

**De in Romance: a partitive article? a preposition?**  
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1. Some Romance languages express indefiniteness by means of a so-called *partitive article*, that in the following examples takes the form *des* in French (1a) and *dei* in Italian (1b).

- (1) a. *Kim a mangé des pommes hier.*                      b. *Ho visto (dei) ragazzi.*  
 Kim has eaten *des* apples yesterday                      have seen *dei* boys  
 ‘Kim ate apples yesterday.’                                      ‘I saw boys.’

In French the use of the partitive article is compulsory for indefinite NPs containing plural count nouns and mass nouns, whereas in Italian the use of the partitive article is almost never obligatory, although it shows dialectal variation. In other Romance languages, such as Brazilian Portuguese (2a), Catalan (2b), and Spanish (2c), the so-called partitive article did not develop into a full-fledged particle, and bare plurals are used to express indefiniteness.

- (2) a. *Recrutaram meninos.*                      b. *Han reclutat nens.*                      c. *Han reclutado niños.*  
 recruited boys                      have recruited boys                      have recruited boys  
 ‘They recruited boys’.

2. At a first glance, *des* has been analyzed as the contraction of *de* plus a definite article *les* for French, and *dei* as the combination of *de* plus a definite article *i* for Italian, which emerged by a grammaticalization process from an original partitive construction in Latin (Carlier et al. 2013, Carlier & Lamiroy 2014, a.o.). However, as shown by several scholars (Milner 1978; Storto 2003; Ihsane 2008; Cardinaletti and Giusti 2016, a.o.), it is problematic to consider *de* as a partitive article because there are many syntactic and semantic differences between those indefinites in (1) and true *partitive constructions* as (3). In the latter, a part-whole relationship is involved between the quantifier and the definite expression, complement of *de*.

- (3) a. *J’ai reçu beaucoup de mes voisins et de mes amis.* [French]  
 I have entertained many of my neighbours and of my friends  
 ‘I entertained many of my neighbours and of my Friends.’  
 (Ihsane 2008: 131, ex. (18a))  
 b. *Ho visto alcuni dei ragazzi.* [Italian]  
 have seen some of.the.pl boys  
 ‘I saw some of the boys.’  
 (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2016: 58, ex. (1b))

3. Among a variety of constructions that have been claimed to show different facets of partitivity (Falco and Zamparelli 2019, a.o.), we focus on *pseudopartitives* (Jackendoff 1977, Selkirk 1977, Corver 1998, Alexiadou et al 2007, Stavrou 2003, a.o.), exemplified in (4).

- (4) a. *un verre d’eau* [French]                      b. *una bottiglia di vin* [Italian]  
 ‘a glass of water’                                      ‘a bottle of wine’

Pseudopartitives differ from ‘true’ partitives in that they do not express a part/subset of a *definite* superset. Additionally, in pseudopartitives the lexical item preceding *de* is not a quantifier determiner but a measure/classifier noun.

4. What is common to all the examples given above is the use of an overt lexical item *de* (except for the bare plurals in (2)). What is different is the status assigned to *de* in the literature: *de* has been considered an article in (1) or a preposition/functional element in (3)-(4). The question we address in this study is: what is the status of *de* in Romance indefinites, partitives and pseudopartitives?

5. We propose an innovative analysis of *de*. We argue that there is neither a ‘partitive article’ nor a ‘partitive preposition’ in syntax. In other words, we show that *de* is not an article or an item encoding partitivity in (1). Rather, the indefinite reading associated with plural count nouns and mass nouns is derived by merging an abstract operator DE to a definite (pluralized) determiner, as in (5), shifts a definite reading into an indefinite one and turns an entity into a property-type expression.

- (5) [DP [D DE [D D<sub>def</sub>]] NP]

We also argue that this hypothesis should be extended to bare indefinites in (2) and pseudopartitives in (4).

As for full (canonical) partitives, we support the hypothesis that *de* is not a partitive preposition, but the overt realization of a bi-relational partitive RELATOR head (den Dikken 2006) that takes a quantifier phrase in the specifier position and a definite (or specific) DP in complement position, thus projecting a RELATOR phrase that behaves like a generalized quantifier.

(6) [RP QP [R RELATOR [DP [D D<sub>def</sub>] NP ]]]

6. We provide several arguments for the claim that indefiniteness is derived from (5) by adjoining an abstract operator DE to a definite article. *De* will be overtly (1) or covertly (2) instantiated at the time of vocabulary insertion, but it cannot be considered an article because:

(i) if *de* were an article, (7a) should be grammatical because articles can precede cardinals, as illustrated in (7b) in Italian.

- (7) a. \**Dei dieci ragazzi* sono arrivati.      b. *Sono arrivati i dieci ragazzi.*  
      *dei* ten boys      are arrived      are arrived the ten boys  
(Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016: 74, ex. (65a))      ‘The ten boys arrived.’

(ii) if *de* were a ‘partitive article’ it should introduce a presupposition of existence (Storto 2003). However, standard partitives (which select a definite DP complement) are disallowed in existential constructions, exactly like definite DPs, whereas bare plural indefinites are allowed.

- (8) *Tras el atentado, hubo \*algunas de las secuelas / \*las secuelas / secuelas (entre las víctimas).* [S]  
      after the attack      had      some      of the sequels      the sequels.      sequels among the victims  
      ‘After the attack, there were sequels among the victims.’

7. In the case of partitives we also argue that *de* is not a preposition, but the (ever) overt expression of a functional head, a RELATOR:

(i) if *de* in partitives were a preposition, its complement would not be transparent to number agreement with the V. See (9) from Peninsular Spanish, and Treviño (2010) for Mexican S.

- (9) a. *La mayoría de las víctimas opuso resistencia a los delincuentes.*  
      the majority of the.pl victim.pl opposed.sg resistance to the delinquents  
      ‘The majority of the victims opposed resistance to the delinquents.’

- b. *La mayoría de los poetas son poco cuidadosos.*  
      the majority of the poet.pl be.pl little careful.pl  
      ‘The majority of poets are little careful.’

(Demonte & Pérez-Jiménez, s/d: 2; exs. (1a, a’))

(ii) if *de* were an optional argument of a quantifier (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016), this would suggest that all quantifiers would have optional arguments depending on whether they select an indefinite complement or a PP; this would suggest that *de* should project a PP (complement of Q) with no specifier, which is unexpected for prepositions.

8. Finally, for pseudopartitives, we propose *de* is not a preposition, but it is simply the Spell-Out of an operator DE that is not necessarily overtly expressed, which explains parallel behavior with indefinites:

(i) if *de* were a preposition, we should expect it to be always present. There are Romance (Asturian, Romanian) languages where *de* is not necessary:

- (10) a. *un sacu (de) patates* [A]      b. *Ceai, a băut toată lumea câte o ceașcă(\*de).* [R]  
      a bag *de* potato.pl      tea has drunk all world each a cup *de*  
      ‘a bag of potatoes’      ‘Tea, everybody drank a cup.’

(San Segundo 2017:14, (48a))      (Tănase-Dogaru & Ușurelu 2015:11, ex. (32))

(ii) Coordination facts also show *de* cannot be a preposition: in fact, one cannot coordinate a partitive (where there is a RELATOR, in our analysis) with a pseudopartitive:

- (11) a. \**Eu comprei [uma caixa [dos livros e de cadernos]]* [BP]  
      I bought a box of.the books and *de* notebooks  
      b. \**[Un puñado [de dólares y de los euros]]* [S]  
      a handful *de* dollars and of the euros

9. In view of these arguments, we conclude that there is neither a ‘partitive article’ nor a ‘partitive preposition’ in syntax. Indefinite *de* is homophonous to partitive and pseudopartitive *de*, but indefinites and pseudopartitives correspond to one structure, giving rise to indefiniteness, whereas partitives correspond to a different structure in which a part-whole relationship is headed by a bi-relational functional head responsible for partitivity.

### Selected References

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