

# Indefinite determiners in two northern Italian dialects, a quantitative approach.

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Cardinaletti and Giusti (2015) claim that the expression of indefiniteness in Italian is achieved with three related determiners: the null article (1), the so-called partitive article (2), and what is usually taken to be the definite article, which can however occur in indefinite contexts (3). As represented by (1)-(3) the three determiners are analysed by C&G as the result of the combination of overt and covert material in DP, more precisely, an indefinite determiner *di* co-varies with a silent counterpart in SpecDP and co-occurs with overt (art) or covert realization of gender and number features in D. The fourth logically possible combination (overt *di* with null D) is not grammatical in Italian (4):

- |                                    |  |                |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| 1. Ho mangiato patate              | [ <sub>DP</sub> 0 [ <sub>D</sub> 0]]           | zero           |
| 2. Ho mangiato <i>delle</i> patate | [ <sub>DP</sub> <i>di</i> [ <sub>D</sub> art]] | <i>di</i> +art |
| 3. Ho mangiato <i>le</i> patate    | [ <sub>DP</sub> 0 [ <sub>D</sub> art]]         | art            |
| 4. *Ho mangiato <i>di</i> patate   | [ <sub>DP</sub> <i>di</i> [ <sub>D</sub> 0]]   | bare <i>di</i> |
- 'I ate potatoes'

C&G further observe that the three possible forms vary across contexts and regional varieties, raising the question of whether they can be considered as expressing semantically different types of indefiniteness or different regional variants of the same determiner (due to contact with the local dialect) or a combination of the two possibilities. Based on the data provided by three AIS maps (1037, 1343, 637), C&G (2018) claim that the material in D are the result of two independent innovations from the mother language Latin which had neither indefinite *di* nor the article. The article in indefinite expressions is the only possibility in central-southern dialects and expands North-South in an isogloss that reaches basically all Italo-Romance with the exclusion of the Grigioni area. In the North and in the South, it coexists with zero (which does not appear in the Median-Central dialects). The determiner *di* has its center in Piedmont at the border with France, where it appears bare (thus providing evidence of the possibility of (4) in Italo-Romance. It expands towards East to Veneto and Istria in an isogloss that crosses the art-isogloss in Emilia Romagna, where *di*+art is the most robustly attested form. Only two areas display a single form: zero in the extreme North-West, art in the Center. *Di*+art is limited to the North and Tuscany. The most used forms are therefore art and zero, which often co-exist. In areas that display more than one form, C&G (2018) claim that zero is the less marked, art implies salient referents, *di*+art implies small quantity.

C&G's raise many questions regarding the geographical distribution and specialization of meaning vs true optionality of the four determiners in present-day dialects in contact with Italian. Answering these questions requires the precise individuation of the contexts that can diagnose core indefiniteness vs. salient indefinite referent vs. small indefinite quantity and the design of questionnaire to be ideally administered covering all Italian dialects. A large research project that is at its initial steps.

In this paper, we present the results from two Northern-Italian varieties, Piacentino and Rodigino, representing two different points of overlap of the two isoglosses: the overt *di* and the overt art. We limit the discussion to two contexts: Positive vs Negative sentences and Telic vs Atelic events.

## METHODOLOGY

**Data collection** was conducted through a questionnaire administered to 15 adult participants of each dialect of balanced age and gender. Each questionnaire was made of 20 items, each displaying

5 possible determiners: zero, art, bare *di*, and *certo*. More than one option could be chosen and in two cases the participant was asked to produce the sentence him/herself. The Piacentino interviews were conducted in the dialect while the Rodigino questionnaire was administered on-line. In both cases, when more than one option was chosen, the participant could specify whether the different choices would correspond to different interpretations.

Due to the presence of (quasi-)complete separations in our data, speakers' judgments were **analysed** with a Firth penalized logistic regression (penalized ML logistic regression), in which the following four predictors were all entered simultaneously into the model: 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 two-way and three-way interactions involving the factors determiner and dialect were included as well, to assess whether and to what extent the preferences of the two speakers' groups were modulated by the aspectual class of the predicate and by the clause polarity. The excellent predictive performance of this model is proved by its high goodness-of-fit score ( $C = 0.907$ ).

## RESULTS

**Overall**, both Piacentino and Rodigino pattern with Italian (1)-(3) and miss bare *di* (4). Furthermore, in Piacentino *di+art* is more acceptable than in Rodigino and art is more acceptable in Piacentino. This pattern is further modulated by the clause polarity and the aspectual class of the predicate. Specifically:

- In the **positive clauses**, Piacentino prefers art e *di+art* and does not display bare *di*; Rodigino prefers art;
- In the **negative clauses**, Piacentino allows all four determiners with a dispreference for zero and *di+art*; Rodigino equally favors zero e art and bans *di+art* (and bare *di*);
- With **atelic predicates**, Piacentino favors art e *di+art*; Rodigino favors art and disfavors *di+art*;
- With **telic predicates**, the two dialects only have art and *di+art* but Piacentino equally favors the two while Rodigino favors art

## DISCUSSION

Both dialects are at the crossroads of the art and *di* isoglosses. In Piacentino overt *di* in SpecDP can appear with overt or covert features in D, while in Rodigino *di* in SpecDP requires overt D. C&G's (2018) generalizations are confirmed as regards optionality and specialization of meaning:

- Art is the most used indefinite determiner in both dialects;
- *Di+art* is significantly more robust in Piacentino than in Rodigino. The frequency of occurrence POS > NEG; ATEL > TEL hold in both dialects;
- Zero is significantly more robust in Rodigino than in Piacentino. The frequency of occurrence again holds in both dialects: NEG > (\*)POS; ATEL > \*TEL;
- Bare *di* only occurs in Piacentino (if the clause is negative). Notably, it has a similar occurrence than zero in Rodigino NEG > \*POS; ATEL > \*TEL.

The scope of **negation** and atelic contexts favors the null head D in both dialects this produces zero in Rodigino and bare *di* (*ad*) in Piacentino. On the opposite side, **telicity** requires overt D. In telic contexts Piacentino freely allows *di+art* and art, while Rodigino strongly prefers art over *di+art* which is however possible. Notably, the most robust indefinite determiner in Rodigino, that is zero, is not allowed in telic contexts

## References

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