

Partitive Articles vs. Bare Nouns in Northern Italy, a morphological parameter

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In this contribution, we analyze the relation between the encoding of indefinites and the encoding of gender and number on N(ouns) in Northern Italian Dialects (NIDs). With newly collected data, we support and refine the claim that there is a direct trade-off between the morphological exponent of gender and number on N and the encoding of indefiniteness (Delfitto & Schroter 1991 and Stark 2016). Absence of overt regular morphs encoding number on N in at least one gender leads to absence of indefinite Bare Nouns (BNs). We propose a nanosyntactic (Caha 2020) analysis in which gender/number suffixal morphs crosslinguistically compete with prenominal markers – indefinite Partitive Articles (PAs) – for the realization of the lowest argumental function of the dP (Prop(erty)P, Ihsane 2008).

Romance languages vary with respect to the way in which they encode object indefinite arguments in positive contexts (Delfitto & Schroter 1991, Longobardi 2001, Stark 2016). While Italian/Spanish allow for indefinite BNs in object position, French does not, resorting to a different strategy, PAs:

- (1) *Giovanni beve sempre Ø vino.* (It.) / *Juan siempre bebe Ø vino.* (Sp.)
- (2) *Jean boit toujours *(du) vin.* (Fr.)
‘John drinks always wine’

PAs are morphologically complex indefinite determiners homophonous with the conflation of the preposition descending from Latin *de* ‘from’ (henceforth DE) and the definite article:

- (3) *Jean boit toujours du vin.* / *Le jouet du garçon.* (Fr.)
‘John drinks always wine’ / ‘The toy boy’

PAs are present in Italian too (Zamparelli 2008, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016) but are interpreted differently from BNs, so that there are contexts in which BNs are preferred over indefinite PAs:

- (4) *È 30 anni che costruisco (#delle) case, ma di così brutte non ne ho mai viste.* (It.)
‘I’ve been building houses for 30 years, but I’ve never seen such ugly ones’

These data suggest that PAs and BNs crosslinguistically compete for the realization of an overlapping set of functions within the nominal domain, expressing indefiniteness. The crosslinguistic variation within Romance has been related to the type of morphological gender/number marking on N (Delfitto & Schroter 1991, Stark 2016). Richer gender/number morphology on N correlates with BNs, poorer gender/number morphology on N correlates with PAs. French has a reduced/absent morphological gender/number marking on N (Pomino & Stark 2016) and therefore no BNs, while Italian and Spanish have a regular gender/number marking on N and, therefore, BNs.

With this contribution we aim at checking the proposed correlations between PAs/BNs and number marking on N against a larger set of languages, refining them. NIDs are the perfect testbed for these research questions: they both vary with respect to the realization on indefinites (different varieties employ BNs, PAs, definite articles or bare DE, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018) and with respect to the typology of morphological gender-number marking on N (depending on the different diachronic treatment of final unstressed vowels and /s/).

The sources we employ are the ASIt database (<http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>) and three new data collections in Liguria, Friuli and southern Lombardy/northern Emilia. The ASIt data (7 input sentences containing BNs or PAs) show an inverse areal relation between the frequency of BNs and PAs: where BNs are more frequent, PAs are less frequent (Veneto, Trentino, Friuli and Valtellina), and vice versa (Emilia, Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria). Definite article translations of a BN/PA input, instead, do not vary across the different areas and, therefore, do not correlate with the frequency of PAs/BNs. This confirms that, in our sample, PAs and BNs compete for the same set of functions within the nominal domain. We also notice a positive

relation with number marking on N: all the varieties in which regular masculine Ns do not take any gender/number marker (e.g., Em. *al piat/i piat* ‘the dish/the dishes’) show a low/null frequency of BNs. The reverse is not apparently true: Ligurian have a low/null frequency of BNs but regular gender/number markers on N at the masculine (*u gott-u/i gott-i* ‘the glass/the glasses’). Given the limits of the ASIt data – too many negative sentences and only one input with a PA – we designed two tests, a free speech elicitation task (video description) and a questionnaire (70 sentences balanced for polarity, gender, number and PA/BN input). On the basis of the ASIt data, we selected three locations: Friuli (+BN; -PAs; +gender/number markers on masculine N), southern Lombardy/northern Emilia (-BNs; +PAs; -gender/number markers on masculine N) and Liguria (-BNs;+PAs; +gender/number markers on masculine N). The elicitation test has been administered to 7 speakers in Liguria (Pietrafraccia/Geo, GE), while the questionnaire to 8 speakers in southern Lombardy/northern Emilia (Viadana/Dosolo, MN) and to 7 speakers in Friuli (Zoppola PN, Mossa/Chiopris, GO). We plan on completing the set of tests for the three locations by September 2020. The questionnaire results for Friuli and Emilia confirm the ASIt data. In Friuli, input BNs have been consistently translated with BNs (93,5%), while input PAs are problematic and trigger various translations: BNs (21,4%), PAs (20,6%), def (24,8%), other (e.g., nominal quantities as *un poc* ‘a bit’, 33,2%). In southern Lombardy/northern Emilia, instead, both BNs and PAs in the input consistently trigger PAs (67,7% and 86,4% respectively) Translations with a definite determiner account for the remaining share. The results from the elicitation task in Liguria, on the other hand, do not confirm the ASIt data. Both BNs and PAs are spontaneously produced by our informants:

(5) *Perkè komunkue a Santuttsese i fanu salami.* (Pietrafraccia2)

‘Because, anyway, in Santuzzese they make salami’

(6) *Ki i versu du vin nte di gòtti* (Pietrafraccia2)

‘Here they pour of.the wine into of.the glasses.’

Pending further confirmation by the questionnaire test, this shows that, in our sample, the relation between gender-number morphology on N and the presence of BNs is bidirectional. Varieties with regular morphs marking gender-number at the masculine show BNs, varieties without regular morphs marking gender-number at the masculine do not.

These new data support an analysis in which indefinite BNs equal autonomous morphs marking gender/number. We propose that these morphs do not only lexicalize gender and number functions, but also the lowest of the argumental functions of the dP, Prop(erty)P (see Ihsane 2008 for an analysis of the argumental functions of the dP). When a language loses these morphs for at least one gender, in the spirit of the full lexicalization principle of nanosyntax (every function merged in the functional sequence must be lexicalized) the system is forced to replace the loss with another marker. The languages in our sample adopt the same type of markers, PAs. The observed crosslinguistic competition can then be rephrased as a competition between a suffixal marker (gender/number) and a more complex prenominal one (PAs).

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