

Recent diachronic and synchronic work on French (article-like) *des* (*des_{al}*) converges on the idea that it is not related to partitives. We discuss two representative papers, identify their shortcomings and argue for the potential of an analysis that does establish a link with partitives. Carlier (2007) traces the origins of *des_{al}* to the preposition *de* and the article *les*. She proposes that the prepositional status of *de* progressively weakened from Latin to Old French and that it acquired a hybrid status between preposition and determiner in constructions like (1):

(1) Marie a mangé **des gâteaux qui étaient sur la table.**

‘Mary has eaten of the cakes that were on the table’

For Carlier, present-day *des_{al}* is an atomic expression and belongs to the paradigm of articles. She identifies the construction in (1) with a presuppositional reading of *les* as its immediate predecessor and explicitly argues against a partitive origin (cf. Section 3).

Ihsane (2013) takes a synchronic perspective. Unlike Carlier, she takes *des_{al}* to be syntactically complex and to consist of quantificational *de* (as in *beaucoup de*) and of *les*. *Les* is generated in NumP and stays there, contributing plurality but not definiteness. Like Carlier, Ihsane explicitly argues against a partitive analysis of *des_{al}*. Her main motivation is that *des_{al}* patterns with quantificational expressions and differs from partitives in its extraction behavior: whereas extraction of *de Zola* is fine in (2a), it leads to unacceptability in (2b).

(2) a. C’est de Zola que j’ai lu **beaucoup de /des livres.**

b. *C’est de Zola que j’ai lu **deux des / beaucoup des livres.**

it’s of Zola that I have read many of / *DES_{al}* / two of_the / many of_the books

The analyses of Carlier and Ihsane are problematic. For Carlier’s analysis, the evolutionary step from the construction in (1) to plural indefinite article is motivated on the syntactic side but stipulative on the semantic side. Indeed, *des gâteaux* in (1) is not a run-of-the-mill indefinite (it presupposes a contextually established set of cakes) and not plural ((1) is true even if Mary only eats (part of) one cake). The question that imposes itself then is how the construction in (1) is a relevant predecessor of *des_{al}*. For Ihsane’s analysis, the challenge lies in the fact that quantificational expressions that take *les* (e.g. *beaucoup des N*) function as partitives: why is it *des_{al}* is the only quantificational expression not to conform to this generalization?

1. Broadening our horizons

On Carlier’s analysis, *des_{al}* only acquired its indefinite plural character after it was inserted into the French article paradigm. This leads to the prediction that similar expressions are free to take on other interpretations. This prediction is not borne out: all expressions with a similar morphological make-up – *de* (or its cognate) and a plural definite determiner – receive plural indefinite interpretations: French *de ces* (Zribi-Hertz 2002; Roodenburg 2004), Italian *dei* and *di questi* (Korzen 1998; Zamparelli 2008; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016) and Dutch *van die* (De Hoop et al. 1991; Oosterhof 2005). We refer to these expressions as *bare partitives*. Their invariable plural indefinite character shows that bare partitives do not acquire plurality and indefiniteness but that these are part of their intrinsic interpretation.

Van die (‘of these’) assumes a special position in the above list. Unlike most other expressions, *van die* has convincingly been argued not to be fossilized and thus allows us to observe the natural behaviour of bare partitives. Next to *van die* (3a), we also find *van dergelijke* (3b) and *van dit soort* (3c) (see Oosterhof 2005 for a fuller paradigm):

(3) a. Gisteren heb ik **van die gevaarlijke honden** gezien.

b. Gisteren heb ik **van dergelijke honden** gezien.

c. Gisteren heb ik **van dit soort honden** gezien.

litt. yesterday have I of these dangerous / of such / of this sort dogs seen

(3a,b,c) are positive assertive contexts and all imply that the speaker saw multiple dogs. They furthermore do not presuppose contextually established sets of dogs. The fact that *die* alternates with the unambiguously kind-referring *dit soort* is central to our analysis.

2. A partitive analysis of *van die*

Our analysis is a variant of the one proposed for the existential reading of English bare plurals by Carlson (1977) and Chierchia (1998), for Dutch *van die* by Oosterhof (2005), for French *des* by Clédât (1901) and Foulet (1965), and for Italian *dei* by Zamparelli (2008).

We assume that *die N* is a kind-referring expression and that *van* functions as a realization operator. *Van* takes the kind (*e*) and returns the set of its instantiations ($\langle e, t \rangle$). We further assume an existential type-shift that allows *van die N* to function as an argument ($\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$).

Indefiniteness | As noted by Zamparelli (2008), a kind-based analysis naturally derives the lack of existential presuppositions and thus ensures *van die* functions as an indefinite.

Plurality | Our analysis predicts *van die* to be an inclusive plural. This is due to the fact that the application of the realization operator returns the set of all realizations of the kind, both singular and plural. We follow Sauerland et al. (2005) in assuming that this is not an undesirable result. Indeed, it is well-known that the English bare plural leads to plural interpretations in positive assertive contexts but not in questions or in the scope of negation. *Van die* is similar in this respect and we follow Sauerland et al. (2005) in assuming that plurality is best derived through the competition with an unambiguously singular expression. Sauerland et al. (2005) identify *a dog* as the competitor of *dogs*. For *van die*, the indefinite singular article is not available due to independent constraints on partitive upstairs Ds but the numeral *één* ('one') is.

Extraction facts | As has been observed for other bare partitives, *van die* is transparent to extraction (4a). In this respect, it is similar to quantificational expressions (4b) and different from standard full partitives (4c). Crucially though, full partitives with unambiguously kind-referring downstairs DPs are transparent to extraction as well (4d), showing that a partitive analysis of *van die* is not endangered by its syntactic behaviour.

- (4) a. Van Kafka heb ik al **van die boeken** gelezen.
b. Van Kafka heb ik al **drie / veel boeken** gelezen.
c. *Van Kafka heb ik al **drie van de/veel van de boeken** gelezen.
d. Van Kafka heb ik al **drie van dit soort boeken** gelezen.
litt. of Kafka have I already of these/three/many/three of the/many of the/three of this sort books read

3. Going Romance

Our analysis of *van die* straightforwardly carries over to *des_{al}* and derives its semantics without stipulation. The main difference is that *van die* contains a demonstrative and refers to a contextually identified kind while the plural definite included in *des_{al}* refers directly to the kind. This semantics makes *des_{al}* into a prime candidate to function as a plural indefinite article.

Carrier (2007) points out that the plural indefinite readings of *des* did not appear until after the phonetic erosion of the plural *-s* of the noun. She takes this to be a crucial argument against a partitive analysis. We disagree: our analysis makes *des_{al} N* truth-conditionally equivalent to a bare plural. This leads us to assume that *des_{al} N* was blocked by the bare plural and could only take over when the latter became obsolete. Rather than linking the use of *des_{al}* to expressions that have the wrong semantics, we thus prefer to think of its *ex machina* appearance in the 15th century as a process of unblocking set in motion by an independent phonetic evolution. The competition between bare plurals and Italian *dei N* followed a different path. The former never became obsolete and pushed *dei* to surface as an indefinite plural determiner with a more specialized semantics than that of an article (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016).

The Dutch facts also cast serious doubt on the syntactic nature of the constraints on extraction from partitives. A prominent alternative explanation for the contrast in (2a/b) is economy (*deux des livres de Z = deux livres de Z*, cf. Ionin, Matushansky & Ruys 2006). The acceptability of extraction with partitive *des_{al} N* then follows from the fact that the more economic alternative – the bare plural – is proscribed. This reanalysis allows us to safely move *des_{al}* to the paradigm of partitives and restore Ihsane's paradigm of quantificational expressions to normalcy.