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Seven types of (in)definite article in Italian

Italian, like all other Romance languages, distinguishes a definite article *l-* (henceforth ART) from an indefinite one. The definite article is usually taken to express definiteness (presupposition of existence and unicity) ART:

    (1) Ho salutato la presidente del comitato.   'I greeted the president of the comittee.'

ART also conveys reference to kind. This is common to all Romance languages (cf. Laca 1990 for Spanish and English, Anscombre 2001 for French) and makes them different from Germanic languages, notably English:

    (2) Adoro *(le) mele / *(la) carne.   'I love apples / meat'

An unexpected use of ART which is partially found in languages other than Romance languages is its mandatory appearance in so-called weak definites. Recent literature distinguish WD with a genitive argument such as (3); WD such as (4), and WD with body parts such as (5):

    (3) Mario vorrebbe sposare la figlia di una femminista.
        'M. would like to marry the daughter of a feminist'
    (4) Maria va spesso all'ospedale.   'Maria often goes to the hospital.'
    (5) Maria e Gianni hanno alzato la mano.   'M and G. raised their hands.'

Regional varieties and special registers allow / require ART to combine with a proper name, as in (6) :

    (6) a. Ho visto la Maria.   'I saw Maria'
        b. Ho studiato il Manzoni.   'I studied Manzoni.'

Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016, 2018, 2020) note that in Italian, ART can introduce weak indefinite nominals as in (7a), which can have the same interpretation as with bare nouns (7b) and indefinites introduced by the so-called partitive article (7c), which Cardinaletti and Giusti (2015) analyse as being formed by an over determiner *de* + ART:

    (7) a. Ieri abbiamo mangiato i biscotti / la carne.
        b. Ieri abbiamo mangiato biscotti / carne.
        c. Ieri abbiamo mangiato delle mele / della carne.
          'Yesterday, we eat apples')

The different possibilities in (7) have different diatopic distribution across Italian dialects and are available in the colloquial standard with different rates of preferences, across regional varieties (cf. Giusti 2021, and the first results of the ongoing VariOpInTA project.

ART occurring in weak indefinites (mostly in the *di* + ART combination) has been related in formal semantics to with reference to kind, advocating weaking of some of the features composing of definiteness (Roberts 2003, Zamparelli 2002, Donazzan 2013, Leonetti 2019).

This talk will approach the issue from the opposite side, proposing with Carlson and Sussman (2005) that we are dealing with different (silent) determiners in Spec DP concording with a free morpheme realizing nominal features in D.

Appropriate diagnostics will be presented to distinguish across these indefinite determiners, capturing the cross-Romance variation, which is particularly rich across Italo-Romance varieties.

The proposal elaborates on Giusti's (2002, 2015) treatment of ART as a free functional morpheme encoding a bundle of nominal features (abstract Case, Number, and Gender) in the highest head projected by the nominal spine. Such a morpheme is combined with a determiner in its specifier, which is solely responsible for the interpretation of the nominal expression.

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