to the DP category, but they do not require an overt determiner in standard French.

Nominal subjects in French						
	DP		QP		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
With det./quant.	667	94.08	59	88.06	726	93.56
Without det./quant.	42	5.92	8	11.94	50	6.44
Total	709	100	67	100	776	100

Table 2: Nominal subjects in French according to presence/absence of the determiner or quantifier

Table 2 shows that, in raw numbers, there are more DPs (N=42) than QPs (N=8) lacking a determiner. If we look at the proportions, however, the opposite tendency holds: with a rate of 11.94%, indefinite determiners are more likely to be dropped than definite determiners, with a rate of only 5.92%. This leads to the conclusion that the reported raw numbers are most probably due to a scale effect, i.e., that since there are more definite than indefinite determiners (and nominals) on the whole, there is also a higher number

of dropped definite articles, but not in proportional terms. An impressionistic look at the Swiss German data supports this tendency, without, however, robust quantitative results.

As mentioned in Section 3, we further analysed the syntactic distribution of nominals with determiner drop in order to identify potential triggers or environments admitting more easily the absence of a determiner required by standard grammar. As for constituency, we found nominal complements of prepositions without determiners; as for syntactic functions favouring determiner drop, “framing constituents” (cf. e.g. FRASCARELLI 2017) and adjuncts (local and temporal adverbials), i.e. non-arguments, were found with a certain frequency without determiners, in both languages.

4.1 “Framing”

Several examples show a dropped determiner in sentence-initial, syntactically not integrated constituents that set the frame or establish a new topic for the following interaction, often denoting speech acts (cf. CHAFE 1976, STARK 1997):

(4)	Ø	Nachricht	von	Ø	tochter:	Hi	mama	mir	gats
	Ø	message	from	Ø	daughter :	hi	mum	me.DAT	goes=it
	guät	und	eu	[...]	(3806)				
	well	and	you.PL.DAT						

“Ø message from Ø daughter: Hi mum, I’m fine and you [...]”

(5)	Ø	Frag:	wo	chäm	mer	das	Perlezüg	über ?
	Ø	question :	where	get.COND.1PL	we.NOM	the	pearlsthing	from?

“Ø question: where would we get that pearl whatsit from?”

(6)	Sinon	Ø	bonne	nouvelle	j’	ai	au	moins	5
	otherwise	Ø	good	news	I	have.1SG	at.the	least	5
	à	mon	essai	sur	la	poésie !	[...]		
	at	my	essay	on	the	poetry!			

“Apart from that, Ø good news: I got at least 5 for my essay on poetry”.

These elements could be considered as overt realizations of the functional projection ForceP in RIZZI’s (1997) split CP approach to information-structural categories in syntax. Furthermore, there is some doubt whether a determiner is actually missing or whether we are dealing here with instances of so-called “telegraphic style” (at least (4) looks like that, with the double determiner omission of *nachricht* and *tochter*, reminiscent of determiner drop in headlines, cf. STOWELL 1991, 2013). Items such as *bonne nouvelle*, *good news* (example (6)) are almost lexicalized as such with a “topic announcement function”, and frames are in general not subject to connectivity, since they are not the result of movement out of the clause, in contrast to dislocation structures (i.e. they are not necessarily case-marked, not subject to cross-over effects, not co-referential with resumptive pronouns inside the clause etc., cf. e.g. CINQUE 1977, CINQUE 1990, RIZZI 1997). These constituents thus do not occupy an argumental position in the clause.

4.2 Prepositional phrases (constituency)

Prepositional phrases (PP) are cross-linguistically known to permit or even require determiner omission (see e.g. Romanian, where definite articles are obligatorily dropped in PPs except for *cu*, “with”). Additionally, we also have cases of determiners dropped together with the preposition (8 out of the 185 D omissions reported in FRICK 2017, against 21 cases of D omission after a preposition). In what follows, we provide some examples for each sub-corpus, first for determiner drop after P:

- (7) [...] Danke no für Ø protokoll (hans aber noni gläse). [...] (8816)
 [...] thanks yet for Ø minutes_SG have_1SG=it but not.yet read_PPT [...]
 “Thanks for Ø minutes (but Ø haven’t read them yet).”

- (8) [...] obi na ines anders januar-lager (zb fideriser hb)
 [...] If=I still in=an other January camp (e.g. Fideriser Heuberge)
 gan entscheidi glaub i de warteschlange & nach Ø
 go_1SG decide=I believe_1SG in the queue & after Ø
 kassesturz hüt abig [...] (6345)
 cash check today evening [...]
 “If I also go to another January camp (e.g. Fideriser Heuberge), I think I will decide in the queue and after Ø cash check [a popular consumer advice show on Swiss TV].”

- (9) C' est vrai que je vais plus le regarder
 it is_3SG true that I go_1SG any.more it_3SG.ACC consider_INF
 avec Ø meme oeil (8900)
 with Ø same eye
 “It is true that I won’t consider it the same way anymore [lit.: with Ø same eye].”

Interestingly, we find determiner drop after P in arguments/complements (example (7), inside the CAUSE argument for thanking, a complement PP in German as in English) as well as in prepositional adjuncts (in a temporal adverbial in example (8) and a manner adverbial in example (9), see section 4.3 below). Additionally, *kassesturz* (“cash check”) in example (8) can be interpreted as a proper name (of the TV show at issue), in which case there would not be any determiner missing.

Furthermore, in our data determiners are dropped not only after but also together with prepositions. This is illustrated by the following examples (10) and (11):

- (10) Gange Ø Ø altstadtbar mit jule (6654)
 go_1SG Ø Ø altstadtbar with jule
 “I go Ø Ø Altstadtbar with Jule.”

- (11) Parfait je suis au cinqueme gauche en sortant Ø Ø ascenceur (23373)
 perfect I am at.the fifth left by going.out Ø Ø elevator
 “Perfect I am on the fifth [floor] on the left when going out Ø Ø elevator.”

In (10), the feminine singular definite article *die* and the governing preposition *in* “in”, “to” are missing (the standard German equivalent would be *in die Altstadtbar*), in an adverbial complement of the unaccusative verb *gehen* (“to go”). In example (11), the masculine singular definite article *le* together with the preposition *de* (“out of”, “from”; the standard French equivalent would be *en sortant de l’ascenseur*) are left out, again in an adverbial complement of an unaccusative verb, *sortir* (here: “to leave”). These “double dropings” often occur with local adverbial complements, which is consistent with WIESE’s (2012) and SIEGEL’s (2014) findings on preposition drop in oral German. For French, this kind of ellipsis is hardly ever mentioned; and none of the rare examples in FRICK/GAZIN/MEISNER (2015) are a clear case of preposition plus determiner drop outside telegraphic contexts.

Determiner drop after prepositions is found not only in adverbial PP complements, but also in adverbial noun phrases and adverbial adjuncts, as we will see in the next section.

4.3 Adverbial adjuncts (dependency)

In line with the typological observations presented in section 2 above, adjuncts admit determiner drop more easily than verbal arguments. This is the case also for our data:

(12)	[...]	wott	sie	ned	los	lah	wott	sie	Ø
		want_1SG	her_ACC	not	let	go_INF	want_1SG	her_ACC	Ø
	ganz	ziit	neb	mier	ha...	[...]	(1123)		
	whole	time	next	me_DAT	have_INF				

“Don’t want to let her go, want to have her next to me Ø whole time.”

(13)	Au	fait	c’	est	bien	ce	weekend	que	tu
	at.the	fact	it	is	well	this	weekend	that	you
	t’	exportes	dans	notre	magnifique	contrée ?	Ø	semaine	prochaine
	REFL	export_2SG	into	our	magnificent	region ?	Ø	week	next
	m’	exporte	à	Genf	je	pense			
	REFL	export_1SG	to	Geneva	I	think_1SG			

“By the way, is it actually this weekend that you export yourself to our magnificent region? Ø next week Ø export myself to Geneva, I think.”

Examples (12) and (13) contain temporal adverbial adjuncts which would require the definite article in the respective standard versions (Germ: *die ganze zeit*, Fr.: *la semaine prochaine*). We have already seen above in example (8) that this may happen also after a preposition in a temporal adverbial adjunct, and in example (9) that we find determiner drop in (prepositional) manner adjuncts.

4.4 Countertendency: Determiner drop in (non-prepositional) verbal arguments (dependency)

If for many of the examples seen so far, determiner drop is possible and in a way less “shocking”, in certain registers such as “informal electronic writing”, determiner drop in certain types of non-prepositional verbal arguments (singular count nominals) has to be considered ungrammatical both in (Swiss-) German and in French, and is strikingly rare (it also goes against CHIERCHIA’s typological assumptions for Germanic and Romance languages, see above, Section 2). There are, however, some attestations of this kind in our data:

- (14) Hello les 2, Tou korek la? Tu peux noter
 hello the two everything correct there? you can note
 Ø numéro mauricien, (enregistrer contact) gros bisous Jean-Jaques (3681)
 Ø number Mauritian (register contact) big kisses Jean-Jaques
 “Hello both of you. Everything all right there? You can write down [the] Mauritian number (save contact). Big kisses, Jean-Jaques.”

In this example, *numéro mauricien* (“Mauritian number”), a singular count nominal in postverbal direct object position, lacks the obligatory determiner (a definite one, most probably). This is ungrammatical in French and German.

- (15) Ø Besti Priis wo ich machä chan isch NNN.
 Ø best price that I make_INF can_1SG is NNN.
 Chf gruáß taylor (6479)
 CHF greetings taylor
 “Ø best price I can offer is NNN Swiss francs. Greetings Taylor”

Here, a singular count nominal in preverbal subject position lacks the definite article, also a clearly ungrammatical structure in modern Romance and Germanic languages (see HAWKINS 1978 for the obligatory definite article with superlatives in English). Both examples have, however, a flavour of “listing”: telephone numbers and prices are often found in a listing format, which might have triggered the determiner omission.

As we have seen above, 50 subjects (see above, table 2) in our French text messages appear with determiner drop, a finding in contradiction to CHIERCHIA’s typological observations on Romance. As shown in table 3, in most of these cases, there is also a second functional element missing in the sentence, namely the copula or an auxiliary verb:

Dropped determiners in French subjects	N	%
Determiner and copula or auxiliary (passive or compound past tense) missing	39	78.00
Only determiner missing	8	16.00

Metalinguistic use	2	4.00
Apposition	1	2.00
Total	50	100

Table 3: *Dropped determiners in French subjects*

That is, many of these subjects without determiners are found in “telegraphic style” contexts, as in example (16):

- (16) [...] il y a eu un vol avant que j arrive
 [...] it LOC has had a theft before that I arrive
 Ø police présente [...] Ø mobile et Ø sac vole (14600)
 Ø Police present [...] Ø mobile and Ø bag stolen
 “[...] there was a theft before I arrived. Ø Police [is] present [...].Ø mobile and Ø bag [have been] stolen”

However, there are also 8 examples including (17) and (18), where nothing else but the determiner is missing in preverbal subject position:

- (17) Ø Pediatre dit tt va tres bien. (17750)
 Ø paediatrician says everything goes very well
 “Ø paediatrician says everything is fine.”
- (18) [...] Ø Tome 10 patois paraitra ce jour [...] (13081)
 [...] Ø volume 10 patois appear_3SG_FUT this day [...]
 “Ø Volume 10 patois is going to come out today [...].”

These instances point maybe to a register-specific possibility of dropping (mostly definite) determiners, something that has to be investigated more thoroughly. Still, only 8 out of 776 nominal subjects in the French sub-corpus show these clear cases of determiner drop in non-telegraphic contexts, i.e. about 1%, a number below the level of performance errors in adult speech.

5 Discussion: Syntax or discourse?

As we saw in Section 4, out of the 9’000 text messages analysed, cases of determiner drop are found in only 5%. About 5% of determiner drop are also attested with French definite nominal subjects (cf. table 2), but only 1% in non-telegraphic contexts (Section 4.4) – percentages which are typical for performance errors also in adults and do not necessarily indicate a different syntax for text messages. Furthermore, most cases are found in non-argumental nominal constituents, and many admit interpretations of proper names, listing or are found in telegraphic style. The numbers reported in FRICK/GAZIN/MEISNER (2015) on preposition plus determiner drop are even lower (10 to 15 cases per 1.000 text messages). Outside telegraphic style, determiners are dropped inside prepositional or nominal phrases with temporal or local

meaning. This is true for a larger proportion of text messages in our data sets – but then again, it is not surprising at all, since text messages often serve to make appointments which is why lots of messages contain local and temporal information anyway (cf. LING/BARON 2013, 191); hence, dropped determiners are bound to occur frequently in these contexts. Of utmost interest are the determinerless cases of “framing”, where the noun in itself (examples (4)-(6): *Nachricht*, “news”, *Frage*, “question”, *bonne nouvelle*, “good news”) denotes the speech act following it. These are non-argumental nominals preceding the proposition proper, which might even grammaticalize in the long run as “topic markers” (see NOAILLY-LE BIHAN 1982 on the French *question* in utterance like *question fric, ça va plutôt bien*, “as far as money is concerned, I am fine”).

All of this leads to the conclusion that the alleged incomplete character of text messages because of redundancy and the need for “speed” does not affect grammatical regularities. Both French, a DP language according to CHERCHIA (1998), and German, an NP/DP-language, are reluctant to admit bare (singular) nominals in argument position but still require determiners in the great majority of cases, irrespective of the communicative needs of sender or addressee. Put another way: grammatical regularities such as the need for functional material in certain syntactic slots are not accessible or subject to externally triggered variation (as has been shown for agreement in French or subjects, cf. STARK 2011, STARK/RIEDEL 2012, STARK/ROBERT-TISSOT forthcoming, ROBERT-TISSOT forthcoming; for a general discussion of well-formedness in language see SEILER 2015). The only exceptions in our findings are local complements of unaccusative movement verbs in (Swiss) German without preposition and determiner, expressions like *gömmmer Kino* (“let’s go (to the) cinema?”; see DITTLI/HÄCKI BUHOFER/HAAS 2003) or *gömmmer Migros* (“let’s go (to the) Migros” (well-known Swiss supermarket chain; cf. example (10)), probably due to language contact, but well-established in some oral registers of Germany and Switzerland:

Wiese (2012: 55) hat dazu mithilfe von Studierenden eine Studie durchgeführt, in der Passant_innen nach dem Weg gefragt worden sind – und zwar solche, „die möglichst wenig danach aussahen, als ob sie eine Jugendsprache wie Kiezdeutsch sprechen würden“ (ebd.). In fast zwei Drittel der Antwortbelege fiel die Antwort als blosse Nominalphrase („da müssen Sie Jakob-Kaiser-Platz umsteigen“) aus. Wiese folgert daraus, „[...] dass es in der gesprochenen Sprache fast schon ungrammatisch ist, in derartigen Fällen Artikel und Präpositionen zu benutzen!“ (FRICK 2017: 55f.).

As native speakers of (Swiss) German, we would not go that far, but do recognize the different status of determiner drop in these (Swiss) German local adverbials vs. all other cases.

6 Conclusion

After this first qualitative and quantitative insight into determiner drop in (Swiss) French and (Swiss) German text messages, it is implausible to postulate a strong influence of technological or interactive factors on the grammar of text messages when it comes to nominal determination. Even if not necessary for the mutual understanding of sender and addressee (recall that definite determiners are more likely to be dropped than indefinite ones), people use determiners whenever required for the well-formedness of the

message – with certain, well-circumscribed exceptions underpinning CHERCHIA’s typological observations (almost no NPs in argument position), except in telegraphic contexts. The few exceptions we have seen to this generalization point to properties such as list readings or proper namehood as additional triggers for determiner drop. Most probably, the different factors may also interact among themselves (and perhaps with further factors which could not be included here), a hypothesis guiding future work on determiner drop in electronic writing. For the moment, we have to conclude (again) that syntax rather than discursive properties seems to dictate the morphosyntactic make-up of text messages.

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