

# INDEFINITE OBJECTS IN MICRO-VARIATION. A CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTITIVES ARTICLES, BARE NOMINALS AND DEFINITE DETERMINERS IN NORTHERN ITALY\*

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*Abstract.* This contribution focuses on indefinite arguments in object position. We address this topic from the point of view of the crosslinguistic variation within the Romance continuum, especially looking at Northern Italian Dialects (NIDs). The target is to describe the distribution of the different possible realizations of this kind of arguments in this area by means of an in-depth analysis of the data coming from the ASIIt database and from three new fieldwork sessions. We show that the microvariation attested in this area reflects and refines the “macro” variation attested among the major Romance languages. The fine-grained picture that can be drawn from a closer look to a set of minimally varying languages helps crosslinguistic comparison and, consequently, the modeling of more precise analyses.

## 1. Introduction

Crosslinguistic variation and its limits are at the core of linguistic research. The main target of crosslinguistic analyses is to reduce the apparently wild discrepancies among different languages abstracting a core of variably encoded grammatical categories. In this contribution, we focus on the variation in the encoding of indefinite objects, restricting ourselves to the assessment of this variation in Northern Italian Dialects. This topic has already been investigated by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), who analyze data coming from the AIS (*Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz, Jahrbuch und Jud 1928–1940*), a classical

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source for Romance dialectology. These varieties, even if closely related and spoken in a relatively small area, show great variation in the encoding of indefinites. Bare Nouns (BNs), indefinite Partitive Articles (PAs), the bare case/preposition ‘of’ (henceforth “bare DE”<sup>1</sup>) and definite articles compete in the lexicalization of indefinite objects. Some varieties present only one of these possibilities, other varieties more than one, with subtle semantic differences reflected in their specific distribution. Such a linguistic landscape is a perfect testbed for assessing the limits of variation in the field of indefinites. The research questions we are going to deal with are: How are the different realizations of indefinite objects distributed in Northern Italian Dialects? Is it possible to reduce these varieties to discrete groups and relate them to the ones already identified for the “major” Romance languages (a.o., Delfitto & Schroter 1991, Stark 2016)? In order to face these questions, we will adopt a multidimensional perspective, collecting our data from both a database (ASIt, *Atlante sintattico d’Italia*, freely available at <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>) and two tests we ran in 2018–2020 in Liguria, Emilia and Friuli.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the variation attested in Italian, French and Spanish in encoding indefinite objects. Section 3 focuses on dialectal Italo-Romance varieties, on the basis of the already existing literature. In Section 4 we present the data we collected and in Section 5 and 6 we discuss their main methodological and theoretical outcomes and the issues left open. A final concluding paragraph summarizes our findings.

## 2. Indefinite objects in Romance, an overview

### 2.1. Partitive Articles and Bare Nominals

It is well known from the literature (Delfitto & Schroter 1991, Stark 2016, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018) that Romance languages vary with respect to the way indefinite objects are encoded. In Italian and Spanish, for example, it is possible to encode mass/count indefinite objects without any overt determiner (Bare Nouns, BNs). French, on the other hand, does not allow for Bare Nouns in argument position and, in order to express the same semantics, employs indefinite Partitive Articles (PAs).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Latin *de* ‘of’, the common form from which the different forms attested in NIDs derive.

<sup>2</sup> As for the gloss abbreviations, we adopt the Leipzig Glossing Rules, which can be found here: <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>. In addition, we use the following glosses: CL = clitic, PART = partitive (used only for clitic pronouns of the type of *It. ne*)

- (1) Mangio pane. (It.) / Como pan. (Sp.) / Je mange du  
eat.1SG bread / eat.1SG Bread / I eat of.the.M.SG  
pain. (Fr.)  
bread  
'I eat bread.'
- (2) Mangio ciliegie. (It.) / Como cerezas (Sp.) / Je mange des  
eat.1SG cherries / eat.1SG cherries / I eat.1.SG of.the.PL  
cerises. (Fr.)  
cherries  
'I eat cherries.'

PAs are morphologically complex forms homophonous with the conflation of the preposition *de* 'of' and the definite article (for an in-depth analysis of French PAs, see Ihsane 2008):

- (3) Le jouet du garçon / des garçons.  
the toy of.the.M.SG boy / of.the.PL boys  
'The toy of the boy / boys.'

As noted in the introduction, we refer to the first part of PAs as DE, indicating the fact that in the languages under analysis the first member of these complex forms diachronically descends from the Latin preposition *de* 'from' (see Carlier & Lamiroix 2014).<sup>3</sup>

PAs are present in Italian too and coexist with BNs (Renzi 1982, Chierchia 1997, Storto 2003, Zamparelli 2008, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016).

- (4) Mangio del pane. / Conosco degli studenti.  
eat.1SG of.the.M.SG bread / know.1SG of.the.M.PL students  
'I eat bread.' / 'I know students.'

In both languages, PAs are used to introduce indefinite arguments and do not denote any real partitivity in the sense of Jackendoff (1968) and Selkirk (1977).<sup>4</sup> The sentences in (1), (2) and (4) do not denote a partition of a definite set, as it is instead the case in (5):

- (5) Three of the boys you met yesterday.

The presence of both PAs and BNs, however, should not lead to think that Italian shows optionality with respect to the choice of the form of the indefinite objects. PAs and BNs are not in free variation. There are

<sup>3</sup> We are not implying that PAs are always formed by means of a simple concatenation process (as Fr. *de la* = of+the.F.SG). Masculine singular *du*, for example, is synchronically a single morph and not the result of the concatenation of *de* 'of' and '*le*'. What we imply is that the form of indefinite PAs is homophonous with the form of the preposition DE plus the definite article, as highlighted in (7) and (8).

<sup>4</sup> But see Hoeksma (1996) and Falco & Zamparelli (2019) for an analysis of the different shades that partitivity can take.

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contexts in which only PAs are possible and others in which only BNs are. We provide here some tests as an example, although there might be others. The general semantic distinction overarching the partially complementary distribution of the two forms is that BNs cannot have wide scope or be specific (see Enç 1991, Ihsane 2008), while PAs can be.<sup>5</sup>

- (6) \*Non hai invitato colleghi, Marco e Lucia.  
not have.2SG invited colleagues Marco and Lucia.
- (7) Non hai invitato dei colleghi, Marco e Lucia.  
Not have.2SG invited of.the.M.PL colleagues Marco and Lucia  
'You didn't invite some colleagues, Marco and Lucia.'
- (8) \*Pane l' ho mangiato, altro no.<sup>6</sup>  
bread it have.1SG eaten other no
- (9) Del pane l' ho mangiato, dell' altro no.  
of.the.M.SG bread it have.1SG eaten of.the.M.SG other no  
'I ate part of the bread, while I left some of it.'
- (10) \*Oggi ho incontrato ragazzi che mi avevano  
today have.1SG met boys that me.DAT had.3PL  
presentato ieri.  
presented yesterday

<sup>5</sup> Two notes on this. First, for some speakers there is a contrast between plural and mass PAs with respect to the possibility of having a wide scope interpretation, as in the following:

- i Non ho bevuto del vino, quello che ha portato Marco.  
'I didn't drink some wine, the one that Marco brought.'

For Cardinaletti & Giusti (2016: 60) this interpretation is not available. Our judgments as native speakers are not so neat, however. We leave this issue aside for the moment, noting that the contrast might be due to different varieties of Italian. Second, while it is the case that PAs can be specific/have wide scope (while BNs cannot), they need not to, as the following sentence suggests.

- ii Cerca da sempre dei cani che sappiano scrivere, ma, ovviamente, non ne ha mai trovati.  
'He's been looking for dogs that can write since forever, but, clearly, he never found any'

We will return to this point (i.e., the cross-categorization between referential interpretations and forms of the indefinite) in Section 6.

<sup>6</sup> As a reviewer points out, there is another source of ungrammaticality in this sentence: dislocated BNs can only be resumed by the partitive clitic *ne* and not by object clitics. However, partitive clitics, in Italian, are incompatible with the reading we are aiming at, in which two identifiable/specific quantities of bread are compared with respect to a predicate (*mangiare* 'to eat').

- i \*Di pane, non ne ho mangiato un kg, di altro sì.  
of bread not PART.CL eaten one kg of other yes.

We believe that these two points must be considered together, strengthening the observation: Italian BNs can only be non-specific/identifiable and, therefore, can only be resumed by a partitive clitic (which can only resume non-specific/identifiable nominals or subparts of nominals).

- (11) Oggi ho incontrato dei ragazzi che mi  
 today have.1SG met of.the.M.PL boys that me.DAT  
 avevano presentato ieri.  
 had.3PL presented yesterday  
 ‘Today I met some students someone introduced me yesterday’

PAs, on the other hand, are not available in contexts like (12) and (13) – under the reading in which the speaker refers to an habitual activity and not to an ongoing activity of building/reading a certain number of houses/books – which we define as “habitual long term activities”.<sup>7</sup>

- (12) Costruisco case da 30 anni, ma una così brutta non l’  
 build.1SG houses from 30 years but one so ugly not it  
 ho mai vista.  
 have.1SG never seen  
 ‘I’ve been building houses for 30 years, but I’ve never seen such an ugly one’

- (13) \*Costruisco delle case da 30 anni, ma una così  
 build.1SG of.the.F.SG houses from 30 years but one so  
 brutta non l’ho mai vista.  
 ugly not it have.1SG never seen

- (14) È 30 anni che leggo libri, ma uno così bello  
 is.3SG 30 years that read.1SG books but one so beautiful  
 non l’ho mai letto!  
 not it have.1SG never read  
 ‘I’ve been reading books for 30 years, but I’ve never read such a beautiful one!’

- (15) \*È 30 anni che leggo dei libri, ma uno così  
 is 30 years that read.1SG of.the.M.PL books but one so  
 bello non l’ho mai letto!  
 beautiful not it have.1SG never read

<sup>7</sup> There is a further context in which we find an asymmetry in the availability of BNs/PAs between Italian/Spanish and French, the complement position of “naming” verbs like *chiamare/appeller* ‘to call’.

- i Queste si chiamano (\*delle) fragole.  
 these.F.PL self call.3PL of.the.F.PL strawberries  
 ii Ça s’ appelle \*(des) fraises.  
 it self calls of.the.PL strawberries  
 ‘These are called strawberries.’

The comparison, however, is not straightforward. There is a difference in agreement between the structures; in Italian the preverbal element, the postverbal one and the verb must covary in number and gender, while the same does not hold in French. This might have to do with the pro drop property of Italian, an independent disturbing factor. Given these complications, we will set aside these examples in the present contribution.

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In French, on the other hand, these contexts require PAs and are otherwise ungrammatical.

- (16) Je construis des maisons depuis 30 ans.  
I build.1SG of.the.PL houses since 30 years  
'I've been building houses for 30 years'
- (17) \*Je construis maisons depuis 30 ans.  
I build.1SG houses since 30 years
- (18) Ça fait 30 ans que je lis des livres.  
it makes 30 years that I read.1SG of.the.PL books  
'I've been reading books for 30 years'
- (19) \*Ça fait 30 ans que je lis livres.  
it makes 30 years that I read.1SG books

Whatever the fine-grained difference between the use of PAs and BNs in Italian turns out to be (e.g., Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018 differentiate between an unmarked indefinite interpretation and a "small quantity" interpretation), the relevant fact for our purposes is that such a difference exists: there is no real optionality between BNs and PAs in Italian.<sup>8</sup> This, in turn, leads us to the conclusion that Spanish and Italian are opposed to French with respect to the encoding of indefinites in these contexts of habitual long term activities (repeated from (12) and (16)), so that Italian and Spanish use BNs, while French PAs:

- (20) Costruisco case da 30 anni.
- (21) He estado construyendo casas durante 30 años.  
have.1SG been building houses for 30 years
- (22) Je construis des maisons depuis trente ans.  
'I've been building houses for 30 years'

With respect to the specificity-inducing context, French PAs behave similarly to Italian PAs. Both in Italian (see (7)–(11)) and French, PAs can be interpreted as specific (see Ihsane 2008:137–140)<sup>9</sup> which could indicate that this value is the kernel out of which PAs diachronically developed to cover additional semantic values:

- (23) J'ai acheté des livres. Il s'agit de Hamlet,  
I have bought of.the.PL books it self is.about of Hamlet

<sup>8</sup> This statement must be fine-tuned to the relevant variation we find among the different regional Italians. The assessment of this variation lies outside the scope of this paper, see Cardinaletti & Giusti 2020 for an approach to this issue.

<sup>9</sup> The same asymmetry with respect to mass PAs that has been signaled in n. 4 for Italian holds in French too (Ihsane 2008: 139–140).

Moby Dick et Sula.  
 Moby Dick and Sula  
 'I bought some books, namely Hamlet, Moby Dick and Sula.'  
 (Ihsane 2008:138)

Spanish, instead, lacks indefinite PAs altogether. In these contexts, we see different indefinite markers like *unos* 'some'.

(24) Compré unos libros: Hamlet, Moby Dick y Sula.  
 bought.1SG some.M.PL books Hamlet Moby Dick and Sula  
 'I bought some books: Hamlet, Moby Dick and Sula.'

We summarize the partial picture we drew for French, Italian and Spanish in the following table.

The symbol ✓ means that the element is available in the given context, ✗ that it is not. For Spanish, PAs are not available. The parallel form *unos* is signaled in brackets.

## 2.2. Generic/weak definites

The picture becomes more complex when we take into consideration definite articles, which can have generic interpretations (weak referential or kind) and be used in contexts akin to the ones we presented before.<sup>10</sup> This overlap is particularly evident when the definite in the weak/generic

**Table 1.** Possible and impossible interpretations for PAs and BNs in French, Italian and Spanish. [Colour table can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

		PAs	BNs
Fr.	Specificity/wide scope	✓	✗
	Habitual long-term activity	✓	✗
It.	Specificity/wide scope	✓	✗
	Habitual long-term activity	✗	✓
Sp.	Specificity/wide scope	✗ (✓ <i>unos</i> )	✗
	Habitual long-term activity	✗ (✗ <i>unos</i> )	✓

<sup>10</sup> On the topic of weak referentiality, see Carlson et Al. 2006 and the contributions in Aguilar-Guevara, Le Bruyn and Zwarts 2014. Gerards 2020 and Gerards & Stark (2020), following Krifka et Al. (1995), further distinguish between Short Weak Definites (SWD, exemplified in the text) and Representative Object Interpretation (ROI):

i We were in Alaska and we saw the grizzly.

The expression "the grizzly" does not refer to a unique entity in the discourse but to a generic representative of the kind "grizzly". ROI are different from SWD in that they can introduce referents in the discourse and are not lexically restricted (for the lexical restriction affecting SWD see below, (37)–(40)). ROI are not relevant for our argumentation and we will not dwell more on them.

interpretation (henceforth G/WD) combines with mass or plural Ns, which can also combine with PAs or be used as BNs. The following Italian sentences, for example, have similar interpretations:

- (25) Mia sorella compra carne tutti i giorni.  
My sister buys meat all the.M.PL days
- (26) Mia sorella compra della carne tutti i giorni.  
My sister buys of.the.F.SG meat all the.M.PL days
- (27) Mia sorella compra la carne tutti i giorni.  
My sister buys the.F.SG meat all the.M.PL days  
'My sister buys meat every day.'

In (27) we see an overt definite article but the uniqueness requirement that is usually tied to it is absent. The speaker does not refer to a definite amount of meat salient in the context but to the event of buying meat every day.

G/WDs are subject to specific restrictions. First of all, it has been observed that they only work with some V+N couples. Both in Italian and English, *the book* in combination with a verb like *read* does not give rise to a G/WD interpretation, while *the newspaper* does.<sup>11</sup>

- (28) I read the newspaper today.
- (29) Ho letto il giornale oggi.  
have.1SG read the.M.SG newspaper today  
'I read the newspaper today.'
- (30) I read the book today.
- (31) Ho letto il libro oggi.  
have.1SG read the.M.SG book today  
'I read the book today.'

The argument *the book/il libro* can only be interpreted as referring to a unique entity salient in the discourse, while this is not the case for *the newspaper/il giornale*. *Reading the newspaper* is an activity that does not have to involve a unique salient entity. A second restriction regarding G/WDs is related to the specificity/wide scope inducing contexts in (32)–(34), where we showed that Italian PAs are grammatical while BNs are not. In these contexts, the use of a definite article introducing the argument is incompatible with a G/WD interpretation:

<sup>11</sup> This has been linked to the fact that the G/WD interpretation is only available when the pairing is "institutionalized". The lexical restriction also affects number: some V+N pairings work as a G/WD only in the singular while others only in the plural. There seem to be no cases in which the G/WD interpretation is possible both in the singular and in the plural (Gerards and Stark 2020: 130).



- (32) Non hai invitato i colleghi, Marco e Lucia.  
not have.2SG invited the.M.PL colleagues Marco and Lucia  
'You didn't invite the colleagues, Marco and Lucia'
- (33) #Il pane l'ho mangiato, l'altro no.  
the bread it have.1SG eaten the.M.SG other not  
'I ate the bread, but not the other one.'
- (34) Oggi ho incontrato i ragazzi che mi  
today have.1SG met the.M.PL boys that me.DAT  
avevano presentato ieri.  
had.3PL presented yesterday  
'Today I met the students they presented me yesterday'

(32) and (34) are fully grammatical sentences, but it is necessary to interpret the nominal introduced by the definite article as denoting a unique referent salient in the discourse. This interpretation is forced in (33) too, but in this case such an interpretation is not readily compatible with the meaning of the whole sentence, which implies a comparison between two quantities/types of bread. In such a situation, referring to a unique salient bread in the discourse is infelicitous, unless it is possible to contrast it with another bread of a different type (adding a demonstrative or a modifier, as the adjective *bianco* 'white', resolves the issue: *il pane bianco l'ho mangiato, l'altro no* 'I ate the white bread, not the other one').

We check now if G/WDs are available in the contexts we defined as "habitual long-term activities" (see (12)–(15)), where we showed that in Italian (and Spanish) only BNs are acceptable, while in French PAs are obligatory. Given the lexical restrictions we noted before, we must check these contexts with plausible V+N couples as, for example, the verb *lavare* 'to wash' paired with the noun *piatti* 'dishes'.<sup>12</sup>

- (35) È 10 anni che lavo i piatti.  
is 10 years that wash.1SG the.M.PL dishes
- (36) Lavo i piatti da 10 anni  
wash.1SG the.M.PL dishes from 10 years  
'I've been cleaning dishes for 10 years.'

(35) and (36) are perfectly grammatical and allow for a G/WD interpretation of the definite article. The speaker is referring to the fact

<sup>12</sup> Note that in some NIDs, the activity of washing dishes is expressed by means of a prepositional verb and the complement (dishes/floors) is not overtly expressed:

i E toze broarà su.  
the girls wash.FUT up  
'the girls will wash the dishes.' (Gazzo PD)

This shows the level of "institutionalization" of the activity of washing dishes. Another activity showing a similar behavior is washing floors.

that she has been regularly doing the activity of washing dishes over the last 10 years, without any reference to a unique and salient group of dishes. G/WDs are therefore available in these contexts, showing that, with respect to contexts investigated, G/WDs in Italian overlap with BNs in terms of interpretation. Both BNs and G/WDs are not available when the context forces specificity/wide scope and both are possible with “habitual long-term activities”. On the other hand, this overlap is restricted only to the set of V+N couples with which G/WDs are possible. The general behavior of Italian is summarized in Table 2.

For the distribution of G/WDs in French, see Milner (1982), Corblin (2013) and references therein. Also in French, the distribution of G/WDs does not seem to differ from the one we highlighted for Italian, so that it should be possible to include G/WDs in the table for French with the same distribution we see in Italian. The same is valid for Spanish (see Aguilar-Guevara 2014).

### 3. The view from Italian Dialects

As already underlined in the introductory Section, Italian Dialects show great variation with respect to the realization of indefinite objects. This variation has been recently approached in Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018). On the basis of the AIS data, they show that the crosslinguistic variation in encoding indefiniteness within Italo-Romance is not only restricted to PAs, BNs and definite articles but involves also another competitor, bare DE.<sup>13</sup> This form is mainly attested in the area of Val d’Aosta and Piedmont.

- (37) A gavar de vin.  
to search of wine  
‘To search wine.’ (Ronco Canavese, TO)

Italo-Romance varieties show different preferences with respect to the realization of indefinite objects with BNs, PAs, bare DE and definite

**Table 2.** Possible and impossible interpretations for PAs, BNs and G/WDs in Italian. [Colour table can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

		PAs	BNs	G/WDs
<b>It.</b>	Specificity/wide scope	✓	✗	✗
	Habitual long-term activity	✗	✓	✓*

\*lexically restricted

<sup>13</sup> The investigation is based on three maps: 1037 “if there was water”, 1343 “to go to the cellar to take wine”, and 637 “to go and look for violets”.

determiners. Some varieties admit more than one option, some other varieties only one. No variation is attested, for example, in the Graubunden area in Switzerland (only BNs) in Valle d'Aosta e Piedmont (only bare DE) and in Center-South to Northern Calabria (only definite determiners). The other areas show more than one option.

Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) analyze this crosslinguistic competition proposing that dialects may differ as to how a single underlying DP structure headed by an indefinite  $D^{\circ}$  is realized. The single underlying structure is composed of a specifier – optionally filled by DE – and a head – optionally filled by a definite article.<sup>14</sup> Crosslinguistic variation is modeled as a function of a set of micro- and nano-parameters determining which part of the indefinite DP is realized, only DE, only the definite article, both (PAs) or neither of the two (BNs). When a variety has more than one possibility, one carries the “unmarked” indefinite flavor and the others convey some additional semantic import, so that the proposed parameters should take care of the definition of the different semantic interpretations assigned to the different options.

With this background information, let us proceed to the presentation of our data. We first analyze data coming from corpora to show the distribution of BNs/PAs/definite articles/bare DE and use corpora data to determine which subareas are the potentially most interesting for our field work investigation. Then, we turn to data coming from our own field work, which is specifically designed to test the problem we are dealing with and evidently does not have the drawbacks of a corpus.

## 4. Data and results

### 4.1. *ASIt*

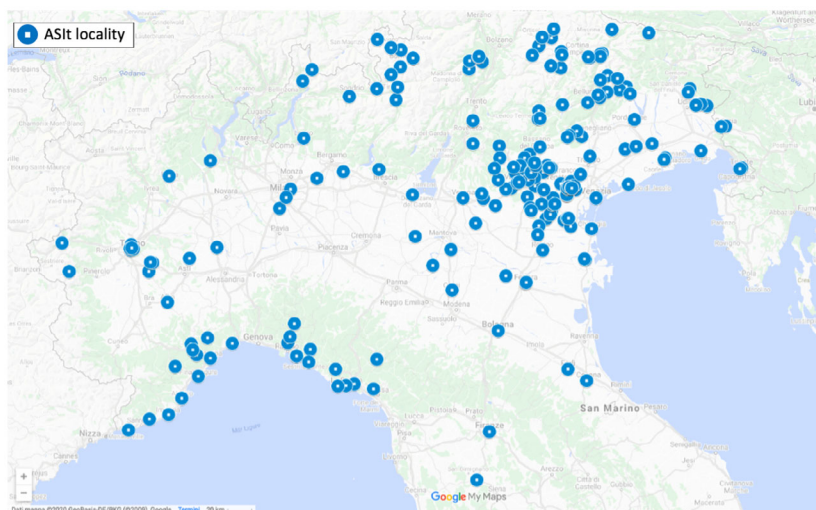
The previous studies on this topic analyzed data coming from the AIS. The great advantage of the AIS is that the data are very well distributed on the territory, there are almost no areas for which there are no observation points. Given its conception as a mainly lexical source, however, the AIS cannot be exploited for in-depth syntactic analyses. Moreover, the data have been collected almost one century ago and cannot be considered highly representative for the present-day status of the languages. Given these shortcomings, we opted for collecting data

<sup>14</sup> In their analysis, both the DE and the definite article in PAs are not directly related to the other instances of the same form within the language (outside PAs, DE is a ‘genitive’ preposition, and the definite article is used to mark specific semantics of the DP, as definiteness or kind reference). The DE morph is analyzed as an indefinite determiner, while the definite article as a dummy which is present only to support gender and number features. For a different take on (Italian) PAs and their relationship with genitive DE and the definite article see Chierchia (1997) and Zamparelli (2008).

from a different source, the ASIt (*Atlante sintattico d'Italia*), freely available at <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>. The ASIt contains data collected by means of different questionnaires. The input sentences are in Italian and the informant provides a translation in the local variety. The translation is provided in a written form (the informants are not asked to write in IPA but to be consistent in their transcription). The presence of explicit contexts and full sentences allows for better controlling the syntactic variables with respect to the AIS. It has to be noted, however, that the coverage of the ASIt is far less complete and balanced compared to the AIS. The uneven distribution of the locations is clearly visible in the following map, which shows all the locations for which we have data in Northern Italy.

The ASIt materials do not cover the central area (south-west of Lombardy, west of Emilia), while most of the data are present in the north-east.

For our investigation, we selected and tagged all the outputs of 13 input sentences coming from the AISIt questionnaires, restricting ourselves to Northern Italian Dialects (NIDs).<sup>15</sup> The choice of these varieties is due to the fact that they show the variation we are interested in. The 13 sentences have been selected on the basis of the presence of an indefinite argument in object position: BN (6 sentences), PA (1 sentence) or G/WD (6 sentences).



**MAP 1:** Inquiry points for the ASIt database in Northern Italy. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

<sup>15</sup> The whole set of tagged sentences (plus others) is available in a soon-to-be open access corpus that has been created within the ongoing project DiFuPaRo (PO1642/8-1).

- (38) BN input:
- a. Non comprano mai frutta, le mie sorelle.  
'My sisters never buy fruit.'
  - b. Non compri mai mele.  
'You never buy apples.'
  - c. Non mangia mai frutta, quella ragazza.  
'That girl never eats fruit.'
  - d. Non mangiamo mai frutta.  
'We never eat fruit.'
  - e. Non mangiamo mai pesce.  
'We never eat fish.'
  - f. Vende solo caffè.  
'She/he sells only coffee.'
- (39) G/WD input:
- a. Carlo non mangia la frutta.  
'Carlo doesn't eat fruit.'
  - b. Chi mangia le patate?  
'Who eats potatoes?'
  - c. Chi porta il pane?  
'Who will bring bread?'
  - d. Compro il pane io oggi?  
'Should I buy the bread today?'
  - e. Non mangio la carne.  
'I don't eat meat.'
  - f. Paolo mangia la frutta. Massimo no.  
'Paolo eats fruit, Massimo doesn't.'
- (40) PA input:
- a. Non leggete mai dei libri.  
'You never read books.'

The balance between different input types is clearly not optimal, but the ASIIt data contain only a single input sentence with a PA, therefore it was not possible to do otherwise. Furthermore, all of the BNs and PAs inputs contain negation, which is clearly an interfering factor, especially with respect to the distribution of bare DE (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3.3).

This subdivision is methodologically relevant for defining the different varieties with respect to the realization of indefinite objects. We classify the varieties looking at (i) the different levels of consistency with the input and (ii) the types of alternative translations attested. For example, two varieties can be equally inconsistent with respect to BN inputs (i.e., both do not replicate BNs in the translation) but receive a different

classification because one variety substitutes them with PAs while the other with bare DE.<sup>16</sup>

In the next section we will look at the different patterns that can be found in the NIDs, on the basis of the ASIIt data.

#### 4.2. *The distribution of indefinites in NIDs, the ASIIt data.*

The research question we intend to tackle in this section regards the scope of the variation: Which patterns do we observe with respect to the encoding of indefinite nominals in NIDs? Let us first look at the results concerning the 6 input sentences in which there is a BN, starting from assessing the consistency of the BN to BN translations (all the following examples are translations of the input sentence (38)b).

- (41) No te compri mai pomi.  
not you buy.2SG never apples  
'You never buy apples.' (Arsiero, VI)

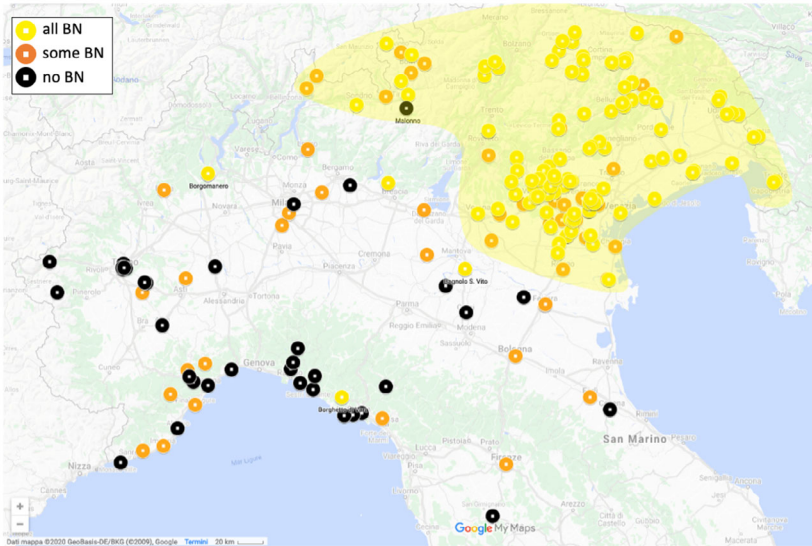
Map 2 shows the locations in which every BN in the input has been translated with a BN (yellow), the locations in which at least one BN in the input has been translated with a BN (orange) and the location in which no BN in the input has been translated with a BN (black).

We highlight in yellow the area in which the majority of the varieties show a very consistent BN to BN translation. This area includes Friuli, Veneto, Trentino, Alto Adige and Valtellina. Outside of the "yellow/BN area" only 4 locations show a consistent presence of BNs: Borgomanero (NO), Brione (BS), Bagnolo San Vito (MN) and Borghetto di Vara (SP). On the other hand, all the black dots (no BN) are outside this area (except for Malonno (BS), which is marginally within this area, as expected since Eastern Lombard has been traditionally recognized to be influenced by Veneto). The distribution of the BN translations, therefore, underlines an asymmetry in the NIDs with respect to the realization of indefinite objects. Following our methodology, we check now for the distribution of the different types of alternative translations attested, starting with PAs.

- (42) Te' n camper mai di pom.  
you not buy never of.the.M.PL apples  
'You never buy apples.' (Carpi, RE)

Map 3 shows the locations in which all BNs have been translated with PAs (dark green), the locations in which at least one BN has been

<sup>16</sup> Not every location has been tested for every sentence. This depends on two factors: (i) the informants do not always translate every sentence in a questionnaire (due to distraction, complexity of the input sentence, etc.), (ii) not every questionnaire has been tested in all locations (e.g., the sentence *vende solo caffè* '(s)he sells only coffee' is present in a questionnaire that has only been tested in a few locations).



MAP 2: Distribution of BN to BN translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

translated with a PA (light green) and the locations in which no BN has been translated with a PA (black).

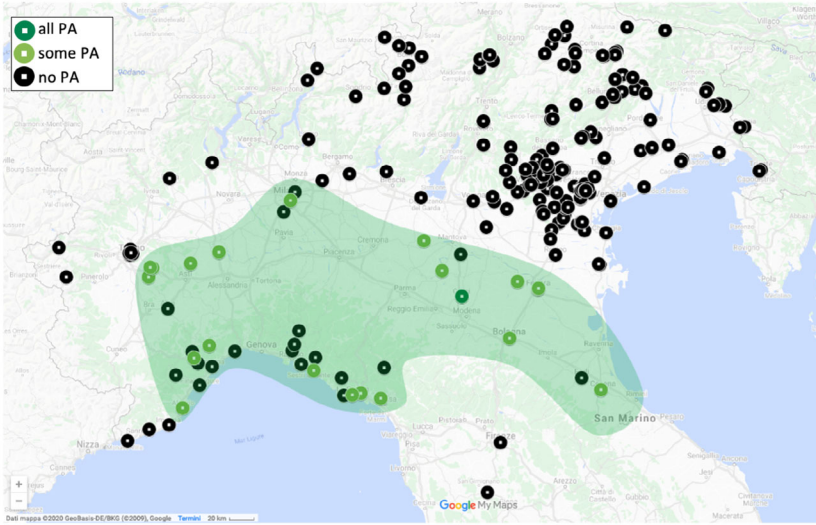
The area highlighted in green includes all the locations in which at least one PA is attested as a translation of a BN in the input and the location (Carpi, MO) in which only PAs are attested. It includes Emilia Romagna, Liguria (the eastern part), central Lombardy and the flatlands of Piedmont (excluding Turin). Even if the southern part of Lombardy is not covered by the ASI database, we decided to highlight it in green following the distribution of PAs in the surrounding areas and the AIS data in Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018).

The second attested option for translating a BN in the input is to employ a bare DE (Map 4).

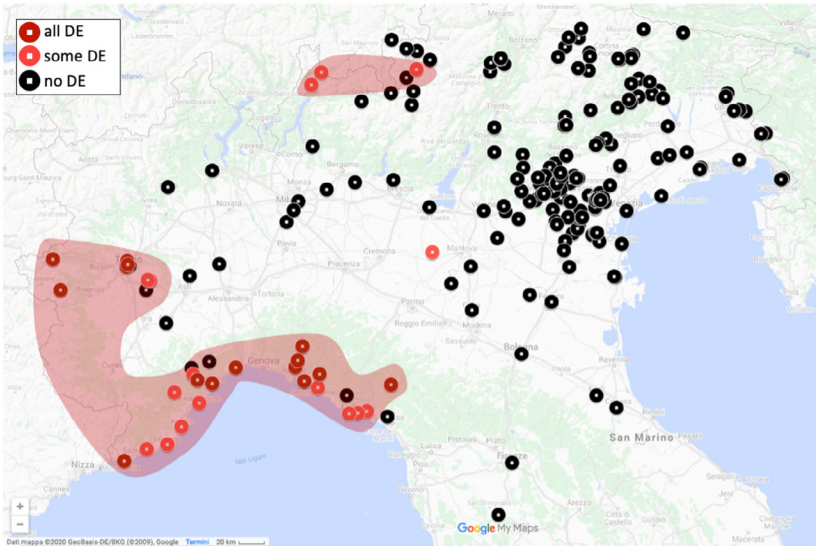
- (43) Ti te n' catti mai d' meji.  
 you you not buy.2SG never of apples  
 'You never buy apples.' (Carcare, SV)

The locations in which at least one bare DE is attested are in pink, the locations in which all BNs are translated as bare DE are in red, the locations in which no BN is translated as a bare DE are in black.

In this case, we have two distinct areas highlighted in red. The first area comprehends Liguria and the western part of Piedmont, with Turin. The second corresponds to a part of Valtellina (Schenone, Villa di Chiavenna, Frontale di Sondalo, SO). There is an additional isolated occurrence of



MAP 3: Distribution of BN to PA translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



MAP 4: Distribution of BN to DE translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



bare DE at Redonesco (MN).<sup>17</sup> Note that the “green/PA area” and the “red/DE area” overlap in Liguria, while the “yellow/BN” area and “red/DE area” overlap in Valtellina. We will get back to these observations later in this Section.

The final possibility is to translate a BN in the input with a definite article.

- (44) Ta   compret   mai   i                   pom.  
       you buy.2SG never the.M.PL apples  
       ‘You never buy apples.’ (Calciate, BG)

Map 5 shows their distribution. The locations in which at least one BN is translated with a definite article are in light blue, the locations in which all BNs are translated as definite articles are in purple, the locations in which no BN is translated with a definite article are in black.

In this case, we notice that the possibility of translating BNs with a definite article is attested almost everywhere, with the exceptions of Liguria, Friuli, and Trentino. Ligurian speakers use almost exclusively DE/PAs when translating a BN in the input, while Friulian and Trentino speakers use almost exclusively BNs.

Let us now consider the cases in which the input is a definite article with a weak referential interpretation. Map 6 shows the distribution of the definite article translations. As above, the purple locations consistently show a definite article in the translations, the light blue ones show at least one definite article translation, while the black ones show no definite article translation.

In this case, there is no area-specific distribution to be highlighted.<sup>18</sup> No real asymmetry is attested.

The sporadically attested other translations of G/WDs are compressed here in a single map (Map 7). The colors identify the same outputs as

<sup>17</sup> Redonesco has only one occurrence of bare DE (input (49)c).

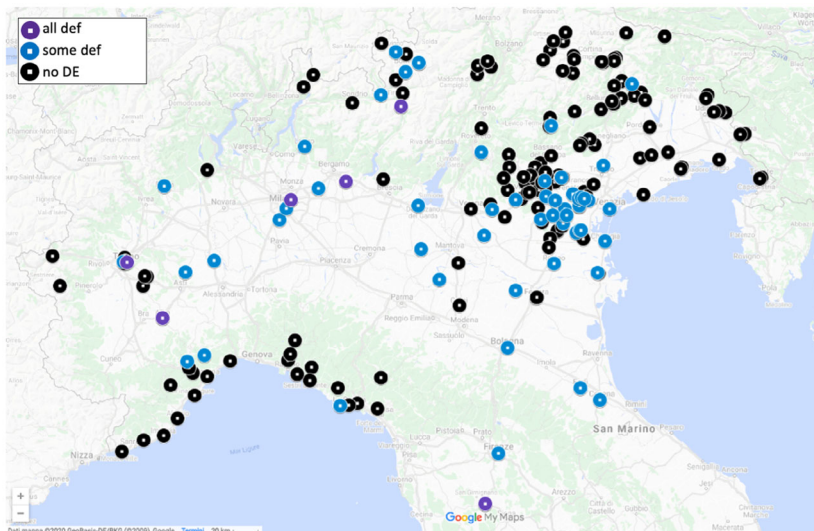
- i La na mangia mai de frùto, chela pütela là.  
    she not eats never of fruit that girl there  
    ‘That girl never eats fruit.’ (Redonesco)

In all the other cases, the speaker uses either PAs or definite articles (input (49)d):

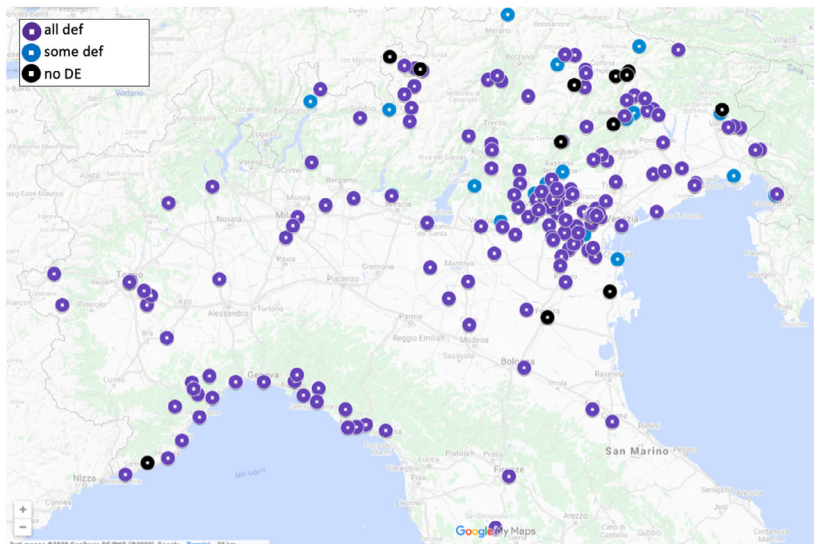
- ii En mangióm mai de la frùto.  
    we.not eat.1PL never of the.F.SG fruit  
    ‘We never eat fruit.’ (Redonesco)

It is unclear to us if this single occurrence constitutes a relevant datum. Pending further investigations, we will leave it aside for the moment.

<sup>18</sup> There are some sporadic cases in which the generic definite article in the input is never translated as such: Taggia (GE), Ferraral (FE), Valfurva2 (SO), Peaio (BL), Falcade (BL), Cirvoi (BL), Mellame d’Arsié (BL), Calalzo di Cadore (BL), Tai di Cadore (BL), Taglio di Po1 (RO) Nimis (UD). All these cases have in common the fact that only one sentence among the 6 with the generic definite has been tested: *non mangio la carne* ‘I don’t eat meat’. This shows that it is most probably an effect of the selection of the data.



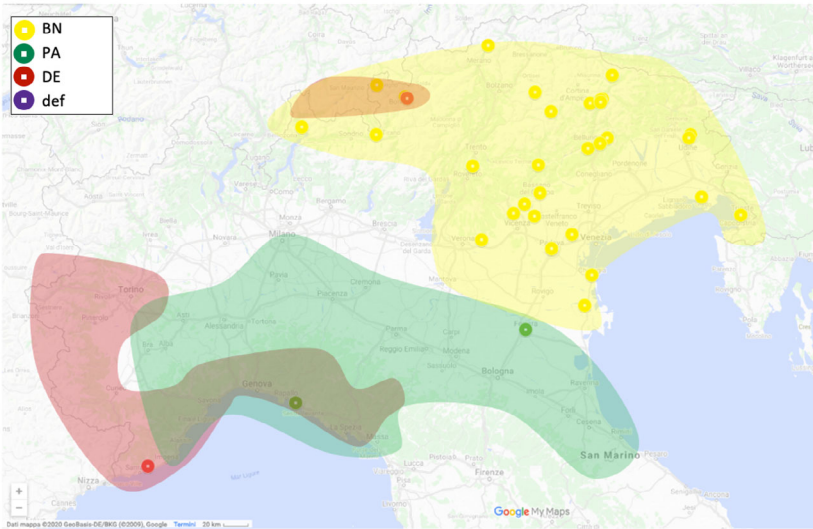
MAP 5: Distribution of BN to def translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]



MAP 6: Distribution of def to def translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

before: yellow = BN, red = DE, green = PA. In order to provide a comparison, we superimpose the areas identified before.

The distribution of PAs/BNs and bare DE translations of inputs containing G/WDs confirms the distribution already identified (all the BN cases fall within the “BN/yellow area”, etc.).



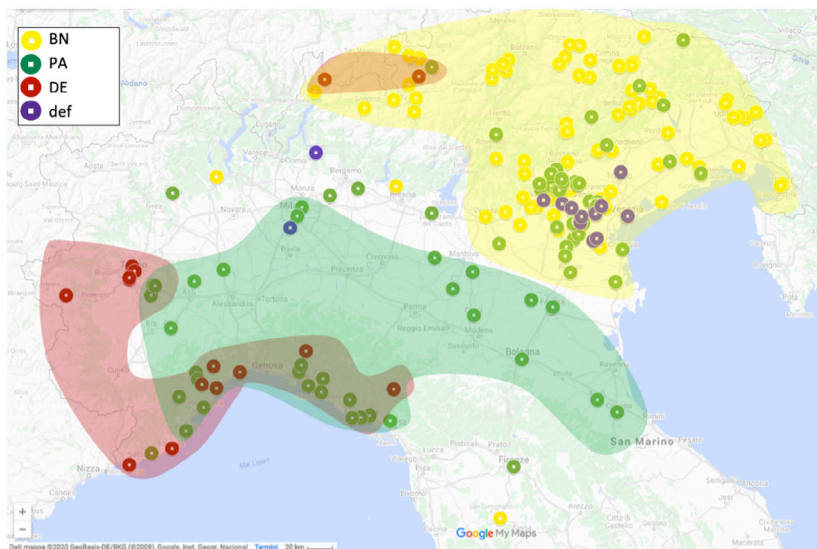
**MAP 7:** Distribution of *def* to *BN|PA|DE|def* translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Finally, we check the input sentences containing PAs (Map 8). As already mentioned, the set contains only one sentence. This does not allow us to check for the consistency of the translation, as we did with BNs and definite articles. The green dots identify the areas in which the PA in the input has been translated with a PA, the red dots correspond to a translation with bare DE, the yellow dots are the ones in which the input has been translated with a BN and, finally, the blue dots the ones in which it has been translated with a definite article. Again, for a comparison, we superimpose the areas identified before.

On the one hand, the “red/bare DE” area and the “yellow/BN” one fit perfectly, further strengthening the proposed areal subdivision.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, there are a lot of green dots outside the “green/PA area”. This is possibly due to the influence of the input, which might lead the speakers to adopt a PA translation. Finally, the definite article translations are mainly present in central Veneto, with a few occurrences in Lombardy. This might be due to the fact that the Veneto area is the most investigated one. Higher numbers of informant might lead to the emergence of a pattern that would appear also elsewhere given an equal situation.

Although not well balanced, these corpus data already show a direct crosslinguistic competition between PAs and BNs. In the areas where BNs are more present, PAs are less present, and vice versa. This supports the idea that these two ways of encoding indefiniteness are in crosslinguistic

<sup>19</sup> There are a few yellow dots outside the yellow area, Borgomanero (NO), Brione (BS) and Colle Val d’Elsa (SI). Note that these varieties stood out also in Map 2.



**MAP 8:** Distribution of PA to BN|PA|DE/def translations. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

competition with each other in NIDs for expressing indefinites. On the other hand, the distribution of definite articles does not seem to be influenced by the presence of PAs or BNs, at least when the input contains a definite article. The possibility of translating a PA or a BN in the input with a definite article seems to be available for all NIDs, except for Ligurian, Friulian, and Trentino varieties, where DE, PAs and/or BNs are the only available choice.<sup>20</sup> Definite articles constitute, in a sense, a “background noise” with respect to the realization of indefinite nominals either as PAs or BNs. As we will see in the next Sections, the new data we collected support this “background” distribution of definite articles. In Section 6 we will make explicit a proposal that can capture this fact.

The distribution of bare DE deserves a different approach. As already noticed, the area in which bare DE is attested overlaps both with the “PA green area” in Liguria and with the “BN yellow area” in Valtellina. Western Liguria and western Piedmont, instead, present only bare DE. With respect to this issue, we underline that most of the input sentences containing BNs, PAs or G/WDs in the ASIt are negative. It is well known that there are languages for which the presence of bare DE is connected to the polarity of the sentence. A well-known case is French, where positive polarity requires PAs while negative polarity requires bare DE.

<sup>20</sup> As we will show, the new data show that also Friulian and Ligurian speakers actively produce definite articles as a minority pattern. They do so at the same rate as Emilian speakers. This contrast between our data and the ASIt ones might be due to the fact that the ASIt data for BNs only contain negative inputs, while our inputs are balanced.

(45) Il a du papier.  
 'he has of.the.M.SG paper'  
 'He has paper.'

(46) Il n' a pas de papier.  
 he neg has not of paper  
 'He has no paper.'

(Ihsane 2008:145)

Given that the ASIIt contexts are almost all negative ones, we cannot distinguish between a language which encodes indefinite objects asymmetrically depending on the polarity of the sentence and a language which marks them consistently with bare DE, both in positive and in negative contexts. Some varieties of Francoprovençal have been described in the literature as belonging to the second type (Kristol 2014, 2016), as the Occitan varieties at the border between Piedmont and France (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018).<sup>21</sup> In our dataset, the only instance of a bare DE not under negation comes from the Occitan variety of Ramats (Chiomonte, TO; input: (38)f):

(47) Ou van maque' d caffè.  
 he sells only of coffee  
 'He sells only coffee.'

(Ramats, TO)

This variety is the only one for which we can take the second option with a fair degree of confidence, also because it does not show any PA/BN in any other sentence in the database.<sup>22</sup> As far as the other varieties showing bare DE, both options are in principle possible, but the first one seems more likely. This would be in line with the analyses provided in Battye (1990), who focuses only on Ligurian, and Garzonio & Poletto (2020). These analyses take bare DE in these varieties to be licensed under negation and opposed to a different realization in positive sentences.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, the ASIIt data show a clear two-way direct competition between BNs and PAs, with a possible third direct competitor, bare DE, only present in the Occitan area. The fourth competitor, the definite article, pops up as a sort of "background noise". It is a possibility for translating BNs and PAs in the input which seems to be equally available in all NIDs.

<sup>21</sup> But see Stark & Gerards (2020) and Davatz & Stark (2019) for a problematization of the categorization.

<sup>22</sup> Notice, however, the presence of *maque* 'only', which is a monotone decreasing quantifier and could interfere with the realization of the indefinite object. The relevant fact, however, is that this is the only variety which shows the presence of bare DE in this context, in opposition to the other varieties for which this sentence has been tested.

<sup>23</sup> Under negation, the balance between bare DE and the other option (PAs in Liguria, BNs in Valtellina) is not straightforward. There are varieties in which it is possible to find both and varieties in which only bare DE is possible. See Garzonio & Poletto (2020) for a description of the possibilities and a proposal for modeling the variation.

4.3. *The distribution of indefinites in NIDs, new data*

As already underlined, the ASIIt data show two crucial problems. The first problem is the presence of a single input sentence with a PA. This does not allow us to assess the consistency of the translation, hindering the direct comparison with the distribution of BNs and PAs. The second problem is the unbalance with respect to polarity. Almost all the input sentences containing an indefinite object in the ASIIt are negative. This does not allow us to assess the distribution of indefinites across the two different polarities and makes it complex to tease apart the varieties behaving like French (positive-negative asymmetry in the realization of indefinites) from the varieties which do not. In order to face these problems, we decided to acquire new data.

As a first step in the process of collecting new data, we identified the areas to be investigated. We settled for three areas which, on the basis of the ASIIt survey, starkly differ with respect to the distribution of indefinite objects: Friuli, Emilia and Liguria. Friuli is in the core of the “yellow/BN area”, i.e., it shows a dominant share of BNs, both as translations of input BNs and input PAs (and, more rarely, of definite articles). Emilia is in the core of the “green/PA area” where BNs are very scarce (input BNs are frequently replaced with PAs). Finally, given that bare DE are absent in both areas, we decided to investigate a third area which presents this additional possibility: Liguria. In Friuli, we investigated two subareas. The first is in the east, around the city of Gorizia (5 speakers: Mossa, Chiopris, San Lorenzo Isontino1, San Lorenzo Isontino2 Romans d’Isonzo). The second is in the west, near the city of Cordenons (2 speakers: Zoppola, Cordenons). In Emilia, we investigated the subarea at the border with Lombardy, along the river Po (8 speakers: Villastrada di Dosolo1, Villastrada di Dosolo2, Villastrada di Dosolo 2, Dosolo1, Dosolo2, Dosolo3, Dosolo4, Viadana). In Liguria, we carried out our investigation north from Genova (7 speakers: Genova, Geo1, Geo1, Geo2, Pietrafraccia1, Pietrafraccia2, Pietrafraccia3) and in Arenzano, a small city on the coast a few kilometers west from Genova (3 speakers: Arenzano1, Arenzano2, Arenzano3). In Table 3 we summarize the most relevant information. The exposure to the dialect ranges from 0,5 (minimum) to 6 (maximum) and has been calculated on the basis of (i) the self-assessment questionnaire on the use of the dialect and (ii) the language spoken by the parents.<sup>24</sup>

We opt for a multidimensional approach, as proposed in Cornips & Poletto (2005), in order to maximize representativity. This means that we adopt two different methodologies, so that we can control for their impact on the results. The study is composed of two sessions,

<sup>24</sup> The self-assessment questionnaire is based on frequency of use, *very often* (2 points), *often* (1,5 points), *seldomly* (1 point), *almost never* (0,5 points), and communities in which the dialect is spoken, *family* (1 point), *work* (1 point), *friends* (1 point), *other* (1 point). One additional point is assigned per parent speaking the dialect, for a total of 6 points.

**Table 3.** Sociolinguistic characteristics of the speakers

speaker	variety	sex	age	occupation	dialect expos.	elicit. test	questionn.
Chiopris	Eastern Central Friulian	M	51	Local police	6	NO	YES
Cordenons	Western Friulian	F	47	Salesperson	6	NO	YES
Mossa	Eastern Central Friulian	M	28	Student	3	NO	YES
Romans d'Isonzo	Eastern Central Friulian	M	35	Employee	6	NO	YES
S. Lorenzo Isontino1	Eastern Central Friulian	M	43	Officer	6	NO	YES
S. Lorenzo Isontino2	Eastern Central Friulian	M	63	Retired	5	NO	YES
Zoppola	Western Friulian	M	68	Retired	4.5	NO	YES
Dosolo1	Emiliano Mantovano	M	74	Retired	4.5	NO	YES
Dosolo2	Emiliano Mantovano	M	40	Employee	4	NO	YES
Dosolo3	Emiliano Mantovano	M	33	Tractor driver	5.5	NO	YES
Dosolo4	Emiliano Mantovano	M	35	Skilled worker	6	NO	YES
Villastrada di Dosolo1	Emiliano Mantovano	F	69	Teacher	5	NO	YES
Villastrada di Dosolo2	Emiliano Mantovano	F	36	Teacher	3	NO	YES
Villastrada di Dosolo3	Emiliano Mantovano	F	26	Copywriter	3.5	NO	YES
Viadana	Emiliano Mantovano	M	66	Mason	6	NO	YES
Genova1	Ligurian	M	86	Retired/ poet	5	YES	NO
Geo1	Ligurian	M	67	Retired	4.5	YES	NO
Geo2	Ligurian	F	72	Retired	4.5	YES	NO
Geo3	Ligurian	M	72	Retired	5	YES	NO
Pietrafraccia1	Ligurian	M	61	Skilled worker	6	YES	NO

(continued)

**Table 3.** (continued)

speaker	variety	sex	age	occupation	dialect expos.	elicit. test	questionn.
Pietrafraccia2	Ligurian	M	38	Retired	6	YES	NO
Pietrafraccia3	Ligurian	M	73	Engineer	5	YES	NO
Arenzano1	Ligurian	M	58	Teacher	6	NO	YES
Arenzano2	Ligurian	M	70	Retired	6	NO	YES
Arenzano3	Ligurian	M	60	Technician	6	NO	YES

administered at different moments in time, an elicited production task and a questionnaire. The target of the elicited production is to elicit a natural response from the speaker in the variety under investigation. To reach this target, we devised two video sequences that the informants had to describe in their own variety. The videos are 4 minutes long and contain mute scenes which are prone to be described using indefinite nominals (e.g., people running, a man slicing some ham, butterflies eating fruit, cows grazing, etc.). In order to make the interaction more natural, we decided to take the informants in couples. One informant had the PC screen in front of her, on a table, while the other informant was placed on the other side of the table so that it was impossible for her to see the PC screen. The first informant had to describe the videos to the second and was instructed to stop the video in case she wanted to add other details or talk about something related.<sup>25</sup> We told the informants that they were completely free to talk about whatever they wanted. The second informant could interrupt the first at any moment asking for clarifications or adding comments. The interactions have been recorded by means of the internal microphone of the PC and transcribed.

This elicitation methodology, despite being useful for eliciting more “natural” data, lacks control on the variables. To compensate for that, we devised a questionnaire, administered in Italian, balanced for polarity of the proposition, gender, number, left and right dislocation and PA/definite/BN input.<sup>26</sup> Note that, in Italian, left and right dislocation generally require the presence of an optional bare DE introducing the dislocated constituent.

- (48) (Di) carne, non ne ho mangiata.  
of meat not PART.CL have.1SG eaten  
‘I didn’t eat meat.’

<sup>25</sup> In order to stop/restart the video, the informant had to press the spacebar. We encountered no difficulties in this respect, also with older speakers.

<sup>26</sup> Italian does not allow for bare DE introducing indefinite objects, such inputs are therefore absent.



This fact implies that there is always at least an optional bare DE introducing dislocated constituents in the input. For this reason, there are no dislocated BNs in the input. The questionnaire contains 99 sentences (29 fillers and 70 targets) and was presented orally by the researcher. The speakers had to translate orally the sentence in their own variety. The whole conversation was recorded and transcribed.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.3.1. Results Emilia

The results from the questionnaire confirm the pattern already highlighted by the ASIIt data. Let us start with the input sentences with a PA. Taking the whole group, not divided by speaker and type of sentence (negative/positive, dislocation/absence of dislocation, gender, number), we notice an evident majority of PA translations: out of 100 sentences with a PA, 85 translations feature a PA (85%), 14 a definite article (14%) and 1 a different quantity marker, *sokuanti* ‘many’ (1%). Taking into consideration only the sentences without dislocation, the picture is even neater: out of 33 sentences with a PA in the input, 31 feature a PA (94%; (49)) and 2 a definite determiner (6%; (50)). Other variables, like presence of negation, gender and number are not relevant (the distribution is the same in both values of the variable).

(49) U           kot       dal           pan.  
       have.1SG baked of.the.M.SG bread  
       ‘I baked bread.’ (Villastrada di Dosolo1)

(50) Al           kög l à mia skaldà l akua.  
       the.M.SG cook he has not warmed the.F.SG water  
       ‘The cook didn’t heat some the water.’ (Dosolo3)

The sentences with a BN in the input show a similar result. Out of the 39 BNs in the input, 28 have been translated with a PA (72%; (51)), 7 with a definite article (18%; (52)). Here we have additionally 4 sentences featuring a BN (10%; (53)).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> As noted in the table, the elicitation test has only been administered to the 7 speakers coming from north of Genova. We planned to extend the test to all the other speakers and locations, but the current situation related to the virus SARS-Covid-2 does not allow for the completion of this part of the data collection. For this reason, we will mainly present the data coming from the questionnaire, which has been administered in all the relevant locations. The data from the elicitation test will be briefly presented only in the section regarding the Ligurian varieties (Section 4.3.3).

<sup>28</sup> The 4 BN translations have been produced by 3 speakers: Dosolo2, Villastrada di Dosolo2 and Dosolo3. Dosolo2 and Villastrada di Dosolo2 are young and work outside the community in Italian-speaking environment. We will return on this fact in Section 5.

- (51) I putlet i à tirat di sas tut al  
 the.M.PL boys they have.3 thrown of.the.M.PL stones all the  
 do d misdè.  
 after of noon  
 ‘The boys threw stones for the whole afternoon.’ (Dosolo1)
- (52) La mame la g à mia mes l oiù.  
 the.F.SG mom she there has not put the.M.SG oil  
 ‘Mom put the oil.’ (Dosolo1)
- (53) Al kög l à zuntà oiù tut al temp.  
 the.M.SG cook he has added oil all the.M.SG time  
 ‘The cook kept adding oil the whole time.’ (Dosolo2)

The translations of sentences with a definite determiner in the input, finally, show a strong consistency in replicating the input. Taking into consideration all the sentences with a definite determiner in the input, 96 out of 100 show a definite determiner in the translation (96%), while 4 show a PA (4%). Taking into consideration only the contexts without a dislocation, all 32 input sentences show a definite determiner in the translation (100%; (54)).

- (54) La nona l à purtà al pan.  
 the.F.SG grandma she has brought the.M.SG bread  
 ‘The grandma brought bread.’ (Villastrada di Dosolo1)

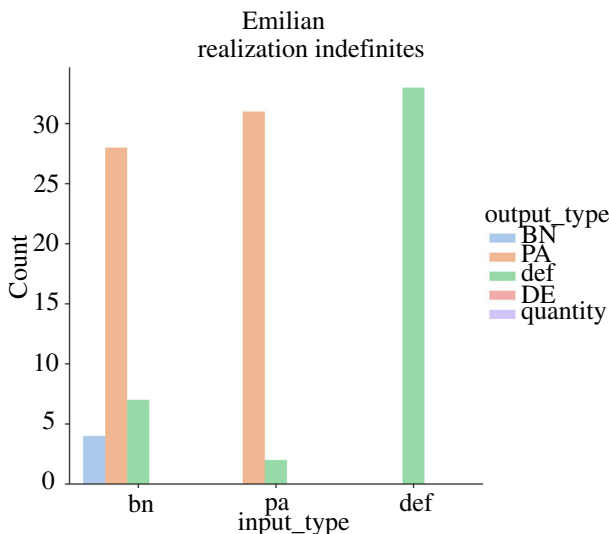
Plot 1 summarizes the distribution, focusing on the cases in which there is no dislocation.

There is a general tendency towards PAs both with input BNs and PAs. In both cases, there is a “background” presence of definite articles. With a definite article in the input, on the other hand, the picture is neat and there is no exception to a translation with a definite article.

#### 4.3.2. *Results Friuli*

As for Emilian, the results from the questionnaire confirm the distribution already highlighted by means of the ASIIt data. We start from the input sentences containing a BN. There are 32 inputs containing a BN, in 29 cases (94%; (55)) the output is a BN, in 3 cases (6%; (56)), the output is a definite determiner.

- (55) I frus i an tirat balos dut al dopo  
 the.M.PL boys they have.3PL thrown stones all the.M.SG after  
 misdì.  
 noon  
 ‘The boys threw stones for the whole afternoon.’  
 (San Lorenzo Isontino2)



**PLOT 1:** Plot Distribution of indefinite translations in Emilian. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

- (56) La        mama no i    a    metut el        ueli.  
       the.F.SG mom not she has put    the.M.SG oil  
       ‘Mom put the oil.’ (Mossa)

The data are opposed to the ones we saw for Emilia, where BNs are generally substituted by PAs. In both varieties, there is a small share of definite articles.

The data concerning input PAs are more troublesome. Taking only the input sentences with no dislocation (47), we see a lot of variability. Out of this subset of inputs, 16 show a BN (34%; (57)), 15 maintain a PA (32%; (58)) and 7 show a definite article (15%; (59)). Other kinds of translations account for the remaining 9 sentences (19%), among which 5 sentences feature nominal quantities like *un pok/un alk* ‘a bit’ (11%) and 4 sentences quantity markers like *siarti* ‘certain’ (8%).

- (57) Ai        kuet    pan.  
       have.1SG cooked bread  
       ‘I baked bread.’ (Chiopris)
- (58) Al        murador i    a    butat iu    dai        murs.  
       the.M.SG mason he has thrown down of.the.M.PL walls  
       ‘The mason tore down some walls.’ (Mossa)

- (59) Ai kuot al pan.  
have.1SG cooked the.M.SG bread  
'I baked bread.'  
(Cordenons)

This variability is not attested in Emilian, where, on the contrary, we saw that almost every PA has been translated with a PA. Here, only a small share of PAs in the input has been translated with a PA.<sup>29</sup>

The sentences containing a definite article, finally, do not show variation in the possible translations, in line with what we saw in Emilian. Out of the 34 input sentences containing a non-dislocated definite determiner, 33 replicate the definite determiner in the translation (97%; (60)), while 1 shows a BN (3%; (61)).<sup>30</sup>

- (60) Al papa i à stranfada l aga.  
the.M.SG dad he has spilled the.F.SG water  
'Dad spilled the water.'  
(Mossa)

- (61) I frus a nd an sertšat sariesis.  
the.M.PL boys they PART.CL have.3PL tasted cherries  
'The boys tasted cherries.'  
(Romans d'Isonzo)

Summing up, Friulian is very consistent with BN translations when the input is a BN. This is in opposition to Emilian, where a BN input is generally translated with a PA. In both cases, there is a marginal presence of translations with a definite determiner. On the other hand, when faced with a PA in the input, Friulian speakers tend to adopt different strategies, either they replicate the PA, or adopt other translations (BNs, definite determiners and other quantity markers). Again, this is in opposition to what happens in Emilia, where speakers consistently maintain PAs. Finally, definite determiners in the input are consistently

<sup>29</sup> As for BNs in Emilian, also in this case the majority of PAs has been produced by young speakers working/studying in an Italian environment (see Section 5).

<sup>30</sup> The BN translation reported in (70), shows an interesting additional feature, the presence of a partitive clitic *nd* in between the subject clitic *a* and the verb *an* 'have.3.pl'. Given the absence of any dislocation or quantity in the sentence, the presence of this clitic is unexpected. Another example of this phenomenon:

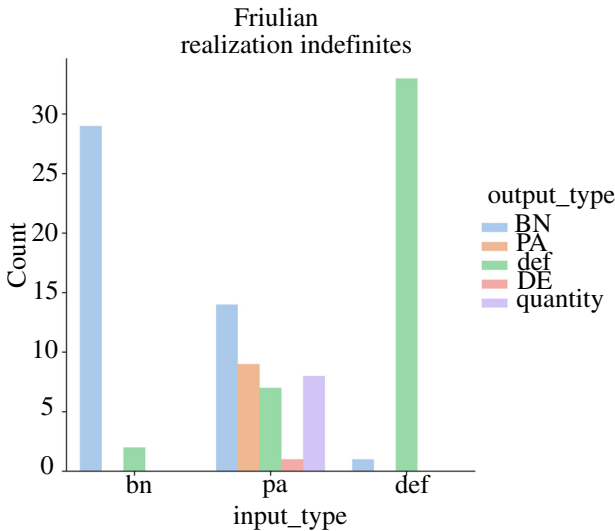
- i I frus no nd an sertšat li sariesis.  
the.M.PL boys not PART.CL have tasted the.F.PL cherries  
'The boys didn't taste the cherries.'  
(Romans d'Isonzo)

The speaker reported the use of this clitic in contexts similar to the ones in which many Veneto varieties show the locative clitic *g* 'there' (see Benincà 2007, Paoli 2019).

- ii El g à cantà.  
he LOC.CL has sung  
'He sang.'

(Padovano; Benincà 2007: 24)

It is possible to hypothesize that this use of the partitive clitic results from the interference of the Veneto variety of Gorizia spoken nearby. Given that Friulian does not have the locative clitic, the speakers resort to the use of the partitive one.



**PLOT 2:** Distribution of indefinite translations in Friulian. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

translated with definite determiners as in Emilian, showing a parallelism between the two varieties.

#### 4.3.3. Results Liguria

In Liguria we have only 3 speakers who completed the questionnaire, differently from Emilia and Friuli, where we have 7/8 speakers. The numbers are, therefore, lower but it is nonetheless possible to see clear patterns, also supported by the comparison with the elicitation data, which are available for this area.

Let us recall that the ASIIt data for the Ligurian varieties are more complex than the ones regarding the other two areas we investigated before. While the other areas show a prevalence for a single realization of indefinite objects (PAs, BNs or bare DE) Liguria shows a relatively high frequency of both PAs and bare DE. We already underlined how this fact could be related to a specific problem of the ASIIt questionnaire: the lack of positive input sentences. These new data, balanced for this variable, confirm this (Plot 3).

Let us first look at the data regarding the input sentences containing a PA (44 in total). We have 24 translations with PAs (55%), 14 with definite determiners (32%), 4 with bare DE (9%) and 2 with other kinds of quantity (1 *n po* 'a bit' and 1 *de kuelle* 'certain', lit. 'of those'). Refining the analysis and taking into consideration only the sentences without dislocation, as we have done for the other areas, the typology of translations reduces to three: 10 PAs (63%, see (62)), 4 definite determiners (25%, see(63)) and 2 bare DE (6%, see(64)).

- (62) A        mama a l à purtaou dee        kandeie.  
 the.F.SG mom she it has brought of.the.F.PL candles  
 ‘Mom brought some candles.’ (Arenzano1)
- (63) U        kotu u pan.  
 have.1SG cooked the.M.SG bread  
 ‘I baked bread.’ (Arenzano1)
- (64) U        kögu u nu à skaldeu de egua.  
 the.M.SG cook he not has heated of water  
 ‘The cook didn’t heat any water.’ (Arenzano3)

The data are very similar to the ones we observed in Emilia. PAs in the input are regularly translated with PAs, there are no BNs and there is a “background” possibility of translating a PA in the input with a definite determiner. The only difference is in the presence of the additional possibility of having bare DE introducing the nominal.

The input sentences containing a BN are 21 in total. In this case we find, as translations, 12 BNs (57%, see (65)), 6 PAs (29%, see (66)), 1 definite determiner (5%), 2 bare DE (10%, see (66)).

- (65) U        nono nu à mandou leteri nte sti ani.  
 the.M.SG grandpa not has sent letters in these years  
 ‘The grandpa didn’t send letters during these years.’ (Arenzano2)
- (66) St anu ki, u barba u nu n à regalau de  
 this year here the.M.SG uncle he not PART.CL has gifted of  
 bira, u l à regalau du vin.  
 beer he it has gifted of.the.M.SG wine  
 ‘This year, the uncle didn’t gift beer but wine.’ (Arenzano1)
- (67) U        vežinu u l à fatu a pulenta pe džurni.  
 the.M.SG neighbor he it has done the.F.SG polenta for days  
 ‘The neighbor cooked polenta for days.’ (Arenzano2)

In this case, the picture is neither similar to Emilian, neither to Friulian. On the one hand, BNs are frequently attested. This marks a divergence with respect to the Emilian pattern, where BNs were almost completely absent. On the other hand, we have non negligible occurrences of PAs. This marks a difference with Friulian, where PAs are completely unattested in this context. The pattern seems to be “mixed”. In addition, there are 2 occurrences of bare DE. This “mix” is due to interspeaker variation. The speaker labeled as *Arenzano1* produced only one BN (in the translation of the input sentence *è trent’anni che costruisco case* ‘I’ve been building houses for 30 years’), 5 PAs and 2 bare DE. The other two speakers, *Arenzano2* and *Arenzano3*, out of 13 sentences in total, produced 11 BNs, 1 PA and 1 definite determiner. In other words, taking *Arenzano1* out of the picture we have a “Friulian”

pattern, while looking only at *Arenzano1*, we have an “Emilian” pattern.<sup>31</sup>

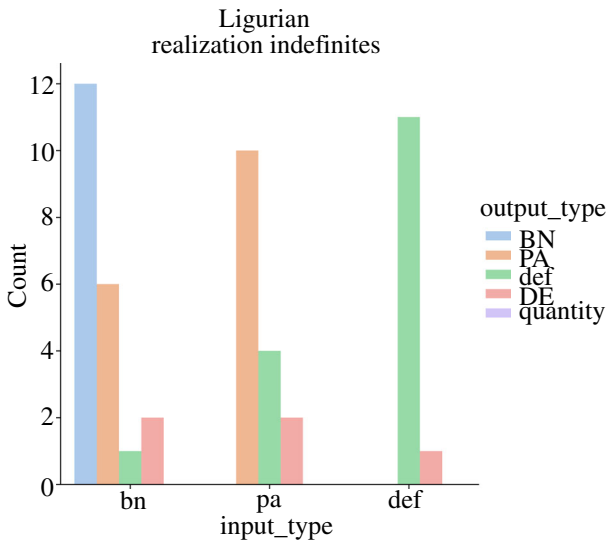
As for definite determiners in the input, they are in consonance with the results obtained for the other areas. In total we have 36 inputs containing a definite determiner, out of these inputs, 35 outputs reproduce a definite determiner. In one case we have an unexpected bare DE.

(68) Nu ò            tadžau a            seulla.  
not have.1SG cut    the.F.SG onion  
‘I didn’t cut the onion.’ (Arenzano1)

(69) I            öspiti nu an            öšü    de patate.  
the.M.PL guests not have.3PL wanted of potatoes  
‘The guests didn’t want any potatoes.’ (Arenzano2)

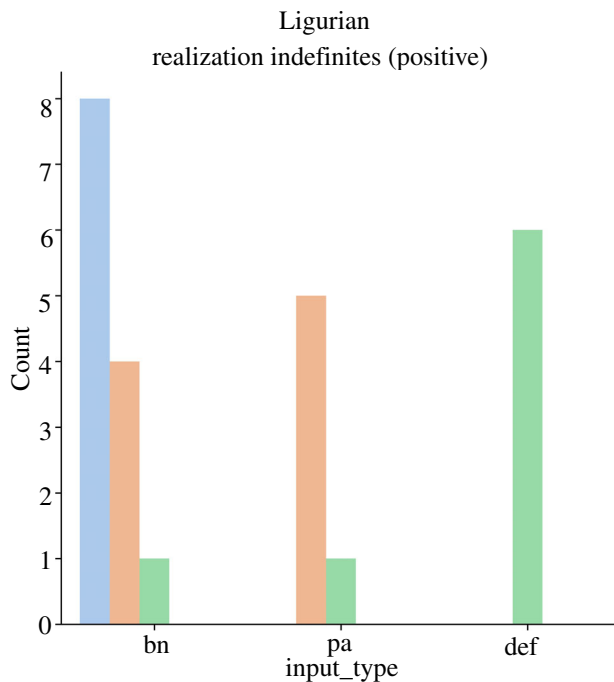
With respect to bare DE, a decisive factor is negation, as expected looking at the crosslinguistic comparison and at the data in Battye (1990). Bare DE is only attested with negation and never occurs in sentences with positive polarity, as Plot 4 and 5 show.

Within both groups, positive and negative polarity, the main factor influencing the realization of indefinite objects is the speaker, as already underlined. With input BNs, *Arenzano1* produces PAs in positive contexts and bare DE in negative contexts, while the other two speakers

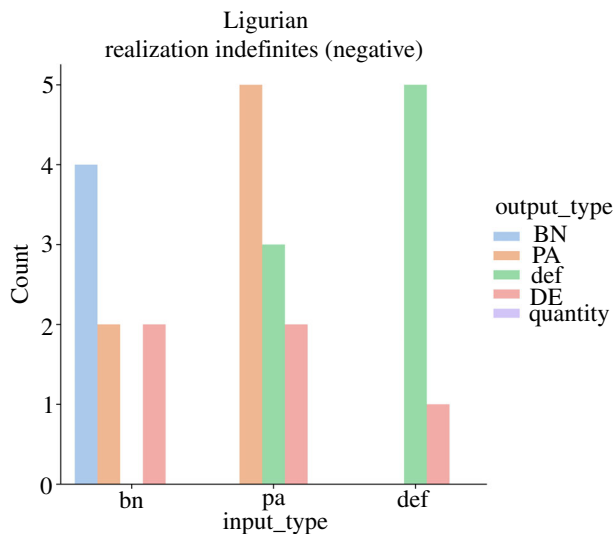


**PLOT 3:** Distribution of indefinite translations in Ligurian. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

<sup>31</sup> Note that *Arenzano1* defined himself as “more archaizing” with respect to the other speakers. This self-assessment, interestingly, corresponds with an observable difference in the data. See Section 5 for a further methodological point on this issue.



**PLOT 4:** Distribution of indefinite translations in Ligurian, only positive. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



**PLOT 5:** Distribution of indefinite translations in Ligurian, only negative. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]



produce BNs in both contexts. These data show that: (i) Bare DE is not in direct competition with PAs/BNs but in complementary distribution, the relevant factor being polarity. (ii) There could be two different grammars at play, one in which BNs are attested (*Arenzano2* and *Arenzano3*) and one in which BNs are almost non-existent and PAs/bare DE take over, depending on the polarity of the sentence (*Arenzano1*).

The grammaticality of BNs in these varieties is supported by the data collected with the elicitation test, where the speakers actively produce both BNs (15 occurrences in object position, see (70)) and PAs (27 occurrences in object position, see (71)).

- (70) Gè n mažellà ke u sta fažendu, pensu, prošütti krüi.  
 there.is a butcher that he stays making think.1sg hams raw  
 ‘There is a butcher who is making hams, I think.’
- (71) Il vöö dö vin, ma l è n gòto tipo kolo da bira.  
 he pours of.the.M.SG wine but it is a glass like that for beer  
 ‘He pours wine, but that is a beer glass.’

There are no occurrences of bare DE, but this is quite expected, given that the type of test (video description) does not stimulate the production of negative sentences.

## 5. Methodological issues

In this section, we address some methodological issues that are relevant for the classification and analysis of the data and can have general importance for field work investigations. These issues revolve around two topics. The first regards the consistency of the results (comparing the ASIt data and the new ones), the second regards how to deal with the influence of the input and how to classify the output of a questionnaire. Let us start from the first. Dialectal varieties are subject to a stronger variation with respect to more standardized languages, for which there is more pressure toward homogenization. Finding consistent results between data collected from different periods and speakers helps in assessing the stability of the phenomenon under analysis in the variety. Contradictory results, on the other hand, should lead to reanalyze the sources, in order to find the reason behind such discrepancies. A related issue is the diamesic difference between written and oral language. The ASIt questionnaires are presented and answered in a written form, while our new questionnaire is presented and answered orally. It is often remarked that there could be discrepancies between the written and the oral form, especially when it comes to translation tasks (Rickford 1987, Sanga 1991, Cornips & Poletto 2005, Buchstaller & Corrigan 2011). The written form favors the use of a more standardized variety of the dialect – for which there is often an agreed-upon orthography – and disfavors less standardized varieties,

which would more typically surface in an oral task. Looking at our data for Emilia and Friuli, we find no relevant discrepancies between the ASIt and the new fieldwork sessions. Both in the ASIt and in the new data, Friulian speakers tend to translate every BN with a BN and to avoid the use of PAs. In the same vein, Emilian speakers tend to maintain the PAs in the input and to avoid BNs in both sources, substituting them with PAs. The situation is more complex for Ligurian, on the account of the lack of positive inputs in the ASIt questionnaires and the already underlined asymmetry in the realization of indefinite objects due to polarity. However, even if we restrict ourselves only to negative sentences with BNs in the input, for which the comparison is feasible, we still find diverging results. While in the ASIt data there are almost no BNs, the new data show a considerable presence of BNs. More specifically, we have one speaker who conforms to the ASIt data (*Arenzano1*) and two speakers who do not (*Arenzano2* and *Arenzano3*). This means that we have different varieties within the same community. The ASIt shows only one variant (*Arenzano1*), while our new data display both. Why is the case that the ASIt shows data only from the variety of *Arenzano1*? Here we can only speculate. One option is chance: the ASIt questionnaires reached only speakers using the variety of *Arenzano1*, while our new questionnaires reached both. Another option is to relate this to the previously mentioned difference between written and oral form. The written form of the ASIt questionnaires would prompt the use of the variety of *Arenzano1*, which the speaker himself defined as more “archaic” (n. 31). This would indicate a relevant influence of the diamesic axis on the realization of indefinite objects. Lacking more precise data, we have to leave this issue aside for further investigations. From the methodological point of view, we underline that the use of different tests and the iteration of the same test in different modalities/periods is crucial for assessing the strength of the generalizations, refining them and identifying potential issues. We can also suggest that written data are more reliable when the situation is stable for a given phenomenon (indefinites in Emilia and Friuli), while they are less reliable when there are different variants (indefinites in Liguria).

Let us now move to the second point, i.e., how to deal with the influence of the input and how to classify the data coming from a questionnaire. In a situation of consistent bilingualism between the local variety and the language used in the input, how can we factor out the influence of the input provided in one of the two languages the test subjects use in everyday speech? Are there common features in the typology of answers that we can identify in order to approach this problem? In the data we gathered, we have been able to identify two different patterns. A first possibility is to find a single consistent translation across speakers which has a form that is very similar to the one present in the Italian input (both, usually, with the same etymological origin). In our data, this always happens with definite articles, which trigger a constant translation with the corresponding form

of the definite article in every variety we investigated. The same happens with both BNs and PAs for the Ligurian speakers *Arenzano2* and *Arenzano3*, with BNs for Friulian speakers and with PAs for Emilian speakers and *Arenzano1*. When confronted with such a pattern, we can be fairly confident that the local variety consistently has the property in question and does not differ much from the input with respect to that specific piece of the grammar. In other words, the local variety has a form in its grammar which corresponds to the one used in the input and marks the same function. The stronger the consistency of a given form in the translation, the stronger this parallelism is supported.<sup>32</sup> There are however instances where the translation diverges from the input. This indicates that the structure of the input is not there in the dialect, or at least cannot be used in the context provided by the stimulus. In our data, this happens in two cases: when Emilian speakers translate BNs and when Friulian speakers translate PAs.<sup>33</sup> In both cases, the majority of the translations diverge from the input, marking a higher degree of “friction” in comparison to the previous type of answers. This does not mean, however, that there are no cases in which the speaker replicates the input (4 BN translations of input BNs in Emilia; 26 PA translations of input PAs in Friuli). Interestingly, we can observe a common tendency regarding the instances where the Italian input is replicated: they are mainly produced by the youngest and more interfered speakers. The oldest and less interfered speakers tend to reject them. For instance: The presence of PA translations in Friulian is mainly due to *Mossa*, a young university student who scores lower than other speakers on the self-assessment part of the questionnaire in the use of the dialect. In a parallel way, the presence of BN translations in Emilian is only due to *Dosolo2*, *Dosolo3* and *Villastrada di Dosolo2*. All these speakers are young and two of them (*Villastrada di Dosolo2* and *Dosolo2*) work in an Italian speaking environment outside of the local community. This shows that these minority patterns are most probably due to interference and should be further investigated to assess whether there is a change in progress or not. More in general, this second pattern – (i) no prevalent and consistent replication of the Italian input, (ii) replication of the Italian input only/mainly within the data provided by young speakers more exposed to the roof language – points to a higher degree of “friction” between the grammar of the input language and the grammar of the local variety. These results can be linked to a priming effect, that is the tendency of a speaker to reuse in a subsequent production a lexical item/structure that was previously heard or read (see Bock 1986, Pickering & Branigan 1998, Branigan & Pickering 2017). More

<sup>32</sup> Clearly, assessing the consistency is related to the numbers of inputs (number of stimuli with that input) and speakers. The higher both are, the stronger the results are.

<sup>33</sup> We set aside the issue of bare DE in Ligurian dialects, for which we refer to Section 4.3.3.

specifically, we are dealing with an across-languages priming with Italian-local variety bilingual speakers (see Hartsuiker et al. 2004, Berolet et al. 2007). This perspective allows us to overcome the “input problem”, often seen as a relevant drawback of translation tasks, especially in dialectological studies. Given the same input, different rates of replication in different varieties indicate different ways in which a given semantics is encoded. Measuring and comparing these different rates, we can get a systematic picture of the crosslinguistic variation. In addition, we can also analyze the intralinguistic variation among speakers of different ages, gender, social background etc. We would also like to underline that, while the results might be read from a priming perspective, a translation task cannot be considered a priming experiment, so that the results are not directly comparable. While a translation task is explicit in stating the relevance of the input to the subject (she is explicitly asked to translate it), priming experiments rely on implicit memory (i.e., exposure to the prime is not explicitly connected to the subsequent production). This difference could easily result in a stronger influence of the input than in standard priming experiments. Summing up: when we see systematic coherence between the input and the output, we can be sure that the dialect has the input structure. When we see no coherence between input and output, then the dialect does not possess the structure provided by the input, although minority cases might be an indication of language change. In the next section, we will draw our partial conclusions on the realization of indefinites in NIDs on the basis of these methodological observations.

## 6. Discussion of the data

As it is apparent from the data, the varieties we investigated realize indefinite objects with different means. In this section we will link them to the major Romance languages (Section 2) and draw some conclusions on the realization of indefinites in a crosslinguistic perspective, modeling an approach to the observed variation.

The first point we address is the relation between definite articles and the other indefinites (PAs, BNs and bare DE). Is the distribution we observe compatible with an analysis of these occurrences as G/WDs, on a par with G/WDs in Italian and the other major Romance languages, or is it the case that another analysis is more adequate? The ASI data show that definite articles are almost equally available in the entire territory of Northern Italy as “underlying” competitors of BNs/PAs/bare DE.<sup>34</sup> Our

<sup>34</sup> With the partial exceptions of Friuli, Liguria, and Trentino, where BNs in the input are almost never translated with definite articles in the ASI. We see that this result is not backed up by the new data, which see an equal production of definites in each zone, also in Liguria and Friuli. As we already speculated, this might be because the BN inputs of the ASI always come within a negative sentence, while the new results are balanced for polarity. We leave however a more careful analysis of this discrepancy to further studies.

new data strengthen this observation: in Ligurian, Emilian and Friulian the distribution of the definite articles is exactly the same, they are basically the only possible translation of a definite article in the input (i.e., no “friction” is attested) and seldom appear as possible translations of the other inputs. We see no inter-dialectal variation with respect to the distribution of definite articles. An additional point that helps clarify the analysis is the fact that 9 out of 10 occurrences of a definite article as a translation of an input BN appear with the following 3 input sentences:

- (72) La           mamma non ha messo olio.  
       the.F.SG mom   not has put oil  
       ‘Mom didn’t put any oil.’
- (73) Il           cuoco ha aggiunto olio tutto il           tempo.  
       the.M.SG cook has added oil all the.M.SG time  
       ‘The cook added oil the entire time.’
- (74) Il           vicino ha cucinato polenta per giorni.  
       the.M.SG neighbor has cooked polenta for days  
       ‘The neighbor cooked polenta for days.’

All these sentences feature a N+V couple denoting an “institutionalized” activity that, also in Italian, can easily feature a G/WD with a meaning similar to the one of the BN (cfr. (72)).

- (75) La           mamma non ha messo l’           olio.  
       the.F.SG mom   not has put the.M.SG oil  
       ‘Mom didn’t put any oil.’

Moreover, when the BN input features a V+N couple which cannot support a G/WD in Italian (e.g., *la zia non ha scritto libri*. ‘The aunt didn’t write any books’), no translations with definite articles are attested. These facts support an analysis of these occurrences of definite articles as G/WDs. It seems that in this case there is no relevant difference between NIDs and Italian: whichever analysis one adopts for G/WDs in Italian can be carried over to these varieties. On a different note, these data show that the presence of G/WDs in a variety is independent from the realization of other forms of indefinites in a specific variety as BNs/PAs/bare DE.<sup>35</sup> This conclusion can be taken further, claiming that the lack of interdependence with respect to the realization of G/WDs and indefinites stems from the fact that they belong to different semantic fields. Our data confirm this analysis, which is implied by Carlson & Sussman (2005), Schwarz (2014) and Aguilar-Guevara (2014) – who propose to interpret G/WDs as special types of kind referring expressions

<sup>35</sup> This is already apparent from the fact that, even if Italian, Spanish and French realize indefinite objects in different ways (see Section 2), they all have G/WDs with a similar distribution.

– and by Corblin (2013) – who propose to interpret them as *relational* definites. In both types of analyses, G/WDs are not considered indefinites tout court.<sup>36</sup> Given our data, we adopt this idea and exclude definite articles from our account of the realization of indefinites in NIDs.

Contrary to what we observed for the distribution of definite articles, there is a clear interdependence between the distribution of BNs, PAs and bare DE: When one form is more frequent, the other forms are less frequent. This indicates a degree of crosslinguistic competition between these forms for the same functional space in the nominal domain, which we traditionally label “indefiniteness”. How can we model this functional space, looking at the different overt realizations we observe in these varieties?

Let us start from the Ligurian variety of *Arenzano2* and *Arenzano3* (Lig.I). In this case, we see a situation compatible with the Italian one. The speakers dispose over both BNs and PAs, no real “friction” is observable with respect to the Italian input. This variety, therefore, shows an overt distinction between (at least) two kinds of indefinites, lexicalized by means of BNs and PAs (= Italian).<sup>37</sup>

In Emilia, letting aside the 4 occurrences of BNs (due to young and interfered speakers, Section 5), we only have PAs. The speakers we interviewed translate every indefinite we propose with a PA, showing a high degree of uniformity. Emilian, therefore, flattens the overt distinction we observe in Italian and Lig.I (*Arenzano2* and *Arenzano3*): input BNs and input PAs are equally translated as PAs. We analyze this as a case of syncretism: two different functions lexicalized by means of the same form. As it is standard in the analysis of syncretism, we interpret it as signaling the presence of shared syntactic-semantic feature between indefinite BNs and PAs in Italian. Ligurian II seems to behave exactly as Emilian with respect to the distribution of BNs and PAs, the only difference being the presence of bare DE under negation, which is an orthogonal phenomenon (with this we mean that the presence of bare DE under negation is both possible in opposition to PAs – Ligurian – and to BNs – Valtellina – in the positive). Ligurian II too, therefore, is amenable to the same analysis in terms of syncretism.

<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018) take definite articles to be, in some varieties (especially Marchigiano varieties), direct competitors for the realization of the indefinite function(s), along with PAs, BNs and bare DE. With respect to this issue, it would be interesting to carry out a questionnaire in the areas where the AIS reports only definite articles as translations of indefinite inputs. If definite articles really express indefiniteness in these varieties, we would expect definite article to fully substitute for BNs in every possible context (i.e., no constraint of the kind observed for G/WDs).

<sup>37</sup> Note that the pattern we observe in these areas of Liguria cannot be extended to the whole region. For example, the varieties at the border with France show a more consistent use of partitive articles / bare DE, while the presence of BNs seems to be extremely reduced (see Pescarini 2021).

In Friulian, letting aside the occurrences of PAs triggered by an input PA (the same we did for BNs in Emilian), we see that BNs are always translated with BNs, while PAs are translated either with BNs or with other quantity markers (like *un pok* ‘a bit’). Apparently, then, we have a situation that is different from Emilian, in which both are consistently realized as PAs. We propose to analyze this fact as the consequence of an attempt by Friulian speakers to disambiguate the translations of the PA inputs from the translation of the BN inputs. The issue is related to the typology of test employed and to the fact that all speakers are Italian-Friulian bilinguals. The test is a randomized sequence of Italian sentences to be translated in the local variety which contains, among other inputs, some inputs with a BN and some inputs with a PA. Friulian speakers – who are fully bilingual – recognize that input BNs and input PAs have a different interpretation in Italian (“meaning1” and “meaning2”). When translating these inputs, they react and try to disambiguate them in Friulian too, even if both are normally realized with BNs in the language. In order to do that, they recruit a form (q-marker) whose meaning – which we could call for expository reasons “meaning3” – is closer to meaning2 than to meaning1.

$$\frac{\text{meaning1} - \text{meaning2}}{\text{BNs}} - \frac{\text{meaning3}}{\text{q-marker}}$$

According to this hypothesis, then, Friulian would be the specular image of Emilian: it has the exact same kind of syncretism between the two indefinite functions, only with BNs and not PAs.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> A reasonable question is why Emilian speakers do not do the same and try to disambiguate the two inputs. We think that this has to do with (i) the specific input item which is subject to “replacement” in the local variety and (ii) its position on the scale of indefiniteness. Friulian speakers do not accept PAs and tend to replace them, while Emilian speakers do the same with BNs. The disambiguation mechanism we propose would only potentially happen in reaction to a sentence which contains the “to-be-replaced” input (i.e., in the non-overlapping condition, BNs for Emilian and PAs for Friulian). We would not expect such a behavior in the overlapping condition (PAs for Emilian and BNs for Friulian), where the speakers directly use the available overlapping form. Friulian speakers, coherently, adopt the disambiguation mechanism only when translating an input PA. Given this, Emilian speakers could potentially adopt the disambiguation mechanism only when translating an input BN (meaning1), in order to disambiguate it from the translation of an input PA (meaning2), since both are normally translated as PAs in Emilian. The issue, we contend, is that the interpretation triggered by Italian BNs (meaning1) is the lowest on the indefinite scale, so that there is no other item available to the speaker which is closer to meaning1 than to meaning2. Looking at (76), while Friulian speakers can go “to the right” and recruit q-markers, Emilian speaker do not have anything to the left to recruit. This directly follows if we accept the idea of a hierarchical order of the different functional projections for indefinite nominals.

The general picture we draw from these data is that crosslinguistic variation in the realization of indefinite objects in NIDs is much more restricted than initially expected. We observe a variation between two types of languages: type one (Ligurian II) has two forms – BNs and PAs – for realizing an indefinite object, each marked for the realization of a specific kind of indefiniteness; type two (Emilian, Friulian) has a single form – either BNs or PAs – for realizing an indefinite object, flattening the distinction observable in the languages belonging to type one. Type two can be further subdivided among the varieties which adopt only PAs (Emilian) and the varieties which adopt only BNs (Friulian). This situation, as already hinted, can be captured by proposing the existence of two contiguous indefinite functions which can be either expressed by a single form (syncretism) or by two.

Our descriptive sketch leaves many open issues. A first issue is the specific analysis of PAs, whose morphological form is complex and consistent in the languages we analyzed (DE + definite morph + gender-number morphs). The point at stake is both the contribution to the final meaning of the various morphs and their relations with other occurrences of formally homophonous morphs. Chierchia (1997), Zamparelli (2008) and Savoia & Baldi (2019), adopting different analyses, propose that the DE that is present in PAs and the case marker/preposition DE ‘of’ are a single lexical item. Other scholars (Ihsane 2008, Carlier & Lamiroy 2014, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, Stark 2016, Gerards 2020) treat them, instead, as two distinct lexical items. The analysis of the definite article presents similar problems. The last open issue we mention is the possibility to link the syncretism observed to other apparently independent features of the nominal system. Within different theoretical frameworks, Delfitto & Schroter (1991), Stark (2016), Pomino (2019) propose to link the distribution of BNs to how number and gender morphology is encoded on N. Simplifying somehow, defective number/gender marking on French nouns is taken to be the reason why the BNs are not available. This block on BNs would trigger the syncretism: PAs, in addition to their initial function as a marker of the higher indefinites would also expand to cover the lower function. The same does not hold for Italian and Spanish, which have rich number/gender marking.

## 7. Conclusions

In this contribution, we analyzed the variable encoding of indefinite objects in Northern Italian varieties. We adopted a multidimensional approach, analyzing data from a corpus (ASIt) and complementing it with new fieldwork sessions with balanced input. We have first established the definite articles as indefinites are actually cases of weak definites and are to be excluded from the picture, since they have the same distribution across all the varieties we examined. Then we have shown that there are dialects



which only display PAs (like French), as Emilian varieties and dialects that only display BN (like Spanish), which is the case of Friulian. We have noted that there are dialects which display the same apparent optionality that standard Italian displays. We have noticed that for Italian it is possible to find contexts where only PAs are possible and contexts where only BN are. This means that the distribution of PAs and BNs in those languages that have both is not stylistic or random, it depends on the syntactic and semantic environment and can be modeled assuming two indefinite functions. The varieties showing only one form can then be treated as cases of syncretism, in which two underlying functions are realized by a single form, either the PA or the BN, flattening the opposition. Other factors, as the presence of bare DE under negation, are orthogonal to this picture. This step will allow to tackle on firmer grounds the other relevant issues we could not address here.

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