

Francoprovençal: what a spatial analysis of ‘partitive articles’ reveals about number marking on nominals

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In this presentation, we will address the question whether the (non-)use of partitive articles (henceforth PA, which historically stem from the fusion of the preposition DE and Latin ILLE-determiners and generally have an indefinite interpretation) correlates with phonologically overt number marking on the noun in Francoprovençal, a non-standardized, highly endangered Gallo-Romance language (Zulato/Kasstan/Nagy 2018), which does not only have PAs but also an invariable DE. We will show the fine-grained spatial distributions of PAs/DE and overt number marking on nouns in the Swiss and Aosta Valley (Italy) varieties, which reveals that PAs are not used to compensate the absence/loss of overt plural morphology on nouns, contrary to what is mentioned in the literature (Delfitto/Schroten 1991, Gerards/Stark 2020, a.o; for a diachronic perspective Mathieu 2009, Carlier/Lamiroy 2014).

We will present several maps based on fieldwork data assembled in the ALAVAL, an audiovisual atlas of Swiss varieties, plus additional data from fieldwork in the Aosta Valley in 2017 (see Ihsane 2018, Stark/Gerards 2020) as well as in Evolène, Valais, in 2019 (see Davatz/Ihsane/Stark accepted) to show, *firstly*, that, in our data, there is no spatial correlation between the distribution of overt number marking on nouns and the availability of PAs, although there is a negative correlation between the distribution of overt *sigmatic* plural marking, on masculine nouns exclusively, and of PAs in Evolène, the only locality with this type of number marking. This means that we cannot state in a generalized way that Francoprovençal varieties with overt plural marking on nouns do not have PAs (or that the absence of plural marking on the noun leads to the necessity of using PAs, cf. also Pinzin/Poletto (2022) for an analysis of Northern Italian Dialects). However, it is true that a dedicated form for the plural suffix (only attested in Evolène) does not co-occur with PAs in the respective varieties.

Secondly, we will show that the spatial distribution of the elements under study reveals two important general facts on number marking on noun phrases: (i) in Francoprovençal, some noun phrases are overtly marked for number twice, once on the noun and once on the PA, while (ii) some noun phrases are not overtly marked for number at all since the noun may be unmarked and (co-)occur with invariable DE. The fact that, in Francoprovençal, nominal groups can lack overt number marking altogether is something which is typologically striking and semantically strongly marked.

This research adds to the knowledge of nominal determination in Francoprovençal but also more generally in Romance by showing that number marking on noun phrases in Romance is more complex than described in the literature and that the role of PAs in these mechanisms is not necessarily prominent.

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