Indefinite determiners in two northern Italian dialects
A quantitative approach

Gianluca E. Lebani & Giuliana Giusti
Ca’ Foscari University of Venice

Going Romance 34
Special session on Preposition-determiner interactions in Romance
November 25, 2020
The syntactic hypothesis (Cardinaletti and Giusti, 2012; 2015; 2016)

Non leggo libri / dei libri / i libri / *di libri
«I don’t read books»

La copertina dei libri
«The cover of the books»
The syntactic hypothesis
(Cardinaletti and Giusti, 2012; 2015; 2016)

Anconetano

Ho leto de(i) libri
I have read de(ART) books

la cupertina d(e)i libri
the cover d(e)ART books

tanti d(e)i libri
many d(e)ART books
The diatopic distribution of indefinite determiners in Italaromance (Cardinaletti and Giusti, 2018; 2020)

Italian dialects (2018) and regional informal Italian (2020) generally present a high degree of optionality and specialization among the four possible combinations.

The four determiners (ZERO, ART, di, di+ART) display clear tendencies in the distribution and specialization of meaning.
Two parameters / isoglosses in three AIS maps

Lateral areas in the North, the extreme South and the islands, maintain the bare determiner with no concord in D → bare nouns

In the center spreading north-south, we find an innovative concord with the null determiner with indefinite interpretation → ART for indefinite meaning

An independent innovation, overt *de* in Spec DP spreading east-west → bare *di*

The crossing area of *di* and ART → is the «partitive determiner» *di*+ ART.
Three interpretations of narrow scope indefinites

AIS map 1037 “[if there was] water” favors unmarked indefinite quantity $\rightarrow$ displays more coherent areas
Three interpretations of narrow scope indefinites

AIS map 1037 “[if there was] water” favors unmarked indefinite quantity → displays more coherent areas

AIS map 1343 “[go to the cellar] to take wine” favors salient interpretation → ART is more widespread
small quantity → $di+$ART is more widespread than in 1037
Three interpretations of narrow scope indefinites

AIS map 1037 “[if there was] water” favors
unmarked indefinite quantity ⟷ displays more coherent areas

AIS map 1343 “[go to the cellar] to take wine” favors
salient interpretation ⟷ ART is more widespread
small quantity ⟷ $di+ART$ is more widespread than in 1037

AIS map 637 “[to look for] violets” favors small
quantity ⟷ $di+ART$ is more widespread, bare $di$
appears at peripheral points;
saliency ⟷ art more widespread than 1037
Protocols for indefiniteness (Giusti, 2021)

a. noun class (mass, count, finer distinctions)
b. type of sentence (generic/habitual vs. episodic)
c. polarity (positive, negative, open)
d. telicity (telic vs. atelic)
e. narrow vs. wide scope
f. specialization (saliency, small quantity)
eg. V+N collocation
The questionnaire (cf. Giusti, 2021 for details)

• **11 multiple choice items** with indefinite direct objects (singular mass vs. count plural), with different tense / aspect / polarity, in different pragmatic contexts.

• **2 substitution tasks**, open questions asking to substitute a singular mass noun with a plural count noun.

• **6 open comments on possible differences in interpretation**, in case more than one possible choice has been provided.

• **4 multiple choice items for pragmatically coherent sentences**, in which the participant is asked to judge coherence of statements with a follow-up causative clause.

• **3 open questions on the linguistic attitude** of the participant (confidence on their judgments, their normative / descriptive attitude, their personal appreciation of the experience of completing the task).
Distribution of indefinites across contexts in informal Italian (Cardinaletti and Giusti, 2020; Giusti, 2021)

The **diatopic distribution** of determiners in informal Italian mirrors the scenario displayed by the dialects

- **ZERO** prevails in the lateral areas (North-East vs. South-West) but is also present in all other areas
- **Di+ART** prevails in the Gallo-Romance area (especially Emilia Romagna)
- **ART** prevails in the Center-South but also in Emilia-Romagna.
- Bare *di* does not appear at all
Distribution of indefinites across contexts in informal Italian (Cardinaletti and Giusti, 2020; Giusti, 2021)

The distribution across contexts confirms the generalizations build on the AIS maps of C&G 2018, (except for bare di):

• Core indefiniteness favors ZERO and / or ART
• Negative polarity [-exist] favors ZERO over ART
• Salient interpretation [+exist] favors ART over ZERO
• $Di+ART$ conveys small quantity interpretation, and is more possible in wide scope interpretation and with telic predicates [+exist] than in narrow scope contexts or with atelic predicates [±exist]
Pilot adaptations to contemporary dialects, term papers by the Comparative Syntax classes (2018, 2019, 2020) - overview of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite determiners in object position</th>
<th>ZERO</th>
<th>ART</th>
<th>bare di</th>
<th>di+art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core +; Specialized meaning (+); unattested -</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campomolino, Vittorio Veneto (TV)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friulian: Castions, Pocenia, Gonars (UD), Morsano (PN)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adria, Badia Pol., Polesella, Fratta Pol., Pontecchio Pol, Rovigo (RO)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genova</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piacenza</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forlì, Cesena, Rimini</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancona</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altamura (BA)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torre del Greco, Casalnuovo, Casoria, Soccavo, Bagnoli, Pozzuoli, Santa Lucia, San Ferdinando, Vasto Napoli, Somma Vesuviana, Frattamaggiore (NA)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galati (RC)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecce</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pilot adaptations to contemporary dialects, term papers by the Comparative Syntax classes (2018, 2019, 2020) - overview of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite determiners in object position</th>
<th>ZERO</th>
<th>ART</th>
<th>bare di</th>
<th>di+art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core +; Specialized meaning (+); unattested -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campomolino, Vittorio Veneto (TV)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friulian: Castions, Pocenia, Gonars (UD), Morsano (PN)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adria, Badia Pol., Polesella, Fratta Pol., Pontecchio Pol, Rovigo (RO)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genova</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piacenza</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forlì, Cesena, Rimini</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancona</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altamura (BA)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torre del Greco, Casalnuovo, Casoria, Soccavo, Bagnoli, Pozzuoli, Santa Lucia, San Ferdinando, Vasto Napoli, Somma Vesuviana, Frattamaggiore (NA)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galati (RC)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecce</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our goal in this talk

To provide a quantitative analysis of the variation and optionality in the distribution of the four determiners in two northern Italian dialects located at the crossroads of the two isoglosses, one in the middle (Piacenza: Molinari, 2018; 2020) and one on the eastern edge (Rovigo: Zanaga, 2019) of the di-isogloss:

• viz positive vs. negative clauses
• viz telic vs. atelic predicates

NEG and ATEL diagnose core indefinites and [-ex]
POS and TEL diagnose specialized meanings and [+ex]
Hypothesis

Less marked contexts favor less marked combinations (and *vice versa*)

\[ \text{ZERO} > \text{bare } di = \text{ART} > \text{di+ART} \]

(1) \hspace{1cm} (2) \hspace{1cm} (3) \hspace{1cm} (4)
Expectation 1
Higher degree of optionality in Piacentino where $di$ and $ART$ are equally unmarked and the more marked $di+ART$ is present in core indefiniteness environments (map 1037)

Expectation 2
Higher degree of specialization of meaning in Rodigino where $ZERO > ART > di+ART$ are hierarchically ordered with respect to complexity

Expectation 3
Different rates of occurrences of optional determiners respect the hierarchy:
less complex $>$ more complex
$NEG > POS / ATEL > TEL$
Methodology

• Participants: n = 31
  16 from Piacenza (Age: 18-30 (5); 31-60 (6), 61+ (5))
  15 from Rovigo (Age 18-30 (9); 31-60 (5); 61+ (1))

• Questionnaire → Task: to judge acceptability of sentences
  • Rodigino: on-line questionnaire (Zanaga, 2019)
  • Piacentino: face-to-face interview (in the target dialect: Molinari, 2019; 2020)

• 17 items, each presented in 5 variants:
  • ZERO (i.e. no determiner)
  • *di* ART
  • *di*+ART
  • *certo* (filler)

• If more than 1 variants were acceptable → follow-up question: *do the selected variants correspond to different interpretations?*
Methodology

• Participants: n = 31
  - 16 from Piacenza (Age: 18-30 (5); 31-60 (6), 61 + (5))
  - 15 from Rovigo (Age 18-30 (9); 31-60 (5); 61+ (1))

• Questionnaire → Task: to judge acceptability of sentences
  - Rodigino: on-line questionnaire (Zanaga, 2019)
  - Piacentino: face-to-face interview (in the target dialect: Molinari, 2019; 2020)

• 17 items, each presented in 5 variants:
  - ZERO (i.e. no determiner)
  - *di*
  - ART
  - *di+ART*
  - *certo* (filler)

• We focus on the 11 items that are specified for Aspect
1. Nella sua varietà, un vegetariano direbbe:
   Non mangio 0/la/di/della/certa carne.

2. Ora sostituisca ‘carne’ con ‘patate’:

3. Nella sua varietà, un astemio direbbe:
   Io non bevo 0/il/di/del/certo vino.

4. Ora sostituisca ‘vino’ con ‘superalcolici’.

5. Raccontando che cosa si può fare in montagna, si direbbe:
   Puoi raccogliere 0/le/di/delle/certe violette.

Raccontando quello che ho fatto domenica per passare il tempo all'aria aperta, direbbe:

6. Ho tagliato 0/l’/di/dell’/certa erba per un’ora.

7. Ho raccolto 0/le/di/delle/certi more per un’ora.

Sto sempre raccontando quello che ho fatto domenica [...], lei direbbe:

8. Ho tagliato 0/l’/di/dell’/certa erba in un’ora.

9. Ho raccolto 0/le/di/delle/certe more in un’ora.

Completi la frase: Mentre Gianni preparava la tavola in giardino ...

10. Maria è scesa in cantina a prendere 0/il/di/del/certo vino ... 
    ... e nel frattempo, ...

11. Teresa è andata dal macellaio a comprare 0/le/di/delle/certe bistecche.
Statistical Analysis

• 2 participants were excluded from the subject pool
  • 1 from Rovigo: incomplete answers
  • 1 from Piacenza: very low agreement → outlier

• Analysis: Firth Penalized logistic regression
  • Penalization required by (quasi-)complete separations in our data
  • Predictors: determiner (ZERO, ART, di, di+ART), dialect (Piacentino vs. Rodigino), clause polarity (positive vs. negative) and aspectual class of the predicate (telic vs. atelic)
  • all the 2-way and 3-way interactions involving the factors determiner and dialect
  • Goodness of fit:
    • $C = 0.907$
    • $X^2 = 670.4, d.f. = 10, p < 0.0001$
Results – Overall

Both dialects display high probability of ART, low probability of ZERO, and no probability of \textit{di}.

The only significant difference is in the probability of \textit{di}+art
Polarity

Negative clauses display a significant difference in the probability of bare *di*

Positive clauses display a significant difference in the probability *di+ART*.

Noteworthy non-significant differences in both polarities regard the probability of ZERO (higher in Rodigino) and ART (higher in Piacentino).
Aspect

The only significant difference is found with $di+\text{ART}$ in atelic predicates.

Noteworthy non-significant differences with ATEL predicates regard the higher possibility of \text{ZERO} in Rodigino and of \text{ART} in Piacentino. With TEL predicates \text{ART} has the same high probability in the two dialects, while \text{ZERO} and bare $di$ have the same null probability.
Discussion

Piacentino

Core indefiniteness under NEG is equally expressed by bare *di* and *ART* (which are equally complex).
Core indefiniteness in POS / ATELIC contexts is equally expressed by *di+ART* or *ART*.
The object of TEL predicates is also equally expressed by *di+ART* or *ART*.
→ Higher degree of optionality

Rodigino

Core indefiniteness under NEG is preferably expressed by *ZERO* but *ART* is possible.
Core indefiniteness in POS / ATEL contexts is expressed by *ART* but *ZERO* and *di+ART* are also possible.
The object of TEL predicates also favors *ART* but also allows *di+ART*.
→ *di+ART* is specialized
Discussion – All expectations are confirmed

**Expectation 1**
Higher degree of optionality in Piacentino: 4 determiners in NEG clauses 3 determiners in POS (TEL and ATEL) with the exclusion of ZERO.

**Expectation 2**
Higher degree of specialization of meaning in Rodigino: ZERO > ART > di+ART are hierarchically ordered with respect to complexity: ZERO is preferred in NEG, ART is preferred POS/ATEL>TEL; di+ART is possible (but always low in probability) in POS/ATEL=TEL.

**Expectation 3**
The rates of occurrences of optional determiners respect the hierarchy: less complex > more complex
NEG > POS / ATEL > TEL
Thank you!

We also thank:

Anna Cardinaletti, co-coordinator of the VariOpInTA project (Variazione e Opzionalità in ItaloRomanzo) and coauthor of most of the research we built on Luca Molinari (for his work on Piacentino) Micol Zanaga (for her work on Rodigino), and all the students of the Comparative Syntax classes 2017-18; 2018-19; 2019-20 for their availability and enthusiasm (names and works in references). Without them the VariOpInTA project wouldn’t be conceivable.

The VariOpInTA project is part of the «progetto di sviluppo di dipartimento di eccellenza Multilinguismo, multiculturalismo, diversità linguistica e culturale per il benessere delle persone e della società».

This work has been greatly inspired by the participation to PARTE – Partitivity in European languages, NWO, PI – Petra Sleeman.


Cerruti, Massimo / Regis, Riccardo (2020) “Partitive determiners in Piedmontese: a case of language variation and change in a contact setting”. Linguistics, 58(3)

Garzonio, Jacopo & Cecilia Poletto (2020) “Partitive objects in negative contexts in northern Italian dialects”. Linguistics, 58(3)


References


Vicenti, Rosa (2019) “Indefinite determiners in the dialect of Altamura (Central Apulia)”. Term paper, MA in Language Sciences, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice.
