

Description of the workshop:

Bare nouns vs. ‘partitive articles’: disentangling functions

Workshop Convenors:

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Description of the topic and research questions

A typological overview of partitive constructions is provided in Luraghi/Huumo (2014), a volume resulting from an SLE workshop organised in 2012. The proposed workshop is a follow-up of this event as it will focus on so-called partitive articles (henceforth PA), in comparison to bare nouns, and crucially zoom in on aspects like the **function**, the **semantics** and the **internal structure** of nominals with partitive articles and their bare counterpart, in a cross-linguistic perspective. Although there is abundant literature on both PAs, at least in Standard languages like French/Italian, and bare nouns in different languages (for French PAs cf. e.g. Bosveld-de Smet 1998, Kupferman 1979, 1994, Ihsane 2008; for bare nouns cf. e.g. contributions in Kabatek/Wall 2013 a.o.), these works do not offer a systematic comparison between the two types of nominals and many questions remain. Crucially, the proposed comparison will shed light on the interrelations between notions like **(in)definiteness**, **existentiality**, **scope**, **number**, **gender** and **individuation**.

Several Romance languages feature, inside their systems of nominal determination, an element traditionally called ‘partitive article’ (PA), often found in contexts where many European languages (e.g. Spanish, English, or German) have bare plural/mass nouns. The workshop aims at bringing together researchers working on various aspects pertaining to these nominals, in a comparative perspective (e.g. scope properties, semantics, syntactic distribution, syntactic analysis).

PAs are elements like *du/des* (of.the) in French and *del/dei* (of.the) in Italian, historically a conflation of *de* ‘of’ and the definite article, as in (1)-(2).

- (1) a. *Hier, Jean a acheté des livres.* (Fr)
b. *Ieri Gianni ha comprato dei libri.* (It)
yesterday John has bought PA.PL books
‘Yesterday John bought (some) books.’
- (2) a. *Hier, Jean a bu du vin.* (Fr)
b. *Ieri Gianni ha bevuto del vino.* (It)
yesterday John has drunk PA.M.SG wine
‘Yesterday John drank (some) wine.’

Despite their label, PAs seldom express a part-whole relation, the partitive interpretation being limited to the object of fragmentative verbs like ‘eat’ or ‘drink’ (Englebert 1992, Kupferman 1979). The most common interpretation of PAs, and the focus of this workshop, is their indefinite use (Storto 2003, Le Bruyn 2007, Cardinaletti/Giusti 2006, 2016), as in (1)-(2), where *des livres/dei libri* means ‘(some) books’ and *du vin/del vino* ‘(some) wine’.

The phenomena discussed in this workshop can be classified into two groups:

1. Evolution and distribution of PAs:

Although Romance languages **developed** from Latin, not all of them have PAs. As Latin didn’t have articles, a question that arises is when and why (indefinite) bare nouns gave way to nominals with articles, especially PAs. Although the evolution of PAs is addressed e.g. by Carlier/Lamiroy (2014), detailed diachronic studies and studies of other languages, also minor languages, are missing.

Why present-day Romance languages vary as to whether PAs are **obligatory or not** is another issue that is poorly understood: in French, there are no bare nouns in argument positions (except in special contexts like coordination, cf. Roodenburg 2004) and articles, including PAs, must be used; in Italian, bare nouns may alternate with PAs (Fr. *Je bois *(du) jus*, It. *Bevo (del) succo*, “I drink juice”; Cardinaletti/Giusti 2016 for Italian). Other Romance languages don’t have PAs at all but may feature a plural indefinite article (e.g. *unos* in Spanish, *niște* in Romanian) in addition to bare nouns (Stark 2007; Carlier/Lamiroy 2014; Giusti/Cardinaletti 2016; Carlier 2016). Some Germanic varieties seem to have special “partitive markers”, but they remain the exception rather than the rule. Thus, the question of the **grammaticalisation** of (partitive) articles and the diachronic changes in the **referential properties** of BNs arise and should be addressed thoroughly.

In addition to the (non)-obligatory status of PAs in a language that has PAs, many issues related to the **distribution** of nominals containing PAs (and of their bare counterparts) call for an analysis. For instance, French PAs may pattern with English bare nouns in some contexts (e.g. in (1)-(2) or with individual-level predicates as in **Des hommes sont blonds/*Men are blond*; Guéron 2006), but not in others (e.g. generic sentences like *Je déteste *des chats; *Des chiens aboient vs. I hate cats; Dogs bark*). Many such examples with an individual-level predicate (Dobrovie-Sorin 1997a,b) or a generic interpretation become acceptable despite the presence of a subject with a PA, if the right kind of element is present in the sentence (e.g. adjective, negation...) (Roig 2013). The role of the predicate, the information structure, operators, typically the negation, etc. in the distribution of nominals with PAs and of bare nouns needs thus to be accounted for.

2. Interpretation and internal structure:

Another issue at the heart of our event concerns the (lack of) correspondence between the **interpretation** of nominals with PAs and of bare nouns. Bare nouns, for instance, only have narrow **scope**, as in (3d) (Carlson 1977, Laca 1996, a.o.), except for Brazilian Portuguese (Wall forthcoming), whereas nominals with PAs are ambiguous between c) and d), just like (3a) (Dobrovie-Dorin/Beysade 2004, Ihsane 2008 for French; Zamparelli 2008, Cardinaletti/Giusti 2016 for Italian). This ambiguity however only concerns plural nominals with PAs. Nominals with a singular PA being unambiguous, the question arises what role **number** plays in these facts (Benincà 1980).

- (3) a. Hoy Juana tiene que leer unos artículos. (c or d) (McNally 2004:120)
 Today Juana has that read.inf a.pl articles
 ‘Today Juana has to read some articles.’
 b. Hoy Juana tiene que leer artículos. (d only)
 c. $(\exists x: \text{article}(x)) [\square [\text{read}(j,x)]]$
 d. $\square(\exists x: \text{article}(x)) [\text{read}(j,x)]$

Singular and plural nominals with PAs do not only differ in number: the former are also mass, whereas the latter are count. How scope, number, **individuation**, and possibly additional notions like **gender** and **existentiality** interact and are related to the **indefinite** interpretation of PAs remains to a large extent mysterious. Whether (some of) these notions are encoded in the syntactic structure of nominals with a PA and/or bare nouns, and if so how/where, also has to be formalised. The comparison between nominals with PAs and bare nouns will also enlighten the much debated issue of the existence of an **empty article** in the structure of the latter (Longobardi 1994).

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